Demotivation in Learning Chinese as an Additional Language: Insights of Irish Chinese Learners

Chang Zhang

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisor: Prof. Lorna Carson

School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Trinity College, Dublin
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Chang Zhang
Summary

This thesis sets out to investigate the demotivation of learning Chinese as an Additional Language (CAL) in the context of Irish higher education. It aims to identify the principal factors of CAL learning demotivation and to explore the causes and features of their demotivating influences from the perspectives of the learner, the learning context and the sociocultural environment. The thesis consists of six main chapters. Below is a brief introduction to the content of each chapter.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the present research. It first addressed the background of Chinese language education in Ireland with a focus on the challenges of teaching Chinese in an Irish context, which had led to the motivation for the researcher to conduct the present research. The aims and rationale of the research were discussed respectively, followed by the thesis outline and a brief explanation of key terminologies used in the research.

Chapter 2 reviewed selected previous studies which are relevant to the current research, with a focus on demotivation research in second language (L2) studies. It begins with a discussion on the definition of the demotivation terminology. In this part, an updated definition was proposed based on the evaluation of the previous definitions and the clarification regarding the range of the demotivation concept and some relevant concepts in motivation and demotivation research. Then, the main body of this chapter is the review of demotivation studies in different contexts. The review followed a chronological order to discuss the development of demotivation research, and comparisons were made simultaneously between studies carried out in different research contexts. As the majority of the research being reviewed focused on EAL learning demotivation, the limited studies on CAL learning demotivation were discussed separately due to their relevance to the current research. At the end of this chapter, some key concepts in L2 learning demotivation research were discussed along with some existing issues in the current demotivation investigations.

Chapter 3 elucidated the adopted methodologies and administration process of the research project. It first presented the research questions, followed by a discussion of the theoretical and ethical considerations behind the adopted mixed-methods approach and
two-phase research design. The next two parts of this chapter described the process of the quantitative and qualitative investigations respectively; each part followed the sequence of participant identification, instrument design and administration and the adopted methods for data analysis. The reliability, validity and limitations of the research design were discussed at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4 and 5 reported on the findings of the present research. Chapter 4 reported on the findings of the quantitative phase of the study, which focused on answering the research questions regarding the identification of main demotivating factors for CAL learning in an Irish context, the perception of demotivation by learners with different motivational statuses and the features of demotivation in different learning contexts. Chapter 5 reported on the findings of the qualitative phase of the study, which focused on gaining more details on learners’ perception of CAL learning demotivation.

Chapter 6 is the discussion and conclusion of the present research. This chapter summarised key findings in response to the research questions. Then, it provided insights in resolving and researching demotivation and discussed the contributions and limitations of the present research.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of Chinese Language Education in Ireland

Chinese language education in Ireland is growing remarkably. Under the influence of increasing bilateral cooperation, Irish universities and higher education institutions established a number of new China or Chinese related degree programmes in the past decade, which has led to more exposure of the Chinese language and culture to Irish students. In the meantime, more international students were attracted by the quality and mobility of Irish higher education and decided to pursue further education in Ireland. Among them, a significant portion was composed of Chinese students. The increasing number of Chinese students also helped to improve the mutual understanding between Ireland and China, which in turn sparked the necessity of learning each other’s languages for effective and in-depth communication.

With Chinese language courses being included in the post-primary education, namely the Transition Year\(^1\) and Junior Cycle\(^2\) curricula, more Irish students expressed their interest in learning Chinese as an Additional Language (CAL). The development of Chinese language education at the post-primary level also contributed to the increasing number of CAL learners in Irish higher education. The recent Languages Connect - Ireland’s Foreign Languages Strategy in Education also highlighted the further development of Chinese language education, with the Chinese language to be introduced as a new Leaving Certificate\(^3\) language subject (DES, 2017a, 2017b). This marked the full implementation of Chinese language education in Irish post-primary curriculum. Such positive support from an educational policy will no doubt further stimulate the development of Chinese language education across Irish educational levels.

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1. Transition Year is an optional one-year school programme which can be taken in the first year after the Junior Cycle and is compulsory in some schools. It bridges the Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle to complete the six-year cycle of the Irish post-primary level education.

2. The Junior Cycle is the first three years of post-primary level education in Ireland.

3. The Leaving Certificate is the graduate certificate following Senior Cycle study in Irish post-primary level education.
However, despite the promising future ahead, Chinese language education in Ireland still faced many challenges at present. At the post-primary level, further development of Chinese courses in Junior Cycle was slow. With the enthusiasm engendered by Transition Year Chinese courses wearing off, not many CAL learners persisted with their learning after entering higher education. While in higher education, CAL learners were identified to suffer from issues of demotivation, which was reflected in a decreasing trend of enrolment and the increasing rate of dropouts for the CAL learning programmes (Zhang & Wang, 2016, 2018). The decreased enrolment in higher education Chinese programmes were reported in other contexts as well. According to the report of UCML & AULC (2017), Mandarin Chinese was one of the main languages that offered in British and Irish Universities, though its overall popularity has decreased in recent years (ibid: 5). The enrolment of Mandarin Chinese programmes varied, that among the 62 participated institutions, about 20 institutions reported either an increased or decreased enrolment of learners in Mandarin Chinese respectively (ibid: 6). Turning to the American context, there was a rapid increase of 16.5% regarding the enrolment of Chinese language programmes in American universities between 2006 and 2009 (Looney & Lusin, 2018: 13). However, there was no significant increase in enrolment afterwards, but an apparent decreasing trend of 13.1% between 2013 and 2016 (ibid.).

The challenges of teaching and learning of Chinese as an Additional Language (TCAL) were rooted in the characteristics of the Chinese language and the different sociocultural backgrounds between Ireland and China. From a language perspective, the tones, characters and a lack of strict grammatical rules were the main challenges for learning Mandarin Chinese (Li et al., 2018; Lu & Song, 2017). Regarding spoken Chinese, the study of lexical tones was one of the main obstacles for Irish beginner learners. Learners’ native languages (i.e., Irish and English) do not possess lexical tones, while they affect both pronunciations of syllables and meaning of lexical items in Chinese (Li & Thompson, 1989: 6). Regarding written Chinese, the teaching and learning of characters (written scripts of Chinese) often appeared to be ineffective and inefficient in an Irish context (Zhang & Wang, 2016: 142). Both Irish and English as learners’ native languages are associated with the alphabetical phonetic writing system. In contrast, the Chinese writing system is logographic. The Chinese orthography requires a close synergy of both phonological and visuospatial processing. Regarding Chinese grammar, it focuses more on the meaning instead of grammatical rules to construct words and sentences. Mandarin
Chinese has little morphology, and violations of strict grammatical structures could often be found in the work of native speakers (Packard, 2000: 2). All the above differences in the Chinese language were unfamiliar and could be challenging for Irish learners, which also put demands on Chinese teachers’ linguistic knowledge and awareness.

From a sociocultural perspective, both Irish learners’ language learning experiences and native Chinese teachers’ teaching methods contributed to the difficulty of CAL teaching and learning in the Irish context (Zhang & Wang, 2018). Irish learners’ methods and perception of language learning were heavily influenced by their study of phonetic languages. For example, students study at least two native languages and quite often another one or even more modern foreign languages that offered in schools. Without proper guidance on adaption, the accumulated methods and knowledge of language studies would not be effective when learning Chinese (Li, 2011: 196). For the Chinese teachers, most of the native-speaker teachers immersed in the classrooms dominated by a grammar-translation method and teacher-centred approach throughout their learning of foreign languages as well as their training of CAL teaching received in a domestic context in China. Such experiences increased the difficulty for them to understand the language education pedagogy and adjust their teaching method accordingly (Zhang & Wang, 2018: 44).

1.2 Motivation for the Research

Previous research on demotivation has provided insights on some apparent reasons for post-primary school students’ demotivation in learning Chinese. The first reason was the compulsory nature of the language course, which was identified to be one of the leading causes for second language (L2) learning demotivation (Dörnyei, 1998; Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2009b; Li, 2014b). In the context of TCAL in Irish post-primary schools, the establishment of CAL courses may come from the interest of the school management or the demand of the parents. Young learners may perceive their CAL learning to have a compulsory nature. The second reason was the lack of perceived benefit for the future (Jahedizadeh, Allahdadi, et al., 2016; Yu, 2013; Zhang & Wang, 2016). Due to the absence of a Chinese Leaving Certificate, CAL courses at post-primary level had a lack of practical benefit regarding learners’ educational advancement. Learners’ motivation in CAL learning needed to be primarily maintained by their interest in the language,
which could be difficult to sustain. The final aspect to the issue was the shortage of qualified teachers (Zhang & Wang, 2018: 41), which was largely determined by the short history of TCAL for only a little more than a decade in Ireland.

The causes for demotivation of CAL learners in Irish higher education were less obvious. In comparison with post-primary school students who might have a lack of initial interest in CAL learning, learners in higher education normally enrolled in CAL courses by their own choices. These learners should have a certain level of initial interest and motivation in CAL learning. However, they still became demotivated as influenced by demotivating incidents during the course of their study. An overwhelmingly popular explanation among both TCAL practitioners and researchers was that such demotivation was associated primarily with the inherent difficulty of the Chinese language. As a result, researchers in the field have undertaken a large volume of investigations to discover how to reduce the difficulty in CAL learning, while demotivation was still a prevalent and consistent phenomenon as identified in different learning contexts (Chen, 2015; Cruickshank & Tsung, 2011; Yu, 2013; Zhang & Wang, 2016).

Regarding the difficulty of CAL learning, the study of Chinese characters was perceived to be one the most challenging tasks for TCAL in an overseas context (Ke, 1996; Kupfer, 2007; Li et al., 2014; Lu & Song, 2017). To investigate whether the learning difficulty was the primary reason for CAL learners’ demotivation, the researcher of the present study carried out an early survey study on demotivation in learning Chinese characters among learners in Irish higher education (Zhang & Wang, 2016). Results suggested that though most of the learners perceived the study of Chinese characters as the most difficult part in CAL learning, they would not choose to give up the learning. This contrast indicated that CAL learning demotivation was a complicated issue, and some important aspects of this problem might be overlooked.

At present, L2 demotivation research focused predominantly on learning English as an Additional Language (EAL), and existing literature has not yet reached a consensus on the primary causes of learners’ demotivation. There were still limited investigations which targeted demotivation of learning other languages. In the context of CAL learning, only one study could be retrieved besides the one that carried out by the researcher of the present study, which was Yu’s (2013) quantitative study on the demotivation of foreign
CAL learners in China. However, no general conclusions could be reached due to the limited number of investigations and the different backgrounds of the two studies (see Section 2.5.6). As a result, the researcher decided to initiate the present investigation to study the CAL learning demotivation in the Irish context.

1.3 Aims of the Research

This research aimed to investigate the primary causes of CAL learners’ demotivation in the context of Irish higher education. The general purposes of this research were to make theoretical contributions to the diversity of demotivation investigations in L2 studies and to offer insights for dealing with problems of CAL learning demotivation in both Irish and a more general overseas context.

For the theoretical perspective, this research aimed to expand the investigation of demotivation to the field of TCAL in an overseas context. It set out to research the formation and characteristics of the CAL learning demotivation in relation to the language, the learner and the learning context. For the practical perspective, this research aimed to offer insights on dealing with issues of CAL learning demotivation which associated with different aspects of CAL learning. It hoped to raise the awareness of L2 teachers and researchers regarding the issues of demotivation, so to address the issues comprehensively in associate with motivational studies. It also hoped to reach a better and more objective understanding of the complexity of L2 learners’ motivational behaviour and thinking. To achieve the above purposes, the aims of the present research could be summarised into the following three objectives:

1) To identify the main demotivating factors of CAL learning in an overseas context
2) To investigate learners’ perception of the identified main demotivating factors
3) To pinpoint the key features of demotivating factors from the perspective of the learner, the language and the learning context.

1.4 Rationale of the Research

The rationale of the current research could be briefly divided into considerations from four perspectives, which are 1) the paucity of research for CAL learning demotivation, 2)
the necessity of amending the current definitions of demotivation, 3) the needs in identifying the primary sources of CAL learners’ demotivation and 4) the needs in investigating learners’ perception of CAL learning demotivation.

Regarding the paucity of research for CAL learning demotivation, the majority of previous research has focused on the specific context of EAL learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013: 156). Research of TCAL in the overseas context was still underdeveloped. The present research aimed to initiate the study of CAL learning demotivation in an overseas context, which was hoped to contribute to the development of both demotivation and TCAL research.

Regarding the definition of demotivation, two existing definitions (Dörnyei, 2001: 143; Kikuchi, 2015: 2, 5) presented some different opinions in interpreting the terminology. The conflict mainly referred to the different understandings of demotivation as either a collective force or a negative process, and whether it should include the effect of internally-oriented forces. A unified definition of the demotivation concept is the foundation of its scientific research. The existing definitions need to be evaluated in order to reflect the up-to-date understanding of the nature of demotivation.

Regarding the primary sources of CAL learners’ demotivation, this study used a quantitative survey to identify the main demotivating factors for CAL learning, while follow-up interviews were conducted to further identify the subconstructs of the main factors. The combination of the two phases of studies aimed to increase the suitability of the results both theoretically and practically.

Regarding learners’ perception of CAL learning demotivation, there was a general deficiency in TCAL research to addresses learners’ needs and wellbeing in CAL learning (Yu, 2013: 25; Zhang & Wang, 2016: 143). The present research adopted a qualitative approach to investigate learners’ perception of demotivation as well as providing insights for remedy solutions.
Demotivation: is defined by this research to represent the negatively perceived forces that originate from or are triggered by external causes, which reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a potential or ongoing behavioural intention (see discussion in Section 2.3.3).

L2 Motivational Self: refers to the theory of L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005: 105-106) and further explained by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009: 29). It consists of three components, which are the L2 learning experience, the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self. This study adopted this theoretical framework to conceptualise some of the identified demotivating factors for CAL learning which depicted both learners’ current learning experiences and their perceptions towards the future.

Chinese as an Additional Language (CAL): refers to the Chinese language that was learned or being studied by learners whose first language is not Chinese. Though there were similar terminologies such as ‘Chinese as a Foreign Language’ and ‘Chinese as a Second Language’ (Duff et al., 2013: 12; Ruan et al., 2015: 203), it is more appropriate to address the complexity of Chinese teaching and learning in the context of the present research which involved Irish Chinese learners as well as international students and heritage learners who all studied Chinese language in the context of Irish higher education.

Chinese Character: refers to the scripts used for the Chinese language by native speakers. It marks one of the features of the Chinese language, which is the logographic reading and writing system. As opposed to the phonetic system of many European languages, Chinese character was reported as one of the most important reasons for the difficulty and resistance for CAL learning among foreign learners (Allen, 2008; Kupfer, 2007). The terminology itself could represent both the simplified script and the traditional script. The former one is commonly used in mainland China and the latter one would appear in ancient literature and is still in use in some Chinese speaking regions at present (e.g., Hongkong, Taiwan). In this study, it refers to the simplified script unless specific descriptions are provided along with the terminology (e.g., traditional Chinese characters).
Pinyin: refers to the Romanised phonetic scheme for the Chinese language. Though it was created as a set of symbols for the purpose of pronunciation, it was often mistreated by teachers and learners as a different script of the Chinese language. Such a phenomenon was more evident among early-stage learners in an overseas context who have a phonetic language background.

Computer-mediated Communication in Chinese (Chinese CMC): refers to various methods of communication in the Chinese language which are assisted by computer or computer-like programmes and facilities. This terminology has a rather broad range of concept in terms of the communication methods (e.g., oral, written), technological programmes (e.g., speech recognition, input software) and platform utilisation (e.g., computer, smartphone, tablet). In this study, it mainly refers to a specific method of Chinese CMC, which is to input Chinese information by using keyboard and pinyin input software. This is also often abbreviated as ‘typing Chinese’ in the thesis.

1.6 Summary

This chapter is the introduction to the present research project. It first outlined the background of the research regarding the current development of Chinese language education in an Irish context. Then it presented the motivation and aims of conducting the research project, and how they were reflected in the rationale of the research. Some key terminologies were explained by the end of this chapter. After the introduction to the research, the next chapter reviews the literature in the field of demotivation that was relevant to the current research project.
Chapter 2 Demotivation in Learning an Additional Language

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews demotivation studies which are relevant to the present research. It begins with an introduction of several concepts that associated with the concept of demotivation, followed by a discussion on the previous working definitions of demotivation and an updated definition of demotivation.

The second and third parts of this chapter review previous demotivation studies following a general chronological order. It begins with a brief review of the nascence of demotivation in educational psychology and instructional communication, then turns to its development in the field of L2 studies. Summaries and comparisons are made between early and later research as well as studies conducted in different sociocultural contexts. As the centre of demotivation research has gradually shifted from Europe to an Asian context, studies from five Asian regions are reviewed respectively due to their contributions to the development of demotivation research (Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Iran and China). Two existing studies of CAL learning demotivation are discussed at the end due to their close relation to the present research topic.

The last part of this chapter discusses some key concepts of demotivation research in L2 studies. Some major directions of research are introduced including the relationship between learner and teacher demotivation, the influence of the wider sociocultural context and learners’ future perception in demotivation and the relationship between demotivation and remotivation research. It also addresses some of the existing issues among the demotivation research for the reference of the present and future research.

2.2 Some Relevant Learning and Motivation Theories

This section briefly reviews some theories in learning and motivation that are relevant to the present research. This includes the learning curve theory, U-curve theory of cross-cultural adjustment, self-actualization and self-regulation theory.
2.2.1 The learning curve and the U-curve theories

As the process of learning an additional language is also a process of intercultural and cross-cultural activity, some theories which discuss the general learning process and the nature of cross-cultural activities could be related to the current study.

When discussing general learning process, learning curve theory was commonly used to depict the relationship between learners’ trait, motivation and their learning outcome (Adler & Clark, 1991; Bills, 1934; Hwang et al., 2004). In general, the learning curve reflects the improvement of learning (Reichenbach et al., 2006). A steep learning curve may indicate a difficult learning process in a short period of time (see Figure 1), and the curve which reflects averaged trails in a longer learning period appeared to be smoother (see Figure 2). In the field of language studies, learning curve theory also helped to explain learners’ language development (Ninio, 2006) and their motivational change in the learning process (Tremblay, 2001). Tremblay (ibid: 252) compared the learning curve of two groups of learners with different level of integrative motivation and reported that the high-level group learned at a relatively faster rate.

Figure 1 Fletcher’s (2016a) learning curve (single subject)
The U-curve theory of adjustment (UCT) has been consistently used to reflect the process of cross-cultural adjustment. Black and Mendenhall (1991: 226) described the four stages of UCT as the initial stage of honeymoon, the culture shock stage of disillusionment, the recovering stage of adjustment and the mastery stage of functioning effectively in a cross-cultural context (see Figure 3).

Figure 2 Fletcher’s (2016b) learning curve (smooth average)

Figure 3 Black & Mendenhall’s (1991) U-curve of cross-cultural adjustment
However, Ward argued that the initial reaction to cross-cultural transition would be processing stress instead of euphoria (Ward, 2004; Ward et al., 2005). She further distinguished the adaptation process into two perspectives, namely the internal-oriented psychological adaptation (see Figure 4) and the external-oriented sociocultural adaptation (see Figure 5). She reported that the significant changes only occurred at the early stage of immersion experiences, and the emerged pattern of sociocultural adaptation was similar to a learning curve. The present study regarding the changes of demotivation in different learning periods shared some similarity and differences with the above findings of the learning curve and the U-curve, which will be further discussed in Section 6.2.2.

Figure 4 Ward’s (2004) illustration of psychological adaptation

Figure 5 Ward’s (2004) illustration of sociocultural adaptation
2.2.2 Actualizing tendency and self

Self-actualization is a psychological term introduced by Goldstein (1940) to describe the motivation to realise one’s full potential. In Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (see Figure 6), self-actualization is depicted as the highest level of human needs. It is to achieve what a person can be, which is subjective to different individuals (Maslow, 1943: 378).

Figure 6 Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in McLeod (2007)

Rogers (1959: 196) recognised such actualizing tendency as one primal motivation for living beings to maintain and enhance themselves. He considered this is part of the human nature, which is related to one’s self-awareness (e.g., experience, concept of self and ideal self) and the state of congruence (e.g., congruence of self and experience, psychological adjustment, maturity). In his theory, the ideal self is the most commonly perceived self-concept which represents the highest value of oneself (ibid, 200). Through the process of congruence, ideal self was compared with self-experiences and symbolized to reflect a more accurate self-concept.

Markus and Wurf (1987: 302) depicted this more accurate self-concept as actual self. In their description of self-representation, one’s self-awareness not only reflects what the self could be and would like to be (ideal self), but also what ought to be and what is afraid of being (ought self). They further explained that all these different perspectives of self-representations are also subjective. Even the actual self could refer to one’s hope or the
possibility of gaining the achievement instead of representing what has actually been achieved.

Drawing insights from the above ‘self’ frameworks, Dörnyei (2005) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System to conceptualise learners’ L2 learning motivation and explained the constructs in his later work (Dörnyei, 2009). This theoretical system consists of three parts, namely the L2 learning experience, the ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self. The first part concerns mainly learners’ L2 learning experiences at present, while the latter two parts focus on learners’ perception towards the future. The ideal L2 self represents learner’s belief that the present L2 learning experience could be beneficial for their future life (e.g., finding a good job that requires the L2 skills, living in the L2 speaking country). While learner’s ought-to L2 self refers to the necessity of the present L2 learning experience in preventing undesirable outcomes in the future (e.g., fail the L2 examination, punished by parents). In the context of the present research, the L2 motivational self system was adopted to conceptualise constructs for CAL learners’ demotivation.

2.2.3 Self-regulation and maturity

To achieve self-actualization requires action from self, which leads to the discussion of self-regulation. There were different views on the role and nature of self-regulation. In the eye of James (1890: 185), self-regulation is an introspective observation towards oneself, while Piaget (1950: 405) saw it as the objective action towards others. In comparison, Vygotsky (1986: 108) recognised self-regulation as the outcome of the mediation and its nature a verbal activity. Fox and Riconscente (2008: 375) considered that these above different views were a reflection of different perspectives on the analysis of self-regulation.

In the context of motivational studies, motivation has been recognised as an associated part of learners’ regulatory mechanism (Bandura, 1991: 69). Learners’ capacity of self-regulation was discovered to relate to their anticipation (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Zimmerman, 2008) and their self-reactive efficacy (Bandura, 1991, 2010). In the context of the present research, the former perspective relates to learners’ (positive and negative) ideal L2 self and the latter one to learners’ ideology and strategy for remotivation.
Traditionally, in comparison with extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation was considered a stronger motive which leads to better self-regulation in the educational context (Deci & Ryan, 2010: 245). This was supported by Gillard et al. (2015) in their pedagogical study. They reported that by providing a classroom environment which boosts the generation of intrinsic motivation, the level of autonomy and learners’ desire for mastery increased. Meanwhile, learners were less likely to be disengaged and demotivated due to a stronger sense of their learning purpose. While in more recent research, Ryan and Deci (2000a) no longer considered the two types of motivation as counterparts if learners were sufficiently self-determined. Under such circumstance, extrinsic motivation could be sufficient to support learners’ autonomy, mastery and purpose in learning, and external reward could also be internalised and eventually be perceived by the learners as intrinsically rewarding (Dörnyei, 1994: 276).

Maturity is another underlying factor which determines the capacity for self-regulation and also the de/motivational behaviour and thinking of the learners. In early childhood, maturity caused by formal schooling has a significant impact on learners’ self-regulation awareness and the growth of language and early literacy (Skibbe et al., 2011). Some similar effects were also identified in the early stage of higher education when learners were experiencing the transition of a more self-aware and self-regulated learning context (Gu, 2009; Magolda, 2000). In a CAL learning context, Yu (2010) identified that learners’ adaption (academic and sociocultural) and language anxiety both related to learners’ maturity and the extent of target language exposure. Yu (ibid) conducted a longitudinal study with 215 CAL learners in a Chinese university and reported that language anxiety associated with learners’ adaption process negatively. In comparison with other factors related to learners’ maturity (e.g., age, length of residence, target language proficiency), the perceived cultural distance presented the most significant correlations with learners’ sociocultural adaption. Meanwhile, the length of residence was found to have a negative correlation with learners’ academic adaption, and the second year in a four-year degree programme was identified to be a ‘critical transitional stage of either adaption or L2 learning’. This finding is similar to the result of the present research regarding the most demotivating period for CAL learning in an Irish context, which will be further discussed in Section 6.2.2.
2.3 The Definition of Demotivation

It has been nearly two decades since demotivation was first recognised as an individual research concept in L2 studies (Chambers, 1993). However, to date researchers still have not reached a unified opinion on the definition of demotivation, which has caused issues due to the different understandings and interpretations. In order to further develop demotivation as a solid research area and to further the understanding of language learner’s motivation behaviour and thinking, a precise and comprehensive representation of the terminology ‘demotivation’ needs to be justified and differentiate it from existing similar but different concepts.

2.3.1 Associated concepts with demotivation

It is natural and almost unavoidable to bring subjective opinions to one’s research, and these opinions often become traits and characteristics of the terminology defined by different researchers. In the context of demotivation research, there were various interpretations of the demotivation terminology, which has led to different translations and further connotations. It increased the difficulty of retrieving and comparing demotivation studies which use different translations, especially the ones that were conducted in different research and sociocultural contexts. In order to reach a mutual understanding on the definition of demotivation, this section first discusses several notions that are relevant but often mistreated as equivalent to the concept of demotivation.

Regarding the concept of ‘demotivation’, there were three main interpretations among the existing literature which described demotivation as either 1) a negative counterpart of motivation (Chambers, 1993; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997), 2) a low motivational status (Ho, 1998; Jahedizadeh, Allahdadi, et al., 2016) or 3) a decreasing process of motivation (Jung, 2011; Kikuchi, 2015; Kim, 2011a, 2011b, 2016).

Based on the previous discussion, the word ‘demotivation’ should refer to the collective force of all the factors that were perceived to have negative influences over learners’ learning motivation. The effect of demotivation is ‘demotivating’, and the negatively perceived factors are categorised as ‘demotivating factors’. Regarding the first interpretation, it is not quite accurate to address demotivation as a negative counterpart of motivation as the target of demotivation is one’s motivation, while the target of
motivation is one’s action. Regarding the remaining two interpretations, the low motivational status of the learner as affected by demotivation should refer to ‘demotivated’, and similarly the decreasing process of motivation should refer to ‘demotivating process’. However, if this process led to an extreme condition of the absence of any positive motivational intention, this particular status is already named as ‘amotivation’ by previous research of intrinsic motivation and self-determination theories (Deci & Ryan, 1985: 71; Ryan & Deci, 2000b: 61).

The above clarification also pinpointed the importance of researching demotivation in the field of L2 studies. Learners’ motivational status is determined by the synergy of both motivation and demotivation, and demotivating influences impact all learners regardless of their current motivational status. As Kim and Kim (2015a: 132) mentioned, some demotivating factors appeared to be positively correlated with motivational constructs. It will be inappropriate to predict that learners’ motivational status will be improved by performing motivating strategies exclusively if issues of demotivation were overlooked. Further understanding of learners’ motivational behaviour and thinking requires attention to both their motivation and demotivation, so that effective solutions could be provided accordingly and comprehensively.

2.3.2 Discussion on the current definitions

The word ‘demotivation’ initially emerged in the research of educational psychology to describe learner’s motivational change, namely a process that negatively affects positive motivational intention or efforts (Meyer, 1978). Christophel (1990) identified several factors which have negative impacts on the effectiveness of communication in classroom teaching and learning, and ‘demotivation’ was used to represent an independent concept of forces that negatively associated with learner’s motivation. Chambers (1993) investigated particularly on the demotivation in learning and described demotivation as a collective concept of all the negative factors in association with the learning motivation. Since then, the word ‘demotivation’ was gradually more frequently mentioned in the later motivational studies as a negative counterpart of motivation (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997).
2.3.2.1 Dörnyei's definition of demotivation

With more research engaging with the concept of demotivation, a clarification on the meaning and range of this concept became necessary. In the field of L2 studies, Oxford (1998) suggested considering demotivation as a distinct research area instead of a vague concept that negatively associated with learning motivation. Dörnyei (1998) supported this notion by pointing out the importance of the demotivation concept and its rich research potential. He offered a working definition of demotivation in his consecutive research, which soon became a popular interpretation of demotivation in the later demotivation studies. This was the first working definition which successfully distinguished the concept of demotivation from the conventional role of an affiliated notion of motivation. This has contributed to the establishment of demotivation as a substantial researchable area in L2 studies.

Demotivation represents “specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action”. It should not include the ones that caused by 1) attractive alternative choices, 2) gradual loss of interest and 3) the sudden realisation of unworthy costs of an activity (Dörnyei, 2001: 143).

The most distinct feature of this description is that it excluded three specific forces from the concept of learning demotivation and considered demotivation as a problem that caused more by external forces. Later demotivation research discussed little the exclusion of the last two factors (gradual loss of interest and the sudden realisation of unworthy efforts). These two factors appeared to be similar to the internal process of deliberation, which associated more with learners’ biological conditions rather than motivational thinking. Based on the discussion around these two factors, Dörnyei (ibid.) considered demotivation to relate more to external influences in comparison with the internal forces. In response to this point, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009: 58) marked that two main demotivating factors listed by Dörnyei (2001: 152-153), namely the reduced self-confidence and the negative attitude towards the L2, appeared to be internally orientated.
In comparison, controversial opinions were raised and discussed by later demotivation research regarding the exclusion of the first factor (attractive alternative choice). Dörnyei (2001:143) explained that the effect of this factor was not actually reducing the level of motivation, but to make it appeared to be lower than the alternative choice in the perception of the learner. However, if considering the motivation of a learner has a limitation in a certain period of time, then the growth of motivation for one specific action is likely to be presented as suppressing the intentions for the others. Such an effect may be considered as a type of demotivation for initialising or persisting other actions. Reflected in demotivation research in L2 studies, Dörnyei (ibid., 153) and many later investigations have listed the influence of learning other languages as one of the main demotivating factors. Learners may perceive learning other languages to be more efficacious or beneficial, which functioned as an attractive alternative choice and could result in demotivation for learning the target language.

2.3.2.2 Kikuchi’s definition of demotivation

As mentioned in Section 2.3.1, though Dörnyei’s (2001) definition was widely adopted by the research of L2 learning demotivation, its appropriateness was also frequently discussed, especially among researchers in the Asian context (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kikuchi, 2011, 2015; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Yu, 2013). Concerns were raised due to an increasing number of investigations which identified internal forces in causing learners’ demotivation. Therefore, demotivation researchers began to advocate a more comprehensive definition of demotivation which incorporates the influence of internal factors into the conceptual range of demotivation (Hassaskhah et al., 2015; Kim, 2011a; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012; Yu, 2013).

Kikuchi first adopted Dörnyei’s (2001) definition of demotivation in his early research (Kikuchi, 2009). Then, after the review of various demotivation studies in Japan (Arai, 2004; Kojima, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004) and the findings of his ongoing investigation (Kikuchi, 2011, 2015; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), he noted that demotivation should not be restricted to solely external factors due to a lack of empirical evidence (Kikuchi, 2015: 4). He revised Dörnyei’s (2001) definition of demotivation and included the negative impact of both internal and external forces into the concept of L2 learning demotivation.
I view language learning motivation as a process in which learners choose to learn a language and put effort into doing so [...] demotivation concerns the negative process that pulls learners down (Kikuchi, 2015: 2, 5).

Kikuchi’s (2015) definition depicted demotivation as a countervailing process of motivation. He stated that demotivation in Dörnyei’s (2001) definition should refer to ‘demotivators’, which was equivalent to ‘demotivating factors’ in the present research. This revised definition helped further differentiate demotivation from its associated concepts such as the demotivating factors, demotivating effect and demotivated status. It also impacted on the later demotivation studies regarding the understanding of the nature of demotivation, that researchers began to address demotivation more as a process instead of a collective force (Jahedizadeh, Allahdadi, et al., 2016: 5-6; Kim, 2016: 136).

Kikuchi’s (2015) definition of demotivation was derived from his understanding of motivation, which was based on the interpretation of motivation in Schunk et al.’s (2008) study. However, Schunk et al. initially described motivation as “something that gets us going, keep us working, and help us complete tasks” (ibid., 4). This ‘something’ should refer to some kind of force that impacts on one’s action, instead of the functioning process of such force.

2.3.3 Proposed new definition of demotivation

A precise and commonly recognised definition is essential in establishing the theoretical foundation for the present research, especially in designing and exploring the framework of potential demotivating factors. Based on the previous discussions of the relevant concepts and the existing definitions, this research proposes a new working definition of demotivation as below.

Demotivation represents the negatively perceived forces that originate from or are triggered by external causes, which reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a potential or ongoing behavioural intention.
The main difference between this definition and Dörnyei’s (2001) description of demotivation is the range of concept. As mentioned, Dörnyei’s (ibid) definition concerned exclusively the influence of external demotivating forces, while internal forces were also included in the current definition to reflect the most recent findings in the field of demotivation research. In the meantime, the term ‘demotivation’ was recognised as a collective force in the present research, which was different from the representation of a dynamic process in Kikuchi’s (2015) definition.

Moreover, the perception of demotivation is subjective to its possessor. This means the factors being perceived to be demotivating do not necessarily contain a consistent negative nature. They are not necessary to be associated with negative behaviours, nor exclusively affect or being perceived by the demotivated learners. Regarding the relationship between motivation and demotivation, motivation impacts directly on the action itself, while demotivation affects motivation. It is not entirely appropriate to address demotivation as a negative counterpart of motivation, and it would be reasonable to predict their interrelationship to be non-linear.

There was another issue in relation to the definition of demotivation, which was its translation in different languages. Though previous demotivation investigations utilised different interpretations of the demotivation concept, the majority of publications in English used the same word ‘demotivation’ for the terminology. However, after these different interpretations been translated into different languages, the different names of the terminology and their connotations became much more deviant. As the present study is closely associated with the TCAL research, the present research also aimed to clarify the different translation of the demotivation terminology in Chinese.

According to Shan (2015b), there were 107 publications which were identified as demotivation studies in the field of L2 studies and educational psychology between 2004 and 2014 in mainland China. Among these publications, the most frequently used terminology regarding demotivation was ‘动机缺失/amotivation’ (37.4%), followed by ‘动机削弱/reduced motivation’ (19%). The direct translation of ‘demotivation’ in Chinese was ‘负动机’, which was the least used among these publications. This has
caused problems in reviewing and referencing the original research as well as their further translations.

For example, some of the research initially adopted the direct translation in their early research (Liu, 2009). However, they were forced to switch to more prevailed but inappropriate translations in their further studies (Gao & Liu, 2015; Liu, 2014). This was often caused by either consideration of public recognition, or merely being misled. As discussed in Section 2.3.1, these interpretations could not distinguish demotivation from the concept of motivation or reflect the current development in the field of demotivation research. The present research calls for attention to the usage of appropriate translation and interpretation of the terminology, as it matters to further the understanding of CAL learning demotivation and its impact on TCAL.

2.4 Demotivation Research in Early Years

The concept of demotivation was originated from psychology (Meyer, 1977). It was borrowed by researchers of instructional communication in the field of educational psychology in the 1990s. However, the concept of demotivation in these early studies still affiliated with motivation and have not yet become an individual researchable notion. This section briefly reviews the relevant literature of demotivation research in the field of psychology and instructional communication, which contributed to the establishment of demotivation research in L2 studies.

2.4.1 The beginning of demotivation research

The terminology ‘demotivation’ was originally used in commercial psychology, which focuses on maintaining the motivation of employees to improve productivity and profits (Line, 1992; Meyer, 1977, 1978). Meyer (1977) first published his theory on the demotivating process, in which he offered a six-phase model to describe the motivational change of the employees during the procedure of their job orientation (see also Meyer, 1978: 263-266). The six phases of this model could be summarised as confusion, anger, subconscious hope, disillusionment, uncooperativeness and departure. This model described the process of the diminishing motivation of the employees regarding their new job. Based on the discussion of this model, Meyer (ibid.) offered suggestions for the
employers on methods to avoid or reduce the negative effect of demotivation among the new employees. The significance of this research is that it incorporated the concept of demotivation into the dynamic process of one’s motivational change. It also clarified two similar terminologies of ‘demotivation’ and ‘amotivation’, which were discussed earlier in Section 2.3.1.

Later, Meyer (1978) further analysed the demotivating process and identified that demotivating influences came from both individual characteristics and the general organisation of the companies. Though the context of this demotivation investigation was different, some of the principal demotivating factors that were discovered, such as the lack of constructive feedback and lack of sensitivity to individual needs, were consistent with demotivation research in L2 studies (Kim, 2012; Zhang & Wang, 2016). Meyer (1978: 266) emphasised the importance of researching demotivation and its interaction with positive motivation. He called for researchers to review the process of motivational change more comprehensively by including the influence of demotivation. Similar notions also appeared in L2 demotivation research, that scholars advocated examining the validity of motivational measurements after the discovery of demotivating influence in L2 studies (Dörnyei, 1998; Oxford, 1998).

2.4.2 Demotivation research in educational psychology

With the growing number of educational psychologists focusing on effective communication in the context of language learning, early demotivation research emerged among the studies of instructional communication (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997). One of the basic assumptions in instructional communication was that teacher immediacy has certain influences on the behaviour of their students (Gorham & Christophel, 1992: 239). Teacher immediacy refers to both verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the teachers and their interactions with the learners. Christophel (1990) identified that specific teacher immediacy had a positive effect on learners’ behaviour. She further explained that teacher immediacy could directly affect students’ learning, and also indirectly through their impacts on students’ learning motivation. As a result, demotivation studies in instructional communication succeed this research focus and paid much attention to teachers’ role in relation to the cause and effect
of learners’ demotivation. Teachers’ influence was first brought to the attention of demotivation researchers in the field, which soon became a central focus of later studies.

Inspired by previous work, Christophel continued her research and tried to further explain the relationship between teacher immediacy and students’ learning motivation (Gorham & Christophel, 1992). Different from the previous motivational research, this study focused on both learners’ motivation and demotivation. It discovered that learners’ lower state of motivation was not simply due to a lack of motivation, but also a result of negative interferences by some identified demotivating factors. The research surveyed 308 undergraduate students in an American university to investigate the main motivating and demotivating factors prior to and during students’ learning process, with a specific focus on teachers’ behaviour as a potential factor for both motivating and demotivating influences. The finding of the research conceptualised the various factors into three general categories as below (ibid., 243).

1. Teacher’s behaviour, which is under teachers’ direct and full control, such as whether or not having sufficient office hours for the students.
2. Structure or format of the class, which is partially under teachers’ control, such as the choice of teaching materials.
3. The course context and student background, which teachers have very little or almost no control, such as the nature of the course and student’s personality and attitude towards the course.

As suggested by the research results, if considering teachers’ influence on different categories of demotivating factors, teacher immediacy could be considered the most prominent source of both students’ motivation and demotivation. Also, it is important to notice that in Gorham and Christophel’s (ibid.) research, most of the categories for motivating and demotivating factors were matched. This indicated that factors in these categories could be perceived as either having a positive or negative effect on learners’ motivation. Gorham and Christophel also conceptualised a ranking regarding the demotivating effect of the different factors by sorting the frequency of the 20 subcategories (ibid., 246). Below are the top five subcategories that were most frequently listed by the students.
1. Teacher was boring or confusing to the students
2. Dissatisfaction with grading and assignments
3. Negative responses to the organisation of the course and course material
4. Teachers’ negative attitude towards students
5. Dislike of the subject area

Christophel and Gorham (1995) continued to investigate the source of students’ demotivation with a different focus on the dynamic change of learners’ motivation and demotivation during the learning process. According to the research results, though teacher immediacy was less mentioned by students when attributing the motivating influences, students who received more immediate teacher feedback seemed to be relatively more motivated. Regarding students’ demotivation, Christophel and Gorham (ibid.) reported that the learning context and teacher immediacy demonstrated almost equal strength in causing students’ demotivation at the beginning of the learning process. In comparison, inappropriate teacher immediacy remained as a salient demotivating influence and persisted along with the development of students’ learning process. These findings indicated that teacher immediacy was perceived by students to be more central to their demotivation than motivation. Students tended to consider motivation as more of a personal state while demotivation being an issue that was associated with their teacher.

In order to further understand the nature of students’ demotivation, Gorham and Millette (1997) explored the different perceptions of teachers and learners on the causes of students’ demotivation. A survey investigation was carried out by using the questionnaire in Gorham and Christophel’s (1992) study. Questionnaires were sent to a group of teaching staff in an American university, and the data collected from 224 teachers were compared with the responses of 308 students from Gorham and Christophel’s (ibid.) work. It appeared that teachers perceived their own behaviours was much less responsible for student's demotivation.

The results showed that teachers and students agreed on the majority of the main demotivating factors except for the inappropriate teacher immediacy. By comparing the categories of demotivating factors generated by teachers and students, several factors identified by students were not recognised by the teachers, such as the compulsory nature of the course, incomprehensible teaching language and teachers’ negative physical
appearance. Some of the factors identified by the teachers, such as students’ lack of prerequisite skills and knowledge, were not mentioned by any responses of the students. The most frequently listed demotivating factors by teachers were as below (Gorham & Millette, 1997: 255):

1. Dissatisfaction with grading and assignments
2. Dislike of the subject area
3. Students’ negative orientation or personality

In comparison, the first two factors (dissatisfaction with grading and dislike of the subject) were commonly perceived by both the teachers and the students (Gorham & Christophel, 1992: 246). This result showed that there was a mutual understanding of the importance of students’ attitude in causing their own demotivation, though teachers appeared to have a much stronger opinion regarding students’ dissatisfaction with their academic results.

Judging by the statistical results of the two studies (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997), it was the most significant source of students’ demotivation as perceived by the teachers, with twice the strength as much as recognised by the students. Besides, Gorham and Millette (1997: 256) noted that teachers who were identified with higher teaching motivation were also more likely to recognise their responsibility in causing and reducing their students’ demotivation, while teachers with lower teaching motivation tended to attribute the cause of students’ demotivation to factors beyond their control.

It is worth noticing that research results could be affected by students’ attributional style. As Gorham and Millette (ibid., 258) mentioned, students demonstrated the tendency to only list positive teacher immediacy as a motivating factor when such descriptions were prompted, while at the same time list the demotivating factors that associated with their teachers upfront. This finding is consistent with their previous study (Christophel & Gorham, 1995), that students attributing the reason for their positive motivation more to personal traits while attributing the causes of demotivating influence more to the teachers. This behavioural pattern may also relate to the different nature of teacher immediacy in affecting learners’ motivation and demotivation. As mentioned by Christophel (1990: 337), teacher immediacy might affect learner’s motivation in a more indirect and subtle manner, which made it more difficult for students to perceive. In comparison, negative
teacher immediacy had a more direct impact on the learner, thus easier for learners to be aware of them.

2.4.3 Early demotivation research in L2 studies

As mentioned, demotivation research in educational psychology focused on learners’ demotivation and its negative influence in causing ineffective classroom communication. After the concept of demotivation researched the field of L2 studies, it soon became tightly associated with the phenomenon of L2 learning failure (Bley-Vroman, 1989; Dörnyei, 2003; Littlewood, 1984: 7; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Early demotivation investigations carried out since the 1990s in Europe and North America context mainly examined the external reasons behind EAL learners’ negative motivational status. These early investigations contributed to the establishment of demotivation as an independent research area in the field of L2 studies. In comparison, later demotivation investigations in the Asian context concerned a wider range of demotivating issues which were caused by both internal and external forces as well as the influence of the learning context and learners’ sociocultural background.

The majority of early research in European and North America context utilised qualitative instruments to investigate learners’ demotivation in L2 studies (Dörnyei, 1998; Oxford, 1998; Ushioda, 1998). Oxford (1998) first identified four categories of demotivating forces by analysing the written essays of 250 students from American universities and high schools. Among them, three were classified as teacher-related factors while the other one was identified to be more relevant to the nature of classroom activities. This finding was in line with most of the previous demotivation research in educational psychology (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997), that the L2 teacher was primarily responsible for learners’ demotivation. However, instead of focusing exclusively on the inappropriate teacher immediacy, demotivation research in L2 studies extended the teacher-owned factors to a broader range. From a teacher perspective, this included internally-orientated factors such as teachers’ personality and competence, and externally-orientated factors such as teaching philosophy and methods.
2.4.3.1 Chambers’ investigation

Chambers (1993) first used the word ‘demotivated’ to describe the “reluctant learners” who had less engagement with the teacher and the class, and pointed out that demotivation is a common phenomenon with a history “for as long as there has been formal schooling” (Chambers, 1999: 6). After observing several classes in four secondary schools in the UK, he reported a large proportion of pupils being demotivated, which was unlikely to be caused by learning disability. To discover whether the teachers and students had any different perceptions regarding this issue, Chambers (1993) carried out a survey investigation which included 191 first-year students and 7 teachers from four UK secondary schools. The survey results showed that all the teachers acknowledge the existence of students’ demotivation and expressed their concerns regarding its negative impact. The existence of demotivation phenomenon was further revealed by the response of the students, that 50% of the students claimed to possess a demotivated status for the L2 learning and another 14% considered their L2 courses being meaningless. As a result, Chambers (ibid.) called for attention to the importance of being aware of the issues of demotivation and pointed out that it was possible to maintain or even increase learners’ motivation by avoiding or suppressing the negative effect of demotivation.

Regarding the identification of the main demotivating factors, Chambers (ibid.) noted that factors listed by students largely varied and were not exhaustive, therefore it was difficult to draw any concrete conclusion on the formation of L2 learning demotivation. In comparison, teachers’ perception of the source of students’ demotivation was relatively united. They consider students’ demotivation was originated more from internal forces such as the poor concentration, lack of confidence to learn the L2 and lack of willingness to learn any subjects in general. Chambers’ (ibid.) research also discovered demotivating influence from factors beyond the context of L2 classroom. Diachronic factors (e.g., unpleasant learning experience in previous L2 studies) and sociocultural factors (e.g., negative influence from family and peers) were identified to also create demotivating impacts on learners’ motivation.

Chambers (ibid.) also noted that many demotivated students still wished to be guided and encouraged. However, it seemed that teachers were more willing to put their effects in helping students with lower learning capability rather than the ones that they perceived
as demotivated. This further emphasised the necessity and importance of making L2 teachers and researcher being aware of the issue of demotivation. It was dangerous to subjectively label a demotivated student as ‘having an attitude problem’ and failed to provide guidance to address their demotivation. Instead, demotivation should be recognised as a natural and almost unavoidable part of the L2 learning process, which could and should be properly treated. Chambers (ibid.) suggested at the end of his research that teachers and researchers needed to communicate more with their students and seek their insights regarding the issue and solution of the L2 learning demotivation.

2.4.3.2 Ushioda’s investigation

Ushioda (1998) targeted 20 students who studied French in an Irish college and used qualitative paradigms to investigate these learners’ effective motivational thinking in dealing with demotivating encounters. Similar to the findings of the previous demotivation study (Chambers, 1993), Ushioda (1998) reported that demotivated learners did not necessarily succumb to their negative motivational status. Students identified as demotivated may still endeavour to put efforts into maintaining their L2 learning motivation. They could recover from their demotivated status by applying self-motivating strategies.

Moreover, Ushioda also mentioned that students may tend to adopt an externally-orientated attribution style regarding the source of their demotivation (ibid., 86). The purpose or subconscious benefit of this was to dissociate the demotivating incident from internal reasons and to maintain a belief in their learning capacity and efficacy, which were essential in maintaining a positive L2 learning motivation. This finding helped explain some previously mentioned phenomenon in the early demotivation research. For example, students attributed the responsibility in causing their demotivation more to external causes (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Oxford, 1998). In light of Ushioda’s (1998) finding, learners’ subjective attribution style may be considered as part of their intentional or unintentional remotivating strategy to protect their L2 learning motivation.

Regarding the construction of main demotivating factors, Ushioda’s (ibid.) research also discovered that learners tended to attribute the cause of their demotivation to external forces. However, different from the previous demotivation investigations (Chambers,
1993; Oxford, 1998), the most salient demotivating factor as identified by the learners were not directly teacher-owned but associated more with the institutionalised learning context. Considering the different research contexts of these investigations, that Ushioda’s (1998) research targeted students of higher education while the previous demotivation research concerned more of L2 learners in post-primary education, it is reasonable to predict that this difference was caused by the different backgrounds of the research participants.

Meanwhile, it was also important to notice that in Ushioda’s (ibid.) research, participants possessed a history of learning French for about five to six years prior to their current learning experiences in higher education. These learners were not demotivated at present. Instead, they could be considered as self-selected highly motivated L2 learners. However, these students also reported demotivating encounters in the present stage of learning. This finding supported the understanding of the present research on the nature of demotivation, that it is not an exclusive issue for the demotivated learners, but a rather common phenomenon which affects L2 learners regardless their motivational status.

Regarding the complexity of L2 learners’ motivational thinking, Ushioda (1998: 83) also mentioned that in the early stage of learning, learners’ motivation for learning the L2 was hardly independent. It was more likely to be associated with their goals for the overall learning programme which incorporated the L2 studies. In the same sense, learners’ motivational status was not only affected by their performance and achievements in L2 studies, but also determined by their intrinsic goal and perception of their learning in general. This finding has two implications for demotivation research in L2 studies. The first is that it is not entirely objective to take students’ academic performance as a good reference for their motivational status. The second is that learners’ goal of learning the L2, as part of their future motivational self (Dörnyei, 2009: 15), could have a salient impact on both learner’s motivation and demotivation. Therefore, it is important to consider some of the institutional and sociocultural influences in motivating and demotivating L2 learners.
2.4.3.3 Dörnyei’s investigation

There were distinct differences between Dörnyei’s (1998) investigation in comparison with the other early demotivation studies. Instead of investigating demotivation as a complement of motivational studies, Dörnyei (ibid.) established a clear focus on investigating the sources and influences of the L2 learning demotivation. He targeted exclusively the demotivated students who were identified by their teachers or peers, and 50 post-primary school English or German learners in Budapest were recruited as the participants of the qualitative interviews. Based on the results of the content analysis, Dörnyei (ibid.) reported nine categories of the common demotivating factors as below. This framework was one of several important references that used to conceptualise the construct of CAL learning demotivation in the present research.

1. The teacher
2. Inadequate school facilities
3. Reduced self-confidence
4. Negative attitude towards the L2
5. Compulsory nature of L2 study
6. Interference of another foreign language being studied
7. Negative attitude towards L2 community
8. Attitudes of group members
9. Coursebook

Two teacher-owned factors were included in the nine categories. The first is the teacher factor, which represented the negative influence that directly associated with teachers’ personality, commitment, competence and teaching methods. The second is reduced self-confidence, which was identified to be partially related to the teachers’ inappropriate behaviour and attitude in causing learners’ experience of failure or lack of sense of achievement. These factors were reported by Dörnyei (ibid.) as accounting more than half of the demotivating influences as identified by the learners, once again pointing to the teacher’s involvement in learners’ demotivation.

Dörnyei (ibid.) also noted that these demotivating factors did not affect learners independently. The demotivating influence that learners received was not a simple combination of all the negative effects generated by each of the demotivating factors, but
a synergised result with ongoing dynamic interactions. A prominent demotivating factor could potentially amplify, disguise or diminish the effect of other motivating and demotivating factors. To address this issue, Dörnyei (ibid.) only included the most salient demotivating factor as identified by each student when conceptualising the categories of the common demotivating factors.

There are two major contributions of Dörnyei’s (ibid.) demotivation investigation. The first is that his framework of nine main demotivating factors became one of the most popular references for demotivation studies in the following decade. The second is that his proposed working definition of demotivation (Dörnyei, 2001: 143), which was extensively discussed in Section 2.3.2. This descriptive definition marked the milestone of establishing demotivation as an independent researchable concept in L2 studies.

2.5 Recent Developments in an Asian Context

Early research in Europe and North America context has laid a good foundation for demotivation research in L2 studies. However, in comparison, the concept of L2 learning demotivation drew more attention from researchers in an Asian context, which was reflected in the increasing number of studies which targeted L2 learning demotivation among Asian learners in the past decade. This phenomenon was heavily influenced by the compulsory nature of EAL learning in many Asian regions, that English was a core subject in post-primary education and also a universal language module for a majority of higher education degree programmes (Nunan, 2003; Sugita McEown et al., 2017; Yihong et al., 2007). EAL learning was promoted to be both necessary and profitable for academic and career purposes, while demotivation was still a prevailing phenomenon among Asian EAL learners across educational levels (Hassaskhah et al., 2015; Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2016; Li, 2014b). Therefore, as soon as the concept of demotivation was brought up in the field of L2 studies, it soon became a focused area of L2 motivational researchers in the Asian context. In comparison with the demotivation research that conducted in Europe and North America context, findings regarding Asian EAL learners’ demotivation demonstrated the significant influence of the sociocultural context in both causing and affecting the L2 learning demotivation.
2.5.1 Demotivation research in Vietnam

Demotivation research in Vietnam began with the work of Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007). They adopted Dörnyei’s (1998) research framework with the aim of identifying external forces that demotivate Vietnamese EAL learners. Retrospective writing materials were collected from 100 non-major EAL learners who were instructed to write in their native language on demotivating experiences and any methods they have applied to recover from the negative status. In consideration of increasing the validity of the research, Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007) reported that they did not offer any information regarding the potential causes of demotivation to the research participants throughout their investigation. Based on the research findings, they raised the concern that due to learners’ different sociocultural backgrounds, it might be inappropriate to apply the findings of demotivation research that carried out in Europe and North America context directly to issue of L2 learning demotivation in an Asian context (ibid., 81).

Similar to Ushioda’s (1998) description, demotivation was identified as an ‘unavoidable phenomenon’ as commented by the majority of the learners (Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007: 89). After the content analysis, 14 main demotivating factors were identified which originated from both internal or external forces. In comparison, external factors demonstrated a stronger effect in causing learners’ demotivation, which was reflected in 64% of the demotivating encounters described by the learners. Among the external factors, learners considered 38% were teacher-owned while attributed another 21% to factors that associated with their learning environment. Trang and Baldauf Jr. (ibid.) then concluded that learners recognised the teachers to be primarily responsible for their EAL learning demotivation, with a particular criticism on their inappropriate teaching methods. This result was consistent with previous demotivation research in Europe and North America context (Chambers, 1993; Dörnyei, 1998; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Oxford, 1998), and was further supported by a later demotivation study that also carried out in Vietnam (Tuan, 2011).

Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007) also separated the learners into four groups based on their different demotivation status for further comparisons. These four groups referred to learners 1) who claimed never to be demotivated (9%), 2) who were fully recovered from past demotivation status (47%), 3) who were partially recovered from past demotivation
status (21%) and 4) who were being demotivated at present (20%). To seek whether there were any differences between the four groups regarding the behaviour of the identified demotivating factors, Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007) compared the average amount of demotivating incidents mentioned in their writings and the distribution of main demotivating factors for each group. They reported that due to a lack of evidence, no particular relationship could be found between learner’s current demotivating status and the amount or particular types of demotivating factors they have encountered. A similar finding was mentioned in Falout and Maruyama’s (2004: 5) investigation, that the experience of demotivation was irrelevant to learners’ current motivational level or language proficiency. However, Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007) were sceptical about this result and expressed expectation for future demotivation research to further investigate on this topic (ibid., 96).

Though Trang and Baldauf Jr.’s (ibid.) research intended to focus on the demotivating effects of external forces, it also discovered the effect of internal forces in causing learners’ demotivation. They noted that while demotivation seems to be a problem evoked mainly by external causes, its effective solutions relied more on interventions of internal forces (ibid., 99). After analysing comments on remotivating methods by learners who were fully or partially recovered from their previous demotivated status, they reported that 71% of the effective methods were associated with internal forces. Among these different methods, the most commonly mentioned one was to emphasise the importance of EAL learning for their future (27%). In comparison, learners appeared to have much lower expectations in changing external conditions such as teachers’ behaviour (6%) and their teaching methods (7%), even though they were more responsible for learners’ demotivation. It was also important to notice that there were two factors that were only mentioned by learners who were fully recovered from the demotivated status, which were the self-improvement and self-determination. This indicated that these two factors might be essential for learners to either avoid or eventually diminish the negative effect of demotivating incidents.

2.5.2 Demotivation research in Japan

Japanese researchers began their investigations of L2 learning demotivation soon after the establishment of demotivation as an independent researchable concept in the late
1990s. Due to the influence of the Japanese educational background, demotivation studies carried out in the Japanese context shared a primary focus on the inappropriate L2 teaching methods. Among them, Arai (2004) analysed qualitative data from 33 Japanese university students and reported that teacher-owned factor is the most salient source of learners’ demotivation. The result was consistent with findings of EAL learning demotivation in Japanese post-primary education, that Hasegawa (2004) also reported the inappropriate teacher behaviour as the most commonly perceived demotivating influence as identified by 223 students in Japanese post-primary schools.

In general, the findings of early demotivation research in Japan mainly concerned the inappropriate behaviour and attitude of EAL teachers and their effects in causing learners’ demotivation (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Ikeno, 2002; Kojima, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004). However, with the further development of demotivation studies, more demotivation researchers in Japan began to draw attention to factors that are less associated with the teachers. Intrinsic sources of demotivation were soon discovered, which led to the discussion of different frameworks of EAL learning demotivation for Japanese EAL learners. In a shift in approach, later demotivation research no longer considered teacher-owned factors as the centre of Japanese EAL learners’ demotivation (Falout, 2012; Falout et al., 2009; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kikuchi, 2009; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). This divergent view on the role of teachers in demotivating L2 learners marked the major difference between the previous L2 demotivation research in Europe and North America context and the ones that carried out in Japan.

2.5.2.1 Falout’s investigation

In order to seek the relationship between learners’ language performance and their EAL learning demotivation, Falout and Maruyama (ibid.) divided the learners into two groups based on their results of a replicated Japanese college entrance examination of English. These two groups were named as the lower proficient group and the higher proficient group. Results of between-group comparisons identified that five out of six proposed factors were recognised as demotivating by the lower proficient group, while the attitude towards the L2 community was not a primary source of demotivation for this group of learners. In comparison, two internally-oriented factors (self-confidence and attitude towards L2 itself) appeared to be more demotivating for the lower proficient learners. However, the percentage of demotivated learners in each group was almost the same, which made it difficult to draw any concrete conclusions on the correlation between the learners’ demotivation and their language proficiency. Also, due to the discovery of internally-oriented factors in demotivating learners, Falout and Maruyama (ibid.) raised the issue regarding the range of Dörnyei’s (2001) definition which excluded the internal factors from causes of demotivation. They argued that all the forces which negatively impacted on L2 learners should be considered as L2 learning demotivation.

There were also differences between the two groups of learners regarding their perception of chronical demotivation influences. In comparison, lower proficient learners suffered more from the reduction of self-confidence in the early stage of learning. The negative effect of demotivation also appeared to persist for a longer period of time for the lower proficient learners. More learners in this group reported that they were still affected by demotivating incidents in their previous EAL learning experiences in post-primary schools. In comparison, this phenomenon was much less frequently discovered among learners in the higher proficient group. Moreover, lower proficient learners were more likely to internalise the cause of their demotivation and blame themselves. They tended to attribute demotivation more relevant to their lack of aptitude. In comparison, learners in the higher proficient group attributed their demotivation more to external causes which were often associated with their teachers and the teaching methods. This finding was in line with the previous demotivation studies, that learners with a higher level of target language proficiency or L2 learning motivation demonstrated the tendency to attribute their learning failure or demotivation more to external forces as a method of protecting self-confidence and maintaining motivation (Gorham & Millette, 1997; Ushioda, 1998).
In order to continue investigating the cause of Japanese EAL learners’ demotivation, Falout et al. (2009) surveyed 900 students in Japanese universities and conceptualised nine demotivating factors which negatively affected learners’ motivational change. These factors were further generalised into three main categories. The first category referred to external factors, which included teacher immediacy, teaching methods and language course design. The second category consisted of internal factors, which included self-denigration, the perceived value of L2 courses and learners’ self-confidence. The second category was named reactive factors, which included learners’ remotivation strategies of help-seeking, enjoyment-seeking and avoidance. Among these general categories, external factors were majorly evolved from classroom context, internal factors were more related to learners’ perception of EAL learning, and reactive factors described learners’ endeavour of changing their demotivated status (ibid., 407).

It is worth noticing that direct teacher-owned factors (e.g., teacher immediacy) were not recognised as an important demotivating factor in Falout et al.’s (ibid.) study but appeared to have a more positive influence over learners’ motivation. In comparison, learners’ criticism focused more on the inappropriate teaching methods (e.g., the grammar-translation method), which was perceived by the learners to be less related to their EAL teachers but more with institutional designs of the course. This finding was supported by the later demotivation research of Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), that teacher factor was not the principal demotivating factor as identified by the Japanese EAL learners in their study.

To continue Falout and Maruyama’s (2004) endeavour on the chronical influence of demotivation, Falout et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between learners’ previous demotivating encounters in EAL learning, their self-regulatory capacity and their current English proficiency. Regarding the previous demotivating encounters, four internally-oriented demotivating factors were identified to have indications for learners’ language proficiency, which were the enjoyment-seeking, help-seeking, self-denigration and self-confidence. This finding suggested that learners’ target language proficiency was more relevant to their internal perceptions of L2 learning.

Regarding learners’ self-regulatory capacity, Falout et al. (ibid.) further compared the results regarding learners’ capability of self-regulation and their current English
proficiency. They reported that the most effective strategy that learners used to revitalise their EAL learning motivation was enjoyment-seeking. However, the effectiveness of this strategy was largely determined by learners’ language proficiency, learning history and the curriculum setting (e.g., English major or non-major). In general, learners with higher English proficiency, longer learning experience or majoring in English appeared to be relatively more competent in dealing with demotivating issues and maintaining their motivation in EAL learning.

Based on the above findings, Falout et al. concluded that learners’ self-regulatory capacity was more relevant to their current experiences in L2 studies in comparison with their previous learning experiences (ibid., 410). Learners who demonstrated a more frequent use of self-regulating methods could have higher achievements in L2 learning, while learners who lacked such skills may risk in failing a negative cycle of learning failure and self-denigration. As a result, they emphasised the importance of cultivating learners’ self-motivating skills, which was vital for the learners to resolve issues of demotivation by their own efforts. To acquire more insights regarding this suggestion, Falout (2012) explored the possible remedy solutions of demotivation by investigation learners’ perception of self-regulating methods.

Falout distributed a questionnaire which consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions to 157 Japanese university students to investigate their experiences of regaining and maintaining EAL learning motivation (ibid.). The survey results showed that the most significant demotivating factor varied largely as identified by the two groups of learners who had different experiences of EAL learning. Learners with more positive experiences listed inappropriate teaching pedagogy as the most salient demotivating influence, while learners with more negative experiences considered their demotivation was mainly caused by the gradual loss of confidence. This result paralleled the finding of Falout’s early research, that L2 learners with different motivational statuses and language proficiencies possessed different demotivation attribution styles (Falout and Maruyama, 2004).

Falout (2012) further pointed out that the awareness and possession of remotivation methods, such as the self-appraisal and self-confidence, were essential for the learners in maintaining their EAL learning motivation. Learners could link their current L2 learning
experience with their previous experiences and use them as references to anticipate their present and future L2 selves. The perceived future self-image was a strong influence on learners’ L2 learning motivation and demotivation at present. Confident learners who encountered more positive experiences could actively utilise self-remotivation methods and seek support from peers and the public to avoid or resolve demotivating incidents, which contributed to their gradual increase of adaptive capacity. In comparison, learners with lower confidence tended to possess a feeling of helplessness and were more vulnerable to both instant and chronical demotivating influences, which led to the tendency of escaping L2 learning. The importance of this finding is that it pinpointed the effect of utilising interferences outside of the L2 classroom (e.g., peer support, social intervention) and learners’ future self-perceptions in dealing with the issues of demotivation. It also inspired the later research in relation to the socio-dynamic and the diachronic perspectives of the demotivation research.

2.5.2.2 Kikuchi’s investigation

After perceiving the prevailed demotivation phenomenon in Japanese EAL classrooms, Kikuchi (2009) initiated his study to investigate the influence of demotivation among EAL learners in Japanese post-primary schools. The research collected qualitative data by both interviews (n = 5) and open-ended questionnaires (n = 42) from EAL learners in Japanese universities. This research used a similar approach of Falout and Maruyama’s (2004) data collection methods, that participants were instructed to comment on their previous EAL learning experiences in post-primary schools by using retrospective thinking. Kikuchi (ibid.) adopted Dörnyei’s (2001) definition of demotivation and focused on the external influences in demotivating EAL learners and generated five main demotivating factors for EAL learning in a Japanese context (Kikuchi, 2009: 466), which are briefly summarised as below.

1. Teachers’ behaviour in the classroom
2. Inappropriate teaching methods
3. Exam-centred course nature and poor results
4. Tedious and repetitive memorisation tasks
5. Teaching and learning material
The research findings showed that teachers’ inappropriate behaviour and over-reliance on the grammar-translation method were perceived by the learners to be the main sources of their demotivation. Based on the identification of these main demotivating factors, Kikuchi (ibid.) also offered suggestions in dealing with the demotivating incidents accordingly. This included 1) raising teachers’ awareness on the communicative approach for language learning, 2) avoiding the one-way teaching method, 3) minimising the penalties for students’ poor exam results and 4) matching students’ interests with the content of textbooks.

Kikuchi (ibid.) called for attention to the influence of the wider sociocultural background in learners’ EAL learning demotivation. He mentioned that some fundamental demotivating influences could only be resolved by the support of educational policies, such as changing the exam-centred EAL courses across Japanese educational levels. At the end of the investigation, he emphasised the needs for large scale quantitative studies in further investigating learners’ demotivation (ibid., 469). As a result, he conducted two consecutive quantitative investigations to continue research the demotivation of Japanese EAL learners (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009).

In order to compare the findings of the previous research (Kikuchi, 2009), Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) kept the same research design of collecting retrospective data from university students in their demotivating experiences of EAL learning in post-primary schools, but adopted a mixed methods research approach. The research used a questionnaire with both close-ended and open-ended questions and collected data from 112 EAL learners in three private universities in Japan. The data analysis generated five general factors for Japanese learners’ EAL learning demotivation. Among them, two factors (coursebook and inadequate school facilities) were identified by the factor analysis of quantitative data, and another three factors (test score, non-communicative teaching methods, teachers’ competence and teaching style) were frequently mentioned by learners’ comments in the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

In comparison with the previous research, though the categories of main demotivating factors were similar, the significance of each factor in demotivating learners was not the same. The previous research indicated that teacher-owned factors were the primary source of learners’ demotivation (Kikuchi, 2009: 466). However, Kikuchi and Sakai
(2009: 197) reported that no dominant factor was found among the five main factors, though the inadequate school facilities demonstrated relatively the less impact on learners’ demotivation. Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) speculated that this contrast in research finding may have important indications on the nature of L2 learning demotivation. The demotivation could be caused by internally-oriented factors, and their influences could be equally demotivating in comparison with the more commonly perceived externally-oriented factors. It also raised concerns regarding the accuracy of Dörnyei’s (2001) definition of demotivation, which excluded the effect of internal factors.

Another investigation conducted by Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) simultaneously was a large scale quantitative survey study, which involved 656 Japanese post-primary school EAL learners. Different from the previous two studies which adopted the retrospective methods (Kikuchi, 2009; Kikuchi and Sakai, 2009), this research gathered data directly from the post-primary school students to acquire information of demotivating incidents in their current EAL learning period. They recruited learners with different motivational statuses and established a framework of demotivating factors which included both internal and external factors. The research finding provided more evidence that L2 learning demotivation should concern factors from both internal and external perspectives. It also confirmed that demotivation was not a peculiar trait for demotivated learners, which is in line with the understanding of Ushioda (1998) and the present research.

To reflect the more comprehensive understanding of L2 learning demotivation, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) summarised a five-category framework for the main demotivating factors. In comparison with the previous studies (Kikuchi, 2009; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009), a new internally-orientated factor was generated to refer to learners’ lack of intrinsic motivation, while two former categories of externally-oriented factors (non-communicative teaching methods, teaching and learning material) were merged into one factor named as learning content and material. In this new framework, two externally-oriented factors (learning content and material, test score) appeared to have relatively more salient demotivating effect for Japanese EAL learners.

To summarise, findings of Sakai and Kikuchi’s (2009) research reflected three major differences between the early demotivation research in Europe and North America
context and the ones that conducted by Japanese scholars. The first is that they included internal factors in the framework of main demotivating factors (ibid., 61). It extended the range of the demotivation concept from focusing more exclusively on external factors to also concerns the influence of internal forces. The second is that they examined the feature of demotivation among learners with various motivational statuses (ibid., 65). It confirmed that demotivation is a common issue among 2 L2 learners and identified that internally-oriented factors have more negative impacts on demotivated learners in comparison with motivated learners. The final and most important difference is that teacher-owned factors no longer occupy the centre of L2 demotivation studies (ibid., 67). The attention of demotivation research was directed to a wider range of factors, especially the role of sociocultural influences in demotivating L2 learners.

2.5.3 Demotivation research in South Korea

Turning to the South Korean context, L2 demotivation research has involved a relatively wider scope of learners in comparison with the previous investigations that carried out in Europe and America context and also in Japan. The backgrounds of research participants were much more diversified which include younger EAL learners in primary schools (Kim, 2011a, 2012; Lee & Lee, 2011) and post-primary schools (Kim, 2009a, 2009b; Song & Kim, 2017), adult learners who study EAL full-time in higher education (Cho, 2014b; Jung, 2011; Kim, 2015; Kim & Lee, 2013; Lee & Kim, 2014) and part-time in private language training institutions (Kim, 2011b), and elder learners in lifelong educational programmes (Kim & Kim, 2015a).

Kim (2016) drew insights from this diversity and compared 19 demotivation studies that were conducted in South Korea. He summarised the relationship of learners’ demotivation and their educational background and identified dominant demotivating forces for learners of different educational levels. For pupils in elementary schools, EAL learning demotivation was mainly caused by the reduced interest, teachers’ inappropriate teaching methods and the pressure of EAL learning that comes from the social environment. For learners in post-primary schools, besides the same reason of lacking intrinsic motivation towards EAL learning, another significant demotivating force was the language learning difficulty. In comparison, the demotivation that college students perceived was mainly caused by the insufficient personal qualities for EAL learning, such
as the L2 confidence, learning purposes, sense of achievement and self-determination. Due to Kim’s continuous investigations and his contributions to demotivation research in the South Korean context in the past decade, this section focuses on reviewing his work over the years (Kim, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2015a; Kim & Kim, 2013; Song & Kim, 2017).

Kim’s series of research of EAL learning demotivation began with his longitudinal study on the motivational change of two South Korea immigrants in Canada (Kim, 2011b). He collected qualitative data through scheduled interviews in a time span of 10 months to investigate two recent immigrants’ motivational change of EAL learning from a sociolinguistic perspective. After analysing the interview data, four motivational factors were generalised. Three of them were related to the increase of motivation and one associated more with demotivation. The two participants shared similar backgrounds in terms of their age and educational experiences. It was discovered that demotivation affected them both as an influential factor in their motivational changes, while the effect varied due to their different perceptions and personalities.

The EAL learning motivation of the first participant (he) was mainly job-oriented. He expressed strong feelings in the interview after several unsuccessful job-seeking experiences. The turning point was one particular incident which made him realise that English proficiency was overvalued by himself for the job-seeking purposes in comparison with the local working experiences. The negative feeling overwhelmed him immediately and caused him to completely lose the EAL learning motivation. In comparison, the other participant (she) possessed a relatively more comprehensive motivation for EAL learning, which was identified as a mixture of three different types of motivation (job-oriented, communicative needs and self-satisfaction).

The other participant denied the paramount importance of local working experiences and considered it as a employers’ excuse for unsatisfied oral English proficiency. Based on this belief, she managed to suppress her negative perceptions and feelings and maintain a dynamic balance between her motivation and demotivation in EAL learning. Kim (2011b: 115) then concluded that learners’ perception of their L2 learning in a particular sociocultural context was essential for their motivation and demotivation. This discovery paralleled the previous findings of Ushioda (1998) and Falout et al. (2009), that learners’
subjective attribution style of their demotivation has a salient impact on the consistency of their positive motivation status and the effectiveness of their remotivation strategies.

With the rapid growth of private EAL learning institutions for young learners in South Korea, Kim (2011a) expressed his concern regarding the actual effect of these private tuitions, especially regarding the trend that they were introduced to students with increasing lower educational backgrounds. He mentioned that despite the temporary improvement of learners’ English proficiency, the early exposure of extracurricular EAL courses could lower their long-term learning motivation and raise demotivation of EAL learning through official curriculum courses in schools. As a result, Kim (ibid.) conducted a simultaneous investigation which adopted a different quantitative approach by surveying 6301 South Korean primary school students to investigate the reasons behind their EAL learning demotivation.

Kim first identified the different types of motivation among these young learners and divided them into five groups. The five groups referred to learners with 1) integrative motivation, 2) instrumental motivation, 3) intrinsic motivation, 4) extrinsic motivation maintained by parental influence and 5) extrinsic motivation maintained by academic influence (ibid., 4). The survey results showed that learners’ intrinsic motivation and two kinds of extrinsic motivation had a general decline trend along with their advancement in EAL learning. In comparison, the positive effect of instrumental and integrative motivation remained relatively consistent. Based on this finding, Kim (ibid.) noted that it was still possible for learners who were demotivated by the current EAL learning experiences to maintain a positive perception regarding a beneficial ideal L2 self and their efficacy in gaining such benefit.

Kim (ibid.) further compared the survey results among learners with different amount of private tuitions prior to their experiences of EAL learning in formal schooling. He reported that private tuitions had a positive impact on improving learners’ instrumental and intrinsic motivation, but not the integrative and extrinsic motivation. Moreover, learners who had fewer experiences of private demonstrated a higher extrinsic motivation for academic purpose. Kim suggested that this finding was tightly associated with the sociocultural background of the South Korean context, that there was a massive public acknowledgement in the usefulness of EAL learning during the period of the
investigation (ibid., 9). He then advocated EAL educators and the general public to help create a positive sociocultural environment for learners to internalise their EAL learning motivation and establish a positive L2 self.

The two above studies focused on learners’ motivational changes and emphasised the influence of the broad sociocultural background on learners’ demotivation (Kim, 2011a, 2011b). Both studies were conducted from a learner perspective, but did not include any insights from the teacher perspective. In order to achieve a more comprehensive view of the issue of learners’ EAL learning demotivation, Kim (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study to investigate teachers’ perception of learners’ demotivation.

After analysing the data from both open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, he identified three general factors of EAL learners’ demotivation as perceived by 17 EAL teachers in South Korean primary schools. The first factor referred to the negative impact of EAL teachers, which included teachers’ ignorance of students’ needs, their lack of patience and the lack of enthusiasm in teaching. The second factor referred to the excessive social pressure, that learners were expected to achieve a high level of English language proficiency as the outcome of EAL learning. The third factor referred to peer pressure, which was caused mainly by the wide proficiency gaps between learners.

Previous demotivation research identified inappropriate teacher immediacy in demotivating the L2 learners (Dörnyei, 1998; Kikuchi, 2009; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007). In comparison, Kim’s (2012) focused more on the influence of teachers’ perception instead of their behaviour. He reported on a general perception among the teachers that learners’ awareness regarding the importance of EAL learning could help improve their motivational level, which was in contradict to the results of learners’ feedback (Kim, 2011a, 2011b).

Kim also discovered the synergy of demotivating factors from different perspectives (e.g., the learner, learning context and sociocultural background), that the interaction between the social pressure and peer pressure contributed significantly to learners’ demotivation (Kim, 2012: 166). He explained that due to the overwhelming expectations of the parents, the teachers and the society regarding the success of EAL learning, learners were forced to participate in private tuitions outside of formal schooling. This has caused learners
who only attended EAL courses in schools to progress relatively slower in EAL learning and also suffered more from the negative influence of peer pressure. As a result, private tuitions of EAL learning became almost a necessity for the young EAL learners in the South Korean context. It increased learners’ workload in exchange for temporary achievements in EAL learning and a lower level of peer pressure. However, it also stimulated the growth of social pressure and learners’ anxiety, which eventually caused even more demotivating influence to the learners.

To further study relationships between the sociocultural influence, learners’ L2 motivational self and their demotivation, Kim and Kim (2015a) conducted a quantitative investigation to investigate 420 elderly learners’ experiences in EAL learning. These learners had an average age of sixty and were attending an English exam preparation course in a lifelong education institute in South Korea. Based on the results of statistical analysis, Kim and Kim reported that three main demotivating factors were identified to have a negative influence on these elderly EAL learners, which were the pressure from the exams and assessments, negative perceptions towards the affordance and negative perceptions towards EAL learning difficulty (ibid., 126). Among them, the pressure from the exams and assessments appeared to be most detrimental. The other two factors demonstrated a strong correlation with learners’ ideal L2 self, and their negative effect gradually reduced along with the increase in EAL learning experiences.

This finding suggested that depending on learners’ different perceptions, their L2 motivational self could be both a strong motive (Falout, 2012; Kim, 2011a) and also as a powerful demotivating force (Kim & Kim, 2015a: 132). Furthermore, demotivation could be caused not only by a negative ideal L2 self, but also a contrast between the high level of expectation in learners’ ideal L2 self and their achievement in the current stage of CAL learning, especially when learners receive negative feedback regarding their learning efficacy. Kim and Kim (ibid.) also noted that many motivating and demotivating factors possessed positive correlations, which indicated that the issue of demotivation was not a simple negative counterpart of learners’ positive motivation.

In light of the previous investigations, Song and Kim (2017) conducted another mixed-methods study to further investigate EAL learners’ motivational change and to explore pedagogical solutions for remotivation. Their research recruited 64 students in South
Korean post-primary schools. Students were first instructed to draw a linear graph to describe their motivational changes from the beginning of their EAL learning in kindergarten to the present. As identified, the majority of the students encountered most influences of demotivation in their first year of junior high school while the most common period for remotivation was the first year in senior high school.

Based on the general patterns of the graphs, Song and Kim (ibid.) divided the participants into two groups of demotivated students (with a consistent decreasing pattern) and remotivated students (with a decreasing trend followed by consistent increasing pattern). Then, they used questionnaires and interviews to investigate the reasons for such deviation. The demotivating factors identified by the students were more associated with external forces, such as the content of the textbook and the curriculum. In line with previous demotivation studies which were also conducted in the Asian context (Falout et al., 2009; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007), teacher-owned factors had a predominant focus on the inappropriate teaching methods. Similar to Kim’s previous findings (Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2015a), the social pressure and necessity of EAL learning also contributed significantly to students’ demotivation.

Regarding the remedy solutions, students perceived that most of the identified demotivating forces have matching remotivation strategies. The conditional change of external factors (e.g., teaching methods, course content, social pressure) were proved to be quite effective in revitalising students’ EAL learning motivation. Though, in comparison, the essential driving force was students’ internal perception (attribution of success and failure in EAL learning, awareness regarding the benefit and necessity of EAL learning). This finding was consistent with the results of Kim’s (2011b) study and another demotivation research conducted by Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007).

2.5.4 Demotivation research in Iran

Demotivation research began to emerge in Iran a few years later than in the Japanese and South Korean contexts. However, due to the apparent issue of EAL learning demotivation, it attracted relatively more attention from Iranian researchers. The early demotivation research in Iran focused on the identification of main demotivating factors of Iranian EAL learners. In 2012, six papers were published with such similar purposes. Among them,
Meshkat and Hassani (2012) and Alavinia and Sehat (2012) focused on EAL learning in post-primary education. These two studies shared the same finding that the inadequate school facility was the most prominent source of EAL learners’ demotivation. They also mentioned that negatively perceived factors from both internal and external resources contribute to learners’ demotivation. Besides, Meshkat and Hassani (2012) reported that the gender factor affected the influence of the main demotivating factors. While in Alavinia and Sehat’s (2012) study, no differences were found among learners in different majors or with different lengths of EAL learning experiences.

The other four demotivation studies involved more of EAL learners in Iranian higher education (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2012; Rastegar et al., 2012; Soureshjani & Riahipour, 2012; Tabatabaei & Molavi, 2012). Their findings were relatively more diverse regarding the construction of the main demotivating factors in EAL learning. In comparison, Soureshjani and Riahipour (2012) drew similar conclusion with the studies which targeted younger EAL learners (Alavinia & Sehat, 2012; Meshkat & Hassani, 2012), that two external factors (EAL teacher and the inadequate school facilities) were the principal demotivating factors as identified by both EAL teachers and learners in their research. However, internal factors such as the lack of competence and lack of intrinsic motivation were identified by Ghadirzadeh et al. (2012) and Tabatabaei and Molavi (2012) to have stronger indications on learners’ demotivation. Moreover, contradicted to Meshkat and Hassani’s (2012) results, Rastegar et al. (2012) reported that no statistical differences were found regarding learners’ perceptions of demotivation between genders.

Since then, the demotivation investigations in Iran began to draw more attention in establishing theoretical models to describe the relationship between learners’ EAL learning demotivation and other concepts in educational psychology (Hassaskhah et al., 2015; Rajabi & Pozveh, 2016; Sahragard & Alimorad, 2013). Succeeded to these early demotivation studies in Iran, Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh conducted a series of demotivation research which focused on the socio-dynamic perspective of the issue (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a, 2015b) and its influence towards learners’ goal orientation (Allahdadi et al., 2016; Jahedizadeh, Allahdadi, et al., 2016; Jahedizadeh, Ghanizadeh, et al., 2016). The outcome of their continuous studies was a structural model which interpreted the interaction between the L2 learning demotivation, language learning burnout and learners’ language achievement.
To begin with, Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015a) carried out a survey investigation as the first step of their two-phase demotivation research which aimed to explore the construction of Iranian EAL learners’ demotivation in two different learning contexts (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a, 2015b). The participants of Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh’s (2015a) research were 250 EAL learners in Iran, that half of them studied English in language institutes and the other half studied English related majors (e.g., language teaching, translation, foreign literature) in universities. They adopted Sakai and Kikuchi’s (2009) demotivation questionnaire as the research instrument and translated it into the native language of the learners. The statistical analysis generated six demotivating factors (teacher, characteristics of classes, experience of failure, classroom environment, teaching materials, lack of interest), which all appeared to be different in affecting the two groups of learners.

In general, EAL learners who studied in language institutes suffered more from the negative influence of demotivation than those who studied in universities. The lack of interest in EAL learning and the inappropriate classroom materials were perceived as the most significant demotivating factors by learners of language institutes. Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015a) offered two explanations regarding this difference. The first was that learners in universities may have relatively higher intrinsic motivation while learners in language institutes may perceive their learning more have a compulsory nature. The second was the poor integration of Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teaching methods and pedagogies in the language institutes. According to Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015a: 93), there was a sociocultural misperception of neglecting the communicative competence for EAL learning. The integration of MFL educational concepts was greatly restrained by the established model of the teacher-centred classroom, and the learning materials also appeared to be exam-centred which lacked authenticity. The utilisation of MFL teaching methods, such as the communicative approach and task-based language teaching, seemed ill-fitted in this particular educational context.

Upon the completion of the first phase of the investigation, Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015b) proceeded to the second phase to explore the relationship between learners’ demotivation, language learning burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism and academic inefficacy) and language achievement. Quantitative data (results of a burnout inventory)
and learners’ background information (e.g., language proficiency, general academic performance) were collected from the same participants of the previous research (Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh, 2015a).

Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (2015b) reported that all six demotivating factors identified by their previous research were positively correlated to learners’ state of burnout. Among them, two factors of the classroom materials and learners’ lack of interest in EAL learning appeared to be the strongest predictors. The relationship between learners’ burnout and language achievement was also found to be negatively correlated. Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh (ibid.) then predicated that demotivation may indirectly affect learners’ language achievement through its negative impact on their state of burnout.

The outcome of the two-phase research was a structural model which interpreted the interaction between L2 learning demotivation, language learning burnout and language achievement (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a, 2015b). More concepts in relation to the L2 studies and educational psychology, such as the goal orientation (Allahdadi et al., 2016; Jahedizadeh, Allahdadi, et al., 2016) and students’ perceptions of classroom activities (Jahedizadeh, Ghanizadeh, et al., 2016) were included successively to complete this model through further investigations with similar research designs (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7](image_url)

Figure 7 Jahedizadeh, Ghanizadeh, et al.’s (2016) model of demotivation
In Figure 7, the six demotivating factors were illustrated on the left side, which were the teacher (TEA), characteristics of classes (COC), classroom environment (CEN), classroom materials (CMA), lack of interest (LOI) and experiences of failure (EOF). The Burnout in the figure stood for learners’ language learning burnout, and the Mastery represents learners’ mastery goal orientation. Four factors regarding learners’ perception of classroom activities were listed in the middle of the figure including their interest (INT), challenge (CHA), choice (CHO) and joy (JOY). Learners’ grade point average (GPA) was adopted as the measure of their language achievement, which was presented at the right side of the figure.

The paths in the figure (as presented by a line with an arrow) were the predictions of influence from one factor to another. There were two estimates reported on each path. The first one was the standardized coefficient (β) and the second one in the blanket was the t value (t). According to Jahedizadeh, Ghanizadeh, et al. (2016), a β with a greater value towards 1.0 indicated a stronger predictive power, and a t value of >2 or < -2 was a statistically significant result.

In the model, all six demotivating factors were identified to have a strong impact on learners’ state of burnout. Among them, only two factors (lack of interest and experience of failure) were negatively influential for their mastery goal orientation. Learners’ state of burnout was an effective predictor for their language achievement, which was realised by its interaction with both the learners’ perceptions of classroom activities and their mastery goal orientation.

2.5.5 Demotivation research in Chinese speaking regions

In the context of Chinese language studies, the first study which included the concept of demotivation was conducted by Ho (1998). Ho investigated the impact of cultural courses on Taiwanese learners’ EAL learning motivation and suggested to increase the teaching and learning of L2 associated culture content as a solution in reducing learners’ demotivation. In the context of mainland China, English was a mandatory subject in post-primary education as well as most of the undergraduate and postgraduate educational programmes (Yihong et al., 2007). The compulsory nature of EAL learning became a
significant source of learners' demotivation, which has also led to the growing attention of language teachers and researchers in recent years.

According to Shan (2015b), 107 papers were published concerning the demotivation of learning foreign languages in the span of 2004-2014 in mainland China. Under the influence of historical thinking in Chinese philosophy, review and reflection research of demotivation studies have been made both prior to and periodically during the surge of empirical studies (Liu, 2009; Shan, 2015b; Wang, 2014). Similar to the trend of demotivation studies in other Asian regions, the two most popular areas of investigations were the identification of demotivating factors (Gao & Liu, 2016; Hu, 2011; Li, 2013b; Zou & Xu, 2016) and the conceptualisation of model for L2 learning demotivation (Hu & Cai, 2010; Li, 2015; Liu & Ying, 2013).

Demotivation research in Chinese speaking regions also predominantly focused on EAL learning, while findings were relatively more diverse due to the different backgrounds of the EAL learners as well as the researchers. The contrast of different findings emphasised the importance of sociocultural influence in L2 learners’ demotivation. For example, Wu (2016) investigated principal demotivating factors for English interpreter trainees. The finding of the research suggested that teacher-owned factors were the most significant sources of demotivation for these highly motivated learners. This result was consistent with previous demotivation investigations that were conducted in different sociocultural contexts (Gorham & Millette, 1997; Kikuchi, 2009; Oxford, 1998; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007). It was also supported by some other demotivation research in similar research contexts (Gao & Liu, 2016; Li, 2014a, 2014b).

In contrast, Yao (2014) carried out a survey study on college students’ EAL learning demotivation in Chinese ethnic minority regions and reported that negative future L2 self was the dominant demotivating factor for this particular type of learners. Yao (2014) explained that this result reflected the influence of learners’ sociocultural background. There was a lack of opportunities and needs for communicating with foreigners, which has led to learners’ negative perception regarding the necessity and benefit of EAL learning in their future life and career. Different from the findings of both Wu (2016) and Yao (2014), the lack of effective learning strategy as an internally-oriented factor was identified to be the most salient source of learners’ demotivation in Zhou and Wang’s
The reason for such difference was also closely associated with the background of the learners. Zhou and Wang (ibid.) recruited non-major EAL students in Chinese higher education as their research participants, who received comparatively less guidance and support on learning strategies in comparison with the English interpreter trainees in Wu’s (2016) research.

With the development of educational technology, a considerable amount of demotivation studies were set to investigate learners’ demotivation caused by the inappropriate integration of Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) pedagogy. Learner autonomy was an issue in designing CALL course and environment (Reinders & White, 2016). Similarly, demotivation investigations in the field also reported findings regarding the internally-oriented factors in causing learners’ demotivation in the context of CALL, such as the lack of intrinsic motivation (Yu, 2012) and learners’ personality (Bai et al., 2016; Lin & Liu, 2015). In the meantime, external causes of demotivation were also identified, such as the authenticity of the learning environment and learning tasks (Bai et al., 2016; Yu, 2012) and teachers’ capability in managing new teaching methods (Lin & Liu, 2015).

2.5.6 Demotivation research in learning Chinese

In the past two decades, demotivation research in the field of L2 studies has been predominantly focusing on EAL learning in different contexts. Due to the influence of English as a global language, there was a paucity in research which addressed the demotivation in learning other languages. In the context of CAL learning, the inherent difficulty of the Chinese language was commonly perceived as the most important demotivating factor for the learners, though not much empirical research has been carried out to confirm this perception. By the time of the present research, only two studies could be retrieved which investigated the issue of demotivation among CAL learners (Yu, 2013; Zhang & Wang, 2016).

2.5.6.1 Yu’s investigation

In order to identify the main demotivating factors for CAL learning, Yu (2013) conducted a quantitative investigation by collecting data from 209 international students in a
Chinese university. Among these students, 88 were from South Korea, 44 from Japan and another 49 from Europe and the United States of America (US). Factor analysis identified ten main demotivating factors as below (listed by priority):

1. Negative attitude towards learning Chinese
2. Learning environment
3. Reduced self-confidence
4. Teaching and learning material
5. The teacher (competence, teaching methods, personality, relationship with students)
6. Interference of other language courses
7. Negative attitude towards the Chinese community and/or Chinese culture
8. Exam results
9. Lack of intrinsic motivation
10. Peer pressure

Among these factors, the negative attitude towards learning Chinese was recognised as the dominant demotivating factor, which was reported to be largely originated from the characteristics and learning difficulty of the Chinese language. Similar to some demotivation studies in the Asian context (Falout et al., 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Yao, 2014), Yu (2013) also reported that teacher-owned factors were not major causes for learners’ CAL learning demotivation. To further investigate the influence of learners’ sociocultural backgrounds, Yu (ibid.) compared results between learners with different language and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Japanese, Korean and English). It was identified that four demotivating factors have more impacts on Japanese and Korean learners, which were the peer pressure, reduced self-confidence, learning environment and negative attitude towards the Chinese community or Chinese culture. This also caused a relatively more demotivated status of these learners in comparison with learners from Europe and the US.

Yu (2013) reported that in general, learners were more likely to attribute the cause of their demotivation to external factors, which were quite often the learning difficulty, learning materials and the learning environment. However, there were different attributional styles of learners with different achievements and experiences in CAL learning. In comparison, learners with lower achievements or in their early stage of
learning tended to attribute the cause of their demotivation more to internal forces, such as the negative attitude towards CAL learning, reduced self-confidence and lack of intrinsic motivation. This finding in CAL learning demotivation paralleled similar discoveries in the previous EAL learning demotivation studies (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Gorham & Millette, 1997; Ushioda, 1998).

Based on the identification of statistical correlations between the main demotivating factors, Yu (2013) reported that these factors were interactive instead of isolated. The internally-oriented factor lack of intrinsic motivation demonstrated moderate correlation with three externally-oriented factors (peer pressure, exam results, the interference of other language courses). Weak correlations were also identified between two internally-oriented factors (lack intrinsic motivation, reduced self-confidence) and two externally-oriented factors (the teacher, teaching and learning material). Three factors were found to be effective in predicting learners’ current motivational level, which were the reduced self-confidence, teaching and learning material and exam results. Another two factors, namely the interference of other language courses and lack of intrinsic motivation, appeared to have better indications on learners’ intention for continuous and future learning.

2.5.6.2 Zhang and Wang’s investigation

Another existing study of CAL learning demotivation was conducted by the researcher of the present research (Zhang & Wang, 2016). During the L2 learning process, learners may find the experiences of learning one or more particular language components (e.g., pronunciation, syntax, morphology) to be relatively more demotivating than the others. Demotivation in learning the language could be largely determined by learners’ demotivation in learning these specific language components. In the context of CAL learning, the difficulty in learning Chinese characters (written script of the Chinese language) was often perceived to be responsible for learners’ demotivation in CAL learning. To investigate the reliability of such perception and the reasons behind learners’ demotivation in learning Chinese characters, Zhang and Wang (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study which targeted CAL learners in Irish higher education.
Eight main demotivating factors were identified for learning the Chinese characters. Though the conceptualisation of these factors was similar to the findings of Yu (2013), the significance of each factor in demotivating the learners was quite different. Similar to Yu’s (ibid.) finding, teacher-owned factors were not in the centre of learners’ demotivation. However, Zhang and Wang (2016) noted that this result might be influenced by learners’ attributional style, their CAL learning experiences and the sociocultural background of the Chinese language. In comparison with learners of other MFL, CAL learners in Zhang and Wang’s (ibid.) research appeared to have more empathy and lower expectations for the CAL teachers.

It was also identified that learners’ negative attitude towards learning Chinese characters was also not a significant resource for their demotivation. Instead, the negative interference of pinyin (phonetic alphabet of Chinese) was found to be the most common cause for CAL learners’ demotivation, followed by the negative peer pressure and inappropriate learning material. Learners’ demotivation in learning Chinese characters was found to be relatively strong in the second year over a four-year learning period. This finding was similar to the general pattern of a learning curve (see Section 2.2.1) and Yu’s (2010) findings on Chinese language learning anxiety and learners’ sociocultural adaption (see Section 2.2.3).

Besides, Zhang and Wang (2016) also reported the dominant demotivating factor for each learning stage. Learners were divided into groups according to their current language proficiency as marked by The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The four groups referred to learners with a Chinese proficiency of CEFR A1 (beginner), A2 (post-beginner), B1 (lower-intermediate) and B2 or above (upper-intermediate). For the beginner group, the leading demotivating factor in learning Chinese characters was the negative influence of pinyin. Learners in this group reported that their demotivation was caused by the comparison they made between the ease of learning pinyin and the difficulty in learning Chinese characters. The former one is a Latin-based phonetic symbol system, while the latter one is a logographic reading and writing system which learners are unfamiliar with.

Issues of learning strategy appear to be more demotivating for both the post-beginner group and the lower-intermediate group. The former group reported that it was mainly
caused by the insufficient knowledge of appropriate strategies for learning the Chinese characters, while the latter group commented more on the ineffectiveness of their acquired learning methods. In comparison, learners in the upper-intermediate group perceived the inappropriate learning materials as the main reason for their demotivation. Their criticism mainly focused on the absence of explanation and guidance for learning Chinese characters in the textbooks and learning materials beyond the elementary level.

Findings in this research provided valuable insights into the design of the present research. Results such as confirming the negative influence of language teachers and the particular role of pinyin in demotivating learners in learning Chinese literacy helped conceptualise the constructs of demotivating factors for the survey (see Section 3.4.2). Learners’ resistance in participating interviews also alerted the researcher some particular ethic issues when conducting demotivation research, which was further discussed in Section 3.3.2.

2.6 Some Key Concepts in Demotivation Research

The understanding of L2 learners’ demotivation has deepened over the years. Instead of attributing demotivation issue primarily to the behaviour of learners or their lack of intrinsic motivation, demotivation research uncovered various internal and external forces which may cause learners’ L2 learning demotivation. However, as a newly established research area, there were still many unsolved puzzles regarding the nature, feature and remedy solutions of demotivation. Therefore, this section discusses some key concepts and existing issues of demotivation research in L2 studies.

2.6.1 The influence of sociocultural context

The influence of sociocultural context reflects in several perspectives of the L2 learning demotivation. It may directly impact on learners’ perception of demotivation as an active factor in L2 learning demotivation. It may also indirectly affect the effectiveness of the research instruments, which could cause different findings regarding L2 learners’ demotivation among research conducted in different sociocultural contexts.
One of the most controversial findings regarding the principal demotivating factor for L2 learning was the teachers’ role in causing learners’ demotivation. Teacher-owned factors were consistently proved to be the most responsible for learners’ demotivation by the early research conducted in Europe and North America context (Dörnyei, 1998; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Oxford, 1998). In comparison, many later investigations which were carried out in an Asian context presented different findings and interpretations regarding the issue of the teacher-owned factors. Many of these investigations reported that teacher-owned factors were not the centre of the issue in comparison with other salient demotivating influences beyond the teachers’ control.

Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007) identified that EAL teachers’ inappropriate teaching methods had a significant demotivating effect on Vietnamese learners’ demotivation. They explained that this result was strongly influenced by the sociocultural context of EAL learning in Vietnam. According to Tran and Baldauf Jr. (ibid., 100), this issue was mainly caused by the poor integration of teachers’ communicative approach of MFL teaching methods in a local EAL educational system. It was dominated by the exam-centred grammar-translation method. There was an unbalanced educational advancement between the teacher training and the EAL curriculum design at the time of the investigation.

In comparison, Sakai and Kikuchi (2009: 67) explicitly noted that teacher-owned factors were not the principal demotivating resource for EAL learners in a Japanese context. Instead, learners’ demotivation came more from the monotonous learning content which was detached from their real life and the excessive pressure for passing the college entrance examination of English. Falout et al. (2009: 410) also mentioned that Japanese EAL learners perceived more positive influence from their teacher rather than negative. Both Sakai and Kikuchi (2009) and Falout et al. (2009) pointed out the negative impact of the national English examination on Japanese learners’ EAL learning demotivation. They advocated a foreseeable educational reformation and the support of policymakers in addressing this issue and called for the attention of demotivation research to the wider sociocultural influences on learners’ demotivation.

As mentioned earlier, the sociocultural influence may also affect the effectiveness of some particular research instruments in investigating demotivation. For example, Trang
and Baldauf Jr. (2007: 85) mentioned that qualitative interview was not an effective method for collecting data of demotivation in their research. They witnessed that learners were reluctant to respond to their interview questions which aimed to investigate their previous experience of demotivating incidents. Such a phenomenon was particularly obvious for questions that asking for the potential demotivating influence of their teachers and the course management. They mentioned that this could be influenced by the Vietnamese sociocultural conventions, that learners avoided confronting their teachers due to the tradition of respecting them as the authorities in the education context.

The researcher of the present research also reported on the influence of the sociocultural background of the target language in learners’ demotivation (Zhang & Wang, 2016). There were controversial findings between the results of the survey and interviews when investigating the demotivation of Irish CAL learners. Two factors of the CAL teacher and the negative attitude towards the Chinese community were not identified as significant demotivating forces by the survey. However, a large volume of comments emerged regarding the dissatisfactions towards the teacher and the Chinese community in the follow-up interviews, which were reported by the learners to be primarily responsible for their CAL learning demotivation. Zhang and Wang (ibid.) compared the background information of the survey and interview participants and found that participants of the interviews possess comparatively longer CAL learning experiences. They attributed the reason for the controversial findings also to the sociocultural influence of the Chinese language and culture, which contained elements of obedience and respect for the authorities. Such influence was embedded in the CAL learning, while gradually being reduced due to the absence of the Chinese sociocultural environment. In comparison, Irish CAL learners with longer learning experiences were more resistant to demotivation caused by the Chinese sociocultural influence as brought by the experiences in learning the language.

2.6.2 Learner and teacher’s demotivation

Since the first discovery of inappropriate teacher immediacy in demotivating the learners (Gorham & Christophel, 1992), teacher’s vital roles in both causing and resolving learners’ demotivation have been discussed extensively by previous demotivation research (Dörnyei, 1998; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Song &
Kim, 2017; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007). With the development of demotivation research in L2 studies, not only teachers’ behaviour was discovered to have immediate impacts on learners’ demotivation, but their own motivational conditions could also indirectly affect learners’ demotivation status.

Chambers (1999: 152) mentioned that teachers who suffered reduced value of their own work also demonstrated a lack of interest in motivating their students. Gorham and Millette (1997: 256) reported that teachers’ demotivation could have a significant impact on their perception of students’ demotivation. They both noted that teachers with higher teaching motivation had the tendency of rating their own students with relatively higher learning motivation. In comparison, teachers with lower teaching motivation were more likely to evaluate their students as demotivated. Moreover, motivated teachers considered their students’ demotivation more related to teachers' behaviour, so that they could be treated by making positive changes towards themselves, such as their teaching methods and classroom management skills. Demotivated teachers tended to attribute students’ demotivation more to factors beyond teachers' control, such as students' intrinsic qualities and the undesired learning contexts and sociocultural backgrounds. They were more easily to give up on students who once have been labelled as demotivated.

This relationship between the learner and teachers’ demotivation has been brought up by more researchers in the later demotivation investigations. Oxford (2001) included teachers’ attitude and beliefs as demotivating factors of learners’ L2 learning. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013: 158-159) also noted that there was evidence regarding the impact of teachers’ own motivational status on learners’ enthusiasm and persistence of learning. With the further development of research which investigated learners’ demotivation, teachers’ demotivation as an associated research area also began to attract the attention of demotivation researchers in the field of L2 studies. The demotivation of EAL teachers was a relatively more serious issue in post-primary education in a European context (Addison & Brundrett, 2008). In comparison, such issue was commonly perceived among EAL teachers who worked in different educational levels in the Asian context (Marai, 2003; Mooij, 2008; Sugino, 2010).

It has been identified that early-career EAL teachers’ demotivation mainly came from the difficulty of employing the communicative approach of MFL teaching and learning.
This was partially caused by insufficient teacher training, but the more important problem was to implement such methods while the educational system and examinations were still grammar-translation centred (Song & Kim, 2016). In comparison, demotivation of more experienced teachers appeared to be originated more in the dissatisfaction for the reward of teaching from both intrinsic and extrinsic perspectives (Ghanizadeh & Erfanian, 2017; Kiziltepe, 2006, 2008). The intrinsic dissatisfactions mainly referred to learners’ misbehaviour and little appreciation of their effort in teaching (Babadi & Rafiee, 2016; Sugino, 2010). The extrinsic dissatisfactions included a broader scope of reasons such as the poor working and research condition (Kim & Kim, 2015b; Kiziltepe, 2008), the lack of opportunities for continuous professional development (Shan, 2015a; Wang & Yue, 2011), the inadequate social recognition (Kim & Kim, 2015b; Mooij, 2008; Yaghoubinejad et al., 2016) and insufficient financial support (Addison & Brundrett, 2008; Hojaji & Salehi, 2017; Marai, 2003).

Similar to L2 learners’ demotivation, L2 teachers’ demotivation was also an issue that was embedded in the sociocultural environment. Kim et al. (2014) compared the demotivation of EAL teachers in China and South Korea and identified unique demotivating factors which associated tightly with each of the particular teaching contexts. The first one was the excessive interference and expectation of learners’ parents, which was reported as a salient demotivating factor for EAL teachers in mainland China. The second one was the overloaded administration, which was relatively more of an issue for EAL teachers in South Korea. Li (2013a) compared the demotivation of EAL teachers who worked in Chinese and Japanese universities. She reported that Chinese teachers attributed their demotivation more to external causes while Japanese teachers considered them more related to intrinsic determinations.

As mentioned, learners’ behaviour and attitude were identified as common demotivating factors for the teacher, and more investigations reported on the teachers’ role in demotivating the learners. However, there was a lack of discussion among the demotivation research regarding the relationship between the demotivation of the learner and the teacher, which was expected to be addressed by the future demotivation research in the field.
2.6.3 Demotivation and the L2 motivational self

Many demotivation studies which utilised retrospective methods have proved that learners’ previous L2 learning experiences have impacts on their current L2 learning demotivation (Falout and Maruyama, 2004; Kikuchi, 2009; Trang and Baldauf Jr., 2007). In comparison, Ushioda (1998) discovered that learners’ current motivational status might also be affected by their perceptions of the future. To address this future perspective of demotivation research, later investigations began to examine the influence of learners’ L2 motivational self on their demotivation (Falout, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2015a; Zhang & Wang, 2016).

From the standpoint of demotivation research in L2 studies, this theoretical framework helped bridge the motivation and demotivation research. A positive ideal L2 self was considered to be essential in both students’ motivating and remotivating process (Kim & Kim, 2014; Magid & Chan, 2012; Yashima, 2009). However, the sustaining of such positive influence requires the learners to perceive their L2 learning experiences to be valuable and efficacious both consciously and simultaneously. Kim (2011b: 115) mentioned that learners could be demotivated once they doubt the benefit or their own efficacy in gaining the benefit of learning the L2. A negative ideal L2 self due to the misperceptions regarding the benefit of learning the L2 may be established more often prior to or in the early stage of learning (Zhang & Wang, 2016). In comparison, the negative ideal L2 self caused by misperceptions regarding learners’ own efficacy was mainly caused by demotivating incidents that learners come across in their L2 learning experiences (Kim & Kim, 2015a).

L2 learners who were driven by an ought-to L2 self mainly conducted L2 learning to avoid potential negative consequences. Such concerns were often based on some external conditions (e.g., the pressure of passing the exam, expectation from the family). As soon as these external conditions were changed, regardless before or after the learners fulfilling their needs (e.g., passing the L2 exam, change of expectation from the parents), learners may cease to put in effort in learning the L2. Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007: 99) reported that some of the post-primary school EAL learners in their research were identified to be demotivated. They still persisted their learning due to the fear of failing the college entrance examination. However, the majority of these learners dropped out from EAL
learning courses either physically or mentally soon after they proceeded to higher education.

### 2.6.4 Demotivation and remotivation

After the discovery of various demotivating factors for L2 learning, research attention of demotivation investigations extended to the effective strategies in dealing with the identified problems. Ushioda (1998) described the purpose of remotivation was to detoxicate the demotivating experiences and recover or revive learners’ motivation. She emphasised the importance of learners’ capability in performing remotivation in maintaining their motivational autonomy, and identified effective remotivating methods from the perspectives of both learners' motivational thinking (e.g., projecting the meaningful and rewarding learning goals) and behaviours (e.g., engaging in entertaining activities which associate with the target language).

As soon as Falout discovered the existence of demotivation issues among the Japanese EAL learners (Falout & Maruyama, 2004), he conducted continuous investigations to identify the demotivating factors and their remedy solutions (Carpenter et al., 2009; Falout, 2012, 2016; Falout et al., 2013). His first consecutive study separated learners into three groups according to their previous L2 learning experiences. Positive correlations were reported between learners’ positive L2 learning experiences and their internally-orientated remotivating skills (Carpenter et al., 2009). At the same time, Falout et al. (2009) discovered that learners’ language learning outcomes were more related to their remotivation capacity in comparison with the frequency of demotivating encounters. Based on the findings of these two studies, Falout suggested a varies of remotivation strategies in his later research. From a learner perspective, they mainly included performing self-appraisal (Falout, 2012: 20) and use pleasant previous learning experiences in modelling the adaptive process (ibid., 2016: 59). From the teacher perspective, Falout et al. (2013: 344) advocated L2 teachers to help learners understand demotivation as a natural and treatable phenomenon in L2 learning.

In the South Korean context, Cho conducted quantitative investigations to examine the factors that affect both EAL learners’ demotivation and remotivation (Cho, 2014a, 2014b; Cho & Chung, 2016). The findings paralleled the previous remotivation study of
Carpenter et al. (2009), that teacher behaviour was the most influential factor for both learners’ demotivation and remotivation. At the time of the investigations, there was a public misperception among the learners and the public that EAL learning did not have sufficient practical benefits. Such a phenomenon was confirmed by the demotivation research of Kim (2011a). As a result, Cho (2014a) emphasised the importance of changing this misperception as a remotivation practice by learners’ own efforts as well as supports from the public. The necessity of changing institutional and sociocultural influences in dealing with learners’ demotivation was also mentioned frequently in other demotivation research (Kim, 2011b: 115; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007: 99).

Later, Kim verified the change of sociocultural influence as one of the most effective remotivating strategies in the same South Korean context (Kim & Kim, 2017: 61; Song & Kim, 2017: 99). Besides, Kim stated that effective remotivation was determined by both intrinsic capability and external support. With the further understanding on the nature and feature of L2 learning demotivation, more remotivation studies were also carried out in the recent years to consciously explore effective strategies in dealing with the complexity of learners’ demotivation (Akay, 2017; Daif-Allah & Alsamani, 2013; Dickinson, 2013; Guimei, 2015; Hamada, 2011; Jung, 2011; Sahragard & Ansaripour, 2014).

2.6.5 Current issues in demotivation research

Demotivation is in its transition from being a widely-perceived problem among L2 teachers and learners into a vibrant research concept. Progress has been made along the way with many problems remain unsolved. Several issues have already been discussed in the previous sections, such as the definition of demotivation (see Section 2.3) and the relationship between student and teacher’s demotivation (see Section 2.6.2). However, there were still a few more problems that needed to be addressed for the reference of the present and future research.

The first issue was that most of the current demotivation research had a predominant focus on EAL learning. This has led to insufficient research attention on the demotivation of learning other languages and caused difficulty in further understanding the nature of L2 learning demotivation. Moreover, the role of English as a global language has a
distinct impact on the demotivation of learners who study other languages, especially native English speakers (Duff, 2017; Nunan, 2003). However, due to the lack of demotivation research on learning other languages, such impact was rarely discussed among the current investigations.

Another issue was the appropriateness and effectiveness of the research instruments for demotivation investigation. Learners’ demotivation is a delegate issue which associates with a variety of learners’ negative feelings and experiences. The investigation of demotivation often leads to participants’ reflection on such unpleasant experiences, which may have a potential negative influence at present and for their future. Demotivation researchers need to carefully select and apply the research instrument to ensure the research being ethical and methodological appropriate.

Regarding the participant of the research, it has been discussed previously that demotivation is a common issue among learners regardless of their current motivational status (see Section 2.3.3). Therefore, when aiming to investigate the general features of demotivation, participants should not be restricted to demotivated learners only. Insights from motivated learners should be meaningful in maintaining learners’ motivation, while effective remotivation strategies should also be drawn from learners who successfully recovered from the demotivated status. Even for investigations which aim to target specifically the demotivated learners, the criteria for selecting participants should be objectively evaluated. Both teachers’ subjective labelling and learners’ academic performance might not be objective references in identifying demotivated learners.

There was also an overlooked area regarding the L2 learners’ demotivation, which is the functioning period of the demotivating influence. The interpretation of demotivation in the present research (see Section 2.3.3) noted that demotivation affects both the motivation of ongoing actions and behavioural intentions. This means that not only demotivation occurs during the learning process, but also prior to the commencing of L2 learning. The existing demotivation research focused more on the former perspective with the aim of helping to provide insights in maintaining and revitalising learners’ motivation. In comparison, the latter perspective was less discussed, which could be more meaningful for the purpose of promoting L2 studies.
2.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the definition of demotivation and reviewed the relevant demotivation research in the field of educational psychology and L2 studies. It first distinguished some different concepts of demotivation and proposed a new definition of demotivation. Selected literature in the field of L2 studies and de/motivation research were reviewed, with the main directions and issues in demotivation research addressed at the end of this chapter. Below is an illustration of demotivation and remotivation that derived from the review of the literature (see Figure 8).

![Diagram of demotivation and remotivation factors]

Figure 8 Main factors of demotivation and remotivation in literature

The main demotivating factors identified by previous research are 1) the teacher, 2) course design, 3) negative attitude towards the language, 4) negative attitude towards the culture and the target language community, 5) inadequate school facilities and 6) influence of another language.

The teacher factor includes demotivating influences caused by teachers’ behaviour (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Kikuchi, 2009; Oxford, 1998) as well as their personal traits such as personality, commitment, competence and teaching method (Dörnyei, 1998; Falout et al., 2009; Kikuchi, 2009; Kikuchi and Sakai, 2009). The course design refers to
the structure and format of the class (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Kim, 2011a) as well as the inappropriate learning content (Dörnyei, 1998; Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh, 2015a; Kikuchi, 2009). The negative attitude towards the language was caused mainly by learners’ own preference (Gorham & Millette, 1997; Kim, 2011b) and the compulsory nature of the language study (Dörnyei, 1998; Kim, 2011b). Besides, a negative attitude towards the culture and the people who speak the target language could also demotivate learners in learning the language (Dörnyei, 1998; Trang and Baldauf Jr., 2007). Inadequate school facilities, such as the inadequate teaching equipment and classroom layout, could lead to demotivation at an institutional level (Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh, 2015a; Kikuchi and Sakai, 2009). Reduced self-confidence was identified to be associated with learners’ negative experiences in learning the language (Falout and Maruyama, 2004; Song and Kim, 2017) and also the pressure and attitude of the peers (Dörnyei, 1998; Kim, 2012). The previous and on-going experiences in learning other languages could also demotivate the learners, which was reflected in the perception that learning the target language was less beneficial (Dörnyei, 1998; Trang and Baldauf Jr.’s, 2007) or efficacious (Kim and Kim, 2015a).

Among the main demotivating factors, externally-orientated factors were stronger in demotivating learners, and the teacher factor was recognised as the dominant influence in research conducted in a European context (Dörnyei, 1998; Gorham & Christophel, 1992). Similar findings were reported by researchers in the Asian context, with a particular emphasis on the inappropriate teaching method of the teachers (Kim, 2016; Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009). However, the teacher factor was not the most significant factor in demotivating Asian L2 learners. In comparison, internally-orientated factors, such as learners’ negative attitude and reduced self-confidence, were found to be more demotivating (Falout et al., 2009; Kim, 2011a; Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009). Also, the experience of demotivation appeared to be less relevant to learners’ current motivational level or their proficiency of the target language (Falout and Maruyama, 2004; Trang and Baldauf Jr., 2007).

The main remotivating factors identified by previous research are 1) enjoyment seeking, 2) help-seeking, 3) goal focus, 4) self-regulation, 5) avoidance and 6) cognitive modification.
Enjoyment seeking main refers to the engagement in entertaining activities that associate with the target language (Ushioda, 1998). Help-seeking is to communicate with teachers (Falout et al., 2013), peers (Falout, 2012) and even oneself (Ushioda, 2001) regarding the issue of demotivation. Goal focus is to project or reinforce the meaning and benefit of learning the language (Carpenter et al., 2009; Ushioda, 1998). Self-regulation includes self-regulated studying activities both in and out of the classroom (Carpenter et al., 2009; Ushioda, 2001). Avoidance is to take precautions to avoid perceived demotivating influence (Carpenter et al., 2009). Cognitive modification has two perspectives. The first perspective is to perform self-appraisal or self-appreciation, so to counter the effect of demotivation (Falout et al., 2009; Falout, 2012, Falout, 2016). The second perspective is to attribute the negative outcome caused by demotivating influences on temporary and changeable forces (Carpenter et al., 2009; Cho, 2014a; Falout, 2012).

Among the remotivating factors, Carpenter et al. (2009) reported that out of the class self-regulation was the most significant remotivation factor in the context of EFL learning in Japanese universities. Different from an individual perspective, Kim emphasised that changing the sociocultural influence, such as the perceived insignificance of L2 learning among the public, was the most effective remotivation factor on a higher level (Kim & Kim, 2017; Song & Kim, 2017).

In relation to the previous research and the current investigation, only two studies were found at the time of the investigation which explored the demotivation of CAL learners (Yu, 2013; Zhang & Wang, 2016). Some characteristics of the Chinese language (e.g., differences in learning spoken and written production) could not be reflected by the previous research which investigated predominantly the demotivation in learning English. The background of learning context (e.g., influence of the Chinese sociocultural background, learners’ perception regarding the necessity and benefit in learning Chinese) could also be more influential in researching demotivation for CAL learning, which requires further identification by the present research. After reviewing the relevant literature in demotivation studies, the next chapter reports on the design of the present research.
Chapter 3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

A combination of good discipline, reliability and social responsibility is essential to successful research (Dornyei, 2007: 17). With the aim of achieving a good research practice, this chapter introduces the design and considerations of the current research project in four sections. Section 3.2 presents the research questions. Section 3.3 discusses the considerations behind the research from both disciplinary and ethical perspectives. Section 3.4 and 3.5 introduce the two phases of the investigation respectively in terms of the participant identification, design of the research instrument, administration of the data collection and methods for data analysis.

3.2 Research Questions

The aim of the present research is to identify the formation, feature and learners’ perception of CAL learning demotivation in the context of Irish higher education. The main research questions and their associated sub-questions are listed below (see Table 1).

Table 1
Research questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Sub-Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are learners’ perceptions of the causes and effects of CAL learning demotivation?</td>
<td>1.1 What are the principal demotivating factors of CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Can we rank the commonality and severity of identified demotivating factors?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.3 Are there any identifiable interrelationships among the demotivating factors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the features of CAL learning demotivation in different stages of the CAL learning process?</td>
<td>2.1 Is there any fluctuation in the identified demotivating factors over the course of the CAL learning process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 What are the impacts of immersive Chinese language exposure on CAL learning demotivation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation among different types of CAL learners?</td>
<td>3.1 Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between motivated and demotivated learners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between learners who study Chinese as a major or minor subject?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between learners who study Chinese writing by handwriting and by typing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 Considerations regarding the Research Design

In order to investigate the above research questions, this research employed a two-phase mixed-methods approach. It begins with a quantitative investigation which aims to identify the main demotivating factors of CAL learning in an Irish context and identify some of its features by statistical analysis. Based on the findings of the quantitative investigation, the second phase of the research investigates learners’ perceptions of the identified demotivating factors. Prior to explaining the design of the above two phases of the present research, the following sections first discuss the disciplinary and ethical considerations behind this particular research design.

3.3.1 Disciplinary considerations

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were commonly used in previous demotivation research. In general, early studies which carried out in Europe and North America context mainly adopted qualitative methods (Dörnyei, 1998; Oxford, 2001; Ushioda, 1998). Oxford (2001: 94) noted that her preference for a qualitative approach was to capture the richness of learners’ perceptions of the influence of the demotivating forces. Dornyei (2007: 29) also mentioned the strength of a qualitative approach in exploring the “subtle personal process” of learners’ demotivation behaviour and thinking.

In comparison, later investigations in the Asian context availed more quantitative instruments (Jahedizadeh, Ghanizadeh, et al., 2016; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Kim, 2011a). Confirmative and comparative studies became more common along with the increasing number of demotivation investigations. These studies used quantitative methods more frequently to identify the construction of the demotivating factors and to investigate their features by comparing data from learners with different learning backgrounds (Kikuchi, 2009: 455; Kim, 2011a: 2; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007: 80; Yao, 2014: 145).

The present research adopted a mix-methods approach and a two-phase research design. The first phase of the research used a quantitative survey as the research instrument to identify main demotivating factors for CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education. The second phase further explored learners’ perception of demotivation from
a qualitative perspective. The reason for adopting two different methods was mainly due to the different background of these two parts of the research.

Regarding the first phase of the research, the previous investigations of EAL and CAL learning demotivation provided references for the construction of demotivating factors for L2 learning. As a result, the identification of demotivating factors in the present research was through exploration and also comparisons with the findings of the previous investigations. Moreover, quantitative methods, especially the combination of survey and statistical analysis, appeared to be more dominant among the previous demotivation investigations for the purpose of factor identification (Kim & Kim, 2013: 79; Liu, 2014: 69). A consistent quantitative approach for the present research could better facilitate the purpose of comparison with these demotivation research.

Regarding the second phase of the research, there were insufficient discussions on the detail of learners’ perception of demotivation in the previous research. In comparison with the first phase of the research, this phase contained more exploratory elements. As a result, it employed a qualitative approach to acquire explicit information from the learners regarding their experiences of demotivating incidents and their insights for effective remotivation strategies. As this second phase of the research relied much on the findings of factor identification, it was arranged as a separate yet consecutive investigation shortly after the first phase of the research.

3.3.2 Ethical considerations

It is almost impossible to avoid ethical issues when conducting research in social science (Punch, 2003: 35). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010: 59) noted that ethical discussions should not be detached from the research context or treated as an afterthought. For the present research, ethical approval was acquired prior to any data collection under the policy of research ethical practice (TCD, 2014). Meanwhile, suggestions made by the British Association for Applied Linguistics on methods and concerns regarding participants’ consents were also consulted (BAAL, 2016). Some general practices of research ethics, such as the procedures to protect the confidentiality of the data and the anonymity of the participants are discussed later when reporting on the design and
administration of the research. This section focuses on some particular ethical issues and the measures of addressing these issues in designing the present research.

The first ethical issue is the choice of appropriate methods for collecting date of demotivation. From the ethical perspective, demotivation is a moderately sensitive topic for the learner. The process of data collection unavoidably requires the learners to refer to their previous demotivating encounters, which may trigger unpleasant memories that are emotionally harmful to the participants. This issue was reported as particularly worth concerning when performing qualitative methods for data collection. Dornyei (2007: 64) noted that qualitative methods require a focus from a personal perspective and data acquired are often intimate to the participants. Trang and Baldauf Jr. (2007: 85) reported that learners in their demotivation study demonstrated reluctance and resistance in participating in the qualitative interviews. They concerned that such incorporation was partially caused by the repulsive feelings that emerged during the interview process.

Regarding this issue, a quantitative survey was used for the identification of demotivating factors. The distribution of the survey was mainly through digital platforms so that participants could choose an environment to fill out the survey with a good level of comfort and privacy. Though the qualitative interviews were followed for some selected participants, careful precautions and immediate interventions were applied prior to and during the interview process. A clear explanation regarding the content, purpose and process of the interview was included in the consent materials which were given to the potential participants prior to the interviews. During the interview process, the researcher would redirect to other topics or cease the interview whenever a participant indicates discomfort, and further consent is required if wish to continue the interview process.

The second ethical issue that needs to be addressed is the conflict of interest. This refers to the potential negative impact of the research findings on the teachers and the hosting institutions of the research participants. Both teacher incompetence and inadequate school facilities were identified to be the primary demotivating factors in previous demotivation investigations (Dörnyei, 2001; Kikuchi and Sakai, 2009; Yu, 2013; Zhang & Wang, 2016). The present research also aims to validate such findings in its particular context. Therefore, the findings of the present research could be perceived as a conflict of interest from the perspective of the concerned individuals and institutions regarding
the academic profile and the reputation of their CAL learning programmes. To address this issue, if the learners were still affiliated with educational institutions at the time of the research, a separate document was also given to their hosting institutions which includes an explanation regarding the above concerns. Moreover, several procedures were also taken to ensure the anonymity of the learners as well as their affiliated institutions (see Section 3.4.3 and 3.5.3).

3.4 Design of the Survey

This section reports on the design and administration of the quantitative survey as the first phase of the present research. It begins with a discussion on the identification of survey participants, followed by the design and administration of the questionnaire, and methods that were used for the quantitative data analysis.

3.4.1 Survey participant identification

Regarding the selection criteria of appropriate participants for demotivation research, Dörnyei’s (1998) early research focused exclusively on the demotivated learners who were identified by their teachers or peers. In comparison, a majority of the later demotivation investigations did not specify the motivational status of the learners when identifying research participants. In the context of the present research, demotivation is considered a common phenomenon among all the L2 learners instead of a particular issue for demotivated learners. The main purpose of the quantitative survey is to identify principal demotivating factors for CAL learners in Irish higher education. As a result, the present research recruited 229 Irish CAL learners with various motivational statuses of CAL learning as the participants of the survey investigation. The demographic information of the participants is reported along with the other findings of the survey in the next chapter (see Section 4.2).

Another aim of the survey investigation is to explore the potential influence of Chinese language exposure on learners’ CAL learning demotivation. The effects of short-term exposure could be identified by the survey for Irish CAL learners, while additional participants need to be recruited to compare and identify the influence of long-term exposure of the Chinese language environment. Theoretically, the ideal participants
would be a population of Irish learners who study CAL in China on a long-term basis, though such cases were extremely limited in reality at the time of the research. It was beyond the researcher’s competence to identify and get in touch with such learners, and it would be highly likely that their number will not, in fact, be sufficient to perform any statistically meaningful analysis. On the other hand, CAL learners in China have diverse backgrounds in terms of learners’ native languages, educational experiences and sociocultural environments. To minimise the influences from the above perspectives on the research results, a further 61 CAL learners were invited to offer survey data which represents learners with long-term Chinese language exposure. All these learners were from two overseas campuses of European universities in mainland China. These universities shared relatively similar educational systems with the Irish universities, and their structures of CAL courses were also similar to the domestic CAL learning programmes in Irish higher education. All the participants came from English-speaking countries in the European region. Learners from different sociocultural backgrounds (e.g., students from greater China regions or other Asian countries) and learners who studied in much more intense CAL courses in China were excluded.

3.4.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire for the quantitative survey investigation in the present research contains two parts (see Appendix A). The first part consists of 73 items which were designed to identify the main factors of CAL learning demotivation, and the second part acquires learners’ background information. The questionnaire was written in English as the participants’ native language. A written statement was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire regarding the aim of the research, estimated time for completion, the policy of data protection, the voluntary nature of the participation and the contact information of the researcher.

Items in the first part of the questionnaire were all negatively-worded five-point Likert scale questions (Likert, 1932). A value of one to five was applied to each of the items in the first part of the questionnaire (1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. not sure, 4. agree, 5. strongly agree). Thus, a greater number indicates a stronger demotivating experience. Each of them describes one typical aspect of the demotivating incidents in CAL learning.
The use of all negatively-worded items (e.g., I think Chinese is not essential for me to get a job) was a common practice in demotivation research (Hassaskhah et al., 2015; Kim & Kim, 2015a; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). The main purpose for such measure is to help learners focus on the demotivating perspectives of the described forces and incidents, that they determine and acknowledge the effectiveness of the items in reducing their motivation for learning. In comparison, positively-worded items direct learners’ attention to a different perspective of increasing motivation (e.g., I think Chinese is essential for me to get a job). Also, mixed usage of both positively-worded and negatively-worded items would cause inconsistency of the item values due to participants’ different focuses and mentalities when rating the items. For example, it would be inappropriate to assume the negative values of positively-worded items (e.g., disagree for Chinese being essential for getting a job) are equivalent to the corresponding positive values of negatively-worded items (e.g., agree for Chinese being not essential for getting a job) in representing the effectiveness in demotivating the learners.

The items were designed based on a proposed framework of six main demotivating factors. The first factor is inadequate school facilities (Q1-9), which focuses on the negative impact of inappropriate curriculum design. The second one is the teacher factor, which concerns CAL teachers’ personality (Q10-13), commitment (Q14-16), competence (Q17-20) and teaching methods (Q21-25) in demotivating the CAL learners. The third factor is the negative L2 self, which includes the demotivating influences of both negative ought-to L2 self (Q26-30) and negative ideal L2 self (Q31-36). The fourth factor is the negative attitude towards the language. It refers to three perspectives of learners’ negative perceptions of the Chinese language, which are the influence of another language (Q37-43), the influence of pinyin (Q44-46) and negative attitude towards the Chinese language (Q47-53). The fifth factor concerns both learners’ negative attitude towards Chinese culture (Q54-58) and the Chinese community (Q59-64). The final factor refers to learners’ reduced self-confidence due to the experience of failure (Q65-69) or the lack of success (Q70-73).

The second part of the questionnaire collects learners’ demographic information (age, educational background, Chinese language proficiency and the current motivational level of CAL learning) and context-related information such as the role of CAL courses in learners’ degree programme (e.g., major, minor, elective), the amount of Chinese
language exposure (e.g., short-term, long-term), the intensity of the CAL courses and the approach of Chinese written composition (e.g., handwriting, electronic writing). An open-ended question is also provided to allow voluntary comments on the topic of CAL learning demotivation.

The design of the questionnaire adopted the construction of main demotivating factors and the associated questionnaire items from the previous EAL learning demotivation research (Dörnyei, 2001: 152-153; Kikuchi, 2015: 145-146; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009: 202-203). The wording of the items also consulted previous studies which provided item banks for motivation and demotivation investigations (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009: 139-148; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013: 268-270; Kikuchi, 2015: 151-152). Fifty-six items were initially created from the general perspective of L2 learning demotivation. Based on the findings of two existing studies of CAL learning demotivation (Yu, 2013: 26; Zhang & Wang, 2016: 145), a further 20 items were added to address the characteristics of both the Chinese language and CAL learning in an overseas context. Being aware of the potential inappropriateness when adapting the findings of EAL learning demotivation to the context of the present research, the demotivation scale in the questionnaire contained a rather large size of items. Though it was expected that not all of these items would associate closely with the issue of CAL learning demotivation, such design was intended to cover as many potential perspectives as possible regarding learners’ demotivating encounters.

Upon completion of the first draft questionnaire, the researcher’s supervisor and another three TCAL researchers from Ireland and UK kindly provided feedback regarding the design and wording of the items. The proposed framework of main demotivating factors was condensed from nine to six main categories. At this stage, the second draft of the questionnaire was completed and ready for piloting. A remaining issue was the sequencing of the items, which had a clear indication on which perspective of the CAL learning demotivation was being investigated. It was arranged to be revisited based on the results of the pilot to see whether it would be necessary to apply item randomisation.

The pilot of the second draft questionnaire recruited 12 undergraduate CAL learners from an Irish higher education institution as the participants. Based on its results, a few further adjustments were made to finalise the questionnaire. The wording of some questions
which collect demographic information was adjusted to accommodate learners’ different backgrounds. For example, regarding the question on learners’ Chinese language proficiency, the original wording of the answers adopted CEFR levels as the sole reference. This was extended to include a combination of standard marked by both CEFR and HSK (official Chinese proficiency test for non-native speakers in mainland China) as well as some general descriptions to help participants better identify the appropriate answers. The idea of item randomisation was discarded as the original design seemed helpful in increasing the clarity of the questions and the efficiency of completion, which is important considering the relatively large number of questionnaire items and limited attention span of the participants. The questionnaire was finalised after the above amendments, and the following section illustrates the process of the questionnaire administration.

3.4.3 Administration of the questionnaire

Sample size matters when it comes to the validity of quantitative research (Larson-Hall, 2010: 32). It is important for the research results to be able to reflect the greater population. In the context of the present research, this population refers to CAL learners in Irish higher education. Though there was no absolute cut-off line regarding the minimal sample size required for acquiring legitimate inferential statistics, quantitative researchers have provided references on this topic. Hatch and Lazaraton (1991: 234) mentioned a number of 30 or more people is desired for each smallest group of participants for achieving a normal distribution of the data. This number was extended by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009: 63) to 50 for normal statistical procedures and an even larger of 100 for factor analysis specifically. However, they also noted that it is not a rigid rule but rather a reference, that smaller sample sizes could be compensated by various statistical procedures (ibid., 62). Besides, statistical analyses required by the present research also demand data partition, such as t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA). These measures require a certain amount of sample size to yield statistically meaningful results. Considering the limited number of CAL learners in Irish higher education at the time of the research, the initial sampling of the questionnaire aimed to reach as many CAL learners as possible who met the criteria.
The researcher contacted eight Irish universities and higher education institutions which were offering CAL courses at the time of the research. Four of them granted permission for questionnaire distribution. As mentioned earlier, a total of 229 Irish CAL learners were recruited as the survey participants, which is a useful number for generating inferential statistics of the target population. A further 61 CAL learners in mainland China also completed the survey, though their data were only used for comparison.

The pilot of the survey used paper questionnaires to gather results and feedback from 12 undergraduate CAL learners. The purpose of using a paper questionnaire was to facilitate the researcher to observe and assist participants to complete the questionnaire while collecting feedback regarding the content and design of the questionnaire. In comparison, the main questionnaire administration used an online survey for distribution. Two survey websites were used for questionnaire distribution. The ‘Survey Monkey’ website was used for Irish CAL learners while another website called ‘Wenjuan Xing’ (Survey Star) was selected to collect data from CAL learners in mainland China. The reason for using two different websites was due to the accessibility of each website in the above two regions. The link of the questionnaire was sent to the participants through gatekeepers, who were mainly the CAL course instructors or management. From the participants’ perspective, the online survey allowed them to complete the questionnaire in a private environment. It may encourage better engagement with the research topic as many of the questions in investigating their demotivation are associated with their teacher, the course and their peers. From the researchers’ perspective, it increases the efficiency of data collection and also the accuracy of data transformation.

Regarding participant anonymity and data protection, the online questionnaire was configured to not store any personal information of the participants (e.g., the IP address). To prevent repetition and duplication, a restriction was applied that a single IP address could submit the questionnaire only once, and the survey links were closed upon completion of the data collection. After collecting the data, data were downloaded, prepared and transferred into statistical analytical software. The methods that were used for quantitative data analysis is presented in the next section.
3.4.4 Methods for quantitative data analysis

After collecting the quantitative data, the next step of the research is to analyse them using statistic mathematics. The software that was utilised for such purpose is the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 22.0, which is commonly used in previous investigations of applied linguistics (Dornyei, 2007: 198). Questionnaire data were first downloaded from the two survey websites and tabulated by using Microsoft Excel. A coding process was performed to prepare data for the SPSS software.

The coding process transform questionnaire items into variables in SPSS. All the items of the demotivation scale were transformed into continuous variables which were assigned with a value of one to five based on the answers from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’ as in five-point Likert Scale. The items that were used to gather demographic information were classified as categorical variables, and their answers were assigned with different values for group identification purposes.

Data screening was performed in SPSS upon the completion of the data preparation. When checking the data integrity, 13 cases were found to have system missing values which do not follow any patterns. Considering their relatively small proportion of the dataset and the appropriateness of different methods when dealing with the missing data (Larson-Hall, 2010: 89), these cases were deleted from the dataset for any further statistical analysis. Moreover, though no multivariate outliers were found at this stage of data inspection, some participants with uncommon backgrounds (e.g., learners with advanced pre-knowledge of Chinese language) were identified as potential outliers and were excluded for further analysis as well. The next step of the research is to perform statistical analysis according to the proposed research questions (see Section 3.2).

The assumptions of each analytical method were checked prior to the performing of the parametric tests. If assumptions were found to be violated, then statistical corrections and non-parametric methods were considered in order to achieve more robust results. The cut off line for statistical significance of the null hypothesis testing was set to be Fisher’s p-value of 0.05 (Fisher, 1950: 142). Below is a brief breakdown of the statistical methods used for investigating the first three research questions associated with the quantitative part of the present research.
The first research question aimed at investigating learners’ perception regarding the causes and effect of CAL learning demotivation. Exploratory factor analyses were performed to answer the first sub-question (What are the principal demotivating factors of CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education?). In the meantime, the descriptive data of factor analyses were consulted along with the results of the post-hoc tests to answer the second sub-question (Can we rank the commonality and severity of identified demotivating factors?) and the third sub-question (Are there any identifiable interrelationships among the demotivating factors?).

The second research question aimed at investigating the features of CAL learning demotivation in different stages of the CAL learning process. To answer the first sub-question (Is there any fluctuation in the identified demotivating factors over the course of the CAL learning process?), a series of ANOVA was performed for each of the identified main demotivating factors to compare differences among learners with different Chinese language proficiencies and different length of CAL learning experiences. To answer the second sub-question (What are the impacts of immersive Chinese language exposure on CAL learning demotivation?), the results of t-tests were compared among learners with different experiences of Chinese language exposure.

The third research question aimed at investigating differences in CAL learning demotivation among different types of CAL learners? After grouping the participants according to their current motivational status of CAL learning, a t-test was performed between groups to provide information for answering the first sub-question (Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between motivated and demotivated learners?). The same approach of t-test between groups was adopted to answer the second sub-question (Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between learners who study Chinese as a major or minor subject?). While for the third sub-question (Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between learners who study Chinese writing by handwriting and by typing?), a one-way ANOVA and post-hoc test of pairwise comparisons were performed to compare three groups of learners who study Chinese handwriting, typing and both.
3.5 Design of the Interview

Findings of the quantitative survey identified six main demotivating factors (see Section 4.3.1). They consisted of demotivating influences from both learners’ internally-oriented perspectives and externally-oriented perspectives. Below is a brief outline regarding the similarity and differences between the factors identified by the previous literature (see Figure 8 in Section 2.7) and the present research (see Table 2).

Table 2
A comparison of main demotivating factors in literature and the present research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors in previous literature</th>
<th>Factors in the present research</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The teacher</td>
<td>1. The teacher</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Course design</td>
<td>2. Course design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Influence of another language</td>
<td>3. Influence of another language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inadequate school facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Negative attitude towards the culture and the community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative attitude towards the target language</td>
<td>4. Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>Emerged as separate factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To briefly explain the result of the comparison, three externally orientated factors were also identified in the present research, namely the teacher factor, course design and the influence of another language. A slight difference is that the influence of learners’ native language (in this case the English language) was also included as part of the influence of another language, which was rarely addressed in the previous research.

The inadequate school facilities and learners’ negative attitude towards the Chinese culture and the Chinese community did not emerge as significant demotivating forces in the present research. This result is likely to be explained by the research context, that Irish university students should study Chinese willingly and the facility of the universities should be sufficient to support their basic needs in learning.

Three internally oriented factors were identified by the present research, which concerned learners’ immediate and previous experience in learning (reduced self-confidence) and
their perception towards the future (negative ideal L2 self and negative ought-to L2 self). They were related to the factor negative attitude towards the target language as identified in the previous research, while more emphasis was put on the language confidence and the impact of learners’ future perception on their present self.

This section reports on the design and administration of the second phase of the research, which aims to investigate learners’ perception of the CAL learning demotivation. It first introduces the process of participants identification, followed by the design of the semi-structured interview questions, the process of conducting interviews and the methods that were used for qualitative analysis.

3.5.1 Interview participant identification

The qualitative part of the present research aims to further investigate learners’ perception of the six identified main demotivating factors. It utilised semi-structured interview as the method for data collection, which focused on acquiring participants’ narratives and insights of the cause, process and countermeasures of the demotivating incidents.

To achieve the above goals, the ideal interview participants should fulfil certain criteria. The first criterion regarded experience of CAL learning in an Irish context, necessary for encountering or witnessing different aspects of the CAL learning demotivation, so that more objective and comprehensive narratives could be acquired regarding different demotivating factors. The second criterion was that they should possess a relatively positive motivational status regarding CAL learning. This means that they are more likely to have successful experiences in dealing with the demotivating incidents, so that information about effective remotivation strategies may be identified from a learner perspective. The third was that these learners should participate in the survey study as well. From a theoretical perspective, they could better represent the larger group of CAL learners who were involved in the survey study. From a practical perspective, they would have a better understanding of the research topic, which may increase the quality and efficiency of the interview. The fourth and final criterion was to include some early career graduates from the CAL learning programmes. These learners could provide more insights regarding the perception of CAL learning in their future career and the sociocultural influences in CAL learning demotivation.
The difficulty in identifying appropriate participants mainly laid in distinguishing learners’ achievement in CAL learning, their current motivational status and potential remotivation experiences. It is not always objective to measure learners’ motivational status and remotivation experiences based on their achievement in CAL learning. High-achieving learners do not necessarily possess a strong learning motivation as it is only one of many indicators (e.g., aptitude, persistence, self-efficacy). Their achievements also do not necessarily refer to more successful remotivating experiences, but instead a reflection of less demotivating encounters. Therefore, connections and communications on a personal level appeared to be particularly useful in participants identification.

The researcher first identified and recruited four CAL learners as the first batch of interview participants. All four of them were previously taught by the researcher. Among them, two were final year undergraduate students of Chinese related degree programmes, and the other two were recent graduates who have already entered employment. A further two batches of participants were recruited consecutively in a later time by using snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961: 148), which consisted of four learners and five learners respectively. As a result, a total of 13 CAL learners were recruited as the participants of the qualitative interviews, whose demographic information is reported in the later section (see Section 5.2).

3.5.2 Design of the semi-structured interview questions

As mentioned, the purpose of the qualitative interview is to further investigate learners’ perception of the main demotivating factors, which were identified by the quantitative survey. The focus of the interview was to guide participants to perform retrospective thinking and discussion with the researcher regarding their experiences of demotivation, so that detailed qualitative data could be acquired regarding the cause, process and possible remedy solutions of some specific demotivating encounters. Though the survey identified six main demotivating factors for CAL learning in an Irish context, it was unlikely that each of the interview participants could contribute data for all these factors. As a result, the interview was designed to be semi-structured and the wordings of the questions were changed due to different circumstances during the interview. It was hoped
that this could allow participants with various backgrounds and experiences to provide different insights regarding the issue of demotivation.

Based on the above considerations, the semi-structured interview questions were created (see Appendix B). It begins with six questions which inquire participants’ experiences of CAL learning demotivation from a certain perspective (e.g., Do you ever feel reduced confidence in learning Chinese?). Each of these questions associates with one principal demotivating factor identified by the survey (e.g., reduced self-confidence). The purpose of these questions was to initiate the conversation and guide the participants to elaborate and discuss some specific demotivating encounters. Upon the completion of the discussion regarding the process and cause of the issue, a follow-up question was arranged to explore possible remotivation experiences of the participants (e.g., Do you have, or could you think of, any solutions that might be helpful in dealing with the problem?).

It is important to point out that though the interview also aims to acquire information regarding potential remotivation strategies of the participants, the primary focus was to deepen the understanding of demotivation. The interview process was designed to emphasise more on the elaboration of the demotivating encounters and the associated backgrounds of the situation, which provides insights for the characteristics of the CAL learning demotivation and the context for the implementation of the remotivation strategies. Upon completion of the draft questions, the wording of the questions and the pace of the interview were examined by the supervisor. A pilot interview was arranged after finalising the questions and no major issues were discovered.

3.5.3 Interview process

The information leaflet of the research was sent to the participants in advance of arranging interviews, which provided information regarding the purpose of the research, the rights and commitments as an interviewee, the policy regarding anonymity and confidentiality of the data and the contact information of the researcher. Then, at the beginning of each interview, small talk was initiated to breaking the ice as well before obtaining informed consent from the participants.
The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis between the researcher and the participants. The language of the interview was typically chosen by the participants for the ease of communication. For the majority of the occasions, the interview was conducted in English, while some of the highly-proficient participants preferred to use a mix of English and Mandarin Chinese to better express their ideas. The locations were normally arranged according to the preference of the participant. They were normally places which are casual and comfortable, such as the coffee places either near the university of the researcher or chosen by the participants. Two online interviews were arranged for two participants who worked in China at the time of the research. All the interviews were audio-recorded.

As mentioned in the previous section, the first part of the interview guides participants to elaborate and discuss demotivating incidents that they experienced or witnessed. For each of the main demotivating factors, the researcher would check with the participants regarding the possibility of multiple demotivating encounters of the same perspective until the indication of saturation. When inquiring the process and background of the demotivating incidents, the researcher focused more on acquiring detailed narratives. In comparison, when inquiring the cause and solutions of the demotivating incidents, the researcher would engage with the participants and conduct discussion more actively.

Thirteen interviews were arranged in a time span of two months. This arrangement facilitated the researcher to conduct data analysis between interviews, so that information gathered from the previous interviews could be used to assist the future interviews. It helped to acquire different perceptions of the same issue from participants with different backgrounds. For example, regarding the value of CAL learning experiences in learners’ future career, current CAL course learners and the graduates who have entered employment may have different understandings. It also helped to better identify the saturation regarding the same issue, so to reduce repetition elements and raise the efficiency of the interviews.

### 3.5.4 Methods for qualitative data analysis

The first phase of the research was a quantitative survey, that the data analysis took place after the completion of the data collection. In comparison, the sequence of qualitative
data collection and analysis was iterative (Longhofer et al., 2012: 51). As mentioned earlier, the analyses of interview data were carried out between interviews. Its purpose is to allow information acquired from earlier interviews to assist the future interviews, so to increase the possibility of achieving a better saturation on the research topic.

The method used for qualitative data analysis is content analysis. For such purpose, the recording of the interviews was first transcribed into textual form (see Appendix F). The principle of the transcription was to stay true to the original material. Standard orthography was applied in consideration of the readability, while minimum adjustments were applied to the transcribed text regarding issues of language errors and repetitions. Marks used in the transcripts were based on Neuendorf (2016). Personal and sensitive information was replaced to protect the anonymity and privacy of the participants (Christians, 2005: 145). When the Chinese language appears in transcription, equivalent or translation in English was provided simultaneously.

Obvious indications of interviewees’ deliberation process, feelings and emotional changes which were noted by the researcher or could be identified by the recording were marked in the transcription. However, the transcribing procedure would inevitably lose some of the nonverbal information. As the qualitative analysis of the interview data focused predominantly on the content, the marking of non-verbal information was not aiming as comprehensive as in linguistics research.

After transcribing the interview data, the researcher first read through the texts for pre-coding deliberations and highlighted contents which either associate with the research question or simply being interesting. Then, a re-reading of the texts was performed simultaneously with the coding process prior to the interpretation of the data. This is to identify patterns in the codes while reducing the massive amount of text information to a manageable level.

The initial coding process first labelled the text chunks with descriptive codes by using as many original words of the texts as possible (e.g., teacher fail to provide accurate instruction and demonstration for pronunciation). The purpose was to keep the clarity of the original data and to avoid subjective overgeneralisations (Dornyei, 2007: 251). In an attempt to improve the quality of the descriptive codes, an external check was arranged
upon the completion of the initial coding by a fellow CAL teacher and researcher. This colleague was provided with part of the data and the codes that were generalised by the researcher as the reference. Then, feedbacks were collected to evaluate the appropriateness of the descriptive codes. The ideas generated by the researcher regarding the initial coding and the feedback from the external check were recorded in an analytic software in the format of a mind map. It was used to provide insights for the second level coding.

Based on the results of the initial descriptive coding and the mind map, the second level coding was performed to cluster the descriptive codes and associate them with higher-order conceptual codes (Longhofer et al., 2012: 60). The highest level conceptual codes were adapted based on the findings of the quantitative survey and the conceptualisation of the six main demotivating factors (e.g., the teacher factor). The lower level conceptual codes were generated based on the cluster of interview data (e.g., inappropriate teaching methods), and then categorised by the highest level conceptual codes through the process of second level coding.

Regarding the technical tools for the qualitative data analysis, a speech recognition software called ‘Dragon Dictation’ was used to assist the transcription of the interview recordings (see Appendix F). For the labelling of the texts, creating codes and taking memos, a mind-mapping software called ‘MindNode’ was used to help create, form and visualise the relationships between quotations, memos and different layers of the codes (see Appendix E).

3.6 Summary

This chapter reported on the design of the present research. It began with the introduction to the research questions, followed by discussions regarding the disciplinary considerations and some ethical issues behind the research design. As the research adopted a two-phase research design with each use a different quantitative and qualitative approach, the designs of each phase were reported respectively. The report of each phase included discussions on the identification of participants, the designing process of research instruments, the administration of data collection and a general introduction to
the methods used for data analysis. Upon completion of the above discussions, the following two chapters report on the findings of the present research.
Chapter 4 Findings of the Survey

4.1 Introduction

It is difficult to directly measure demotivation as part of people’s psychological perceptions (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013: 62). In order to investigate the causes and features of CAL learning demotivation, the first phase of the research utilised quantitative survey and statistical analysis as the research instruments due to their advantages in identifying and constructing frameworks of interactive factors (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009: 5). This chapter reports on the findings of the quantitative survey. Section 4.2 briefly introduces the demographic information of the survey participants. The following sections report on the findings of the survey and their indication for answering the associated research questions. Section 4.3 reports on findings regarding the identification and correlation of the main demotivating factors. Section 4.4 reports on findings regarding the features of CAL learning demotivation in different learning periods. Section 4.5 reports on differences in demotivation among learners with various learning backgrounds.

4.2 Participants

The survey participants were 229 CAL learners from four Irish universities and third level institutions, and 61 CAL learners from two universities in mainland China. The Irish universities and institutes offered Chinese course as part of learners’ degree programme at the time of the research, while the two Chinese universities are overseas campuses of European universities. The considerations behind this sampling criteria were discussed in Section 3.4.1. Most of the statistical analyses included data exclusively from the Irish Chinese learners, while data collected from learners in China were only involved when answering one specific question which investigates the influence of the Chinese language environment in CAL learning demotivation. Below presents the demographic information of the survey participants in Ireland and in China respectively.

For the 218 CAL learners in Ireland (see Figure 9), the majority of their age was between 16 to 24 (n = 173), while the rest fell into age groups of 25-34 (n = 17), 35-44 (n = 12), 45-54 (n = 10) and more than 55 years old (n = 6). Among them, 177 were undergraduate
students and 41 were postgraduate students. Due to the rather short history of Chinese language education in Ireland, fewer students learned Chinese as a major subject (n = 51), while the majority took Chinese courses as a minor subject (n = 167). Regarding the approach of teaching and learning written Chinese, nearly half of the learners were studying written Chinese by handwriting (n = 88), and the other half by typing (n = 109). A small number of learners were taught by both methods and could choose by their own preference for composition and assessment (n = 21).

The lengths of their Chinese learning experiences distributed rather equally into four groups of less than one year (n = 65), one to two years (n = 52), two to three years (n = 32) and more than three years (n = 69). Accordingly, their proficiency levels were also relatively balanced, except for the advanced learner group. There were 43, 64, 58 and 43 learners with Chinese language proficiency of CEFR A1 to B2 respectively, while only ten learners claimed to possess a Chinese language proficiency equivalent to or higher than CEFR C1. The questionnaire also included a question to inquire learners’ Chinese proficiency prior to the current stage of CAL learning for the purpose of identifying potential outliers for the later statistical analysis. The results showed that a small number of participants possessed pre-knowledge of the Chinese language which equivalent to the level of CEFR A2 (n = 22), B1 (n = 4), B2 (n = 3) or C1 and above (n = 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>81.19%</td>
<td>18.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Minor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>23.39%</td>
<td>76.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Handwriting</th>
<th>Typing</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Handwriting | 40.37% | 50% | 9.63%
| Typing | 29.82% | 33.85% | 14.68% | 31.65% |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>&lt; 1 year</th>
<th>1-2 years</th>
<th>2-3 years</th>
<th>&gt; 3 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>29.82%</td>
<td>33.85%</td>
<td>14.68%</td>
<td>31.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>23.39%</td>
<td>23.39%</td>
<td>23.39%</td>
<td>23.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 3 years</td>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>16-24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency by CEFR</th>
<th>A1</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>C1 or above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>29.36%</td>
<td>26.61%</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
<td>4.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 16-24</td>
<td>25.34%</td>
<td>35.44%</td>
<td>45.44%</td>
<td>&gt;55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Age | 79.36% | 7.8% | 5.5% | 4.59% | 2.75% |

Figure 9 Background information of survey participants in Ireland
Regarding learners’ experience of learning aboard (see Figure 10), the learning programmes of some learners did not provide opportunities to study for a short-term in a Chinese speaking environment (n = 51). For the learners who have such opportunities, most of them have already acquired experiences in living and learning in a Chinese context (n = 128), while the others have not yet acquired such experiences (n = 39). Regarding the arrangement of the learning abroad experiences, most of the learners went aboard either in their third year (n = 143) or the second year (n = 24). The majority of them stayed for a whole academic year (n = 130), while fewer stayed for a shorter period of one semester (n = 15) or only a few weeks (n = 25).

For the 59 CAL learners in China (see Figure 11), most of them had an age of 16-24, while there were also a few relatively more senior learners with an age of 25-34 (n = 2) and 45-54 (n = 2). Most of these learners were undergraduate students (n = 58) with only one exception as a postgraduate student. Only one of these learners was learning Chines
as a major subject, while the others were learning Chinese as minor subjects (n = 33) or elective modules (n = 25). Regarding their lengths of Chinese learning experiences, there were learners who study Chinese for less than a year (n = 17), one to two years (n = 27), two to three years (n = 13) and more than three years (n = 2). Their Chinese proficiencies were equivalent to CEFR A2 (n = 15), B1 (n = 21), B2 (n = 13) and C1 or above (n = 10). The majority of these learners did not have any experience in CAL learning prior to their study in China. The exceptions were two learners with a pre-knowledge of Chinese which equivalent to CEFR A1, and one learner with a higher level of CEFR B1. Regarding their approach of teaching and learning written Chinese, the dominant method was by handwriting (n = 52).

4.3 Main Factors of CAL Learning Demotivation in an Irish Context

This section reports on findings in relation to the first research question. Section 4.3.1 reports on findings regarding the construct of principal demotivating factors of CAL learning in an Irish context. Section 4.3.2 reports on findings regarding the commonality and severity of the identified factors in demotivating learners. Section 4.3.3 reports on findings regarding the potential interrelationship between the identified factors.

4.3.1 The identification of main demotivating factors

Regarding the construct of CAL learning demotivation, previous studies in the field adopted different conceptualisations when constructing L2 learning demotivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013: 148; Ghadirzadeh et al., 2012: 192; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009: 192-194; Song & Kim, 2017: 94; Yu, 2013: 26). In the present research, exploratory factor analysis was the statistical method adopted for identifying the underlying construct of the CAL learning demotivation. To briefly summarise the process of the test, principal axis factoring was selected as the method for factor extraction due to it is cautiousness and also more robust even when normality is violated (Beavers et al., 2013: 6). Oblique method (direct oblimin) was selected for factor rotation as it is highly plausible that the identified factors were correlated instead of being isolated with each other (Green & Salkind, 2005: 328).
Only data collected from CAL learners in Ireland was used in factor analysis. When checking the assumptions for performing exploratory factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013: 617-620), 13 cases were found to have system missing values and were exempted from the test. Another eight students who had a Chinese pre-knowledge above CEFR A2 were considered univariate outliers and were also filtered out by the suggestion of Rummel (1970: 217). A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was performed regarding the rest 210 cases, which returned a result of 0.8 as an indication of good sample size (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999: 225). When checking the multivariate normality, 21 items were found to be skewed, and 17 of them were excluded from the test due to their extreme floor or ceiling effects (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009: 190). Another two items were also excluded due to their interferences of the interrater reliability of the survey. A total of 31 items entered the exploratory factor analysis. The result of Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity \( p = 0.000 < 0.05 \) in the preliminary analysis indicated a good absence of singularity among the variables, and the minimum determinant \( = 1.138E-5 > 0.00001 \) also met the requirement after adjustment (Field, 2009: 648).

After performing the test, the scree plot suggested two comparatively good constructs of either six or seven factors. Further extractions were performed using different constructs from five to nine factors. The construct with six main factors was selected based on the results of the explained total variance, commonalities of selected variables and factor loadings. It explained a total variance of 43.4\% for all the questionnaire items. Though some of the constructs had better coverages of the total variance, the six-factor construct demonstrated relatively better representation adequacy in comparison with the other constructs (Hair et al., 2014: 108). The factor loading was set to be greater than 0.364 as the sample size was 210 > 200 (Stevens, 2009: 332). Below is a brief illustration of the results of the factor analysis (see Table 3, see Appendix C for more detail).
Table 3
Identified main demotivating factors for CAL learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
<th>Sample item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 73</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>It is difficult to improve my academic performance in Chinese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>7, 10, 13, 17, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>My Chinese teacher doesn’t understand how difficult it is to study Chinese as a foreign language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course design</td>
<td>11, 12, 56, 58</td>
<td>0.665</td>
<td>The Chinese culture I have learnt has a lack of practical application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>31, 32, 33, 35</td>
<td>0.664</td>
<td>Chinese is not essential for me to get a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of another language</td>
<td>39, 40</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>It is not necessary to be good at Chinese to communicate with Chinese people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>26, 27, 44</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>I keep attending this Chinese course as I don’t want to fail the exam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three factors had a relatively more solid indication of consistencies with a Cronbach’s alpha above 0.7 (Kline, 2013: 13), while another three factors had a Cronbach’s alpha between 0.64-0.67. However, Kline (ibid) also mentioned that an alpha below 0.7 was also commonly seen in the research of social science. Both Cortina (1993) and (Grayson, 2004) also argued that theoretical interpretability is more important than the indication of the alpha. After checking the construction of the three factors with lower alpha and their theoretical finesses, they were considered as valid constructs in the context of the present research.

Also, one factor (influence of another language) included only two associated items. Conventionally it was more commonly recognised that a construct should include more than three items (Costello & Osborne, 2005: 5). While scholars also argued that the conceptualisation of fewer than three items for one factor may also suffice (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Drolet & Morrison, 2001). Worthington and Whittaker (2006: 821) mentioned that a factor with two items could be retained if the items are highly correlated and also relatively uncorrelated with the other factors. In the context of the present research, multiple conceptualisations of the constructs were examined based on different numbers of factors extracted, while this factor remained consistently with two associated items. This factor also demonstrated small correlations with other factors (see Section...
4.3.3). There were also examples of a two-item construct in the previous L2 demotivation studies (Kim & Kim, 2017: 56; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009: 64). Therefore, this construct was retained as valid due to its good internal reliability and theoretical interpretability.

### 4.3.2 The commonality and severity of main demotivating factors

The commonality of each factor was identified by the total variances explained, that a larger percentage of total variances indicated a factor being more commonly perceived. The severity of each factor was identified by the mean score, that a larger mean score indicated a factor to be more severe as perceived.

Regarding the commonality, the reduced self-confidence appeared to be the most commonly perceived demotivating force among the Irish CAL learners, which explained 18.9% of the total variance. Another two relatively more commonly perceived demotivating factors were the teacher (7.8%) and the course design (5.8%).

Further statistical tests were required to explore the severity of identified main demotivating factors. The first step was to transform the data for the purpose of calculating the mean score of each main factor. As all the items were negatively worded and all using the five-point Likert Scale as the measurement, no reversed mean and data standardisation was required. After the data transformation, five new variables were created with each named after one identified main demotivating factor. Then, descriptive data were acquired for the new variables in terms of mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis and standard errors (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

Descriptive statistics for the main demotivating factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>3.019</td>
<td>0.780</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>-0.428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>2.989</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>-0.168</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>2.851</td>
<td>0.999</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>-0.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course design</td>
<td>2.581</td>
<td>0.792</td>
<td>0.295</td>
<td>-0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>2.532</td>
<td>0.749</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>-0.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of another language</td>
<td>2.529</td>
<td>0.970</td>
<td>0.450</td>
<td>-0.448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The standard error of skewness is 0.168 and the standard error of kurtosis is 0.334.
As illustrated in Table 4, all the means of the main factors identified were around the middle value of three. To ensure the results were meaningful in reflecting learners’ perception of demotivation, the frequency of items associated with the main factors were further consulted (see Appendix C for detail). In general, for each of the main factors, there were at most less than 21% of the participants actually picked the middle value. The phenomenon of the means being close to the middle value was a reflection that learners’ perception towards these demotivating factors were relatively diverse. This result was in line with the findings regarding the different perceptions between motivated and demotivated learners (see Section 4.5.1). The inclusion of both types of learners has contributed to these unified results of the means of the main demotivating factors.

In order to ensure the validity of the data, a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to check whether these six factors had statistically significant differences. The assumption of sphericity was found to be violated due to the significant result of the Mauchly’s test, and the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied to the degrees of freedom when performing the test (Howell, 2012: 472; O'brien & Kaiser, 1985: 316). The returned result of overall effects was significant (F [12.34, 0.66] = 18.66, p = 0.000), which indicated that the mean scores of the six main demotivating factors were statistically different. The result of the multivariate test was further checked due to its robustness even without the fulfilment of sphericity assumption, and it yielded similar results which helped further strengthen the validity of the finding.

After the above inspections, the present research used the descriptive statistics of the main demotivating factors to interpret their severity. In comparison, three factors including the reduced self-confidence (M = 3.02), negative ideal L2 self (M = 2.99) and the negative ought-to L2 self (M = 2.85) seemed to be more demotivating for CAL learners. Judging by the standard deviation, learners’ perception of three factors in demotivating their CAL learning appeared to be relatively more unanimous, which were the course design (SD = 0.79), the reduced self-confidence (SD = 0.78) and the teacher (SD = 0.75).
4.3.3 The interrelationship of the main demotivating factors

Data from several statistical tests were consulted to explore the interrelationships among the identified main demotivating factors. The first one was the results of paired contrasts in the report of the ANOVA. It revealed that two factors appeared to be clustered closer than the others, which were the teacher factor and the course design (F [0.498, 0.891] = 0.559, p = 0.456). The second one was the results of post-hoc analysis, which was performed using pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment. The results of the tests indicated the factor reduced self-confidence had correlations with two factors of negative ideal L2 self and negative ideal L2 self.

These above findings could confirm that there were correlations among factors on a general level, while further data were required to identify the more specific interrelationships among the factors. For such purpose, the correlation coefficients between the identified factors were examined through the representation of the factor correlation matrix in the output of the exploratory factor analysis. Below is the table of the correlation matrix (see Table 5), and the scale that adopted to determine the effect of the coefficient was 0.1-0.3 as a small effect, 0.3-0.5 as a medium effect and above 0.5 as a strong effect (Cohen, 1988: 115).

Table 5
Factor correlation matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reduced self-confidence</th>
<th>The teacher</th>
<th>Course design</th>
<th>Negative ideal L2 self</th>
<th>Influence of another language</th>
<th>Negative ought-to L2 self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-0.249</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.301*</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>-0.312*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>-0.249</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-0.182</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course design</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>-0.182</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>0.301*</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>-0.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of another language</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>-0.312*</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>-0.213</td>
<td>-0.165</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = medium correlation
Based on the numerical representation of the matrix, no strong correlation was found among the main factors, while there were small and medium correlations among the factors. The most active factor was reduced self-confidence, which was found to have a medium positive correlation with the negative ideal L2 self \((r = 0.301)\), while also negatively correlated with another two factors of the teacher \((r = -0.249)\) and the negative ought-to L2 self \((r = -0.312)\). The course design factor also appeared to have small to medium negative correlations with the teacher factor \((r = -0.182)\) and the negative ought-to L2 self \((r = -0.213)\). The negative ideal L2 self and negative ought-to L2 self were also mildly associated with each other as learners’ two types of negative perceptions towards the future. In comparison, the factor influence of another language appeared to be rather isolated from all the rest of the main demotivating factors.

4.4 The Features of Demotivation in Different Learning Periods

This section reports on findings regarding the second research question and the associated sub-questions, which aims to investigate the features of demotivation in different learning periods. Section 4.4.1 presents findings in relation to the changes in the identified demotivating factors over the course of the CAL learning process. Section 4.4.2 reports on findings which concern particularly the differences in CAL learning demotivation at various stages of the immersive Chinese language exposure.

4.4.1 The change of CAL learning demotivation

The change of CAL learning demotivation was examined among learners with different Chinese language proficiencies and with different length of the CAL learning experiences. Regarding the proficiency, participants were categorised into four groups of CFER A1 \((n = 43)\), A2 \((n = 64)\), B1 \((n = 57)\) and B2 or above \((n = 46)\). Regarding the length of CAL learning, participants were separated into four groups of less than one year \((n = 65)\), one to two years \((n = 51)\), two to three years \((n = 32)\) and more than three years \((n = 62)\).

After checking the assumptions of normality and homogeneity, a series of ANOVA was performed to explore differences in the main demotivating factors between groups. When comparing results among learners of different Chinese proficiencies, only the teacher...
factor was identified to be statistically different from other factors (F [3, 206] = 3.644, p = 0.014, eta squared = 0.050). In comparison, four main factors were identified to be statistically different among learners with different length of CAL learning. They were the teacher (F [3, 206] = 8.067, p = 0.000, eta squared = 0.105), course design (F [3, 206] = 4.740, p = 0.003, eta squared = 0.064), the influence of another language (F [3, 206] = 3.599, p = 0.014, eta squared = 0.050) and the negative ought-to L2 self (F [3, 206] = 4.858, p = 0.003, eta squared = 0.066). The results of the Levene’s test suggested that the factor course design violated the assumption of homogeneity of variances (p = 0.004). Therefore, the above results of this factor were corrected by the Welch’s F, and all three tests (the standard ANOVA, the Welch’s test and the Brown-Forsythe’s test) yielded similar significant results regarding this factor.

The above findings indicated that the fluctuation of CAL learning demotivation was associated more with the length of the study rather than learners’ achievement in Chinese language proficiency. To further investigate the trend of each demotivating factor, post-hoc analyses were conducted using paired-samples t-tests. As the group sizes were not equal, Turkey’s contrast was used as the main method to identify the trend, while Games-Howell adjustments were applied where necessary due to its better sensitivity to the differences (Larson-Hall, 2010: 282). The findings of the post-hoc tests are summarised below.

![The Teacher](image)

Figure 12 Influence of the CAL teacher in different learning periods
Regarding the teacher factor (see Figure 12), post-hoc test showed significant differences between groups of one to two years and less than one year (mean difference = 0.566, CI = 0.220, 0.912, p = 0.000, d = 0.780) and also with two to three years (mean difference = 0.589, CI = 0.172, 1.006, p = 0.002, d = 0.864). While indifference was found between groups of less than one year and two to three years (p = 0.999). These findings described the trend of the demotivating effect of the teacher factor. It began mildly in the first year of CAL learning (mean = 2.291, SD = 0.706), then grew significantly in the following year (mean = 2.856, SD = 0.744). In the third year, it dropped to a relatively same level in comparison with the initial stage (mean = 2.267, SD = 0.612), but gradually returned to a moderate level of demotivating effect in the late stage of the learning.

![Figure 13](image)

**Figure 13** Influence of the course design in different learning periods

Regarding the course design factor (see Figure 13), post-hoc test identified significant differences between the one to two years group with all the rest of the groups (with less than one year, mean difference = 0.363, CI = 0.078, 0.648, p = 0.013, d = 0.422; with two to three years, mean difference = 0.526, CI = 0.183, 0.870, p = 0.003, d = 0.648; with more than three years, mean difference = 0.485, CI = 0.197, 0.773, p = 0.001, d = 0.590). In comparison, the results of two to three years group were not statistically different from both the less than one year group (p = 0.329) and the more than three years group (p = 0.808). These findings suggested that the negative effect of the course design factor was particularly strong in the second year of CAL learning (mean = 2.917, SD = 0.947). It began with a mediocre negative effect in the first year (mean = 2.554, SD = 0.762). After reaching its peak in the second year, its effect returned to a similar level of the first year.
in the third year of CAL learning (mean = 2.391, SD = 0.651), and remained steady since the third year (mean = 2.431, SD = 0.674).

![Figure 14 Influence of another language in Different Learning Periods](image)

Regarding the influence of another language (see Figure 14), post-hoc test showed that results of more than three years group were statistically lower than the less than one year group (mean difference = -0.334, CI = -0.668, -0.001, p = 0.049, d = 0.350) and one to two years group (mean difference = -0.575, CI = -0.930, -0.220, p = 0.002, d = 0.642). In comparison, the results of two to three years group were not significantly different from the less than one year group (p = 0.453). This indicated that the influence of another language appeared to be more negative in the early stage of the CAL learning, but tended to be gradually reduced along with the further study. Similar to the previous two factors, its strongest demotivating effect occurred in the second year of CAL learning (mean = 2.833, SD = 0.920).
Regarding the negative ought-to L2 self (see Figure 15), post-hoc test found the results of one to two years group were significantly higher than the two to three years group (mean difference = 0.820, CI = 0.387, 1.252, p = 0.000, d = 0.861) and more than three years group (mean difference = 0.441, CI = 0.079, 0.804, p = 0.017, d = 0.449). The results of less than one year group were barely lower than the one to two years group (mean difference = -0.354, CI = -0.713, 0.005, p = 0.053, d = 0.367), while no statistical difference was identified between the less than one year group and more than three years group (p = 0.613). This indicated that the effect of negative ought-to L2 self mainly fluctuated during the second to third year of CAL learning, with its positive peak in the second year of CAL learning (mean = 3.216, SD = 0.963) and its negative peak in the following third year (mean = 2.396, SD = 0.941). Beyond these fluctuations, its negative effect was nearly consistently both in the early and late stage of CAL learning.

To further investigate the dominant demotivating factor in each learning period, descriptive data of the ANOVA tests were also acquired to compare the means of different factors (see Figure 16). Further paired samples t-tests were performed to examine the significances of identified differences between group.
In the first year of CAL learning, negative ideal L2 self appeared to be the primary demotivating factor (mean = 2.965, SD = 0.768). However, results of the paired-samples t-tests suggested that its effect was not statistically different from the negative ought-to L2 self (t = 1.699, p = 0.097, df = 42) and the reduced self-confidence (t = 1.416, p = 0.164, df = 42). In the second year of CAL learning, negative ought-to L2 self was the dominant demotivating factor (mean = 3.216, SD = 0.963), while similarly no statistical differences were found in comparison with the negative ideal L2 self (t = 0.502, p = 0.617, df = 63) and the reduced self-confidence (t = 0.309, p = 0.759, df = 63). In the third year of CAL learning, negative ideal L2 self was the most demotivating factor (mean = 3.086, SD = 0.761), though it was not statistically significant from the factor reduced self-confidence (t = 1.164, p = 0.249, df = 56). Then since the completion of the third year, reduced self-confidence was perceived to be the primary source of learners’ demotivation (mean = 3.145, SD = 0.828).

To summarise, the effects of main demotivating factors (i.e., reduced self-confidence, the teacher, course design, negative ideal L2 self, influence of another language, negative ought-to L2 self) remained consistent among learners with various achievement in terms of Chinese language proficiency. In comparison, the effect of four demotivating factors (i.e., the teacher, course design, influence of another language, negative ought-to L2 self) fluctuated over the course of the CAL learning process. All four factors demonstrated different behavioural patterns, while it was common that the second year since the beginning of CAL learning appeared to be the most demotivating for CAL learning in an Irish context. Moreover, though it appeared that there were different dominating
demotivating factors for each learning period, the factor reduced self-confidence seemed consistent in being primarily responsible for CAL learners’ demotivation.

4.4.2 The impact of the immersive Chinese language exposure

The impact of the immersive Chinese language exposure was explored by comparing results among learners who possessed different long-term and short-term experiences of studying abroad in a Chinese speaking environment. To begin with, a comparison was first made between participants in Ireland (n = 210) and in China (n = 57) to examine the effect of long-term Chinese language exposure. A series of independent samples t-tests were performed to investigate the differences in main demotivating factors and the associated items between these two groups of participants. The table below presents the results of the t-tests for the main demotivating factors (see Table 6), while findings regarding the comparison of items were made where necessary. As the factor negative ideal L2 self was the only one which met the assumption of the equality of variance, the data below regarding all other factors were adjusted by the results when the equal variance was not assumed.

Table 6
Influence of long-term exposure in a Chinese language environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demotivating factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>3.019</td>
<td>2.632</td>
<td>0.387</td>
<td>4.715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher</td>
<td>2.532</td>
<td>3.367</td>
<td>-0.834</td>
<td>-9.379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Course design</td>
<td>2.581</td>
<td>3.026</td>
<td>-0.445</td>
<td>-4.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>2.988</td>
<td>3.009</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Influence of another language</td>
<td>2.529</td>
<td>2.097</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>4.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>2.851</td>
<td>2.912</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>-0.566</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: df = 265; * = P < 0.05

As shown in Table 6, the insignificant results of the t-tests suggested that the mere exposure of the Chinese language environment might be ineffective in changing learners’ negative ideal L2 self (p = 0.853) and negative ought-to L2 self (p = 0.573). Only one item associated with the negative ideal L2 self was identified to be statistically different between groups. The results indicated that instead of boosting a positive ideal L2 self, a
long-term exposure to the Chinese language environment reduced learners’ desire in living in China and using Chinese to communicate with the locals (item 35, mean difference = 0.419, CI = 0.131, 0.707, p = 0.005, d = 0.548).

CAL learners in Ireland appeared to suffer more from the reduced self-confidence and the negative influence of another language. Regarding these two factors, the results of item comparisons showed that learners’ opinion was more clustered for the former factor, while more controversial for the latter one. Peer pressure appeared to be more responsible for causing reduced self-confidence for CAL learners in Ireland. In comparison with learners in China, CAL learners in Ireland were more likely to perceive their classmates to have better communicative capability in Chinese (item 66, mean difference = 0.778, CI = 0.496, 1.060, p = 0.000, d = 1.047). Only one item was rated comparatively less demotivating for CAL learners in Ireland, which is about the academic performance of CAL courses. Even though, such difference was statistically insignificant (item 65, mean difference = -0.263, CI = -0.615, 0.089, p = 0.143, d = 0.181). Regarding the influence of another language, CAL learners in China were more aware of the necessity of learning Chinese for communication purposes (item 39, mean difference = -0.816, CI = -1.011, -0.621, p = 0.000, d = 1.169), while both groups of learners considered the proficient of Chinese language being unnecessary for travelling and tourism purposes even in a Chinese domestic context (item 40, p = 0.773).

In comparison, CAL learners in China perceived the influence of their teacher and the course design to be more demotivating. Further comparisons made among items identified some more differences between groups. In terms of the CAL teachers, CAL learners in China expressed more dissatisfactions towards teachers’ insufficient constructive feedback (item 10, mean difference = 1.057, CI = 0.720, 1.394, p = 0.000, d = 0.759) and their lack of empathy for the learners (item 13, mean difference = 1.329, CI = 0.998, 1.660, p = 0.000, d = 0.971). They also perceived CAL teachers in China possess relatively lower communicative capability in foreign languages (item 17, mean difference = 1.020, CI = 0.696, 1.343, p = 0.000, d = 0.763), and their teaching approach was more teacher-centred (item 25, mean difference = 1.023, CI = 0.694, 1.353, p = 0.000, d = 0.751). One item associated with the teacher factor was rated as equally demotivating for both CAL learners in Ireland and China, which was the lack of concern and feedback on a personal level (item 22, p = 0.236). In terms of the course design, both groups of learners
considered that the CAL courses emphasised too much on the accuracy of Chinese pronunciation (item 11, p = 0.983), while learners in China also felt that the requirement on the accuracy of writing Chinese characters was also excessive (item 12, mean difference = 0.825, CI = 0.490, 1.160, p = 0.000, d = 0.595). Regarding the cultural elements in their courses, CAL learners in China rated more impractical for the content (item 56, mean difference = 1.496, CI = 1.188, 1.804, p = 0.000, d = 1.175), while such content was also less necessary in their CAL learning programmes in comparison with the CAL learners in Ireland (item 58, mean difference = -0.536, CI = 0.795, 0.276, p = 0.000, d = 0.757).

To investigate the influence of short-term Chinese language exposure, further independent samples t-tests were performed between Irish CAL learners who had experiences in studying in China (n = 120) and those who did not possess such experiences (n = 90). Regarding the assumptions of the test, the course design factor was found to violate the equality of variance, and its test results were corrected accordingly. The results of the t-test are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Influence of short-term exposure in a Chinese language environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demotivating factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>3.043</td>
<td>2.988</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher</td>
<td>2.594</td>
<td>2.449</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>1.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Course design</td>
<td>2.469</td>
<td>2.731</td>
<td>-0.262</td>
<td>-2.313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>2.913</td>
<td>3.089</td>
<td>-0.176</td>
<td>-1.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Influence of another language</td>
<td>2.375</td>
<td>2.733</td>
<td>-0.358</td>
<td>-2.687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>2.733</td>
<td>3.007</td>
<td>-0.274</td>
<td>-1.981</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Yes = possessed short-term study aboard experience; No = did not possess study aboard experience

Three factors yielded statistically significant results between groups, and learners with experiences of short-term Chinese language exposure appeared to be less demotivated by the influence of three factors. This referred to the factors course design, influence of another language and the negative ought-to L2 self. To further discover the differences
between groups, the result of independent sample t-tests among items associated with the above factors were consulted.

Regarding the course design factor, learners who have been short-term exposed demonstrate a better recognition of the necessity in improving the accuracy of Chinese pronunciation (item 11, mean difference = -0.636, CI = -0.962, -0.310, p = 0.000, d = 0.594) and handwriting (item 12, mean difference = -0.342, CI = -0.655, -0.028, p = 0.033, d = 0.298). They were also more aware of the importance in achieving a good Chinese proficiency for the purpose of communicating with Chinese speakers (item 39, mean difference = -0.378, CI = -0.667, -0.088, p = 0.011, d = 0.357) and for travelling in Chinese speaking regions (item 40, mean difference = -0.339, CI = -0.643, -0.0345, p = 0.029, d = 0.304). These different perceptions appeared to result in their better resistance to the negative influence of another language.

Though no significant difference was identified on a general level regarding the teacher factor, its three associated items were found to have statistically different results between groups. It suggested that learners who possess short-term Chinese language exposure experiences were more dissatisfied with the pace of the CAL courses (item 7, mean difference = 0.336, CI = 0.039, 0.633, p = 0.027, d = 0.309), the insufficient opportunities to practise Chinese during the courses (item 23, mean difference = 0.611, CI = 0.298, 0.924, p = 0.000, d = 0.534) and the teacher-centred classroom (item 25, mean difference = 0.422, CI = 0.116, 0.728, p = 0.007, d = 0.377).

The different time of the Chinese language exposure in CAL learners’ learning experiences may also affect its effectiveness in reducing demotivation. To further explore whether there is a better time to arrange the study aboard experiences from a demotivation research standpoint, further comparisons were made between participants who were involved in two different types of learning aboard programmes. This refers to learners who participated in short-term exchange programmes up to one academic year in either the second year of their CAL learning programmes (n = 21) or in their third year of learning (n = 79). An independent samples t-test was performed to explore any potential differences in demotivating factors between these two groups of participants. All assumptions were fulfilled, and the test results are reported in Table 8.
The t-test only identified one factor to be statistically different between groups (influence of another language, $p = 0.046$). This may indicate that early short-term exposure to the Chinese language environment was more beneficial in helping learners to deal with the demotivation caused by the influence of another language. It was also interesting to notice that the factor negative ideal L2 self demonstrated no statistical differences among learners with or without, and also with different types of Chinese language exposures. This finding was in line with the motivational study of Kim (2010), which mentioned the mere exposure of the target language environment may not improve learners’ L2 learning motivation. From a demotivation research standpoint, such finding suggested that it may also be ineffective if relying solely on the exposure of the Chinese language environment in dealing with learners’ demotivation caused by their negative ideal L2 self.

Table 8
Influence of different short-term exposure programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demotivating factor</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In 2nd year</td>
<td>In 3rd year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>3.101</td>
<td>3.055</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher</td>
<td>2.577</td>
<td>2.633</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Course design</td>
<td>2.274</td>
<td>2.570</td>
<td>-0.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>3.119</td>
<td>2.889</td>
<td>0.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Influence of another language</td>
<td>2.048</td>
<td>2.519</td>
<td>-0.471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>2.460</td>
<td>2.840</td>
<td>-0.379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: df = 98; * = $P < 0.05$

To summarise, the Chinese language environment had various impacts on learners’ CAL learning demotivation. Such an impact was not purely positive but demonstrates different features in relation to the type and length of the immersive exposure experience. The consistent exposure to the Chinese language environment appeared to be mainly effective in dealing with learners’ reduced self-confidence. A short-term exposure excelled in diminishing the negative influence of another language, and the early exposure appeared to be more effective in comparison with such experiences in the later stage of CAL learning. The short-term exposure also helped address demotivation issues caused by the course design and learners’ negative ought-to L2 self, and its effect was not affected by the time of the exposure.
4.5 Demotivation among Different Types of CAL Learners

This section reports on findings regarding the third research question, which aims to investigate the differences in CAL learning demotivation among different types of learners. Section 4.5.1 reports on different perceptions of demotivation between motivated and demotivated learners. The following two sections present findings regarding the impact of two primary differences in CAL curriculum settings in the context of Irish higher education. Section 4.5.2 reports on differences between learners who study Chinese as a major and minor subject. Section 4.5.3 reports on differences between learners who study Chinese writing by the method of handwriting and by typing.

4.5.1 Motivated and demotivated learners

To investigate differences in CAL learning demotivation between motivated and demotivated learners, participants’ current motivational statuses in CAL learning were inquired by the survey. The descriptive data showed that 149 participants were identified as motivated and 50 as demotivated. An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the means of six identified main demotivating factors between the two types of participants (see Table 9). After checking the assumptions of the test, Levene’s test showed a significant result for the course design factor (p = 0.018). Due to its violation of the equal variance assumption, the results of this factor were corrected by the output when equal variances are not assumed.

The results showed that the influence of another language was equally demotivating for motivated and demotivated learners, while demotivated learners perceived the rest of the main factors more negatively in comparison with the motivated learners. The largest contrast between group was the perception regarding the teacher in demotivating students (mean difference = -0.756, CI = -0.973, -0.540, p = 0.000, d = 1.096). It was the least demotivating factor as perceived by the motivated learners, while appeared to be much more demotivating for the demotivated learners.
Table 9
Differences between motivated and demotivated learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demotivating factor</th>
<th>Mean (Motivated)</th>
<th>Mean (Demotivated)</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>2.799</td>
<td>3.598</td>
<td>-0.799</td>
<td>-7.025</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher</td>
<td>2.335</td>
<td>3.091</td>
<td>-0.756</td>
<td>-6.883</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Course design</td>
<td>2.414</td>
<td>3.050</td>
<td>-0.636</td>
<td>-4.505</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>2.804</td>
<td>3.415</td>
<td>-0.611</td>
<td>-4.903</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Influence of another language</td>
<td>2.513</td>
<td>2.540</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>-0.165</td>
<td>0.869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>2.696</td>
<td>3.300</td>
<td>-0.604</td>
<td>-3.853</td>
<td>0.000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: df = 197; * = P < 0.05

When further inspecting the differences in items, the t-tests returned only one insignificant result regarding item 44 (p = 0.216), which indicated no statistical differences between groups. This item concerned the contrast of the pressure between learning pinyin and Chinese character, and it was associated with the main factor of negative ought-to L2 self. Other than that, all the rest of the items associated with the main demotivating factors (except for the influence of another language) demonstrated statistical differences between groups, which are briefly summarised below.

Regarding the factor reduced self-confidence, demotivated learners were more likely to feel less confident in the present stage of CAL learning in comparison with their experiences of the early stage (item 67, mean difference = -1.156, CI = -1.514, -0.798, p = 0.000, d = 1.327). They also perceived themselves more inefficacious in mastering the appropriate methods for CAL learning (item 69, mean difference = -0.947, CI = -1.222, -0.673, p = 0.000, d = 1.189).

Regarding the teacher factor, demotivated learners appeared to be more dissatisfied about the pace of their course (item 7, mean difference = -1.032, CI = -1.397, -0.667, p = 0.000, d = 1.337). They also considered the CAL teachers being more responsible for their lack of CAL learning methods (item 20, mean difference = -0.949, CI = -1.314, -0.585, p = 0.000, d = 0.731) and the insufficient opportunities to practise Chinese during the courses (item 23, mean difference = -0.917, CI = -1.274, -0.560, p = 0.000, d = 0.722).
Regarding the course design factor, demotivated learners considered the language associated courses (e.g., Chinese culture, Chinese society) were less beneficial. In comparison with the motivated learners, more of the demotivated learners perceived these courses had a lack of practical applications (item 56, mean difference = -0.779, CI = -1.107, -0.451, p = 0.000, d = 0.668). They also tended to enrol these courses only when it was compulsory (item 58, mean difference = -0.812, CI = -1.190, -0.435, p = 0.000, d = 1.013).

Regarding the negative ought-to L2 self, demotivated learners concerned more about the result of CAL learning in affecting their academic performance (item 26, mean difference = -0.859, CI = -1.237, -0.481, p = 0.000, d = 0.639). They also appeared to have less intentions to continue CAL learning after their graduation (item 31, mean difference = -0.765, CI = -1.140, -0.390, p = 0.000, d = 0.573), which was partially reflected in their relatively more negative ideal L2 self in comparison with the motivated learners.

**4.5.2 Learners who study Chinese as major and minor subjects**

Based on the demographic information collected from the questionnaire, participants were divided into groups of learning Chinese as a major subject (n = 50) and learning Chinese as a minor subject (n = 160). Independent samples t-tests were performed to investigate potential differences between groups. All assumptions were fulfilled, and the results of the test are reported below (see Table 10).

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demotivating factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reduced self-confidence</td>
<td>2.953</td>
<td>3.040</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
<td>-0.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher</td>
<td>2.640</td>
<td>2.499</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>1.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Course design</td>
<td>2.330</td>
<td>2.659</td>
<td>-0.329</td>
<td>-2.601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative ideal L2 self</td>
<td>2.990</td>
<td>2.988</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Influence of another language</td>
<td>2.270</td>
<td>2.609</td>
<td>-0.339</td>
<td>-2.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Negative ought-to L2 self</td>
<td>2.473</td>
<td>2.969</td>
<td>-0.495</td>
<td>-3.124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: df = 208; * = P < 0.05
The results showed that three factors were statistically different between groups, which were the course design, the influence of another language and the negative ought-to L2 self. Learners of Chinese major appeared to be affected less from all these three factors in general. Comparisons regarding their associated items were followed between groups.

For learners who studied Chinese as a major subject, only one item was rated more demotivating in comparison with learners of Chinese as a minor subject. This item was associated with the Chinese teacher, with a specific criticism on the teacher-centred one-way teaching style (item 25, mean difference = 0.500, CI = 0.145, 0.855, p = 0.006, d = 0.385).

For learners who studied Chinese as a minor subject, the demotivating influence of course design reflected more in their dissatisfaction towards the excessive requirement on the accuracy of Chinese pronunciation (item 11, mean difference = 0.526, CI = 0.152, 0.900, p = 0.006, d = 0.384) and the compulsory nature of non-language modules (item 58, mean difference = 0.371, CI = 0.080, 0.663, p = 0.013, d = 0.472). The contrast between the anxiety of learning pinyin and Chinese character (item 44, mean difference = 0.710, CI = 0.285, 1.135, p = 0.001, d = 0.457) contributed relatively more to their negative ought-to L2 self. The negative influence of another language mainly referred to their mindset that affected by English as both their native language and a global language, that CAL learning was perceived to be less essential for the purpose of communicating with native Chinese speakers (item 39, mean difference = 0.361, CI = 0.051, 0.671, p = 0.023, d = 0.470).

4.5.3 Learners taught by handwriting and by typing

The most widely used method for teaching and learning Chinese composition in both domestic and overseas contexts was handwriting Chinese characters. The learning of typing Chinese for the purpose of composition and written communication became more popular in recent years, especially among overseas CAL learning programmes which Chinese is a minor subject of the learners (Li et al., 2018: 2).

Based on the results of the survey, participants were divided into three groups regarding their different methods of learning Chinese writing. The first group refers to learners who
studied Chinese writing mainly through handwriting (n = 80). The second group refers to learners who studied Chinese writing mainly through typing (n = 109). Learners in the third group were taught by both methods and they could choose either to practice and fulfil assessments according to their own preference (n = 21).

A one-way ANOVA was first performed to investigate differences between groups in relation to the main demotivating factors. Regarding the assumptions, inspections of histogram and Levene’s test suggested no violation of the normal distribution and equal variance. Test results returned no statistical differences among the three groups of learners. To further inspect the data, post-hoc tests were also performed and inspected, and the pairwise comparisons identified two differences between the group of handwriting and typing. The first is that learners who studied typing were more stressful in learning Chinese characters after being exposed to the study of pinyin (mean difference = 0.515, p = 0.03, CI = 0.037, 0.993). But at the same time, they were also more confident in taking on a job which requires Chinese as the working language after graduation (mean difference = -0.467, p = 0.02, CI = -0.880, -0.055).

4.6 Summary

Below is a model which depicts the main findings of the quantitative analysis (see Figure 17).
The survey results identified six main factors for CAL learning in an Irish context. Among them, three were internally-orientated (reduced self-confidence, negative ideal L2 self, negative ought-to L2 self), and the other three were externally-orientated (the teacher, course design, influence of another language). The factor ‘reduced self-confidence’ was the most commonly perceived and also the most severe demotivating influence from a learner perspective. In general, learners were more aware of factors that associated with immediate demotivating incidents (i.e., reduced self-confidence, the teacher, course design) while less aware of the effect of their future perceptions (i.e., negative ideal L2 self, negative ought-to L2 self) and the influence of the embedded sociocultural context (i.e., influence of another language).

Both positive and negative correlations were identified among the main demotivation factors. The internally-orientated factors and externally-orientated factors could interact with each other. The demotivating influence of a certain factor could be amplified, reduced or disguised by another one. All these findings suggested that learners’ demotivation is the results of collaboration among these factors. The only exception was the factor influence of another language, whose demotivating influence appeared to be more independent.
The effect of demotivation on learners is also a dynamic process, that the influence of different demotivating factors fluctuated over the course of the CAL learning process. Such fluctuation was associated more with learners’ length of CAL learning experiences instead of their achievement in Chinese language proficiency. On a general level, the second year after the initiation of CAL learning was the most demotivating period for CAL learners in an Irish context. There were also different dominating factors for each period of learning. This referred to learners’ negative ideal L2 self in the early stage of learning, the negative ought-to L2 self in the middle stage of learning and the reduced self-confidence in the late stage of learning.

The mere exposure of a Chinese language environment could not effectively reduce all aspects of CAL learning demotivation. Learners with consistent long-term exposure appeared to suffer less from reduced self-confidence and the influence of another language. However, they were also relatively more vulnerable to demotivation caused by the teacher and the inappropriate course design. Short-term exposure was beneficial in reducing the negative influence of another language, and the survey results suggested that such a positive impact was more effective if being arranged in a relatively early stage of CAL learning. Besides, the short-term exposure could also help learners to deal with some demotivation issues in the CAL course design and reduce their chances of establishing a negative ought-to L2 self.

Learners with various motivational statuses in CAL learning also perceived the issue of demotivation differently. In general, demotivated learners perceived more negatively regarding all the main demotivating factors in comparison with motivated learners. Again, the only exception was the influence of another language, which appeared to be equally demotivating for both motivated and demotivated learners. This was potentially caused by the different layers and perspectives of demotivation, that most of the other demotivating factors were associated with the learner or the learning context, while the influence of another language was more determined by a wider sociocultural environment.

Some curriculum settings also affected learners’ perception of CAL learning demotivation. For example, learners who studied Chinese as a major subject were more aware of the demotivating influence caused by the teacher-centred teaching approach. In
comparison, learners who studied Chinese as a minor subject expressed more dissatisfaction towards the excessive requirement on accuracy in the language courses and the compulsory nature of non-language courses. These learners were also more likely to possess a negative ought-to L2 self and being affected by the negative influence of another language. Another perspective was the different approach of teaching and learning Chinese writing by handwriting and by typing. Though the previous investigation of the researcher has proved that typing method appears to be more effective in dealing with learners’ demotivation in learning the Chinese character particularly (Zhang & Wang, 2016: 148), such approach seemed to be trivial in affecting the demotivation of CAL learning from a holistic L2 study standpoint.

After presenting the findings of the quantitative phase of the research, the next chapter continues to report on findings of the following qualitative phase of the research.
Chapter 5 Findings of the Interviews

5.1 Introduction

The quantitative survey identified six factors of CAL learning demotivation in an Irish context (see Section 4.3.1). This result was used to guide the qualitative interviews and also the organisation of the main themes of the interview data. In comparison, the subcategories of the main themes emerged directly from the interview data in compliment of the results of the quantitative survey. This chapter reports on findings of the qualitative interviews, which aimed to further explore learners’ perceptions of the main demotivating influences. Section 5.2 introduces the demographic and motivational background of the interview participants. Section 5.3 reports on some general results of the interviews, which could help interpret learners’ awareness and the interrelationship of main demotivating influences. Section 5.4 and Section 5.5 look at more detailed interview data in terms of learners’ perception of internally oriented and externally orientated demotivating factors respectively.

5.2 Participants

The researcher recruited 13 Irish university students and graduates as the participants of the qualitative interviews. Their ages ranged from 21 to 26. All the participants had studied Mandarin Chinese as part of their degree programmes for four years or more. They all possessed at least one year’s experience of living and studying in mainland China and had achieved a Chinese proficiency of CEFR B2 or above by the time of the interviews. Among them, six participants were employed, and two were working in the field that directly related to China and Chinese studies. The transcripts of the interviews are attached as the appendix of the thesis (see Appendix F).

5.2.1 Background of interview participants

This section introduces some relevant demographic and motivational background of the interviewees. In consideration of protecting interviewees’ anonymity and privacy, all the real names of the interviewees were converted.
Interviewee 01 is David, who was a postgraduate student major in Chinese studies at the time of the investigation. He first visited China when he was young and have been learning Chinese consistently since post-primary school. His current Chinese proficiency was CEFR B1, approaching B2. He has studied Chinese in Dublin, Beijing and Taiwan, where he was exposed to various teaching and learning approaches as well as different sociocultural background. He was highly motivated at present while being highly demotivated previously, which was mainly associated with his former Chinese teacher.

Interviewee 02 is Peter. He was an undergraduate student who was about to go to Beijing for postgraduate study. Peter was a migrant student who was naturalised in recent years. His interest in CAL learning was influenced by his grandparents who were diplomatic officers that used to visit China. He had no prior experiences in learning Chinese while achieved a Chinese proficiency of CEFR C1 at the end of his four-year study, with one year aboard in Beijing. He was demotivated at the moment, as claimed to be mainly associated with the course design and teaching quality, particularly in the final year study. However, he looked forward to revitalising his motivation in CAL learning once travelled to China for his future endeavour in further education.

Interviewee 03 is Rose, who was a recent graduate and currently works in a major financial and accounting company in Ireland. Her decision in learning Chinese for her undergraduate degree was a strategic plan that associated more with future career potential instead of integrated interest in the language and culture initially. She achieved a good level of Chinese up to CEFR C1 after the four-year study and was continuously studying Chinese with private tuition, even though Chinese language skills were not required for her present employment. She was in general motivated throughout the learning process over the years, while being aware of many demotivating incidents and influences that negatively impacted on her.

Interviewee 04 is Adam, who was a final year undergraduate student. Adam achieved CEFR B2 for his Chinese and was currently still looking for employment opportunities after graduation. He had no experiences in learning Chinese beforehand, and he enrolled in the Chinese programme for his undergraduate degree mainly due to the promotion of the courses during the orientation period of the university. His attitude towards CAL learning was relatively neutral, as potentially affected by his personality. He did not work
particularly hard on the subject but managed to maintain a relatively stable level of motivation in CAL learning. He did not perceive Chinese as a difficult language and had a little bit regret in not putting more effort into learning it.

Interviewee 05 is Leo, who has graduated from college for two years and was currently working in China. He grew interested in learning Chinese due to gradual enjoyable experiences in learning the language, in which positive peer competition played a vital role. He achieved CEFR B2 before graduation and became more fluent at the moment as he used Chinese in his work on a daily basis. He was considering returning to Ireland in the near future after finishing the current contract, mainly wish to experience a different working environment and meet different people.

Interviewee 06 is Ethan, who was graduated from a postgraduate programme in China for a year. Before that, he studied Chinese for four years in an undergraduate programme in Ireland. His academic performance in relation to Chinese language studies was not ideal, though he was very intrigued by the Chinese culture and the development of technology in China. Though has been naturalised, he felt that he could relate to more sociocultural elements in China rather than in Ireland. He was currently unemployed while trying to get an internship at one of the leading communication technology company in China.

Interviewee 07 is Paddy. Paddy was a talented learner who also worked hard on CAL learning, which resulted in a Chinese proficiency of approaching CEFR C2 at the end of his undergraduate study. After being graduated for one year, he currently worked in an international company in a European country, where French was his working language. He was a good friend with Leo (interviewee 05) and Chris (interviewee 10), that he played a leading role in their friendly competition in CAL learning while in college. However, his comparatively outstanding performance was also the source of his demotivation, that peer pressure from other classmates often affected him negatively.

Interviewee 08 is Carlos. Carlos was a migrant student who grew up in a Chinese speaking country. His mother speaks Mandarin and father is Irish. He hated learning Chinese before moving to Ireland, while the table turned quickly after he was exposed to a different approach of Chinese teaching and learning in the Irish university. He was
currently in his second year of undergraduate study, preparing to study abroad in China in the next year. He was moderately motivated while demonstrated consistent exposure to demotivating incidents that related to the course content and peer pressure.

Interviewee 09 is Cian. Cian was a ‘genius’ in learning languages. He was in his final year of undergraduate studies. At this stage, he has studied three foreign languages formally in post-primary schools, self-studied two other languages (one of them is Japanese) and performed extraordinarily in Chinese programme. At first, it seemed that he could unconsciously avoid the influence of many common demotivating incidents, so to naturally sustain his motivation in CAL learning. While with the progress of the interview, it was discovered that he deliberately chose to ignore or forced himself to change negative perception as a strategy in dealing with demotivation. However, though Cian was quite successful in learning languages, he was less competent in learning other subjects, including his major. This has led him to a difficult position in securing employment opportunities after graduation.

Interviewee 10 is Chris. Chris currently worked in a consulting company in Ireland, and most of his clients were from China. Chris did not make up his mind for learning Chinese until his trip to China in his third-year undergraduate study. He saw great potential and benefit in CAL learning while being exposed to the environment, came back with much stronger motivation and a good set of effective learning strategies accumulated from his friendly competition with his friends. Though he was still learning the language, he considered language as a tool for his career and still value the study and area of his former major study to be primarily important.

Interviewee 11 is James. James’ aunt spent more than a decade in China and was currently teaching Chinese at post-primary level in Ireland. Influenced by the family, James enrolled in the Chinese programme while entering college. He has just graduated with a good job offer, with Chinese skills being one of the critical criteria for his job. James was motivated but at the same time very practical. He was the only interviewee who demonstrated a deeper understanding about his own efficacy and the willingness to adjust expected outcome to fit the needs of reality, which has greatly prevented him from being demotivated due to unrealistic L2 self expectations.
Interviewee 12 is Emma. Emma graduated two years ago and worked in a local accounting firm at the moment. Emma used to be a very academically successful student, which also reflected in her performance in the Chinese programme. She achieved a Chinese proficiency of approaching CEFR C2 and her oral competence could compete with native speakers. She was nearly alienated by the peers due to her outstanding performance while others were struggling but managed to maintain the motivation as well as the peer relationship with good communication skills and personality. Coming from a migrant background, she also identified more of issues of demotivation at the sociocultural level.

Interviewee 13 is Liam. Liam was a recently graduated undergraduate student. He initially tried to find a job that could better utilise his Chinese skills but failed. More recently he managed to acquire a job offer which has no relation with Chinese studies. He was demotivated due to the contrast between his good achievement in learning Chinese and the unpleasant experiences in utilising such achievement in the labour market. However, he still hoped to be able to better reflect his advantage in CAL learning in his future career, potentially after changing jobs or starting his own business.

5.2.2 Initial motivation of interview participants

Most of the interviews included a specific section to guide the interviewees to reflect their experiences of CAL learning at the very beginning. Information was acquired through this process regarding when and how the interviewees established their initial motivation in CAL learning. After this retrospective section, further enquires were followed to identify whether the interviewees would use such memory as a countermeasure in dealing with the demotivating incidents in the later stage of CAL learning, especially the ones which may negatively affect their ideal L2 self. Twelve out of thirteen interviewees were involved in this investigation, and all of them could still remember their initiation of their CAL learning experiences and the establishment of their initial motivation in CAL learning. The results of this investigation are summarised below.
Table 11
Summary of interviewees’ establishment of initial motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Sudden incident or gradual experience</th>
<th>Before or after the commencement of CAL learning</th>
<th>Self-aware or influenced by others</th>
<th>Mentioned its positive impact on remotivation</th>
<th>Motivation in CAL learning being steady or fluctuates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 David</td>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 Peter</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fluctuate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 Rose</td>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 Adam</td>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 Leo</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 Ethan</td>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fluctuate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07 Paddy</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 Carlos</td>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fluctuate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09 Cian</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>N/A&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 James</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Emma</td>
<td>Incident</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Liam</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fluctuate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Incident = 6</td>
<td>Before = 8</td>
<td>Self = 7</td>
<td>Yes = 4</td>
<td>Steady = 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience = 6</td>
<td>After = 4</td>
<td>Others = 5</td>
<td>No = 7</td>
<td>Fluctuate = 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: <sup>a</sup> Interviewee 9 claims that he rarely suffers from problems of demotivation, therefore there is no need to perform remotivation activities.
<sup>b</sup> Interviewee 10 did not mention the initial motivation, therefore data is missing and the overall number of participants for this section is 12.

Regarding the cause of interviewees’ initial motivation in CAL learning, about half of the interviewees established their motivation immediately after some kind of incident (e.g., promotion of the Chinese courses, visit a Chinese company), and these sudden realisations happened exclusively before the commencement of learners’ CAL learning process. The other half of the interviewees acknowledged it more as a gradual process, in which they built up their motivation along with their interest and commitment in CAL learning over time. This process may take place before the commencement of the CAL learning, and persist until a rather late stage of learning. In other words, this type of learners might begin CAL learning without a clear perception of the role of CAL learning in their future.

So that’s the thing. Like for people like ‘I am not sure’, it’s the ‘I am not sure’ people that should go (study aboard in China), do you know what I mean? Or the people who really like it, but they are not sure whether they want to live there. Does that make any sense? Because, I went because I like the language, but I never been there before. So I wasn’t sure if I could live there for a year. ((laughter)) So that’s why I went. But other people went because they weren’t sure whether they want to keep it or not, even though by that time it was too late (to change language module or learning programme). But it was like they
still want to know whether or not it was for them. So they went, and some of them actually didn’t like it at all. Then there were people who really loved it.

(Emma, T12: 195)

The establishment of learners’ initial motivation could be mainly realised by themselves or influenced by some other people such as their teacher, friends and family members. As suggested by the results of the interviews, it appeared that learners who were influenced mainly by others tend to complete such a process earlier, which was often before the commencement of their CAL learning experiences. However, as their initiation of motivation was heavily influenced by information from other sources instead of their own comprehension, demotivating incidents which were contrary to their expectations may lead to trust issues of the initial sources of information. Their motivation was also more likely to be overthrown and transformed into demotivation. Some of the interviewees mentioned that their actual experiences were not in line with the descriptions or promises made by others. This is often a result of inappropriate CAL course promotions which exaggerated the benefits of the course (e.g., job opportunities) or belittled the necessary efforts that learners need to commit in order to achieve such benefits (e.g., workload, learning difficulty).

PETER: It feels like we were LIED TO a little, you know. It’s like...It feels like they (the person who conducted the Chinese course promotion) need a lot more from us rather than we need from them, you know. So they were really keen to make all these fabrications, you know, like, told us all these great things.

[...] 

CHANG: Would you think it would be fairly better if they just tell you the truth? Like exactly, or fairly objectively what it is gonna be like to study Chinese, you know, since the beginning? And you just really have a steady course in terms of difficulty throughout the years, and like just keep it that way?

PETER: Yes, that’s what I am talking about. I think that would be better, but you get less students, you understand? Because only the real people who want to learn Chinese will be there. Because the people in our class, they understand, like I know them. They tell me that ‘I wish I could drop out. It was so easy in the first year. But it can’t keep going.’ I mean there are people like me and (an anonymous peer) and… uh… (an anonymous peer) and (an anonymous peer) … uh… Like we really love Chinese, so we will really stay. But like others, they would drop out. Because they only did it for the GPA. (Peter, T2: 163)
Some of the interviewees confirmed that the memory of establishing their initial motivation could remind themselves about their purpose and pursuit for CAL learning when dealing with demotivating incidents. It is interesting to notice that interviewees with such experiences were also all motivated by a certain incident in the first place, while interviewees who established their motivation through a gradual process could not acknowledge this benefit. The researcher suspects that part of the reason could be that it is easier to recall the memory of concrete incidents, so they could be used as inspirations or reminders in comparison with the relatively more abstract long-term experiences. As a compliment, motivation generated by a gradual realisation appeared to lead to a more consistent motivational status in CAL learning. However, as limited by the number of interviewees, such presumption could not be fully investigated by the present research.

CHANG: Would you use that as a force or as a reminder whenever you are feeling down? Like [this is where I started

ROSE: [Yeah, this is why I need to do this.

CHANG: Would this also helps when you need a boost? For example, you are feeling a little bit tired today or you want to study a little bit more. Will you also use this as a positive reinforcement to make yourself more motivated to learn Chinese?

ROSE: Well, no. It’s kind of tough this year to motivate myself. Because I am tired, and I am so busy with so many projects. So right now, the only thing that motivates me to do Chinese is GPA. That’s the only thing that motivates me right now. But I know I made the right decision to study Chinese. And I am just gonna need to push through, even if I am demotivated or tired. (Rose, T3: 394)

5.3 Learners’ Perception of Main Demotivating Influences

This section reports on results of the interviews which could help further identify learners’ awareness and the interrelationship of the main demotivating influences. Results presented in this section have both similarities and differences in comparison with the survey, which will be further discussed in the next chapter when summarising the findings of both phases of the current research project.
The main themes of the interview data were organised based on the result of the main demotivating factors identified by the survey results, while subcategories emerged from the interview data. Content analysis was used to understand and illustrate the results of the interviews (Neuendorf, 2016). The coding process was described more in detail in the previous chapter (see Section 3.5.4). To summarise, the first level coding adopted keywords that related to perceptions and incidents of demotivation (e.g., afraid of making mistakes, culture shock), and relevant quotations were grouped by these first-level codes. A further second-level coding was performed to review and organise the emerged first-level codes, which resulted in the subcategories of the main themes (e.g., self-doubt). A model was created to depict the construction of main demotivating influences and the interrelationship among them (see Figure 18).

As illustrated in the above figure, the main themes are presented by the pill-shaped boxes and their subcategories by the rectangle boxes. The connecting lines with arrows illustrate the interrelationship between themes. The number in the brackets under main themes and their subcategories represents the number of interviewees who made relevant comments and the frequency of such comments. Take the factor reduced self-confidence as an...
example, the expression ‘(13:96)’ represents that 13 interviewees have commented on this topic, and there were 96 occurrences in total in relation to this demotivating factor. The frequency of occurrences was calculated by non-consecutive mentioning’s of the same topic during the interview process. In another word, one discussion accounted only one frequency regardless of the length of the discussion.

5.3.1 The awareness of main demotivating influences

According to the results of the interviews (see Figure 18), three main factors of reduced self-confidence, negative ideal L2 self and the teacher factor were commonly perceived by all the interviewees. One interviewee (09 Cian) did not make any comment on the course design. This was likely to be determined by his personality and aptitude in learning languages, as well as his strategy and competence in deliberately ignoring demotivating influences from external sources as mentioned previously. Two interviewees did not make comment on the influence of another language (08 Carlos and 02 Peter), which was potentially determined by their language background. Both of them were migrant students whose native languages were not English. They also did not attend post-primary education in Ireland and have relatively no or fewer experiences in learning other languages before entering college.

Regarding the four interviewees who did not mention demotivation in relation to the negative ought-to L2 self, two of them were extremely high-achieving learners (09 Cian and 12 Emma), while the other two did not take the CAL learning quite seriously when in college (04 Adam and 06 Ethan). Due to the nature of the negative ought-to L2 self, it is reasonable to predict that such influence may be more demotivating to the majority of the CAL learners who performed regular, in comparison with the extremely high-achieving or low-achieving learners.

Interviewees also appeared to be more aware of and felt stronger about the suffering of some immediate demotivating incidents. This was reflected in the frequency of the occurrences of their narratives on the topic, that the negative influences of reduced self-confidence, the teacher factor and the course design were mentioned nearly or above 80 times respectively across all the interviews. In comparison, demotivating influences from the future perception were mentioned at least half less frequently, and the underlining
influence of another language as the sociocultural background was also more easily to be overlooked.

5.3.2 The interrelationship of main demotivating influences

This section mainly summarises the interrelationship between the subcategories of different main demotivating factors. The interrelationship between different subcategories of the same main factor will be discussed where necessary when reporting the result of the interviews in more detail in Section 5.4 and Section 5.5.

On a general level, the perceived mechanic of interaction among the different factors follows the pattern of experiencing external incidents and then internalising them to become self-perceptions towards the present and the future. There were more interactions identified which took place among factors which concerned more of the present stage of learning in comparison with the past and future perspectives. While the influence of another language, as the underpinned sociocultural factor, was less perceived to be interactive with other demotivating factors.

Beginning with the externally oriented factors, teachers’ lack of empathy appeared to be the most active demotivating influences. It affects learners’ sense of achievement (see line 1, Figure 18). As reported by some interviewees, teachers often could not understand the challenges and difficulties of the learners in CAL learning, which could result in their insufficient acknowledgement of learners’ progress and achievement in learning. For some high-achieving learners, teachers’ lack of empathy could also create or increase their peer pressure (see line 2, Figure 18), that their achievement could be attributed to their aptitude rather than their effort, which may result in themselves being alienated by the peers. One interviewee who came from an Asian background mentioned extensively on the synergy of this phenomenon based on his own experience. Teachers’ lack of empathy could also cause inappropriate course requirement (see line 3, Figure 18), which was reported to be evident on the phenomenon that Chinese courses focused excessively on the accuracy of both oral and written production even when conducting communicative tasks and practices. This effect could, in turn, determine the teaching method to be more teacher-centred (see line 4, Figure 18).
Insufficient supervision of the CAL learning programme was another active demotivating influence. First of all, it appeared to be also responsible for learners’ lack of necessary sense of achievement (see line 5, Figure 18), which was reflected particularly in the absence of marking criteria and unclear description of learning outcomes. The latter phenomenon was also mentioned by the interviewees in relation to the difficulty in evaluating the benefit of the current stage of CAL learning, which further contribute to the establishment of a negative ideal L2 self (see line 6, Figure 18). In the meantime, due to the lack of supervision in conjunction with issues in Chinese teachers’ perception of their authority (see line 7, Figure 18), a dedicated communication mechanic was missing between the learners and the course instructors, which made it difficult for learners to provide constructive feedback for the teachers. Other than that, the inappropriate course structure was interrelated to the inadequate feedback from the teacher (see line 8, Figure 18), that individual concern and feedback were difficult to be supplied due to the oversized classroom.

Turning more to the internally oriented factors, the lack of punishment was identified to be linked to interviewees’ negative perception towards CAL learning in their future career (see line 9, Figure 18), that several considered there will be no or very little downfall in the future career if learners choose to not put in effort in CAL learning at present. The self-doubt could help establish learners’ negative ideal L2 self (see line 10, Figure 18), especially from the perspective of living in the target language environment. In general, learners may feel less competent to achieve the proficiency required for living in a Chinese environment, which naturally decrease their intention and expectation in living with the community who speaks the target language.

After reporting the findings of the interviews on a general level, the next two sections aim to provide insights from the interviewees on different demotivating influences in more details.

5.4 Perception of Internally Oriented Demotivating Influences

This section presents findings of the interviews on learners’ perception of the three internally-oriented demotivating influences, namely the reduced self-confidence, negative ideal L2 self and negative ought-to L2 self.
5.4.1 Reduced self-confidence

The results of the interviews indicated that, while on a macro level, learners’ confidence in CAL learning increases gradually along with the continuous study, it also fluctuates when challenges emerge especially during learning thresholds. The issue of learners’ reduced self-confidence is mainly determined by the lack of sense of achievement, the feeling of self-doubt and pressures from the peers, which are discussed in the following sections respectively.

![Constructs of reduced self-confidence](image)

**Figure 19 Constructs of reduced self-confidence**

5.4.1.1 Lack of sense of achievement

One of the major causes of CAL learners’ reduced self-confidence is due to the lack of sense of achievement. In class, it mainly comes from teachers’ inappropriate behaviour, the insufficient opportunities to practise Chinese and the difficulty to improve the academic performance of CAL courses. Out of class, setbacks when applying the Chinese knowledge into real-life also diminish learners’ confidence.

In a CAL classroom, teachers’ frequent and inappropriate methods of correcting mistakes could directly cause learners’ reduced self-confidence. Interviewees reported that some of the teachers used frequent interruptions to correct mistakes during a communicative task. This could interfere with learners to gain a sense of achievement through conducting and completing the tasks. Regarding the methods of correcting mistakes, forced mechanical drills in front of peers and public could greatly reduce learners’ confidence, especially when the instruction of adjusting pronunciation is also not clear.
I was humiliated last year in one of the conversation classes because I could not pronounce ‘Chuqu’ (Chinese for ‘go out’). And it was repeated in front of me maybe between 20 to 50 times. And I have to keep doing it. And I have to say like ‘no, no, no…’ And the teacher would say like ‘Everyone else has been doing it. David, why can’t you do it?’ And I kept trying and I felt REALLY REALLY low confidence, low motivated. I felt terrible…and I say ‘Okay, since I cannot repeat it while you were saying that to me, I think the problem is that teacher, is the mechanic. I don’t know what to do with my mouth. Can you explain it to me?’ But that teacher couldn’t tell me that and he just said that ‘It doesn’t matter. Just repeat after me.’ And even my Chinese classmates could tell me that. And I felt awful for many months until I looked up the phonetics online on YouTube and watched a video and practised on my own for a couple of hours. I realised that…uh…I needed to put my tongue further for the ‘Chu’. I needed to put my tongue behind the bottom of my teeth for ‘Qu’. Nobody told me that. That was such a simple solution that caused me MONTH and MONTH and MONTH of demotivation. (David, T1: 759)

A common problem that frequently mentioned by the interviewees was the insufficient opportunities to practise Chinese in class. Interviewees reported that CAL courses sometimes emphasised too much on lecturing and neglect communicative elements in the class. Learners gradually became passive and would not have sufficient confidence to try and make mistakes, hence lesser opportunities to gain a sense of achievement. This problem is more serious in an Irish context due to the lack of Chinese environment. As in China, it could be compensated by more opportunities to practise out of class. However, learners also mentioned the use of modern communication technology may increase their opportunities of using Chinese out of the class. For example, learners reported that they would interact with native Chinese speakers on social media with the assistance of Chinese input software or use voice recognition software in associate with translation applications to directly communicate with native Chinese speakers in a face-to-face manner.

And in China, I suppose a good way to measure your progress is just practise your speaking and see, like talk to people and have conversations, and if you feel your conversation is getting better, or they understand you better, you will get that you are getting your progress. Obviously, that’s not always possible in Ireland. But, I still think there are ways to measure your progress without a grade. Say even sometimes like, for example, I changed the language of Siri for my voice recognition to Chinese when I was in China, just as a way of practice. And for me it was like, all the progress that I could notice is that I tell Siri to look up something in Chinese, and if it gets it for the first time, and that definitely helps. Uh…I do think you could see your progress that way. (Leo, T5: 122)
In terms of the actual gain of confidence through practising Chinese in class, interviewees mentioned different strengths and weaknesses for such activities in an Irish or a Chinese context. The advantage of CAL learning in China is that classes were filled with international students who came from various language backgrounds. Communication among peers was often forced to rely on Chinese, which passively provided the necessary opportunities to practise Chinese. However, because of this, interviewees reported that strict ‘Chinese only’ rules were also often applied, which increased the difficulty of conducting effective communication in the beginner stage. In an Irish context, classmates could use a mix of Chinese and English in practice, and effective communication was achievable even in the early stage of learning. While due to the lack of a Chinese environment, the use of English could also be abused by both the learner and the teacher.

Another important aspect which contributes to CAL learners’ reduced self-confidence is the difficulty in improving academic performance. Consistent poor marks and negative feedbacks affected learners’ confidence. In combination with the peer pressure, the low sense of achievement could trigger self-doubt. Besides complaints regarding the difficulty in CAL learning, the feeling of unfairness was also frequently mentioned by the interviewees. Such feeling could be caused by several reasons which include teachers’ subjective marking and the marking scheme being not standardised or not available for the learners.

PETER: So I don’t know the weighting system, like how you measure the ability of Chinese. Because like the way they measured it, I don’t think it’s accurate at all.

CHANG: Uh…Did the teacher give you the marking scheme?

PETER: No, they just made that (score) up. No, we don’t know how we got the scores. It also happened with another teacher. So uh…I got the result from another teacher. I am not gonna say her name. It was very…like…It was a C+. And I was like ‘Why is it so low? I mean what happened?’ And she was like ‘Oh, I am so sorry!’ And she just put my grade up.

[...]

CHANG: As you mentioned, scores could be sometimes not objective. It could be highly subjective to the teacher’s preference. Once they set up an impression for you, then you could be stuck with
that impression. Then it is gonna be difficult to change that. And that relates to your GPA.

PETER: Yes, absolutely. Once like they get an idea of you, ((sarcastic laughter)) you can do whatever you want. You know, make them dinner, tell them that they are your best teacher, they just don’t care, you know. Once they had that impression, that’s you. (Peter, T2: 113)

When practising Chinese out of class, learners also face many challenges which prevent them from gaining a sense of achievement. Regarding this aspect, interviewees elaborated more on their experiences in China, as they had limited opportunities to practise Chinese in an Irish context. On one hand, the immersive experience offered continuous input of Chinese language and massive opportunities for practice in real life. The fact that learners could survive in a different language and cultural environment provided them with a good sense of achievement. The positive feedback from native speakers when conducting spontaneous conversations also significantly increased their confidence. More importantly, these interactions with native speakers could function as a separate external benchmark on learners’ communicative capability in Chinese. According to several interviewees, it was even more convincing than their academic performance of the CAL courses. Learners could draw insights from this type of feedback and achieve a relatively objective view of their progress in CAL learning.

On the other hand, learners reported on occasions where they were forced to solve practical issues which require Chinese proficiency beyond their current level. These circumstances could be frustrating and failure in communication could cause problems in real life. There were also sociocultural elements which contribute to learners’ loss of confidence when interacting with native speakers. For example, not many native Chinese speakers possess a relatively long-term experience in learning one or more foreign languages. This contributes to a less sense of empathy for the CAL learners. They could not adequately distinguish the differences between a foreigner who speaks Chinese and a foreigner who is learning to speak Chinese. Some of the interviewees reported that praises from native speakers were not always sincere but rather deliberate, which was an important source of their demotivation.
5.4.1.2 Problems of self-doubt

Participants of the interviews mentioned three perspectives regarding the feelings of self-doubt in CAL learning. The first perspective is about the learning disability at present, that learners question their ability to learn Chinese for the current period of study. The second perspective is the perception of learning disability for the future, that learners doubt their ability to continually gain progress in CAL learning after the current period of study. The third perspective is related to insufficient or effective methods for CAL learning.

For the high achieving learners, the self-doubt often originated from the contrast between learners’ ideal L2 self and the reality at present. This phenomenon was particularly evident for learners who have successful experiences in learning other foreign languages. Influenced by such kind of experiences, high achieving learners may set up unrealistic goals for their current stage of CAL learning. Regardless of the fact that whether they progressed sufficiently, the learning outcome appeared to be dissatisfactory in comparison with their goals. Consistent inputs of such negative perception led them to the state of self-doubt, as their successful experiences in learning other foreign languages made them less likely to blame other factors such as the difficulty of the language or the teacher. For the same reason, instead of lowering the expectation for CAL learning, these learners tended to give up entirely. In a sense, the previous experiences reduced their competence in dealing with setbacks in CAL learning.

So the one thing I do is to keep all the exams (papers) or all the school books. And I look at them and I feel ‘Oh that was so easy’. Another thing I do is that I will have (the recording files of) my oral final exam in Wuhan (a city in China, in this context the learner is indicating an early stage of CAL learning). Then I came back to Ireland, and I say ‘Oh my God! My Chinese is not improving’. But I listen to it, and I feel like ‘Oh my god, I'm actually improving’. So, having voice recordings of old exams and stuff can be motivating cause I can see my progress, even though I may feel like I've not made any (based on academic performance of the courses). (David, T1: 312)

For the average and low achieving learners, various incidents could cause them to doubt their CAL learning ability at present. It could be the first contact with CAL learning, that the different language system and learning mechanic seemed to be overwhelming. It could be a gradual accumulation of the learning difficulty or frustration when comparing
with achievement with the peers. Among the many reasons, two types of incidents were mentioned more frequently by the interviewees, and both of which had something to do with the influence of the Chinese culture. The first is the experience of culture shock, which is a problem for most of the CAL learners when they were first exposed in a Chinese sociocultural environment. They were put in a situation that demanded them to use limited proficiency of Chinese to fulfil communication tasks in an unfamiliar sociocultural context.

But there were those are dark periods of disillusionment. Now I didn't even remember how exactly it felt. But the general feeling was like ‘Wow, this is way harder than I imagined.’ It's like culture shock for sure. What I remembered was like every little thing is really hard, that it is exhausting. You paid a lot of efforts, like even if just going to the police office and registering your residency. If you go there alone, Shanghai is such a massive city, it takes two hours to take a bus to get there. Then you have to find food at 35°C, that is something you're not used to. And you have to speak Chinese to a police person. It was really stressful like you are operating outside of your comfort zone all day. (Liam, T13: 251)

The second is the fear of making mistakes. Interviewees reported that on one hand, teachers often encouraged students to try and practise Chinese. While on the other hand, a consensus was implanted through the teaching and the content of the learning materials that one should speak only when they could speak correctly. Affected by teachers’ overcorrection and the tendency of avoiding confrontation in Chinese culture, CAL learners could become more passive and gradually lose both interest and courage in making mistakes.

And with our classmates… I think it's the same, especially the two younger guys in our class. I think that they have a lot in there, but because of shyness and they are a little bit of perfectionist, that they don't produce that much… But there is such a fear in the classroom that I spent in China of making mistakes. And that you uh (.) you have to (.) only speak if you speak perfectly. That comes through from the book and comes through the teaching. But actually, once you go up and do it, your teacher is like really happy. It’s uh (.) We call it the cognitive dissonance. (David, T1: 84)

The present demotivating experiences could also lead to learners’ doubt towards their ability in CAL learning in the future. For example, learners who struggled to keep up the pace of the current period of study often worried that they will not be able to cope with
the CAL learning after proceeding to the next level. Another common concern among the interviewees is that they would not be able to maintain their Chinese language proficiency after graduation. At that time, they will no longer receive guidance from the teacher, and there will be fewer opportunities to practise Chinese as well. Many of the interviewees considered themselves do not have the capacity to conduct the self-study. They feared that instead of being able to maintain or continue improving their Chinese, they will lose it gradually instead. Also, this negative perception towards the future is different from their negative ideal L2 self. In fact, most of these interviewees who demonstrated such fear appeared to have a positive ideal L2 self for CAL learning. Their doubt was not the importance nor the benefit of Chinese in their future life, but the possibility and their efficacy in acquiring the benefit.

Another element which caused the interviewees to doubt their CAL learning capability is the lack of appropriate learning methods. It began to occur in the early stage of learning, but such problem could persist until a much later stage if insufficient guidance was provided for the learner. One of the common issues from this perspective is learners’ imbalanced learning strategy regarding the different language skills. As not all the learners come from a linguistic study background, and Chinese is quite a different language to them in many ways, learners could be easily confused about how to learn the Chinese language comprehensively. For example, the interviewees mentioned two common tendencies regarding the character study when reflecting on their experiences in the early stage of CAL learning. The first is to study pinyin as a replacement of characters. The reason is that pinyin is in an alphabetic form, so learners naturally felt more familiar with it. The other tendency is to equivalent the study of Chinese characters to the study of the Chinese language. Most of the learners’ efforts were given to the comprehension and repetition of Chinese characters, while other aspects of CAL learning were neglected. Both the above two tendencies could lead to an imbalanced CAL learning structure, which resulted in poor learning outcomes and learners’ doubt towards their aptitude in learning Chinese.

5.4.1.3 Influence of peer pressure

In comparison with the lack of sense of achievement and learners’ self-doubt, the negative influence of peer pressure appears to be more associated with learners’
personality and immediate demotivating encounters. This section reports on the findings regarding the demotivating effects of peer pressure among learners with different levels of achievements in CAL courses (namely the low achieving and high achieving learners) and learners with an inappropriate model of CAL learning.

The peer pressure that low achieving learners received came typically from the comparison they made between themselves and their peers in CAL learning. After comparing the academic performances and CAL learning experiences, low achieving learners may suffer reduced self-confidence due to several reasons. The first is when they considered the performance of their peer to be unachievable for themselves. The amount of pressure is determined by two main factors. The first one is the level of familiarity between the learner and the peer. In general, the closer the relationship between them, the more pressure the low achieving learners would receive. The second factor is the perceived differences in terms of efforts they put into CAL learning. The confidence reduction increases when less effort of the peer was acknowledged by the learner. To illustrate the effect of these two factors, a CAL learner might feel less confident due to the pressure from a classmate who they often studied together but had better marks for the CAL courses. Such peer pressure may appear to be less if the peer learner was a new exchange student who used to study Chinese in a more intensive learning programme elsewhere.

But when I see people who studied for only one year or two years, and they are nearly fluent. That really…uh… It kind of hurts. (Ethan, T6: 178)

It may seem that the high achieving CAL learners were the ones who generated peer pressure to the low achieving learners, while according to the interviewees, these learners also bore a different type of peer pressure. It is no doubt that the aptitude of learning languages plays a part in CAL learning. As reported by the interviewees, there could be a misperception among the peer CAL learners which attributed the success of high achieving learners predominantly to their aptitude instead of their effort. Such misperception is tightly associated with the differences and difficulty in CAL learning in comparison with learning other modern foreign languages. This phenomenon led to a lack of sense of achievement for the high achieving learners. Even if they acquired decent
marks for the CAL courses, their efforts in CAL learning were not sufficiently acknowledged in the social environment of their peers. The situation would be worsened if the majority of the peer CAL learners were struggling with CAL learning, that the high achieving learners could be alienated. Under such circumstances, the high achieving learner may lose desire in putting maximum effort in CAL learning and began to restrain themselves in order to reduce the pressure from their peers. In other words, they were willing to sacrifice their achievement in CAL learning in exchange for a more harmonious peer relationship.

Yeah, the pressure thing, it is definitely something, I feel like… Sometimes even like when we were preparing for class or stuff like that, they will say ‘Oh, you don’t need to study that hard.’ And I am like ‘That’s how I get good grades, because I study.’ But it was actually made like I actually didn’t need that much help, or I don’t need to study, or I am already at the level that I don’t require any more help. But actually, I found that…like…the help is obviously what got me to that level, so obviously I would want more help, because that’s how I improve. But sometimes I felt like I don’t want to ask much, because…especially when I was in front of them. (Emma, T12: 392)

There was also a different kind of peer pressure which came from the inappropriate model of CAL learning. This refers to the learners who had a peer CAL learner as their role model, but the role model herself or himself was demotivated. The subtlety in this situation is that the model might be a positive influence at the beginning, while she or he became demotivated afterwards. These models then disseminated pressure and demotivation for the learners who looked up to them. According to the interviewees, such a model could be a senior Chinese learner who used to inspire others but failed to find a decent relevant job after graduation. It could be a learner who worked hard but gradually began to struggle in keep progressing in CAL learning. It could be a passionate Chinese learner who just experienced culture shock and became demotivated. When learners took them as models for their CAL learning, their confidence in CAL learning could be negatively influenced by the demotivating experiences or status of their models.

I think it was when I saw other people who maybe have been studying in China for years. And you hear them say it like ‘Oh, yeah, I am still not that fluent.’ Then it kind of ‘Oh!’ ((laughter)) (indication a sudden realisation and a feeling of despair) (James, T11: 23)
Results of the interviews also helped identify two essential criteria which need to be fulfilled for a suitable role model in learning the language. The first and the most commonly perceived quality was the success in CAL learning, which was often accompanied by some other achievements (e.g., a good career, exotic travelling experiences). The second was relatively less mentioned, which was the possibility for learners to relate themselves to the person. This was determined by the perceived similarity of the efficacy and learning experiences between the role model and the fellow CAL learners.

One person that I was always really impressed was…do you know (an anonymous person)? He was maybe like two years ahead of us. And seeing him maybe, like…he used to never get that kind of good grades in Chinese, but he really liked it. So he went back to (an anonymous institution) last year when we were there and was doing masters in finance. And he was taking…he studied Chinese…loads of them when he was over there. And now he was working in a bank in China. It’s in Hong Kong, but I think he uses his Chinese. So I mean I was kind of always impressed by him. (James, T11: 621)

5.4.2 Negative ideal L2 self of CAL learners

Many of the learners who voluntarily enrol in the CAL courses possess a positive ideal L2 self in the early stage of learning. Based on the results of the interviews, learners established different types of ideal L2 self, which affected them differently when dealing with the demotivating incidents in their later stages of learning. Moreover, such self-perception may change along with learners’ experiences over the course of their CAL learning process. There were demotivating incidents which could affect learners to transform or establish a negative ideal L2 self. Interviewees mentioned that learners’ personality seemed to play an important role in dealing with demotivating incidents. Learners with a generally optimistic life attitude appeared to be more capable of resisting or resolving the negative impact of demotivating encounters from this perspective. Regarding the causes of a negative ideal L2 self, interviewees commented more from the perspectives of a CAL learning experience in their future career and education, and the expectations in living in a Chinese environment.
5.4.2.1 Negative perception of future career

As identified by the interviewees, learners possess three types of perceptions regarding the role of a CAL learning experience in their future career. There was a clear distinction that some of the interviewees commented exclusively on the benefit of such experience for career purposes, while others considered it meaningless. Almost no interviewee contributed to both sides of the opinions. Meanwhile, many interviewees mentioned that they tended to be more ignorant about the career side of CAL learning in the early stage of learning. They only began to forge more concrete perceptions until a late stage of learning. Their perceptions were not consistently being positive or negative, but changed along with their learning experiences, the growth in maturity and different choices in career paths.

I guess when you were in college, you don't think that far ahead. It's only when I was in the fourth year I started to think about the career, I realised that I wanted a career that has some way involved in China, not necessarily work, you know, or spend my life in China, but something that related to it. (Chris, T10: 395)

The negative perception regarding the role of a CAL learning experience in learners’ future career is mainly caused by three reasons. The first is a lack of career opportunities which relate to China or Chinese studies. The second is learners’ doubt in the necessity of acquiring a certain Chinese proficiency for career purposes. The final one is related to learners’ preference of future working environment.

Due to the short history of Chinese language education in Ireland (Zhang & Wang, 2018), there were still limited opportunities for CAL learners to pursue a career which associates with China or Chinese studies in an Irish context. Graduates who intended to stay in
Ireland may find it difficult to rely much on their Chinese language skills when applying for domestic jobs. For those who were willing to pursue a career elsewhere, they need to compete with fellow CAL learners all around the world. As many of the CAL learners in an Irish context were learning Chinese as minor or elective courses, it could be challenging for them to take advantage of their CAL learning experience in comparison with learners who studied Chinese as a major or who studied full time in a Chinese language environment. Failure in acquiring relevant jobs impacted negatively on the ideal L2 self of the applicants as well as other learners who were aware of such incidents.

But I definitely felt a decreased motivation when I get no for these jobs. More like I didn't get any job offers in Singapore or Hong Kong, and there will be definite denies, right? I would think ‘What the Chinese is gonna be for me? Is it only gonna be a party trick at the dinner table? Like when people ask me to say something in Chinese? Is this all it is gonna be for the next five to ten years? Or I am gonna actually build a career out of it?’ And those are the ideas that other people had, you know? (Liam, T13: 366)

Two kinds of CAL learners tend to doubt the necessity of learning Chinese in benefiting their future career. The first kind refers to learners who no longer wish to have a career that related to China or Chinese. It is different from the ones who were demotivated before the commencement of the CAL learning. This type of learners used to have hope in acquiring such a job, but they gradually lost interest in fulfilling their expectation as affected by demotivation along with their CAL learning experiences. They still acknowledge the benefit of CAL learning for career purposes, but they doubt their efficacy in meeting the requirement to achieve the desired benefit. This is particularly common among learners who study Chinese as a minor or elective subject. For example, after the Erasmus year in China, learners would have witnessed and evaluated the benefit and the amount of effort they needed to invest in utilising their Chinese proficiency in getting a relevant job. If the learners perceived their efforts were unlikely to be matched by the benefit, learners would change their strategy to strengthen their major study or switch to another degree programme in consideration of better career development after graduation.

The second kind of learners still wishes to pursue a career that is related to China or Chinese studies. However, they believe that a certain level of Chinese language
proficiency is not essential in achieving this goal. It was often a result of external influences, that the learners either witnessed some concrete examples in real life (e.g., someone who does not speak Chinese but get a job in China) or were affected by someone who is convincing (e.g., someone who works in China saying that Chinese is not necessary for getting jobs). For example, one of the interviewees mentioned that he was convinced by one of the guest speakers of their Chinese courses. The speaker was a successful Irish businessman who also consulted for Irish and Chinese companies. During the speech, a core idea was delivered that the understanding of Chinese culture and people is essential in doing business instead of being proficient in the Chinese language. This interviewee appeared to have a strong impression of this speech and claimed that his perception was changed ever since.

Yeah, I think what the employers want more is people who understand Chinese life and how to do business in China as opposed to the language… I think, I don’t think it is essential. I think it would be really sad to live in China without Chinese, because you wouldn’t really enjoy it as much as you could. But I think to work in China, you don’t need it. (James, T11: 271)

It is important to notice that the effect of external influences is also determined by learners’ own perception. For example, several interviewees also mentioned that a CAL learning experience could help showcase some aspects of their personality and career-related skills (e.g., courage when facing challenges, intercultural communication skills), which sometimes might be even more desirable in comparison with their language skills when applying for jobs. Their positive perceptions helped them establish a more comprehensive view regarding the benefit of CAL learning experience, which was reported to be beneficial in maintaining their CAL learning motivation.

Like when I was in an interview, they asked me ‘So, what’s your proficiency?’ You could say ‘semi-fluent’ or I could go say ‘HSK 5’. And they will say like ‘What is HSK 5?’ So they don’t know. And you have to explain like in HSK there are six levels and I am on level 5. And then they kind of think like ‘Oh! Okay, so you are pretty good.’ So they don’t really care. They want to hear more about you as a person, that you are mature enough to go abroad. And you are dedicated enough to study a difficult language. Or that you are versatile enough to live in both Ireland and China. And they are just really interested in hearing about your different experiences. Yeah. I suppose it is not just about the language. It’s like you developing as a business person, to develop key characters in traits that they will find useful. (Rose, T3: 258)
The final cause for learners’ negative perception from a future career perspective is their preference for the working environment. Some of the interviewees explained clearly that they would prefer to work in China where they could further study the language and be exposed to the culture. More of them considered they would like to get a job that is related to China or Chinese studies, while at the same time indicating that they would prefer a working environment either in Ireland or in Europe. This preference concerned both the working and living conditions in different contexts. Regarding the working environment, many interviewees made it clear that only because they study Chinese, one should not presume that they would prefer to get a job in China or work purely with Chinese people. Most of them actually preferred to work in an international environment with elements of China or Chinese. The reason for them to study Chinese is consistent with such purpose, that it could help them to analyse and solve problems from a different sociocultural perspective or better assist them to work with people from a different sociocultural background. For learners who have such kind of perception, a pure Chinese working environment would be demotivating.

**CHANG:** May I ask, would you still want to get a job that relates to China or Chinese after your graduation?

**PETER:** Yeah, hopefully something internationally. Because, I don’t want to work with only Chinese people. Because I don’t want to be treated like what I have been treated right now. I like to hopefully be like a blend of Chinese and internationals. So, when I was in China, I did meet people who were more internationally minded, and they understand the culture more. So that’s what I am hoping. (Peter, T2: 347)

### 5.4.2.2 Negative perceptions of further education

Similar to the negative perception regarding the role of a CAL learning experience in learners’ future career, some of the interviewees also mentioned their negative perceptions from a further education perspective. Continuing with their studies in Chinese, as recognised by the interviewees, could include both full-time or part-time study in educational institutions as well as private tuition or self-study after the learners graduate from the current CAL learning programmes. Based on interviewees’ future plans, they could be divided into two groups. The first group refers to learners who
intended to pursue further education after graduation and the second group are learners who preferred to enter employment after graduation.

For the first group of learners, their perception was first determined by the direction of their intended further education. Learners who were not taking a direction which involves China or Chinese studies tended to perceive their CAL learning experience to be less helpful in pursuing further education. This perception towards the future could negatively impact on their CAL learning at present. For example, an undergraduate CAL learner has decided to apply for postgraduate courses in business studies of an Irish university. If the postgraduate course does not involve or require CAL learning, this learner might be less motivated in achieving a good standard of Chinese language for the current CAL courses. This issue could demotivate learners from a reversed perspective, that learners who were demotivated by their current CAL learning experience, especially those who were learning Chinese as a minor or elective subject, could also abandon CAL learning and focus on other directions (e.g., learners’ major subject) for further education. Besides, there were also issues of insufficient information for learners to pursue further education in a Chinese environment.

I know there are scholarships for European citizens and also Irish citizens. The only reason I know about this stuff is because that I researched it myself. But it would help if, you know, other than just the (an anonymous institution) scholarship, the (an anonymous institution) scholarship. There are other kinds of scholarships, but we are never aware of this. There was an event this year, which is good (an information exhibition for higher education opportunities in China, which is organised by the Irish government). (Ethan, T6: 154)

An exception would be the ones who chose to study in a Chinese language environment (e.g., study Computer Science in mainland China). For them, to further study the Chinese language is to facilitate their learning of other subjects as determined by the learning environment. However, they could still be demotivated if it was not a choice they made willingly (e.g., accept funded further education opportunity in China due to financial considerations). There were also interviewees who were interested in applying further education that associates with China or Chinese studies, but eventually gave up due to the influence of self-doubt. For these learners, the negative perception that they were not
efficacious in achieving the ideal outcome for future CAL learning could contribute to their demotivation in CAL learning at present.

JAMES: I mean, I don’t know when it happened, but I think I just accepted that I will never be perfectly fluent in Chinese… I mean I think I could get by perfectly, but Chinese people would always be able to…not looking at me, just by listening to me and know that I am not a native speaker.

[…]

CHANG: It actually would happen if you feel less likely to meet your expectation. But you have already changed your expectation. When you realise that is not possible, you set up another goal.

JAMES: I think so. (James, T11: 3)

The second group of learners chose to enter employment instead of continuing to pursue further education after graduation. If proficiency in Chinese was not required for job applications or by their future working environment, it could impact negatively on their ideal L2 self regarding the continuous study of Chinese in the future. Some of the interviewees who were motivated in CAL learning may enter employment in an environment without the needs of Chinese. Their negative ideal L2 self was mainly about the fear of losing their communicative capability in Chinese due to limited time or capacity for self-study. This would be more common among the learners who were about to enter employment for the first time. They needed more effort to adjust themselves and to cope with the demands from the work. Therefore, it would be more difficult for them to prioritise the further or continuous study of Chinese. However, it also does not necessarily mean that these learners would definitely possess a negative ideal L2 self for pursuing further education in Chinese. According to the interviewees, as long as they held the belief that their CAL learning experience could still be beneficial for their future career, even from an indirect perspective (e.g., enhance their intercultural communication and awareness), or they will eventually manage to integrate their capability of communicating in Chinese into their career development, they could still maintain a positive ideal L2 self regarding further education in Chinese.

One of the major reasons I choose to accept the offer of EY is because of their three years programme. They said they are going to send people abroad. They
send people to other EY offices all around the world. And they said some people get to send to Singapore. And I said, ‘They speak Chinese in Singapore, so please send me to Singapore.’ So, I am definitely planning for it. (Liam, T13: 391)

5.4.2.3 Negative perception of living in a Chinese environment

Interviewees mentioned a few reasons for them to prefer not to live in a Chinese environment, which appeared to have a negative impact on their ideal L2 self and also their current CAL learning motivation. This section focuses more on their negative perceptions about the living condition and sociocultural environment. This includes influences of excessive attention for foreigners, the contrast between learners’ perception and their actual experience and the necessity of CAL learning for living in a Chinese environment.

Learners’ negative perception of living in the Chinese environment is often established directly through their personal experiences. Though interviewees reported on various demotivating incidents which may contribute to such negative perception, many of them appeared to be closely associated with a particular element in the Chinese sociocultural environment. A perception that many of the interviewees shared was that there was too much attention for foreigners from the general public in China. It seemed like the public still have not been exposed sufficiently by contact with foreign people. As a result, interviewees considered they received too much undesired attention and were often treated differently while in China.

Interviewees mentioned incidents such as they were often asked by strangers to take photos with them, or they heard people talk about their appearances. Some of them initially felt like being privileged. However, with the accumulation in living experiences, they gradually realised that these behaviours were conducted out of curiosity as still many Chinese people found them strange. Learners then began to notice some disrespectful elements in those behaviours and considered themselves being alienated. They found it difficult to blend in, that they were always being treated differently, regardless in a positive or negative way. It was frustrating as they did not want such kind of experience to be consistent if they intended to stay for long, while it was difficult to make any
concrete changes by their own efforts as it was determined more by the wider Chinese sociocultural background.

Yeah, yeah, I think the main…okay, I got to be honest with you…it’s just the…foreigner thing in China a little bit threw me off, ((laughter)) like you know, taking pictures and constantly asking questions… It was just some other day, there were too many people. I was on the subway, it was crowded and sweaty and all this. And I was like someone come to me and like ‘Oh, let me take a picture of you’. And I was not in a good mood, I was like ‘No, no, no!’ And they just insist, and you just want to leave, you know, I don’t want to stay there anymore… It was just weird, because it was like…it was not only like this, it was like they were watching you as you were doing everything. (Emma, T12: 234)

Another main cause of interviewees’ negative perception about living in a Chinese environment comes from the contrast between their fantasised perception of living in China, and their actual experience while living in China. It is a phenomenon that often happened during or after learners’ Erasmus learning experience. Some of them find their experiences in China could not match their perception. In comparison with their experiences or perceptions of living in other places (e.g., a domestic living experience, the perception of living in another country), they chose not to pursue a life in a Chinese environment after graduation. This choice they made towards the future could impact negatively on their current CAL learning motivation.

The key to this problem seems to be the contrast. The demotivation was not necessarily caused by unpleasant experiences in China, but rather the feelings of disappointment and being deceived. Learners tended to overestimate the enjoyment of living in China for some reasons, only to find out their experiences to be less than their fantasy. To further investigate the source of learners’ perception of living in China, some interviewees mentioned that it was formed by their early experiences of travelling or living in China. For them, the disappointment came from the changes in reality or merely the contrast between the experiences of being a tourist and an international student. In comparison, more interviewees considered their fantasy was acquired either directly from the promotion of the CAL courses or gradually through the content of the CAL courses, in which the attractiveness and benefit of living in a Chinese environment were exaggerated. As a result, the contrast between fantasy and reality led to their disappointment. The awareness of the reasons behind such misperceptions made them fell being deceived. All
these negative feelings impacted negatively on their ideal L2 self and also contributed to their demotivation in CAL learning at present.

The final issue is different from the previous two scenarios. Learners who had this issue actually found their experience while living in a Chinese environment to be pleasant, but perceived such experience to be less dependent on their communicative capability in Chinese. In other words, they considered it is not necessary to be proficient in Chinese in order to pursue and enjoy life in a Chinese environment. This issue is associated with the impact of English being a global language. Interviewees reported that many of the Chinese people they came across in China speak English. This phenomenon is quite common if the learners were staying in higher education institutions where English is a compulsory subject for Chinese students (Cheng, 2008; Nunan, 2003). It is also common if the learner lived in a city with a good level of modernisation or worked in a company with a multinational employee background. Another factor which further encouraged such perception is the development of modern communication technology. Some interviewees mentioned that the basic level of communication in Chinese could be realised by utilisation of some interpretation applications. The use of these applications could accomplish communicative tasks that they could not fulfil after years of CAL learning. Therefore, they felt strongly that it is not necessary nor meaningful to put much effort into CAL learning even if they decided to live long-term in a Chinese environment.

Sometimes I do, and also not just because Chinese people speak English. You have all these voice technology devices for you. You could hear them talk in Chinese and they will speak English to you. (David, T1: 401)

5.4.3 Negative ought-to L2 self of CAL learners

CAL learners who are mainly driven by an ought-to L2 self may still persist their learning in order to prevent undesirable consequences, such as failing exams and losing course credits. It may seem like learners who possess such kind of self-perception are forced to conduct CAL learning, that their learning style is passive and could be exam-driven. However, their achievement in CAL learning is not necessarily lower than learners who are mainly driven by a positive ideal L2 self. According to the interviewees, due to a primary concern of the academic performance, this type of learners may even achieve
better results for exams and assessments, in comparison with learners who valued more of actual progress in improving communicative capability.

People will cram to study a short period for good grades. But if you ask them to do Chinese speech or whatever, they won’t do it. Where weaker students who don’t care about the grades, they watch Chinese movies because they are interested in them or they are into Manhua (Chinese for ‘comics’) or TV series, they will be much better to cope with the Chinese speech than those people who got an A. (David, T1: 513)

The problem for learners who are driven by an ought-to L2 self is that they often cease to put in any effort as soon as the cause of their concerns is eliminated. As identified by the interviewees, such kind of phenomenon happened more commonly in both the early stage or late stage of CAL learning. Besides, learners’ ought-to L2 self for learning different languages could be transferred and merged under certain circumstances.

5.4.3.1 Influence in the early stage of learning

Interviewees with various CAL learning experiences offered different insights on what could cause them to have a negative ought-to L2 self in the early stage of CAL learning. Learners with more successful experiences found the CAL learning experiences to be less challenging than they expected. They could become demotivated if the CAL courses failed to provide opportunities for them to adequately demonstrate their capability and effort in CAL learning. This was partially determined by learners’ aptitude, but also an issue associated with inappropriate elements in CAL course design.

It was reported that the early stage CAL courses could be designed to be quite easy for the purpose of reserving students and also reduce their learning anxiety. However, if the course could not provide enough challenges for the high achieving learners to gain a sense of achievement, they may foster a negative ought-to L2 self and become demotivated. The CAL courses may require little effort for them to gain a decent result, therefore the process of gaining such results was not as rewarding as they expected. Meanwhile, though the results appeared to be decent by the standard of the marking criteria, it may fail to reflect the outstanding performance of these learners. Interviewees mentioned that others who worked less hard or demonstrated less communicative capability in Chinese
could acquire a rather similar result with them in terms of academic performance, which they found to be extremely demotivating.

I mean sometimes test could even get a little bit easy. And you will be like ‘Yeah, this is so easy. I don’t really need to study for it.’ Because a lot of the students are getting the 80s and 90s. And maybe there are some…it would be at the end of the exam, there are some very difficult questions to make them work for that high 90 or 80 grades. Because I think it is easy to get ‘A’s, or ‘A+’s as well. (Paddy, T7: 153)

It seems that the reduced difficulty of the CAL courses in the early stage of learning should be in favour of the low achieving learners. However, the results of the interviews suggested that it could be demotivating for them as well for a different reason. As mentioned earlier, the primary concern of low achieving learners who were mainly driven by an ought-to L2 self is to fulfil the necessary requirements in term of academic performance. In this sense, the easiness of the early stage CAL courses provided them with a temporary sense of security. Without the fear of failing exams, they also tended to be less motivated and were reluctant to put much effort into CAL learning. This phenomenon was particularly evident among learners who study Chinese as a minor or elective subject. With less concern on gaining the necessary credit for CAL courses, they would direct their attention and effort to other subjects they found to be more demanding. They could gradually establish a negative ought-to L2 self and perceive the CAL courses more of a tool to gain academic credits in general. Even if they did not progress normally in CAL learning, such issue was disguised by satisfactory performance of the course and could be realised by both the learners and their teacher in a later stage of learning. This is one potential reason behind the phenomenon that the second year in a four-year CAL learning programme is the most demotivating period for the learners (see Section 4.4.1).

And I felt like in Chinese you were never in doubt of failing. So when you haven’t got that fear, the push that kind of get you to study, you never…you maybe neglect it more than you should be. Because you only start in college, I guess you are kind of insecure about exams. You probably put too much focus on that as supposed for Chinese, if you know what I mean. (Chris, T10: 241)
5.4.3.2 Influence in the late stage of learning

In the early stage of CAL learning, the negative ought-to L2 self of some low achieving learners is mainly caused by the feeling of security towards fulfilling the requirement of the CAL courses with minimum efforts. Such negative perception is also evident among learners in the late stage of learning, especially among the final year learners. As long as such perception is persistent, CAL learning is unlikely to be prioritised.

For learners who intended to enter employment after graduation, as soon as they perceived or realised that Chinese is not immediately beneficial for career purposes, they tended to put minimum effort to maintain the performance of the CAL courses while spending more time and efforts on job applications or other areas. For learners who intended to pursue further education after graduation, they will need to ensure necessary credits and academic performance for all the learning subjects as demand by the entry requirement of their further education institutions. Even for the high-motivated learners, if they considered it was easier to fulfil such requirement for the CAL courses with little effort, they may sacrifice some actual progress in CAL learning to push up the performance of other subjects in pursuit of a good overall GPA (Grade Point Average).

It’s just this year it was changed. So it’s never about GPA until now. But it’s just when it is so close to graduation, everything is GPA. (Rose, T3: 426)

Another perspective which also contributed to learners’ negative ought-to L2 self is their growing capacity in identifying suitable and personalised CAL learning content. The accumulated experiences in CAL learning help shape their preferences and improve their capability in distinguishing learning materials and contents which are interesting or beneficial for themselves in particular. In comparison with their early stage of learning, they take more initiative in selecting and filtering provided learning materials and could be indifferent to those which are boring or irrelevant to them. For these learners, the issue of negative ought-to L2 self is towards the certain contents of the CAL courses, which does not necessarily affect their overall motivation in CAL learning.
CHANG: Do you ever think you only learn Chinese for GPA purposes? I know you have a genuine interest in learning the language, but do you have that kind of moments?

JAMES: Yeah, I mean there are certain parts that we study, and I know I am only studying this for GPA… For example, for a test yesterday, we have to learn like all these ‘Chengyu’ (Chinese idioms), and some of them have that really abstract meaning, and I was like ‘Okay, I am learning this for the exam, but this doesn’t matter. (James, T11: 309)

5.4.3.3 Ought-to L2 self between languages

There was also an interesting phenomenon about the transition of learners’ ought-to L2 self between different languages being studied. It happened to some of the CAL learners who possessed previous experiences of learning other foreign languages, and the transition often took place at the beginning of their current stage of CAL learning. Many of these learners originally intended to continue studying another language prior to enrolling in CAL courses. As identified by the interviewees, the change of decision was likely to be caused by both external influences (e.g., unsatisfying course quality or academic performance) and internal perceptions (e.g., incapable of achieving ideal proficiency or gaining benefits for studying the other languages). These learners’ initial motivation in CAL learning was originated from the ought-to L2 self in learning other languages. In other words, they perceived learning Mandarin Chinese as a ‘second chance’, which was an alternative solution to avoid undesirable consequences for learning other languages.

So when I was entering (college), I heard that the (Chinese) course was good, but obviously I was planning to do French. You know the first year we have to pick two languages? So I actually was going to pick French and Italian… The French in (an Irish university) is shit, like… excuse me ((laughter)) Maybe I lose my passion. I was really passionate about it. I studied it for seven years… That was actually the first push, because I was doing worse in another language, so I will just keep this one (the Chinese language). (Emma, T12: 528)

It was either a choice of…uh…continue to learn Spanish which I was never good at it, or start with Chinese. So basically I chose Chinese because it was a fresh start. Everybody was at the same level at the start, so I would have a better chance. (Ethan, T6: 44)
However, since the commencement of CAL learning, similar concerns began to be applied to CAL courses as well. For some of the learners, they found the CAL courses to be interesting or less intimidating. They progressed normally and their motivation in CAL learning became more independent. However, there were also learners who found themselves being equally or even more inefficacious in CAL learning. Under such circumstances, the results of academic performances became crucial in shaping learners’ motivation in learning these different languages. It appeared that as long as the learners could manage to gain better academic results for CAL courses, they would tend to continue CAL learning regardless their actual improvement in communicative capability or language proficiency in comparison with learning other languages. The original ought-to L2 self in learning other languages was gradually transferred and merged into CAL learning as well, that their motivation in CAL learning became a strategy of avoiding failing exams and losing credits for MFL courses in general.

EMMA: So I think like there are people like…they didn’t like it (the Chinese courses), but they still want to stick it through. And I think that comes to one of the other questions there, like about the grade. I think some people also felt like…yes it was really hard to learn itself, but they are willing to go through it because they know like if they improve their language, they could get a better grade. So there is like another aspect to it.

CHANG: Than other language modules?

EMMA: Yeah. (Emma, T12: 214)

5.5 Perception of Externally-Oriented Demotivating Influences

This section presents findings of the interviews on learners’ perception of the three externally-oriented demotivating influences, which are the teacher factor, the course design and the influence of another language.

5.5.1 Teachers’ role in demotivating learners

One of the heavily commented areas regarding CAL learners’ demotivation is about their teacher. According to the results of the interviews, both inappropriate behaviour and mentality of Chinese teachers could cause learners’ demotivation in CAL learning. Some
of the problems identified are more about the traits and personalities of the teachers. For example, a teacher was identified to be demotivating because she enjoyed sharing her personal experiences during designated class hours, which were irrelevant to the purpose of the course. In comparison, there are also general problems which appeared to be common among Chinese teachers as reported by the interviewees. This refers to problems of inappropriate teaching methods, inadequate instruction and feedback, issue of teachers’ authority and empathy and the influence of teachers’ demotivation on their students.

![Figure 21: Constructs of the teacher factor](image)

### 5.5.1.1 Inappropriate teaching methods

In line with the findings of the previous demotivation studies (Dörnyei, 1998; Gorham & Millette, 1997; Kikuchi, 2009; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007), two aspects of Chinese teachers’ teaching methods were frequently mentioned by the interviewees. The first one is about the strict rule of using only the target language during class, and the second is Chinese teachers’ one-way teaching style.

In general, interviewees agreed that both teachers and learners should not abuse the use of English, and the use of the Chinese language should be encouraged during class. However, many interviewees also complained that a strict ‘Chinese only’ rule in the early stage of CAL learning could be frightening and demotivating. There are limited transliterated words and foreign words in the Chinese language that beginner learners could learn and utilise. This increased the difficulty of designing and conducting communicative tasks in the early stage CAL classroom where only the Chinese language was allowed. The language content for practice was often a replica of the learning materials, and the artificial use of the language could only provide a limited sense of achievement for the learners when completing such tasks. Such phenomenon was more evident for CAL courses in a domestic context in China, that the use of learners’ native
language as well as a mix of Chinese and learners’ native language was usually forbidden during the class. However, with a Chinese language immersive context, learners could relatively catch up in a short time span and grasp necessary words and expressions in Chinese to conduct communicative tasks. While in an Irish context, such acquiring process is extended to a longer learning period. If the rule of using the Chinese language during class is applied strictly without adjustment, the CAL courses and practices would have a lack of communicative elements for a longer period of time.

She didn't like when I use one word in English (and fill in the rest with Chinese) … When I started using it, it helped… To use Chinglish* can really help because it allows for more sentences to be spoken… I know some people are a bit uncomfortable with it. But for me, it gives me a lot more freedom and a lot more flexibility… And another thing, actually that was demotivating… It was like elementary 2 (Chinese class level). And the teacher only spoke Chinese. And everyone for the first month was in shock. And they were really scared. And they really hated it. (David, T1: 149)

* the interviewee uses Chinglish to represent the mixed usage of both English and Chinese

Another common problem of Chinese teachers is the one-way teaching style. Interviewees reported that quite often the CAL courses were heavily teacher-centred. Courses were often arranged similarly to lectures instead of MFL courses. The predominant focus of the courses was the delivery of the knowledge of the Chinese language, and teachers concerned more of the pace of the course in terms of the requirement of the course instead of learners’ capacity. It was contradicted to the course descriptions which emphasised on the communicative approach and interactive elements. Besides, it was also difficult to distinguish the differences between comprehensive classes and classes for specific language skills, as they followed the same pattern and use the same material.

There was not a lot of engagement in class, where I think the most important thing should be the interaction between the teacher and the students. In class, it shouldn’t be the teacher just kind of teach at you. (Chris, T10: 464)

The interviewees helped identified several potential reasons for the popular one-way teaching style among the native Chinese teachers. First is about the quality of the teacher.
training, that the native Chinese teachers might not have received sufficient training for CAL teaching and learning in an Irish context. Several interviewees mentioned that their teachers did not fully understand the concept of the student-centred classroom, that their applications of pedagogical theories were inappropriate and superficial. The second is about the Chinese teachers’ own experiences of MFL learning. MFL education in China often receives criticisms of being teacher-centred (Cai & Cook, 2015; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). It is likely that teachers subconsciously recall more of their own experiences of MFL learning rather than their training in MFL teaching when preparing and conducting the CAL courses. After years of immersive experiences, it is not easy for native Chinese teachers to realise and resist the tendency of conducting one-way teaching. Moreover, problems of the school facility could also contribute to CAL teachers’ one-way teaching style. Interviewees reported that classrooms allocated for their CAL courses were lecture rooms, in which desks and chairs were fixed on the ground and were away from the podium. This inconvenient layout was not friendly for conducting MFL courses nor helpful in performing interactions between the teacher and the learners.

5.5.1.2 Issues with instruction and feedback

Other than the inappropriate teacher immediacy in the classroom, interviewees also reported that problems out of the classroom, such as teachers’ inadequate instruction and feedback for the assignments, could also contribute to their demotivation. To be more specific, interviewees mainly commented on the incomprehensible instruction, inappropriate constructive feedback and the lack of individual feedback.

Three reasons are frequently mentioned by the interviewees regarding their difficulty in understanding CAL teachers’ instructions. The first is Chinese teachers’ insufficient communication capability in English. Even though the use of target language is encouraged for both teachers and learners in MFL classrooms, the working environment in Irish higher education still demands a proficient English proficiency for the teachers. The instruction and feedback for CAL learners’ assignments may require precise and clear narratives in English. It is unrealistic for beginner learners to understand complex assignment requirements in Chinese, while instructions written in incomprehensible English could be even more confusing.
Like me and (an anonymous peer), we just like telling her like ‘what are you trying to say?’ Then she gave us feedbacks, critics. But the critic makes no sense. She was just like saying words, and the whole class was like, don’t know what she was saying. You don’t make any sense, you know. And we saw her on Google, checking words. Because she didn’t know what they mean. So, uh… incredible. (Peter, T2: 266)

The second reason to cause unclear instructions for the CAL learners is teachers’ insufficient experience in TCAL. The incident that mentioned earlier (see the first quotation in Section 5.4.1.1), that the CAL teacher used an inappropriate method to instruct learners’ pronunciation, is a typical reflection of this problem. Instead of explaining by using illustrations of pronunciation techniques, the teacher asked the learner to consistently listen and repeat, even after the learner has indicated that such method is ineffective. Teachers who lacked or were unaware of feedback from the learners could not properly evaluate the transparency of their instruction. The guidance and explanations they provided could be incomprehensible to the learners.

Uh…recently especially with the assessment, they’ve been so vague, and we have a group chat of all the students in the class. And we basically just sent the message like ‘What are we supposed to do? I don’t know what I am being asked to do.’… But then when we try to do what she tells us to do, she used to go like ‘No, no, no. It’s not that! It’s this!’ And then you have to redo it. (Rose, T3: 191)

The third reason for Chinese teachers’ instruction is the lack of empathy. This is a severe problem which reflected in many aspects of the TCAL in the Irish context, which will be discussed more comprehensively in the next section (see Section 5.5.1.3). Regarding this particular perspective, interviewees reported that often the instruction provided by their Chinese teachers was merely a description of the assignment outcome, and learners were expected to complete the tasks without necessary guidance and information.

Yeah, I think we are just told to do this, and send it to me on this day. Whereas there is nothing in between… We were just expected to do it ourselves. (Adam, T4: 360)

Regarding Chinese teachers’ feedback, the first issue identified by the interviewees is that teachers have the problem in providing constructive feedback. There are two
perspectives to this issue. One is that some Chinese teachers tended to completely avoid confrontation and criticism, which led to a lack of necessary constructive feedback for the learners. Due to the concern of the negative effect of criticism and an insufficient understanding of methods of performing constructive criticism, it is reported that many Chinese teachers rarely offered constructive feedback for the learners. However, though the criticism was restrained on a verbal level, it may be reflected subconsciously through teachers’ non-verbal behaviours.

So it’s like always find someone who understands that you are learning Chinese, that they understand the fact that you are learning it, but they don’t fool you with the faults. Because that’s the thing like they could come back and knock down your confidence. Someone gives you that false sense of security that you have good Chinese, and you come back five minutes and you were talking to someone else, and they don’t understand what you were saying. And you were like ‘But that person says my Chinese was GOOD!’ But in this situation, you know, you start to doubt yourself again. So I think it was the conflicting message that could bring your self-confidence down a bit. (Emma, T12: 322)

The other perspective of this issue was Chinese teachers’ excessive use of superficial encouragement. Interviewees reported that teachers tended to praise the learners as a group, where specific encouragements for individual learners were rarely seen. Teachers with inadequate English proficiency also struggled with finding appropriate words to encourage learners. They were forced to repeatedly use vague and general words in English which often refer to learners’ aptitude (e.g., clever, smart) instead of commenting on their achievement (e.g., good job, great work). Frequent exposure to these generic compliments made learners aware that the praise from the teacher was a mean of encouragement instead of a sincere recognition, which many interviewees found to be demotivating instead of encouraging as intended.

PETER: Okay, that’s the thing. The Chinese people, the teachers, they hate criticism. They were like ‘Oh, you are so good!’ And then you get B-. It’s like I can tell you are lying to me. And it’s like ‘Oh I am so sorry…’ No, just tell me the TRUTH! Just stop lying! I prefer honest criticism. That’s how you get better. But overall, like, you know, Chinese people like to say ‘No criticism’, but they still destroy you, you know?

CHANG: But the other side of this coin is that, they gave you compliments a lot. But they are very vague.
PETER: Yeah, they don’t really mean it. Very vague… and that makes you really annoyed. That just shows that you don’t value your students. You don’t respect them enough to treat them equally as human beings, more like a baby. It’s incredible. And I had a bad temper for that kind of thing. It’s completely demotivating. (Peter, T2: 301)

The second issue regarding Chinese teachers’ feedback is that there was insufficient feedback on a personal level. This phenomenon is partially determined by the size of the CAL class, that it is easier for the teachers of smaller classes to tend to the individual needs of the learners. However, most of the interviewees studied Chinese in small-scale classes, and they considered this issue was more of a reflection of the collective thinking in Chinese culture. It appeared that Chinese teachers paid more attention to CAL learners on a holistic level. They either had less interest in providing individual feedback or had a lack of awareness for its necessity.

But for the Chinese studies, I guess you are right. It’s more collective and the teacher looks at the overall picture, or the class. But again, when I think of my experience of learning Chinese in Taiwan and in (an anonymous institution), it was a big classroom (an anonymous institution). It’s hard to get individual feedback because you don’t get to focus on each student as much as you like, because you don’t have enough time. But when I was in Taiwan, it was only five or six people. It’s easier for the teacher to give individual feedback, because at least…she could define each person with their strengths and weaknesses and stuff like that. And she can point that out like ‘Focus on that’. But like…our teachers in (an anonymous institution), when you ask them about feedback, they don’t give it. So you would also have to take the initiatives at the same time. (Ethan, T6: 89)

5.5.1.3 Teachers’ authority and empathy

Due to the different sociocultural background between Ireland and China, there are also sociocultural embedded issues which could cause Chinese teachers to demotivate their students. Two of the major issues identified by the interviewees are Chinese teachers’ authority and lack of empathy. The first one associates more with the hierarchy and obedience elements in Chinese culture and history. The second one relates more to the insufficient exposure to MFL learners and learning experiences for both the Chinese teachers and the Chinese community in general.
Being obedience and respect for authority is one of the typical elements in Chinese and Asian culture (Cortazz & Jin, 1996; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). In traditional Chinese culture, teachers as the authority in educational context demand respect from their students. Students should show their respect and obey the teachers unconditionally. Though much less severe in a modern educational context, Chinese teachers still tend to expect respect from their students and are not always comfortable in dealing with challenges from them.

From a teacher perspective, they might consider challenging the teacher in front of the class as a kind of disrespectful behaviour. Influenced by the culture, they might subconsciously fill the course with tight schedules and leave no room for questioning and challenging. When the above incidents occur, they tend to attribute the reasons for not tolerating questions to its negative impact on the pace of the course while neglecting the cultural influence. Interviewees mentioned that this problem seemed to be more serious among the teachers who worked in a domestic Chinese context. In comparison, teachers who had more experience in teaching and learning in an overseas environment tended to have better awareness regarding this issue and appeared to be more open to questions and challenges from their students.

I think it just makes it really hard to ask questions, to challenge anything. Like I think we would be all...like our class in general, would probably be too uncomfortable or afraid to challenge the material. But in other classes (non-Chinese classes), you know, it is not a problem. I mean, we could challenge, we could question, we could say like ‘That is wired.’ In Chinese (class), I don’t think we could ever do that. But I think maybe that’s also, like when you go to China, you can’t really do that either. (James, T11: 523)

From a student perspective, they could also be influenced by this culture through their CAL learning experiences. They might be self-aware, or forced by peers and sociocultural pressures, to behave obediently in Chinese and Chinese related courses. In combination with the problem of one-way teaching, students gradually became more passive and reluctant to ask questions. They could develop self-censoring in conducting communication in Chinese or in fulfilling tasks of Chinese courses, due to the perception of paying necessary respect to the teacher and to the Chinese community. As reported by the interviewees, students gradually realised such behaviours were not always
appropriate nor necessary. They would have a better understanding along with more extensive experiences in CAL learning and their growing maturity. Therefore, it appeared to be a more common problem among the early stage CAL learners.

ROSE: ((laughter)) It’s kind of funny because when we do our exams, like exams that ask for opinions, like we have to write opinion essays based on the stuff we learned, and we all tried to be really nice in the essays because we know that the examiners are not gonna like it if we kind of like drag down China’s face. ((laughter)) So there is that.

[...]

CHANG: So you know, there is a sort of obedience culture in Chinese culture. And it sounds like you guys were influenced by this kind of culture. Like obedience, just say the nice things? Don’t speak out, like self-censoring?

ROSE: Yeah. But, do you want an A? ((laughter)) (Rose, T3: 303)

Another issue that closely associates with Chinese teachers’ sociocultural background is the lack of empathy for CAL learners. This is mainly caused by insufficient exposure to MFL teaching and learning. As reported by the learners, some Chinese teachers they came across have demonstrated a lack of competence in distinguishing the differences between foreign language speakers and foreign language learners. It is difficult for teachers who do not have enough experiences in learning foreign languages to understand the struggles and needs of their CAL students. They tend to evaluate the difficulty and the required amount of effort in learning Chinese from a native speaker standpoint instead of the perspective of a foreign language learner.

We had a teacher for our oral class, and he learned English for twenty years. And he said, ‘I still can’t speak English.’ So he understood for us learning Chinese, that it was very difficult. And he knew how to motivate us, make us feel that we are doing a good job. But the other Chinese teachers, they have no English. They only speak Chinese. And they were like ‘How come you couldn’t do this? This is easy.’ (Rose, T3: 66)

This situation could be worsened if the teacher has a lack of TCAL experiences. One of the common problems for novice Chinese teacher is that they have not yet developed a set of teaching languages as well as a sense of language control which could match the
‘corpus’ of their learners. Quite often they could make an explanation of simple concepts become even more difficult to understand by using words and expressions beyond learners’ knowledge. Such kind of behaviour is also recognised by the interviewees as being a lack of empathy for the learners.

Yeah, but I think the main problem is that she doesn’t understand our level of Chinese. I think she thinks us are a lot higher than it is. And a lot of the words that we use, that we have already known, but we don’t. It’s…I think she didn’t know how difficult it is for us. (Adam, T4: 215)

There was also a particular type of learners who would suffer more from teachers’ lack of empathy. This refers to CAL learners in the Irish context who came from an Asian background but not the greater China region, or further generations of Chinese immigrants who had no or little influence of the Chinese language in their family. For these learners, they barely had any advantages in CAL learning in comparison with the Irish CAL learners. However, their physical appearances made the teachers more easily to underestimate their efforts and the amount of difficulty they came across in CAL learning.

CHANG: But for the teachers, would they overthink about this…how big the advantage really is… Do you have that kind of feeling from your experience?

CARLOS: (long pause for about half minute)

CHANG: Well, it is a tough question. ((laughter))

CARLOS: YEAH! It is a VERY TOUGH question! Uh…a little bit of both. So, yes and no. Sometimes I do think I am overestimated. They (teacher and peer students) were like, when I get bad results, they were like ‘Oh Jesus, how could you get that result!’ I don’t…while I don’t…you know. They must think my ability is much better than I actually am. So, yeah, yeah, I definitely feel it, but just not that directly…I actually felt that, but maybe more is gone unnoticed. I think it is one thing that how I think about myself, and it is another thing like how people who didn’t know me see me. (Carlos, T8: 135)

It is also interesting to see the other side of the story, that interviewees demonstrated more empathy towards the various problems of their Chinese teachers. Some of them tried to avoid the discussion about the problems of their teachers, others might attribute problems
of their teachers to a broader sociocultural context or factors that beyond the teachers’
control. It indicated that on a general level, CAL learners in an Irish context might possess
more experiences of MFL learning in comparison with their teachers. However, such a
phenomenon could also be considered as reflections of the obedience culture on CAL
learners.

I think maybe she lacks support from the institute? Or that she has too many
classes that she is teaching? I know she is teaching second and fourth years,
but maybe she is teaching first years as well? I don’t know, maybe? Uh…or
that they just not standardise the content of the course that being taught and
circulate within the institute? I am not sure. (Rose, T3: 161)

5.5.1.4 Influence of teachers’ demotivation

Previous research has mentioned that L2 teachers’ demotivation could have a negative
impact on their students (Chambers, 1999; Ghanizadeh & Erfanian, 2017; Kim & Kim,
2015b; Sugino, 2010). This phenomenon was also found in the results of the interviews.
Interviewees identified that the main reason for the demotivation of their Chinese
teachers is the lack of commitment or enthusiasm for CAL teaching. They were aware
that some of their teachers were disconnected and had no desire to communicate with
them unless required by the course management.

The lack of commitment to teaching is mainly due to the excessive workload or a clash
of interest between the benefit of teaching and teachers’ personal goals. Teachers with
excessive workload tend to have less interest in looking after CAL learners’ performance
and psychological conditions. They teach as a mean of survival and their goal is to gain
the payment with minimum effort. According to the interviewees, this phenomenon was
more common among visiting and part-time teachers who have not yet made clear
whether the TCAL experience in an Irish context would be beneficial for their future
career.

We saw him just coming out from his bed and his hair would be sticking and
he would just open the book and say ‘Where were we?’ And some of the
students you could see that are getting angry. And it was very tense, and it
was very unhealthy… I don’t blame him for that because he had no training.
And that was part of his PhD that he had to fulfil hours. And the last was that,
he was demotivated. Because he realised that by teaching he was neglecting his own PhD, so he…he only prepared classes after we complained. (David, T1: 687)

Another phenomenon which was more common among the full-time Chinese teachers is the gradual loss of enthusiasm in teaching. The reasons for this phenomenon are complicated, which involve a series of educational and sociocultural influences. It could be a chain of demotivation that teachers have witnessed demotivating incidents of their students and gradually became demotivated themselves. It could be a lack of sense of fulfilment and positive stimulation, that they conducted the same kind of teaching for years and lost interest in improving methodology or conducting research. It could also be a sociocultural influence that Chinese teachers drained their enthusiasms in the early stage of their teaching career to ensure a steady job. After acquiring such a job in an Irish context where currently there were not many competitions in Chinese teaching, they lost the pressure as well as the enthusiasm for teaching responsibly.

PETER: Because…like…Chang, I don’t want to be offensive, but in Chinese culture, you mentioned uh…the hierarchy, the structure. Once a person gets to that position, that they are SAFE. And then they could do whatever they want. They can read from the book and go home.

CHANG: Ah okay. So you think it’s fairly that this teacher has already got what she needs, what she wants. And she feels safe, that she doesn’t want to put in any more effort.

PETER: Yes, exactly.

CHANG: Or maybe she spent too much on her way to this position [and …

PETER: Yes, EXACTLY, EXACTLY. When I had this teacher in the first [year…

CHANG: Ah so you actually had her in the first year as well!

PETER: Yeah, and the second year as well. She will put in a lot more effort, and now it’s like zero effort. She is asking us to do homework questions, which is irrelevant, and we don’t get our grades for six or seven weeks. (Peter, T2: 67)

In general, the majority of the interviewees found it difficult to deal with demotivating issues caused by teachers’ demotivation in teaching. They felt that it was quite challenging if they try to resolve the issue externally, as they perceived themselves did
not have sufficient influence and expertise in challenging their teachers. However, it was also ineffective to perform remotivation strategies from an internal perspective while the external demotivating influence of the teacher remained unsolved. They either attempted to isolate themselves from the demotivating incidents or reinforced positive influences to counter the negative feelings (e.g., praise from other people, focus on positive ideal L2 self).

So we complained, and his boss would get angry at him, and tell him to prepare. And you could see he becomes really tired of classes. It becomes really intense, but he hasn’t been prepared for class. And we would be like ‘Oh my god what is this class?’ We would be stressed because he was stressed. He would get stressed. OH MY GOD! It would be a perfect class to look at how NOT to teach. It would be really good for your PhD if you were seeing that… I didn’t know what to do. My motivation was low. I am just talking to myself that ‘I am going to China next year! I am going to China next year!’ That helped. (David, T1: 708)

5.5.2 Demotivating elements in Chinese course design

Problems in the design of Chinese courses and learning programmes could also cause learners’ CAL learning demotivation. As reported by the interviewees, these problems mainly refer to issues in the structure, requirement, content and supervision of the CAL courses. Both CAL learner and teacher’s effort appeared to be less effective in dealing with these issues, which require interferences from the course management level to make positive changes.

Course design

- Structure
- Requirement
- Content
- Supervision

Figure 22 Constructs of course design

5.5.2.1 Demotivating issues in course structure

Interviewees reported on three major problems regarding the structure of CAL courses, which are the workload of Chinese studies in a joint degree programme, the compulsory nature of the non-language modules and the oversized classroom.
The first issue in CAL course design is the excessive workload of CAL learning. This is mainly reported by interviewees who studied Chinese as minor or elective modules, that they considered the workload of CAL learning was too much in comparison with their major studies and other subjects of their degree programmes. This was often caused by insufficient communication and coordination between Chinese language modules and learners’ other degree modules, that the workload of CAL learning and learning, in general, could be overwhelming for the learners. Such a problem was more evident in the early stage of learning, that learners were still in the transition of adjusting a different lifestyle from previous experiences in post-primary schools. Though it appeared that this issue became less serious with learners’ increasing familiarity and capability in CAL learning and time management skills, interviewees stated that it may persist until a much later stage of learning if not being addressed properly. Also, it often took time to make changes to the structure of the CAL courses, sometimes even the structure of the whole degree programme. Therefore, feedback from the current learners in relation to course structures could only be reflected in the future. Moreover, interviewees considered both teachers and coordinators of Chinese and other modules were equally responsible for this issue.

ROSE: I mean when we were in first and second and third year, Chinese was taking up so much time. Like I wasn’t putting nearly as much time into my business classes… I don’t think those teachers (business teachers) understand that we have a joint degree, and that we can’t dedicate all of our time to writing up reports and analysing accounts, that we have to sit down and write characters over and over again trying to remember what the hell it is.

[…]

ROSE: It’s just, I want to expand on that point. When I signed up for this module, or for this degree, it’s International Commerce WITH Chinese. I didn’t sign up for International Commerce AND Chinese, you know?

CHANG: So the workload is too much.

ROSE: Yeah. (Rose, T3: 425; 505)

Interviewees also expressed strong opinions about the rigid course designs which made the CAL course related non-language modules compulsory to the learners. This referred
to CAL programmes which arranged these non-language modules as compulsory, or programmes which simply had a limited range of elective modules, so they were nearly compulsory to the learners as well. The reason behind this inappropriate design was often due to the perception that the study of these non-language modules could help internalise learners’ motivation and increase their persistence in CAL learning. Regarding the limited choices of non-language modules, it was mainly a result of insufficient academic staff. It could also be a strategic measure to ensure the number of enrolments for these courses, so to stabilise or increase the income of these courses as well as the CAL learning programme. Interviewees mentioned that the credits of some non-language modules were marked as prerequisites for external scholarships, which was required by the CAL learning programme instead of the demand of scholarship provider. Interviewees considered the study of these courses to be quite demotivating due to their compulsory nature. They found some of these modules to be hardly beneficial and possessed doubts regarding the purposes of these modules.

Like, do you know about the (an anonymous institution) scholarship? Like you have to study two non-language Chinese modules? Those modules are just a waste of time. They had no relevance. Once you land in China, once you do land in wherever you need to land, those modules were thrown out of the window. Those are just completely irrelevant… They created those modules so that they have more footholds, so they could employ more Chinese people and those people could build like opinions, so they could stay in numbers. (Peter, T2: 225)

The final problem regarding the CAL course design is the oversized classroom. In general, interviewees considered the disadvantage of a large Chinese classroom outplays its advantages. It was difficult for teachers to tend to the needs of individual students. Limited by the designated class hours, students in large classes tended to have less opportunity for guided practices and a reduced level of participation, which further decreased their chance to interact with the teacher and peers. It also encouraged the teachers to focus more on learners from a holistic perspective and adopt a one-way teaching style. In the late stage of CAL learning, an oversized classroom may also indicate that students with various Chinese proficiency were forced to learn together. This phenomenon was often found after learners’ Erasmus year in China. It increased the difficulty in balancing the needs of different learners and keeping a course pace which would be suitable for the majority of the class.
5.5.2.2 Demotivating issues in course requirement

According to the interviewees, the demotivating influence in CAL course requirement mainly referred to the excessive requirement on the accuracy of language usage beyond the need for communication. To be more specific, this includes requirements on the accuracy of tones in pronunciation and the handwriting of Chinese characters.

Regarding the accuracy of tones in pronunciation, the lexical tone is one characteristic of the Chinese language which could affect the meaning of the words. However, in a certain communicative context with a clear language domain, words with similar pronunciation but different tones rarely cause trouble in communication. Some of the dialects in China have different tones in comparison with the Mandarin (Chen, 2000: 13-19), while it usually is not a problem for people who speak these dialects to communicate with others who speak Mandarin Chinese. However, in a CAL learning context, the strictness on the pronunciation of tones could be applied to an unbearable level for the learners. The underlined problem is the insufficient understanding of a communicative approach in MFL teaching and learning among both Chinese teachers as well as the programme designers. Some of the errors in Chinese language use, such as lexical tones in the present context, appears to be important from a linguistic standpoint. However, such error is much less effective in causing difficulty in communications. Too much emphasis on its strictness may lead to learners’ demotivation, especially among those who pursue effective communication but have no intention of achieving a ‘perfect’ pronunciation in Chinese.

Regarding the accuracy of Chinese handwriting, there are more sociocultural reasons behind the problem. As a language with a logographic writing system, a clear presentation of Chinese characters is necessary for written communication. Moreover, influenced by the culture of Chinese calligraphy, the Chinese handwriting in the context of ancient China also provides a range of information about the writer in terms of the artistic taste, educational background and even their social classes (Chen, 2011: 64-65). Reflect in modern Chinese education, good handwriting is still highly encouraged or even implemented as a mandatory element in early childhood education in a domestic context in China. This sociocultural influence affects CAL teachers and programme designers...
when it comes to the requirement of Chinese handwriting for CAL learners. The CAL course may require much on the accuracy of Chinese handwriting less in consideration of the communicative effectiveness, but more of a subconscious reflection of such culture. However, these requirements appear to be unreasonable for CAL learners whose MFL learning experiences mainly consist of studying phonetic languages. Besides, the change of writing tools in modern life further impacts learners’ perception of this problem. Keyboard inputting has become a more frequently used tool for written communication in many contexts in comparison with the traditional handwriting method. For CAL learners who aims at learning Chinese as a tool of communication, they have less intention in pursuing good handwriting of Chinese characters. Therefore, they could become demotivated when such requirement is forced upon them and with a strong emphasis on its accuracy.

ROSE: I had a teacher who would say the line is too harsh. It needs to be more fluent and more rounded. Or she would say like ‘I could tell you did this part first before this part or this part’.

CHANG: WHAT? I am curious like how could she measure your stroke order by looking at your writing?

ROSE: Seeing where the pen went, sometimes? It’s kind of like when you are doing calligraphy and you start by pushing down hard and then go light? I don’t know. They knew, somehow.

CHANG: Did similar stuff like this ever happen to you when you were learning other languages? I don’t know whether you learned French or German or something? Would the teacher ever tell you like ‘Your handwriting is not beautiful enough’ or something like that?

ROSE: No. Like I studied French and Irish. All the teachers ever say is that ‘Once I could read…what you are writing…is the main thing’. So maybe like when I was learning English, maybe my words are too small, or they were too crushed on each other, then the teacher would say ‘Try spread it out a little bit. It would make it easier for you and for me.’ And that’s it. They never said like ‘No. I hate your writing.’ ((laughter)) (Rose, T3: 118)

5.5.2.3 Demotivating issues in course content

Results of the interviews suggested that the main problem of the course content was being impractical. Interviewees identified two main reasons for this problem. The first is the
repetitive elements in the course content, and the second is about the course content which learners found it difficult to relate to. It appeared that the problem could be caused by the inappropriate teaching and learning material itself, or the inappropriate organisation of the course content.

When you do well in class and you can’t transfer that into real life, that’s probably the most frustrating things that I have ever experienced. (Paddy, T7: 44)

Interviewees mentioned that the repetitive elements could occur both within and between CAL learning modules. Within one Chinese module, the course content could have a lack of variety, that learners need to practise and talk about one particular topic for quite a long period of time. Interviewees reported that some of the Chinese modules covered language topics much less than described by the course specification, which made them feel more or less being deceived and demotivated. There were also repetitions in the learning content between modules, which was caused by a lack of communication among the teachers of different modules. For example, interviewees reported that language topics and grammatical knowledge could be overlapped between comprehensive language courses and courses which aimed to improve different language skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing) or courses for specialised language domains (e.g., Business Chinese, Chinese in Computer Science). Participation in CAL courses with repetitive elements appeared to be ineffective and less rewarding, which could cause demotivation for especially the high achieving learners. Another form of repetition was caused by the course organisation, that courses were rigidly structured and too predictable for the learners. These courses were often conducted by teachers who followed strictly the structure provided by the textbook. They rarely changed the structure and improvised during the teaching, which learners found it to be repetitive and demotivating.

I think one of the biggest issues in Chinese classes is the monotony of work. Basically, it’s boring. It’s repetitive, like it’s one style. It’s all kind of like writing characters. And that’s something I actually see in the lectures in here, where basically every lesson’s structure is exactly the same. And you will be literally working through a textbook, you know, working through the exercises. It’s almost like doing math. It’s kind of like just PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE as supposed to actually applying. So, I think there should be a little bit of variance added to lessons, because that could be like a demotivating factor. It is boring and you kind of like losing
motivation. You would be like ‘Oh Jesus, I’ve done this…you know…same lesson structure like a hundred times already.’ (Carlos, T8: 485)

Regarding the irrelevant perspective of the problem, interviewees reported that CAL learning content could deviate from authentic situational scenarios they would come across in real life. The learning content could be constructed by artificial languages, which aimed at providing knowledge of the language in a more reasonable sequence from the perspective of linguistic research and first language acquisition approach. Many of the authentic contents which are useful for immediate use in communication were either ignored or being treated as supplementary elements of the course due to their grammatical insignificance or difficulty. There was also insufficient content that associate with learners’ major study, which caused learners’ concern on the implementation of the learning outcome in their future career. These issues led to a gap between learners’ needs for acquiring necessary grades and GPA for academic purposes and their needs for applying the learning content to complete communicative tasks in daily life and in their future career. It was inevitable that learners would suffer demotivation for neglecting the progress in one or more of these above perspectives.

Yeah, I felt maybe there was a lack of emphasis on the…how to put it…what students do after graduation. Like it’s a Business and Chinese course, maybe there wasn’t enough focus on the business aspect of the Chinese class…The whole degree is Business and Chinese, and I think most of the people in this major would consider a business job in China. Of course, we need to be proficient for conversation in general in Chinese, but also Chinese that you are gonna use in business scenarios. I know we did a module in the final year, but still I think that was only for two semesters. Probably that was not enough throughout the whole course, to prepare for a life working in China. (Chris: T10: 103)

The same problem occurred in some of China or Chinese related non-language courses as well. There was a common perception among the CAL teachers that these modules could improve learners’ interest in learning the Chinese language (Attaran & Yishuai, 2018; Tang, 2012; Xiong & Grandin, 2010). As a result, if these courses were created with such a purpose, sometimes they could be designed with too much emphasis on its role of being ‘entertaining’ and neglected the practical benefits that learners could gain from their study. Besides, not all learners would be interested in these non-language courses. Many current CAL learners in the context of Irish higher education were learning
Chinese as minor or elective subjects. They learned Chinese with the aim of benefiting their major study. They valued the CAL courses as being essential in improving language and communication skills, and they were less interested in putting much effort into the non-language courses.

There were DEFINITELY a lot of interesting things, but a lot of them are not practical. I do agree with stuff like that, like learning something about Chinese, say Chinese art and traditional Chinese medicine. It’s very interesting. But I don’t know whether it is helpful. Some stuff I suppose, you know…like, you learn about Chinese food, like at the table, polite manners, business card culture, that could really help. But I think a lot of it, sorry, I think a lot of it was just interesting than practical, in some way. (Leo, T5: 331)

Another important perspective that interviewees mentioned is the censorship in the learning content. They felt that some of the necessary learning contents were deliberately filtered and they seemed to only get access to the ‘positive’ aspect when it comes to the information delivered by the Chinese courses. This issue was reported to be more evident among the non-language courses. According to the interviewees, such kind of censorship prevented them to reach an objective understanding of the subjects they were studying. It is likely that such kind of censorship was applied in consideration of preventing some ‘negative’ information in demotivating the learners. However, learners’ awareness of this issue suggested that they could be even more demotivated by the censorship itself. Interviewees stated that they would acquire the missing information or knowledge eventually from elsewhere and would reach their own objective opinion regarding the learning subject. However, they found the censorship in course information irritating and demotivating, as they felt being distrust and incapable of comprehending and distinguishing the information by their own capability.

I feel like sometimes if we are only hearing one side of the Chinese culture and Chinese society, I mean we only hear the positive side of it. (laughter) I mean, I never knew there was a Korean War. Because we study Chinese history, but that chunk of it was left out. And it was someone said to me that do I know something about the Korean War, and I was like ‘What Korean War?’ Like I knew Chinese history well, but we only ever like… I suppose maybe because it did not sound good or it wasn’t the best part of the Chinese history, that they just left it out… (James, T11: 490)
Similar as in the problem of repetition, an inappropriate organisation of the teaching and learning material could also make the course content less relevant to the learners. The arrangement of the CAL course content needs to consult both learners’ language proficiency and their Chinese sociocultural awareness in the target learning period. Course content being arranged to early could cause difficulty in comprehension, which would be demotivation for the learners. For example, one interviewee mentioned a course which introduced Chinese linguistics terminology and background knowledge at the beginning of the CAL learning programme. It was arranged in consideration of assisting learners’ CAL learning, while many of the learners found it intimidating instead of being helpful. It was only until a much later stage of learning, when learners became much more proficient in Chinese, they began to comprehend more content of the course. Another interviewee mentioned an introductory course of Chinese culture after learners’ Erasmus year in China. At that time, most of the content of the course appeared to be superficial in comparison with learners’ own understanding and experiences, which was hardly beneficial anymore.

Moreover, the irrelevance could also be caused by a poor selection among the available learning materials, which was a more evident issue among specialised Chinese language courses. This is often due to the teachers being unfamiliar with the particular language domain. More specialised CAL courses are created, and will be needed, due to the increase in diversified backgrounds and aims of the CAL learners. However, the current CAL teachers were mainly trained for genetic Chinese language courses. It would be difficult for teachers to distinguish and select appropriate content for these particular courses if they did not possess a certain level of understanding about the specific language domain, which was often determined by learners’ major subject.
It is good material, but they are making it seems as if the word for ‘dandruff’ and the word for ‘market entry’ are the same importance. I am never gonna go to China and talk about dandruff with someone on the street. I am gonna talk about your market entry strategy, can I see your business account? (Rose, T3: 482)

5.5.2.4 Demotivating issues in course supervision

The final part of the problem regarding the CAL course design is about its supervision. This includes the lack of an effective feedback system between the learner and the teacher, lack of supervision for the CAL learning programme and guidance on utilising bilingual partnership.

When exploring the possible solutions for the demotivating incidents, many of the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction towards the absence or ineffective channel for them to gain support to deal with the demotivating issues they came across in CAL learning. They complained that most of the time the only opportunity for them to provide feedback for the course was through the questionnaire of course evaluation once each semester. It was often very general and could be artificial to tackle their real problems. Besides, its timing was often at the end of the semester when it was already too late to make any changes. It often relied on the direct communication between the CAL learners and teachers to identify and resolve problems of the courses. However, there was a sociocultural barrier that Chinese teachers might not be comfortable for dealing with challenges, which was reflected in their objection for direct feedback from the learners.

As mentioned by some interviewees, the effort they put into resolving demotivating issues may end up not only in vain, but also jeopardised their relationship with the teacher. Without a proper feedback system and the attention from the course management, learners may feel desperate in dealing with this type of demotivation.

I don’t think the teacher is…They don’t seem very welcome to suggestions. I think part of the reason is that, even if we say something, it’s not gonna be changed. (Adam, T4: 186)

Another aspect which contributed to the same problem discussed above is the lack of supervision for the CAL courses. There was not always a CAL course coordinator who could be proactive to gather learners’ feedback and help them with their issues of
demotivation and well-being in general. This phenomenon was particularly obvious in the context of the joint learning programmes in which learners study Chinese as minor or elective modules. This problem was mainly caused by the ineffective synergy between the department of Chinese study and the department of learners’ major study. It could be unclear between the two departments on the responsibility of resolving problems of learners’ demotivation in CAL learning. The coordinators of the whole degree programme were normally from the department of learners’ major study. It could be difficult for them to help learners with specific issues in CAL learning demotivation as their expertise was not necessarily related to CAL learning and intercultural communication. This issue became more serious when it comes to the supervision of CAL learners’ Erasmus learning in China. Interviewees reported that they were unsure whom they should turn to when suffering from CAL learning demotivation while they were in China, as it seemed there was a lack of support for well-being from both their own universities and the hosting universities.

We didn't have much support from (an anonymous institution). But in terms of the culture shock, or other kinds of mental health issues or problems, I don't actually know. I don't think… I think most of the international students just stuck with their friends. They just stay together. I don't think there was actually a support structure for people, you know. (Liam, T13: 80)

Interviewees also expressed expectations for more guidance on establishing bilingual partnerships. Due to a lack of target language environment, it was particularly precious for Irish CAL learners to form bilingual partnerships with the native Chinese speakers and gain opportunities for more language input and practice. The importance and benefit for such partnership were often strengthened in CAL courses, while insufficient opportunity and guidance were provided for learners to establish such a connection with the potential targets (e.g., international students from China). Without official activities and interferences, some of the interviewees found it difficult to get in touch or blend in with the community of Chinese international students. Not all the Chinese students were positive in communicating with the learners due to their personality, the influence of Chinese sociocultural background or simply being affected by a negative experience of culture shock.
But, take the Chinese society, they tended to be just a Chinese society for Chinese people, so it’s actually quite hard to…it’s not like you don’t feel welcome, it’s just that it feels like…uh…it wasn’t designed for Chinese society, not for everyone. (Ethan, T6: 440)

According to the interviewees, the difficulty in establishing bilingual partnerships was underestimated. It requires not only a certain level of Chinese language proficiency, but also social skills and skills in communication in general. These requirements were particularly necessary as reported by the interviewees due to the influence of English on their mentality as both their native language and a dominant language in social communications. Learners need guidance from these perspectives to identify, form and maintain a beneficial bilingual partnership. Interviewees suggested including such guidance into the concern of the CAL learning programme instead of treating them as purely supplementary elements.

Like I am thinking when other students ask me how I make Chinese friends, they were like all the Irish students they ask me that. And I was like ‘What do you mean by how to make Chinese friends? It’s just friends. It’s the same like how you make other friends. You say hello and you talk about yourself for a while. Then you bring up something like a topic or stuff.’ And they are all like ‘I don’t know what to talk to them about.’ I generally just like ask them if they have any film suggestions for me, or I ask them about their hometown, you know, ask them something about themselves. Because for most of the time we were so used to be the one who is ANSWERING. You know, like when the first time you meet somebody, and people were like ‘Oh, you are from Ireland. Tell us something about Ireland, something about this and something about that.’ You spend a lot of time to explain yourself, and you forget to ask. And that’s where the relationship was formed, that back and forth. (Emma, T12: 509)

Some of the interviewees also reported that the impractical CAL learning content also increased the difficulty in communicating with the native speakers. Learners need to learn and know how to initiate and maintain a conversation in Chinese for the purpose of practice in the early stage of learning, while such skills and language content might not be fully covered by the CAL courses. Besides, interviewees also mentioned that structurally monitored bilingual partnership could be less beneficial, as it failed to provide genuine interest and purpose for communication. They prefer a partnership which is based on friendship instead of practice with strangers in an artificial manner.
After a while, anyway, I became less embarrassing speaking it. And I really started to get better. So, I just try to say it again, or have something they say after a while, like ‘ni zai shuo yi bian’, like ‘You just repeat that’, you know, trying harder. But at the start…at the start it was very difficult. (Leo, T5: 18)

### 5.5.3 Influence of another language

As reported by the interviewees, the negative influence of another language mainly comes from two perspectives. The first is the negative transference of learners’ experiences in learning other foreign languages, which often leads to ineffective applications of language learning strategy and perceived slower learning progress. The second is the influence of English as both learners’ native language and a global language, which affects the mentalities of both CAL learners and native Chinese speakers.

![Figure 23 Constructs of influence of another language](image)

**5.5.3.1 Influence of learning other foreign languages**

Learners’ L2 learning experiences may have both positive and negative impact on their L3 and further language learning experiences. Such impact could reflect in the perspectives of both the language learning strategy (Cenoz, 2001; Hall et al., 2009) and learners’ psychological conditions (Dewaele, 2002; Gabrys-Barker, 2011). In the context of the present research, many of the Irish CAL learners possessed experiences in learning other foreign languages prior to their current period of CAL learning. These foreign languages often refer to European languages offered in Irish post-primary schools (DES, 2017a: 11), such as German and Italian, which are alphabetic phonetic languages. The distance between learners’ native language and these European languages is much closer in comparison with Chinese, which is affected by a different logographic reading and writing system of Chinese language and also the differences in Chinese grammar and syntax (Lu & Song, 2017: 15). As a result, learners may find it difficult to apply the
language learning strategies they accumulated through learning other foreign languages into CAL.

CHANG: So overall would you think your experience of learning German is beneficial in learning Chinese?

LEO: Um…my honest answer would be no. I don’t think it was beneficial. I don’t know. I don’t think it had any effect on my learning of Chinese. I mean, learning Chinese was a whole different experience. (Leo, T5: 435)

For learners who have the capability to identify this issue, they tended to distinguish these differences and develop new strategies for learning Chinese particularly. Yet still, they might get demotivated due to the feeling that their previous language learning experiences were not helpful in learning Chinese, especially if they prioritised the importance and benefits of CAL learning. In comparison, for learners who could not fully realise this issue, the application of inappropriate learning methods could result in dissatisfying learning pace and outcome. This could be extremely demotivating if the learner consistently compared their progress in learning Chinese and the previous experiences in learning other languages. As reported by DeFrancis (1986), it takes about four times of effort for a native English speaker to progress in learning Chinese in comparison with learning other European languages. With the inappropriate learning methods, this contrast could be extended to an unbearable level.

I think…yeah…sometimes at the beginning, in the initial stages, I would compare and wonder maybe how good I was at French when I was learning it for…you know…three months and how good I was at Chinese. (Cian, T9: 77)

As identified by the interviewees, such a phenomenon could be quite common in the early stage of learning, particularly among learners with successful experiences of learning multiple foreign languages. The ineffective methods caused them difficulty in progressing normally in CAL learning. For some of these learners, the contrast between their success in learning other languages and the relative ‘failure’ in learning Chinese made them more vulnerable to self-doubt. For others, the accumulated confidence through their experiences of learning other languages caused them to overlook the
problem from an internal perspective. Even after they realised the problem, they could still be reluctant to make changes to the learning methods.

When investigating the benefit of previous experiences in learning other languages, interviewees reported that it contributed more to the general understanding of learning a language, such as being patient about the progress and not being afraid of making mistakes when practising with the native speakers, instead of any specific methods or techniques which could help the CAL learning particularly. For learners with linguistics study background or awareness, it would be comparatively easier for them to distinguish the differences between languages. However, interviewees with such background pointed out that though it helped to recognise the differences in learning Chinese, which may facilitate their learning, such awareness could still demotivate them. In general, interviewees recommend learners to avoid comparison between learning Chinese and learning other foreign languages. They also suggested that it would beneficial for beginner level CAL courses to include a proper induction section on the characteristics of the Chinese language in comparison with other foreign languages. The sooner the learners could realise such differences, the sooner they could better evaluate and utilise their previous experiences in learning other MFL to benefit their current stage of CAL learning.

LEO: I think it would be beneficial to highlight ‘This is something very different from European languages, and you can’t compare them.’ You can’t say ‘Oh, I’ve studied French for two years and I’ve studied Chinese for two years, and my French was so much better.’ You can’t do that. Yeah, I think it would be a good thing to highlight. And people would stop comparing them on the same bases.

CHANG: And actually, I could remember from our beginner class, we do have a slide, a brief introduction on the characteristics of Chinese language... But that’s a little bit too general. It’s just a summary of all the differences... So maybe it would be worthwhile explaining all these differences in detail, rather than getting it over with and rush to the class.

LEO: Yeah, I would be a hundred percent agree with that. I think that would be very beneficial, at the start, like in the first semester of the first year, week two, yeah.

CHANG: Just to make the students realise, like we always say but we didn’t really put a lot of effort to make them genuinely realise,
that it’s not a DIFFICULT language, but a very DIFFERENT language.

LEO: Yeah. (Leo, T5: 481)

5.5.3.2 Influence of the English language

As one of Irish CAL learners’ native language, English is usually the language being spoken in both educational and working environment in an Irish context. The native Chinese speakers, either studying or working in Ireland, need to be proficient in English. This sociocultural context not only affects learners’ perception about the necessity and benefit of learning Chinese for career purposes, but also impacts on their mentality of CAL learning.

When learners conduct spontaneous communication with native Chinese speakers in an Irish context, for the ease and efficiency of communication, they often choose English as the language for communication. The occasion which uses Chinese as the primary language for communication needs to meet certain conditions. First of all, even being aware that the learner could speak Chinese, usually the native Chinese speakers would not initiate a conversation by using Chinese due to the perception of respecting the local sociocultural conventions. It often requires the learners to take initiation and express the intention to speak in Chinese for either communication or practice purposes.

Secondly, English is usually the language which both speakers share the highest level of proficiency. The influence of English in a domestic Irish context is discouraging for learners to conduct spontaneous communication with native Chinese speakers. For situations which involves time pressure, requirements on precision or interpretation of abstract or complex meanings, they need to resort to English. This may cause the speakers to frequently switch between languages and eventually continue with English.

Yeah, I mean any Chinese person who is travelling to Ireland for work, they will soon have a decent level of English. So you kind of doubt like, it would be either to be nice to have a little bit Chinese, just to impress them a little bit, show that you understand Chinese culture. Unless your Chinese is better than their English, I don’t see it being… You are not going to use it in a business context in Ireland. (Paddy, T7: 241)
The impact of English as a global language in a Chinese context could also indirectly affect the perception of Irish CAL learners. English is still a mandatory foreign language subject in both post-primary and higher education in China (Gu, 2010; Yihong et al., 2007) as well as in many other countries in Asia (Carson, 2016; Sugita McEown et al., 2017). Being proficient in English is nearly compulsory for better education and for career development in the regions with a decent level of internationalisation. As a result, Irish CAL learners may perceive that it would suffice as a native English speaker for communication purpose even in a domestic Chinese context.

Yeah, but I mean that’s just the fact of life when you are a native English speaker. I mean the language of business, no matter what language you want to…if you got to Spain, Russia, wherever, the language is always going to be English over the local language. (James, T11: 301)

One of the interviewees also mentioned the good standard of English among the native Chinese people he encountered and its influence on his confidence in learning and speaking Chinese. He claimed that he would be more willing to practice French with native French speakers as he considered in general the level of English among the public in France was similar to his level of French. This made him feel more comfortable when making mistakes. However, as most of the native Chinese speakers he came across possess a much higher level of English in comparison with his level of Chinese, he felt more embarrassed when making mistakes while speaking Chinese with the native Chinese speakers.

Another interesting aspect of the demotivating issue caused by the influence of English is the lower level of learning motivation by contrast. This phenomenon refers to the delicate situation in a bilingual partnership, that two learners who study each other’s language would sometimes compete for opportunities of practice. In the context of the present research, this refers to the bilingual partnership between an Irish CAL learner and a native Chinese speaker who wish to learn English. Due to the impact of English as a global language, the Chinese speaker often appears to have a higher level of motivation in learning English in comparison with the Irish CAL learner. As reported by the interviewees, they sometimes found it difficult to practise Chinese with the native speaker simply because their partners were more eager to practise English with them. This
phenomenon was even more evident in a Chinese context, where the lack of an English environment has further strengthened the motivation of native Chinese speakers to practise oral English with the Irish CAL learners.

With regard to Chinese people speaking English, the problem is, yeah, when I go to China they won’t speak Chinese to me. Because they are so much more motivated to learn English. And the Chinese people in China are really good at throwing their Mianzi (Chinese for ‘face/esteem’) in the bin and not being feeling embarrassed for making mistakes. And that’s amazing to me, that I'm jealous that they can do that so well. (David, T1: 407)

5.6 Summary

This chapter presented the main findings of the qualitative interviews which followed the previous survey investigation. In terms of the main demotivating factors, followed on the results of the survey, data from the interviews helped identify and establish subcategories of the main demotivating factors as well as the degree of awareness learners may possess for different demotivating influences. On a general level, learners were more aware of immediate demotivating incidents (e.g., negative peer pressure, inappropriate teaching method or course content) in comparison with deeper level self-perceptions (e.g., L2 study presents insufficient challenge) and the influence of underlining sociocultural background (e.g., the influence of English as learners’ L1).

In terms of the interaction among the different demotivating forces, external influences could be internalised by the learners, which further contribute to the establishment of negative self-perception. Representing two different layers of the learning context, many interactions were found between the subconstructs of the teacher factor and the course design, which have caused chain effects in producing demotivation. In comparison, there were fewer interactions among internally-oriented demotivating forces.

The next chapter will summarise the findings of both phases of the research and make comparisons where necessary to answer the research questions, and further discusses the issue of demotivation based on the findings of literature in the field and the present research.
Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter synergises and summarises the findings of both survey and interviews to answer the research questions comprehensively and to discuss the issues and solutions in relation to the present research and the literature in the field. Section 6.2 summaries all the key findings and presents them by the order of the research questions. Section 6.3 discusses insights provided by the literature and the present research in dealing with identified demotivating influences. At the end of this chapter, the contribution, limitation and future direction of the present research were discussed in Section 6.4 and 6.5.

6.2 Summary of Research Findings

This section summarises the key findings of both quantitative survey and qualitative interviews in relation to the research questions.

6.2.1 Main demotivating influences for CAL learning

This section summaries findings regarding the first research question and its associated sub-questions, which focus on the identification of learners’ perception of the main demotivating factors for CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education.

Research Question 1

| 1. What are learners’ perceptions of the causes and effects of CAL learning demotivation? | 1.1 What are the principal demotivating factors of CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education? |
| | 1.2 Can we rank the commonality and severity of identified demotivating factors? |
| | 1.3 Are there any identifiable interrelationships among the demotivating factors? |

Two models of CAL learning demotivation were created based on the results of the survey (see Figure 17 in Section 4.6) and the interviews (see Figure 18 in Section 5.3). Below is a table which depicts the similarity and differences between the two models.
Table 12
A comparison of two models of CAL learning demotivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Content</th>
<th>Survey Model</th>
<th>Interview Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of main demotivating factors</td>
<td>Main constructs</td>
<td>Adopted from the survey model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subconstructs</td>
<td>Identified by factor analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identified by content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrelationship</td>
<td>Between different main constructs</td>
<td>Identified both positive and negative correlations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between subconstructs</td>
<td>Identified interaction and chain effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With some factors beyond the model</td>
<td>Identified by correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the comparison of models and findings of both survey and interviews, a more comprehensive model of CAL learning demotivation was created as below (see Figure 24).

Figure 24 Final model of CAL learning demotivation
To summarise, six main demotivating factors were identified by the present research in the context of CAL learning in Irish higher education. Among them, three factors concern more of learners’ internally-orientated negative perceptions, while the other three are reflections of negative external influences. The three internally-orientated factors are 1) reduced self-confidence, 2) negative ideal L2 self and 3) negative ought-to L2 self. They represent the influences of negative perceptions established in the previous and current CAL learning experiences as well as the negative perceptions towards the future in demotivating learners at present. The three externally-orientated factors are 4) the teacher, 5) course design and 6) the influence of another language. They depict demotivating influences from different perspectives of the learning context in terms of the CAL classroom, curriculum setting and the wider sociocultural background of the CAL learning in an Irish context.

In comparison with the general findings of previous demotivation studies on EAL learning demotivation, the influence of English emerged as a new subconstruct of the factor influence of another language. Two commonly acknowledge internally-oriented factors were insignificant in the present research, namely the negative attitude towards the L2 and negative attitude towards the L2 culture and community. All these differences appear to be closely associated with the influence of English as a Lingua Franca, that different types of EAL education around the world was perceived by the learners to have more or less a compulsory nature. While in the context of the present research, it was replaced by learners’ perception of the CAL learning experiences towards the future.

As illustrated in Figure 24, on a general level, learners were more aware of immediate demotivating incidents which may come from both external influences (e.g., teachers’ behaviour, inappropriate course design) and internal perceptions (e.g., self-doubt). In comparison, learners were less aware of the effect of their internal perceptions towards the future on their CAL learning at present (e.g., perception towards the benefit and challenge of CAL learning), as well as the underlining influence of the linguistic and sociocultural background in both Ireland and the Chinese speaking regions. It is also interesting to notice that, though learners demonstrated less competence in perceiving the influence of their own linguistic and sociocultural background, they were well aware of the influence of such background from a cross-cultural standpoint. This was reflected in
a good number of comments from the interviews on the issue of Chinese teachers’ perception of their authority in education and their insufficient empathy towards students.

However, despite that learners demonstrated better awareness towards external demotivating forces, the strength of internally-orientated forces appeared to be more evident in demotivating the learners. This finding is in line with more demotivation research in an Asian context, that instead of the teacher factor, reduced self-confidence as an internally-orientated factor was the most significant demotivating force as identified by both the survey and the interview. On the other hand, it also incorporated the main consensus among previous demotivation studies in the European region, that teachers’ role in demotivating students was the most significant external influence.

Moreover, the more concrete and more immediate occurrence of demotivating incidents possesses stronger power in causing demotivation. For internal forces, the strength of incidents that linked with reduced self-confidence was more demotivating than those that associated with the negative future perceptions of their ideal and ought-to L2 self. The external demotivating forces came from different layers of the CAL learning context, and learners in general felt stronger for those that directly impact on their learning experiences (e.g., the teacher and the course design) than those that indirectly affecting their perceptions (e.g., influence of English).

Results of both survey and interviews confirmed that demotivating influences from different perspectives interact with each other throughout the learning process. The only independent demotivating force was the influence of another language, which was perceived to have nearly no interaction with any of the other main demotivating forces. On a macro level, there was a negative correlation between external and internal forces (see Figure 24). For example, potentially affected by learners’ different attribution styles, they would tend to blame either themselves or their teachers for their reduced self-confidence in learning Chinese. Similarly, they would attribute their fear for undesirable outcomes (e.g., failing the exam) to either internal reasons (e.g., negative ought-to L2 self) or external conditions (e.g., the course requirement). However, on the micro level, some of the external forces could be internalised which contribute to the establishment or enhancement of negative self-perceptions. For example, this phenomenon could be identified through the impact of insufficient empathy of teachers and the course
supervision on learners’ confidence in learning the language. Regarding the internal forces, learners’ reduced self-confidence associated positively with two dimensions of their negative future perceptions, namely the negative ideal L2 self and negative ought-to L2 self. In comparison, the two different types of future self-perceptions were negatively correlated.

6.2.2 Demotivation in different learning stages

This section summaries findings regarding the second research question which focuses on the change of demotivation in different learning stages.

Research Question 2

| 2. What are the features of CAL learning demotivation in different stages of the CAL learning process? | 2.1 Is there any fluctuation in the identified demotivating factors over the course of the CAL learning process? |
| 2.2 What are the impacts of immersive Chinese language exposure on CAL learning demotivation? |

Based on the findings of the survey and the interviews, below is a more comprehensive illustration of the changes in demotivation over time (see Figure 25).

Note: * = change over time was statistically insignificant

Figure 25 Final illustration of changes in CAL learning demotivation
On a general level, the early-middle stage of learning (one to two years in a four-year study period) is the most demotivating period for CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education. This result is in line with findings of Yu (2010) regarding the relationship between learners’ maturity, length of target language exposure and learners’ academic adaption, that the second year in a four-year study in a foreign country was the ‘critical transitional stage of either adaption or L2 learning’.

There were also different dominating demotivating forces for different learning periods, which were learners’ negative ideal L2 self in the initial stage of learning, the negative ought-to L2 self in the early-middle stage of learning and the reduced self-confidence since the late-middle stage of learning.

The negative effects of two internally-orientated forces, namely the reduced self-confidence and negatively ideal L2 self, were relatively persistent throughout the learning process. Even short-term exposure to the target language environment (e.g., studying abroad) appeared to be in evident in changing their negative impact. As demonstrated previously (see Figure 24 in Section 6.2.1), the short-term exposure appeared to be only effective in changing the negative perception about ought-to L2 self and reducing the negative influence of learning other languages and the L1 English. The survey results also suggested that such positive effect could be stronger if arrange the exposure in the early stage of learning rather than later.

In comparison, the effect of the other four main demotivating forces changes along with the length of study. However, only the influence of another language demonstrated a decreasing trend over time, while the rest demotivating forces presented a cyclical and recursive trend towards the end. Further comparisons were made between the changes of demotivation in the present research with Fletcher’s (2016b) learning curve (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 in Section 2.2.1) and Black and Mendenhall’s (1991) U-curve of cross-cultural adjustment (see Figure 3 in Section 2.2.1). The results showed that the changes of demotivation were more similar to a flipped U-curve of cross-cultural adjustment, but much less so with the learning curve (see below Figure 26).
This result was in line with the finding of the survey, that the CAL learning demotivation is in a dynamic process which changes along with the length of the study, but not with learners’ achievement in Chinese language proficiency (see Section 4.4.1). In the meantime, some of the later studies of the U-curve illustrated the process of cross-cultural adjustment more towards a recursive process instead of a reified progress of recovering (Anderson, 1994; Ward, 2004; Ward et al., 2005). If such understanding was reflected in the adjustment of the U-curve, then the changes of demotivation over time and the flipped U-curve of cross-cultural adjustment became even more resemble. This result may have an indication of the nature of demotivation for future research.

6.2.3 Demotivation in different learning contexts

This section summaries findings regarding the third research question which focus on the characteristics of CAL learning demotivation in different learning contexts.

Research Question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation among different types of CAL learners?</th>
<th>3.1 Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between motivated and demotivated learners?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between learners who study Chinese as a major or minor subject?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Are there differences in CAL learning demotivation between learners who study Chinese writing by handwriting and by typing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As identified by the survey results, the dominant demotivating influence was different for motivated and demotivated learners. Motivated learners in the present research identified that their negative ideal L2 self was the most significant demotivating force, while reduced self-confidence was perceived as the primary source of demotivation for demotivated learners. In comparison with motivated learners, demotivated learners perceived all the main factors to be more demotivating, which was particularly evident in the perception of their teacher in demotivating students. The only exception was the influence of another language, which appeared to be equally demotivating for both types of learners.

Learners who studied Chinese as a minor subject perceived two factors to be more demotivating in comparison with those who studied Chinese as their major. The first one was the course design, which mainly referred to the compulsory nature of some non-language modules and the excessive requirement on the accuracy of language usage beyond the need for communication. The other factor was the negative ought-to L2 self, which was under the influence of English as both learners’ native language and a current Lingua Franca.

In terms of the two writing methods that learners were taught in the present research, the implementation of the typing method presented no significant impact on learners’ demotivation in learning the Chinese language. Such finding was in contrast with the previous investigation of the researcher, that typing method was identified to be more effective in dealing with CAL learners’ demotivation in learning Chinese characters (Zhang & Wang, 2016: 148). This contradiction indicated that effective method in dealing with any exclusive aspect of demotivation may not yield significant result in changing the overall picture. As demotivation itself is in a dynamic process in which different forces interact and collaborate, comprehensive methods are required for robust remedy solutions.
6.3 Discussion on Resolving and Researching Demotivation

This section discusses the findings of the present research in relation to the literature in the field of demotivation research. Section 6.3.1 summaries findings for learners to maintain and revitalise their language learning motivation. Section 6.3.2 provides suggestions for CAL teachers to reduce or avoid causing learners’ demotivation. Section 6.3.3 offers some insights for CAL course management in keeping the well-being of both CAL learners and teachers. Section 6.3.4 discusses some indications for demotivation researchers in the investigation of both learners’ motivation and demotivation.

6.3.1 Findings for CAL learners

In general, there are two main approaches for learners in dealing with the issues of demotivation. The first approach is to change their own misperceptions and inappropriate strategies in CAL learning, and the second approach is to seek help from the others (e.g., the peers and teachers).

In line with findings of previous demotivation research (Chamber, 1993; Dörnyei, 2001; Kim, 2016; Sakai and Kikuchi, 2009), the reduced self-confidence is the primary internal reason for learners’ demotivation. In the context of the present research, it was often caused by the feeling of self-doubt and the ineffective learning strategy. After comparing the achievements either with peers or with themselves in learning other languages, some of the learners tended to doubt their efficacy in learning Chinese. To change this misperception, learners should focus on self-appraisal by comparing their present and previous achievements in CAL learning (Falout, 2012: 20). They should also recognise the process of making mistakes is beneficial for learning a language, and actively pursue opportunities to practise with the native speakers both within and outside of the designated class hours (Ushioda, 1998; 85-86). In terms of the learning strategy, the previous investigations focused mainly on teachers’ responsibility in providing learners with appropriate strategies in learning the target language (Falout et al., 2009; Kim, 2015; Yu, 2013; Zhou & Wang, 2012). In comparison, the results of the present research suggested that it is more important for learners to realise the differences in learning Chinese and learning other MFL languages, so that necessary adaptations are made in
integrating learners’ knowledge and strategy in learning other languages effectively in learning Chinese.

The external approach in dealing with demotivation is to seek help from the peers and the teachers. When seeking help from the peers, it is important to not only pay attention to the achievement of the peers, but also the efforts they made and the strategies they have adopted in CAL learning. It helps low achieving learners to reduce their anxiety and high achieving learners to gain acknowledgements of both their aptitudes and efforts. This finding is supported by the previous research which mentioned that it could be beneficial for learners to spend some time together studying and practising the language (Dickinson, 2013; Hamada, 2011) or engaging in entertaining activities which associate with the target language (Ushioda, 1998; Guimei, 2015), instead of carrying out specific discussions regarding the issues of demotivation. It is also important for demotivated learners to actively seek support from their teachers. Teachers could help provide guidance in dealing with demotivating incidents from a different perspective (Carpenter et al., 2009), and they could help communicate with the course management regarding institutional demotivating influences (Cho, 2014b; Cho & Chung, 2016).

6.3.2 Findings for CAL teachers

Teachers could help reduce learners’ demotivation through changing their own mentalities as well as supporting the learners both in and out of the classroom.

From teachers’ internal perspective, the demotivating influences of teachers’ inappropriate behaviours were extensively discussed among the previous demotivation investigations (Christophil & Gorham, 1995; Falout and Maruyama, 2004; Kim, 2016; Oxford, 1998), while the inappropriate mentalities of teachers were less mentioned. Teachers’ attention was conventionally given to learners’ negative attitude and the difficulty in learning the language (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015a; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007; Yu, 2013), while there were more salient demotivating forces as identified by the present research (see Section 6.2.1). Therefore, it is crucial for the teachers to be aware of the complexity of learners’ demotivation in learning the target language.
Teachers also need to overcome some sociocultural barriers to teacher properly in a different educational context (Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007; Zhang & Wang, 2018). From a cultural perspective, the educational ideology regarding teachers’ authority in Confucianism is not entirely appropriate in an Irish context (Hu, 2002: 98). It is important to realise that teachers’ authority should be maintained through resolving questions and challenges from the learners professionally, and respects could be gained from receiving constructive feedback and reflect them in the teaching. From a social perspective, teachers should be particularly aware of the issue of empathy as influenced by a primary monolingual ideology in China (Zhang, 2016: 471). Theoretically, local educational pedagogy should be consulted in providing effective encouragements and constructive feedback, which are often required on a personal level. Empirically, active communications are necessary for understanding the needs and challenges of learners with various backgrounds and capacities in learning the language.

In a CAL classroom, the primary focus should be improving learners’ communicative competence instead of delivering linguistic knowledge. Teachers should be aware of the influence of the contemporary Chinese educational system and avoid the tendency of arranging the classroom to be exam-centred (Tan, 2017: 212) or teacher-centred (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 20). Teachers should also manage their interferences in communicative tasks to ensure learners’ engagement and learning autonomy (Assor et al., 2005; Jang et al., 2010; Reeve et al., 2004). In an overseas context where comparatively learners have fewer opportunities to practise the target language out of the designated class hours, such opportunities and guidance should be provided sufficiently during the class. Teachers are also responsible for making learners understand the characteristics and differences in CAL learning in comparison with other MFL in the early stage of learning, so to reduce the negative transferences and help learners establish effective and tailored learning strategies.

Out of class, clear instruction and marking criteria should be provided for any tasks, and feedback should follow upon the completion of the tasks. This is to reduce the demotivation caused by dissatisfying marks (Ghanizadeh and Jahedizadeh, 2015a; Kikuchi, 2009; Kim and Kim, 2015a), but also more importantly learners’ ignorance of their weaknesses and directions for further improvement. Providing learners with a role model in learning the language is also effective in reducing their demotivation, while
there are certain criteria need to be fulfilled. In general, the person should be able to demonstrate both the achievement and effort in CAL learning, while more importantly the possibility of their experiences to be synergised by others (e.g., similar background and efficacy in learning). If possible, teachers should also help learners establish bilingual partnerships with the native speakers in life or through social media, so to increase their opportunities to practise and be exposed in the target language environment. Besides, previous investigations have mentioned that learners are more comfortable of making mistakes when engaging in such kind of activities (Falout, 2012; Kim, 2012), and the peer feedback they gain could be easier and more effectively adopted (Yang et al., 2006; 192-193).

6.3.3 Findings for CAL course management

Some of the demotivating influences could be reduced through effective design and supervision of the language courses. Besides, the course management should also concern the well-being of the language teachers and avoid the negative impact of their demotivation on the learners.

Regarding the course design, the learning outcome and workload should be arranged with a good coherence throughout the entire learning programme. This is crucial in ensuring the courses to be equally challenging and rewarding in different learning stages, so to maintain learners’ positive ideal L2 self as well as ought-to L2 self (Yashima, 2009; Trang and Baldauf Jr., 2007). Attention should also be given to some particular significant demotivating forces in different learning stages. In the early stage of learning, a good balance should be maintained in terms of the course requirements on the accuracy of language usage and the productivity of communicative tasks. This is to minimise the negative influence of learners’ reduced self-confidence and to ensure sufficient opportunities to gain the sense of achievement (Carpenter et al., 2009; Falout, 2012; Ushioda, 1998). In the middle stage of learning, the focus should be on the workload of learners. This requires a good organisation of language and non-language courses as well as compulsory and elective courses, and sufficient communication among instructors of different courses. In the late stage of learning, the learning content should avoid repetition both within and across different courses, and more practical elements should be
embedded to help learners transit from the role of language learners in the educational domain to language users in the occupational domain (Council of Europe, 2017: 14-15).

Regarding the course supervision, there should be dedicated personnel who are responsible in providing support for learners in terms of their well-being (Falout et al., 2013: 344) and help maintain communication between the learners and the teachers (Babadi & Rafiee, 2016; Ghanizadeh & Erfanian, 2017). This kind of support is particularly necessary when learners are more vulnerable to the issues of demotivation, such as the early-intermediate level of learning and the learning abroad period. Information regarding the course and the learning should be clear and made available upon request, while promotion and career talks should be arranged regularly. The benefits of learning the language should be reminded to help learners maintain or revitalise their motivation (Carpenter et al. 2009; Kim, 2011b; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007). However, it should not be exaggerated or misleading to prevent learners’ demotivation caused by unrealistic expectations (Falout, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2015a; Zhang & Wang, 2016).

It is also important to maintain teachers’ motivation in teaching, so to prevent their demotivation in affecting the learners. The previous research mentioned that language teacher could be demotivated due to excessive workload and insufficient financial support (Kim & Kim, 2015b; Kiziltepe, 2008) as well as lack of opportunities for continuous professional development (Shan, 2015a; Wang & Yue, 2011). In addition, results of the present research suggested that inappropriate criteria of teacher evaluation and insufficient communication between teachers and learners should also be addressed to reduce and present teachers’ demotivation.

6.3.4 Findings for demotivation researchers

In comparison with the previous demotivation research, findings of the present research provided some more insights regarding the nature and feature of L2 learning demotivation. This refers to the inclusive range of the demotivation concept, the importance of investigating demotivation in context and the relationship between motivation and demotivation research.
To begin with, Dörnyei’s (1998, 2001) definition of demotivation focused on external forces in demotivating the learners, which influenced the understanding of many later investigations regarding the nature of demotivation (Ghadirzadeh et al., 2012; Liu, 2009; Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007). The findings of the present research acknowledged the impacts of external forces, while the existence and effectiveness of internal forces in causing learners’ demotivation were also identified. These findings supported the demotivation investigations which advocated to broaden the range of the demotivation concept and terminology (Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Kim, 2011a; Kikuchi, 2015; Yu, 2013), which was also reflected in the proposed new definition of demotivation (see Section 2.3.3). Moreover, the previous demotivation research concerned mainly issues of immediate demotivating incidents. In comparison, the influences of learners’ future perceptions attracted more research attention among the recent investigations (Falout, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2015a; Zhang & Wang, 2016), which was also identified to be one of the prominent and particularly persistent sources of L2 learners’ demotivation in the present research.

As mentioned by the previous demotivation research, it is important to look at the issues and solutions of demotivation in context (Trang and Baldauf Jr., 2007; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). Many of the differences in the conceptualisation of demotivation were influenced by the different learning and research contexts of the present and previous research. For example, investigations that carried out in an Asian context reported that learners’ negative attitude towards L2 learning was mainly due to the learning difficulty (Cho, 2014b; Rastegar et al., 2012; Yu, 2013) and learners’ concerns of language identity (Ho, 1998; Li, 2013b; Tim, 2015). Such issues appeared to be less prominent in the context of the present research, that the problem was related more to the insufficient practicability and relevance of the learning contents. These differences were first determined by the different learning contexts, that language courses in the previous research contained a certain level of compulsory nature (Dörnyei, 1998; Kikuchi, 2009; Kim, 2009b; Li, 2014b), while it was more voluntary for learners in the present research. It was also a result of different sociocultural influences, particularly the negative influences of English for native speakers in establishing multilingual ideologies (Lanvers, 2017; Ushioda, 2017) and for non-native speakers in learning other foreign languages (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Duff, 2017; Nunan, 2003).
The present research also helped shed light on the understanding of the relationship between motivation and demotivation research. For example, learners’ positive ideal L2 self was perceived to be beneficial in promoting L2 learning motivation (Kim & Kim, 2014; Magid & Chan, 2012; Yashima, 2009), while there were also empirical investigations reported that it was not a significant predictor for learners’ CAL learning motivation (Kim, 2011b; Kowk, 2018). The present research identified that learners’ ideal L2 self could be beneficial in dealing with demotivation, while it needs to be established by memories of strongly motivating incidents instead of gradual input of positive experiences. Such phenomenon was also mentioned by previous research of demotivation and remotivation (Falout et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2015a; Kim & Kim, 2017). These different research findings indicated that learners’ positive ideal L2 self may be more effective in reducing demotivation instead of increasing motivation. It also marked the importance of looking at learners’ behaviour and thinking of motivation and demotivation comprehensively.

6.4 Summary of Contributions

The present research adopted a mixed-methods approach to investigate the issue of demotivation in CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education. The quantitative survey identified problems and causes of demotivation which commonly exist among Irish CAL learners. The qualitative interviews further explored the features and learners’ perceptions of CAL learning demotivation.

From a theoretical perspective, the present research proposed an updated definition of demotivation based on the discussion of previous literature in the field and is supported by the findings of the present research. The new definition addresses the two most important issues in defining the demotivation terminology, which are the inclusion of internally-orientated forces into the range of concept and referring demotivation as a collective force instead of a dynamic process. It further emphasises the concept of the ‘negative forces’ in the new definition, that they are subjectively perceived by the learners instead of containing a negative influence in nature. It distinguishes the demotivation terminology from several similar terminologies in the field of motivation and demotivation. It also addresses the associated issues of the translation of the demotivation terminology in different languages, with a predominant focus on its translation in Chinese.
Another theoretical contribution of the present research is the identification and construction of the main demotivating factors in CAL learning in the context of Irish higher education. The findings of the present research share both similarities and differences in comparison with the previous demotivation research of EAL and CAL learning in different contexts. It marks the importance of discussing issues of demotivation in context, that it would be insufficient to draw insights of language learning demotivation with investigations focus predominantly on learning English. It also supports the notion to value demotivation as a distinct researchable concept, that some of the factors draw from motivational research, such as learners’ ideal L2 self, appears to be more effective in reducing or preventing demotivation in comparison with increasing motivation. Therefore, research in both directions of motivation and demotivation should be consulted for an objective understanding of language learners’ motivational behaviour and thinking.

From a practical perspective, the present research provides information on CAL learning demotivation and some potential directions for remedy solutions from a learner perspective. This includes insights for learners in changing misperceptions and performing remotivation strategies, for teachers in guiding learners and also dealing with their own demotivating behaviours and mentalities, and CAL course managers in evaluating the CAL course design from the standpoints of both learner’s language learning achievement and their wellbeing. It hopes to raise attention to the demotivating elements embedded in the wider sociocultural environment of the CAL learning, and suggests that study of learners’ demotivation should be included in education psychology training for the CAL teachers.

6.5 Limitations and Future Directions

The present research has a number of limitations. First is about the design of the quantitative survey, that items are comparatively redundant and the explained total variance by the identified demotivating factors are relatively low in comparison with the well-established questionnaires and scales in the field of L2 acquisition and motivational studies. One of the important reasons is due to the paucity of demotivation research in learning languages other than English, especially the extreme shortage of investigations
which concern CAL learning in an overseas environment. The present research could only draw limited insights from the previous investigations in the field. As a result, the questionnaire has an exploratory nature in a large degree, that many items were included with cautious of being relevant to the research topic. Some of them were eventually proved to be insignificant in the context of the present research. This issue is hoped to be gradually resolved by further investigations in the same or similar directions. The construction of main demotivating factors and the associated items could be more polished with results demonstrating better reliability and validity in future research.

The second limitation is about the research participants. The present research considers that demotivation is a common phenomenon among all CAL learners. The main body of the research participants is set to be CAL learners in Irish higher education at the time of the investigation, regardless of their current status of CAL learning motivation. This is helpful in investigating demotivation from a more comprehensive perspective. However, the present research did not manage to engage learners who drop out of the CAL courses. These learners should be able to offer valuable insights from the perspective of demotivated learners. It is hoped that future research could include this particular type of learners and to reach a more objective understanding of the research topic. Meanwhile, the first four participants recruited for interview were previous students of the researcher, that subjective perception towards these participants (e.g., motivational status, achievement in learning the language) may cause bias subconsciously. Though it is unlikely to be able to avoid bias entirely, the researcher needs to be more aware of the potential influence of bias. A personal approach is beneficial in identifying research participants, in this case, interview candidates. However, it could be more objective to step aside and focus more on the role of a researcher when conducting the interview.

The third limitation is about the appropriate research methodology for demotivation research. The qualitative part of the research adopted a semi-structured interview as the method for data collection. The concern about the appropriateness and effectiveness of this method has already been mentioned by previous demotivation investigations in the field (Trang & Baldauf Jr., 2007: 85). In the present research, there are occasions which indicate potential negative feelings of the participants, such as pausing for thoughts, keeping silent and commenting questions for being ‘tough’. As the interview often require introspections, interviewees also face risks of realising demotivating incidents
and sources they may not notice before. They may begin to suffer from these
demotivating elements afterwards. Though the present research has put effort into ethical
and methodological considerations to address this concern, and countermeasures are
predesigned and applied during the interviews, it is still difficult to judge whether the
interview would be the most appropriate method to investigate the issue of demotivation
and whether there are better alternatives. This requires the attention of researchers in the
field with different methodological expertise to evaluate and provide insights on the
efficient and appropriate methods in research demotivation.

In terms of future directions, limitations of the present research should first be addressed.
There are also important aspects of CAL learning demotivation that the present research
could not manage to include, which are expected to be uncovered by future investigations.
The first is about the time that the demotivating incidents and influences occur. The
present research is established from a ‘maintenance’ perspective. It is set to study learners’
demotivation during the term of the study. Its practical implications are mainly targeting
how to better sustain learners’ motivation and ensure their wellbeing. However, there
could be demotivation caused by influences and incidents prior to the commencement of
the learning, which may diminish learners’ motivation and cause them to abandon
learning the language even before putting into any effort. Future demotivation research
could consider this different affecting period of demotivation, which may provide
insights into language learning demotivation from a ‘promotion’ perspective.

The second future research direction is the perception of demotivation from other aspects
of language learning. The present research focused on investigating the language learning
demotivation from the learners’ perspective, who are the receivers of the demotivating
influence. It is particularly beneficial in understanding learners’ needs when dealing with
demotivation issues. However, the findings of the present research pinpointed that
learners’ demotivation is also tightly associated with other aspects of learners’ language
learning experiences, such as the teaching and management of the CAL courses. The
future research could consider investigating learners’ demotivation from these
perspectives and compare the different perceptions and solutions provided by the teachers
and the managers of the CAL learning programmes. It will help to understand the issue
of language learning demotivation more comprehensively and also help provide solutions
which are not only theoretically effective but also practically feasible.
The third potential research direction is to investigate language learners’ motivation, demotivation and remotivation jointly. The natural step forward after demotivation research is to investigate remotivation to discover appropriate remedy solutions. Findings of the present research indicate that some of the concepts in motivation demotivation research, such as learners’ different types of future L2 selves, play different roles in learners’ motivation and demotivation. It may also help to shed light on the question regarding how to appropriately apply the results of demotivation research in benefiting the learners. As inspired by the interview process, there appears to be a dilemma in cultivating their capacity in dealing with demotivation by raising their awareness of the issues and preventing them from the influence of demotivation by isolating them from the perception of some demotivating incidents and influences. It would be meaningful to carry out investigations that examine these concepts under the framework of both motivation and demotivation research in L2 studies, so discussions on remotivation could cover both sides of increasing motivation and suppressing or avoiding demotivation.
References


Appendix A Questionnaire of CAL Learning Demotivation

Thank you for your participation!

This is Chang Zhang from Trinity College Dublin, a current PhD student in Applied Linguistics. I am conducting this research on learner’s demotivation of learning Chinese. Therefore, I would greatly value your input by filling out this short online survey (which should take about 10-15 minutes to complete). If you have any questions at all about the nature of this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at zhangch@tcd.ie.

All data collected in this survey complies with data protection and anonymity regulations. No personal data is asked for or retained. Cookies, personal data stored by your Web browser, are not used in this survey. You must be over 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence. There are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study.

By completing the survey, you confirm that you have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in this study. In this survey, there are no wrong or right, bad or good answers. I am interested in learning about your personal experience and opinion.

**Part I Demotivation Questionnaire**

*If the question involves more than one teacher, textbook, course etc., please answer the question based on the overall impression of them at your current learning stage.

*If you can, please try to respond to all the statements.


1. The content of my Chinese textbook is irrelevant to my life.
2. The language parts of my Chinese textbook are boring.
3. The design and layout of my Chinese textbook are boring.
4. My Chinese textbook is not very helpful for self-study.
5. The class size of my Chinese course is not appropriate.
6. The time of my Chinese class is not appropriate.
7. The pace of my Chinese course is not appropriate.
8. The workload in my Chinese class is too heavy.
9. I find learning to handwrite in Chinese has a lack of practical applications.
10. My Chinese teacher doesn’t tend to give me any constructive feedback.
11. My Chinese teacher tends to be critical about the accuracy of my pronunciation.
12. My Chinese teacher tends to be critical about the accuracy of my Chinese characters.
13. My Chinese teacher doesn’t understand how difficult it is to study Chinese as a foreign language.
14. The Chinese classes I’m taking right now are not very well-prepared.
15. My current Chinese teacher is not very approachable.
17. When my Chinese teacher speaks English, it is not always comprehensible.
18. My Chinese teacher’s explanations and instructions are not always clear.
19. My Chinese teacher doesn’t seem to be a very experienced teacher.
20. I haven’t learned much in this class about different methods of learning Chinese.
21. I don’t like the atmosphere of my current Chinese course.
22. I don’t get much individual feedback on my progress in Chinese in this class.
23. I have limited opportunities to practise Chinese during class time.
24. I have limited opportunities to practise my Chinese outside of class.
25. This Chinese course consist largely of one-way teaching (teacher-fronted classroom).
26. I only work hard at my Chinese course because the marks count towards my degree.
27. I keep attending this Chinese course as I don’t want to fail the exam.
28. I keep coming to Chinese class only because I enjoy the friendships I have with the other students here.
29. I choose to keep learning Chinese as my family expect me to do so.
30. I keep learning Chinese just because I don’t want to look like a failure.
31. I will not continue with learning Chinese after I graduate.
32. I think Chinese is not essential for me to get a job.
33. I think Chinese is not essential for me to pursue further education.
34. I can’t imagine Chinese being a valuable and desirable skill of mine in the future.
35. I can’t imagine myself living in China and using Chinese to communicate with the locals.
36. It is not necessary to achieve a high level of Chinese as I could use modern technology to communicate.
37. Learning Chinese is more difficult than learning another foreign language.
38. Learning Chinese is less efficient than learning another foreign language.
39. It is not necessary to be good at Chinese to communicate with Chinese people.
40. It is not necessary to be good at Chinese for travelling in China.
41. It is not necessary to be good at Chinese to find a job and live in China.
42. Learning Chinese couldn’t offer more benefit than learning another European language.
43. The majority of jobs I would take will not require Chinese as the only working language.
44. I feel less stressed when learning pinyin in comparison with learning characters.
45. I wish I could only need to learn pinyin in order to learn Chinese well.
46. I would rather learn Chinese characters from the very beginning instead of postponing it.
47. I find Chinese more difficult than I imagined.
48. I don’t enjoy learning Chinese.
49. I feel overwhelmed by the workload of studying Chinese.
50. I am not comfortable speaking Chinese in front of people.
51. I would not choose to learn Chinese if I knew it was this difficult.
52. I don’t feel happy or proud when telling people that I study Chinese.
53. I would prefer to spend more time on other subjects than Chinese.
54. I am not interested in Chinese culture.
55. I do not feel attracted to Chinese culture the more I learn.
56. The Chinese culture I have learnt has a lack of practical application.
57. I don’t select Chinese books, music, movies and TV shows for my own leisure time.
58. I wouldn’t choose Chinese culture and society-related modules if they were not compulsory.
59. Chinese people treat foreigners in a weird way.
60. I do not feel attracted to China the more I learn.
61. I have no desire to know about China and Chinese people.
62. I don’t like some of the behaviours of Chinese people.
63. I find it difficult to make friends or work with Chinese people.
64. I would prefer not to work or live in China after my graduation.
65. I am not satisfied with my academic performance in Chinese.
66. I feel that other students speak Chinese better than I do.
67. I feel less confident learning Chinese now compared to my early stages of learning.
68. I don’t think I have the ability to excel in Chinese.
69. I don’t think I have mastered the right methods of studying Chinese.
70. It is difficult to improve my academic performance in Chinese.
71. I feel that I deserve better grades for my efforts in learning Chinese.
72. I don’t think I will have enough language proficiency to study Chinese by myself after my graduation.

73. I don’t think I could take on a job that requires Chinese as the working language after my graduation.

**Part II General Information**

1. Are you an undergraduate or postgraduate student?
   - Undergraduate
   - Postgraduate

2. What is your age?
   - 16-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55 or over

3. How long have you been studying Chinese?
   - Less than 1 year
   - 1-2 years
   - 2-3 years
   - More than 3 years

4. What is your current Chinese language proficiency?
   - Beginner (HSK1 / CEFR A1)
   - Post Beginner (HSK2 / CEFR A2)
   - Intermediate (HSK3 / CEFR B1)
   - Upper Intermediate (HSK4 / CEFR B2)
   - Advanced or above (HSK5 or above / CEFR C1 or above)
   - Native Speaker

5. What is your Chinese language proficiency prior to your current learning stage?
   - None or lower than HSK1/CEFR A1
   - Beginner (HSK1 / CEFR A1)
• Post Beginner (HSK2 / CEFR A2)
• Intermediate (HSK3 / CEFR B1)
• Upper Intermediate (HSK4 / CEFR B2)
• Advanced or above (HSK5 or above / CEFR C1 or above)
• Native Speaker

6. What part does your Chinese course play in your current studies?
   • It’s my major
   • It’s my minor
   • It’s an elective
   • Other (please specify)

7. Where will you spend most your time learning Chinese in this degree course?
   • Ireland
   • United Kingdom
   • China
   • Other (please specify)

8. How many Chinese classes do you have per week?
   • Fewer than 3 hours
   • 3-6 hours
   • 7-12 hours
   • More than 12 hours

9. Have you ever been to a Chinese-speaking country?
   • Yes
   • No

10. When will you stay in a Chinese-speaking country in this degree course?
    • No time
    • In my first year
    • In my 2nd year
    • In my 3rd year
    • In my final year
    • Full time in Chinese-speaking country
• Other (please specify)

11. How long will you stay in a Chinese-speaking country in this degree course?
• No time
• A few weeks
• One semester
• One year
• Two years or more
• Other (please specify)

12. How does your module approach the practice and assessment of writing in Chinese?
• Mostly by typing
• Mostly by handwriting
• Either, depends on student preference
• Other (please specify)

13. What statement best sums up your current attitude to learning Chinese?
• Strongly motivated
• Slightly motivated
• Neutral
• Slightly demotivated
• Strongly demotivated

14. Do you have any more comments?
Appendix B Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Prepared questions for inquiring demotivating incidents
1. Do you ever feel reduced confidence in learning Chinese?
2. Do you ever doubt the benefits of learning Chinese?
3. Do you ever doubt the necessity of being able to speak Chinese in an Irish and a global context?
4. Do you ever feel you only want to study Chinese as they count for your GPA?
5. Do you think that Chinese language teachers can demotivate their students?
6. Have you ever been dissatisfied with the way that your Chinese courses have been designed?

Some selected follow up questions from interview transcriptions
1. About influence of short-term exposure (from transcription 01, line 140): Would you compare your (motivational) status while you were there (in China) and in here (in Ireland)? Would you think that you were more motivated back there (in China)?
2. About ideal L2 self (transcription 03, line 240): So you are saying the importance or the benefit of learning the Chinese language is not only about being able to speak Chinese? It’s not only about the language? It’s not only about the proficiency, getting certificates?
3. About negative ought-to L2 self (transcription 04, line 90-110): But what about here? … in Dublin, you have less chance of using Chinese as a working language. Have you ever doubt the necessity in using Chinese? … What’s the nature of the chitchat? Is that English? … I presume some of the content (of the chitchat) would still relate to China or Chinese, right?
4. About reduced confidence: (transcription 06, line 175-190): Which period of study are we talking about? When did you feel that, I mean the dissatisfaction towards the achievement? … You didn’t mention the attitude (of the peers). Normally that’s (the achievement) a result of hard work. It’s not like someone who is actually naturally good at this (learning Chinese).
5. About peer pressure (transcription 09, line 365-385): So when it (learning Chinese) was not a problem for you, would you be a demotivating influence for others? … Yes, nobody likes a show-off. But would it bother you if the teacher always set you as an example? … That’s what I want to ask. Would you perform rather conservatively when you DO notice that others are not as good as you in a group? … Could you give me an example of this? Like how far will you go (to perform conservatively)?
## Appendix C Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis

### 1. Factor loading

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
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<td><strong>Factor 1: Reduced Self-Confidence (Cronbach’s Alpha = .838)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>It is difficult to improve my academic performance in Chinese.</td>
<td>.743</td>
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<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>I don’t think I have the ability to excel in Chinese.</td>
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<td>69</td>
<td>I don’t think I have mastered the right methods of studying Chinese.</td>
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<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>I am not satisfied with my academic performance in Chinese.</td>
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<td>I feel less confident learning Chinese now compared to my early stages of learning.</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>I feel that other students speak Chinese better than I do.</td>
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<td>72</td>
<td>I don’t think I will have enough language proficiency to study Chinese by myself after my graduation.</td>
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<td>I don’t think I could take on a job that requires Chinese as the working language after my graduation.</td>
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<td>I haven’t learned much in this class about different methods of learning Chinese.</td>
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<td>I have limited opportunities to practise Chinese during class time.</td>
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<td>My Chinese teacher’s explanations and instructions are not always clear.</td>
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<td>The pace of my Chinese course is not appropriate.</td>
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<td>This Chinese course consist largely of one-way teaching (teacher-fronted classroom)</td>
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<td>My Chinese teacher doesn’t understand how difficult it is to study Chinese as a foreign language.</td>
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<td>My Chinese teacher tends to be critical about the accuracy of my Chinese characters.</td>
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<td>The Chinese culture I have learnt has a lack of practical application.</td>
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<td>I wouldn’t choose Chinese culture and society-related modules if they were not compulsory.</td>
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<td>Chinese is not essential for me to pursue further education.</td>
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<td>I will not continue with learning Chinese after I graduate.</td>
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<td>I can’t imagine myself living in China and using Chinese to communicate with the locals.</td>
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<td>It is not necessary to be good at Chinese to communicate with Chinese people.</td>
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<td>I only work hard at my Chinese course because the marks count towards my degree.</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>I feel less stressed when learning pinyin in comparison with learning characters.</td>
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2. Frequency of items by percentage

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Appendix D Participant Information Leaflet

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

Participant Information Leaflet

Demotivation of Learning Chinese Among Overseas Learners,
Chang Zhang, PhD Student in Applied Linguistics at Trinity College Dublin

You are invited to participate in this research project which is being carried out by Chang Zhang from Trinity College Dublin. Your participation is voluntary. Even if you agree to participate now, you can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.

The study aims to investigate the causes and characteristics of demotivation in learning Chinese in an Irish context. If you agree to participate, this will involve you taking one or more interviews for 45-60 minutes each, regarding the experience of learning Chinese. The audio of the interviews will be recorded.

There might be potential discomfort aroused by recalling unpleasant memory experienced currently or in the past regarding learning Chinese. The researcher will direct to another topic to continue the interview or cease the interview, based on his evaluation and your feedback during the interview process. The interview will not continue unless you agree to do so.

The researcher will not make any comments during the interview. If it is desired, the researcher could offer some advices for learning of Chinese based on the results of the interview upon the completion of the interview.

This research may benefit schools and universities on their curriculum settings regarding Chinese studies, teachers on their motivational management of their students, and students who are suffering negative influence from the identified demotivating factors.

Any information or data which is obtained from me during this research which can be identified will be treated confidentially. This will be achieved by avoiding any personal information during the interview and use codes to name the interview recording files. Portions of the recording may be played during conference presentations, or written transcriptions may be made for teaching and research purposes. Data of this research project may be published in the future. The original recording and all copies will be available only to the present researcher.

Materials that are sensitive will be kept in a secure location in the School which will be locked when the researchers are not present. If copies are made available to researchers elsewhere, similar conditions regarding the storage and use of recordings will apply.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Mr Chang Zhang at zhangch@tcd.ie or the supervisor Professor Lorna Carson at carsonle@tcd.ie.
Appendix F Transcripts of Audio Interviews

Transcribed using a simplified version of the Jefferson (1992) conversation analysis conventions.

KEY:

(.) short untimed pause

( ) inaudible or unclear speech

(information) guess at unclear speech

((gestures)) descriptions for movements

please louder speech

PLEASE much louder speech

[and then overlapping speech

[it was

(an anonymous …) altered information in consideration of privacy and anonymity
Transcript of Audio Interview 01 (David, T1)

Present: David
Location: Coffee shop near the college
Date: 19th April 2018
Interviewer: CHANG Zhang
Duration: c. 75 minutes

CHANG: What made you feel like you were the most demotivated in the second year of study? And in the first year it was more like a honeymoon? What do you think?

DAVID: You mean after the whole year in (an anonymous institution) the first year?

CHANG: No no no, you mentioned the first year in Netherlands.

DAVID: Oh oh (you mean) when I came back from China, I didn’t want to continue. uh (.) To be honest none of us like the teacher. None of us did and he was just a weird guy and uh (.) we uh (.) I felt I had much more to gain about doing courses on China and keep focusing on my politics (modules) and that (.) the best way for me to learn Chinese now on would be to go to China. And so after I experienced China when I know about being immersed I thought that would be difficult. But the one student that did do it, she said her Chinese was really improved after and she just did her class one-on-one with the teacher, cause no one else was taking the Chinese classes back in the Netherlands. And uh (.) but then again she can continue on with it, that she got a job in London.

CHANG: Then what about you? First, do you have an expectation or a driven force for you to learn the language, (like) to be able to visit China?

DAVID: Yeah.

CHANG: Then when you had such kind of immersive experiences, you find that maybe, if you want to live in here, it's much more (work and study) [than expected. A lot more…

DAVID: [yeah yeah, tell you exactly and also being in China and knowing you can communicate (with Chinese people) it was VERY motivating every day. Where when you're in Europe, or back in Ireland, you feel like you're learning, I felt I was learning for no reasons. Because when you say one word or say something in China, you get (.) or someone responses or… or they open their eyes and they think you can speak (Mandarin Chinese). That makes it worth (learning Chinese). Where when you're in here you have no one to do that with you and you know uh (.) you don't feel the reward of the point of learning Chinese if you do it on your own. And so, it makes it more difficult.

CHANG: When did you go to China? It is the second year or the first year?

DAVID: Uh (.) the second year. Yeah, the first semester of the second year. Which was actually really early because most people go [uh (.)

CHANG: I don’t think you have mastered the [survival Chinese yet.

DAVID: [No. no.

CHANG: But still you feel a lot of achievement, that you were there, like you learn (.) [like automatically.

DAVID: [Yeah, yeah. Like I speak to the taxi driver or at the bus stop, to the bus driver, at the canteen. It is just the little things. It was more (.) yeah the fact that I was surviving and I'm just being exposed, that being in the exposure is just so important. [And so

CHANG: [You don’t think that is frightened. That like the achievement of both using the language and also be able to survive [in that environment

DAVID: [Yeah, so it is everything, just everything that makes it so good. Oh my god. I was 21 or something at the time, that I became so proud of myself that I went to China and did that.

CHANG: ((laughter)) May I ask that (whether) you feel much less (of the sense of achievement) the last time you went there?

DAVID: Yeah. So now going back to China last year (.) and (.) it's like OK they were lots of foreigners there. There were lots of people doing the same thing. There were lots of people who could speak Chinese. No special David. ((laughter)) And so (.) then to get the fulfillment of speaking Chinese my level needs to be higher. I want to only get that satisfaction with a higher level of Chinese, through making a conversation uh (.) or explaining a point of view. That's really important. If you can explain your opinion in another language, like you kind of, you can gain respect. It's about being recognised while speaking another language. Cause sometimes when you're speaking to people in Chinese and you're saying a few words, but you can just see people doing ‘oh yeah, very good, very good’ and kind of just [uh (.)
DAVID: [Like they didn’t really mean it. That they are just being nice.

CHANG: [Yeah, and you are just like OH… (disappointed or angry) and you hate yourself.

DAVID: ([laughter]) But if you're saying something are they all like ‘OH, OH REALLY’, like you see some spontaneous response. Then you know you are like YES ((excitement)).

CHANG: Do you get those fake comments from your teachers. May I ask the teacher you have mentioned, is it native Chinese or [it is a.

DAVID: [Oh he was Dutch. And he had done () there is a famous Chinese studies bachelor at (an anonymous institution), where they study traditional and simplified (Chinese characters) and they go to China for a year. Uh () So when I was in Xiamen, (the Chinese teacher) was a woman, who was very young and didn’t have much of the experience in teaching. And I went to Taiwan last year, and she (the Chinese teacher) was about 50 or 60 years old. She has like 25 or 30 years teaching Chinese and she had a PhD in grammar or something. She is brilliant. I should, next time I will bring my ‘Taiwanese books. I have to collect them. They are great. She would let us talk ABSOLUTELY RUBBISH CHINESE, with AWFUL tones. But we felt great and she would make little corrections along the way. And in Taiwan it was great. Because in the class there was about 7 or 9 of us. And we had Japanese and Korean people in the class who couldn’t speak English. So we would sit there awkwardly and then we will only start, we can only speak in Chinese. And you REALLY want to talk to them because of the Americans besides you there whatever. They can talk in English, but these people are left out of the conversation. And you don’t want to be rude. And it's not good for the class. So you REALLY try making an effort (to communicate with them in Chinese). And they do too. So when the teachers are not in the classroom, no one is judging you shit Chinese, so you don't care. And you might use words that you learned just yesterday because they are fresh in your head and you have tīngxie (the word ‘dictation’ in Chinese) in 10 minutes. And that’s actually just the most important part of the class, just usually the five or 10 minutes you come early to talk rubbish Chinese with your classmates. Because that’s for confidence. I find that for me, confidence is SUCH an important part of Chinese. And if my confidence is low, I will not be able to put through a lot of Chinese, even though I've been studying Chinese every day. But if I haven’t spoken in Chinese for two weeks, for some reasons my confidence is high. I will speak rubbish Chinese for about 5 or 10 minutes. But I will start speaking a little better, because my confidence is there. I feel like it's a REALLY big confidence thing. And with our classmates from the class I think it's the same, especially the two younger guys in our class. I think that they have a lot in there, but because of shyness and they are a little bit of perfectionist, that they don't produce that much. While I used to be like, but now I don't care about that. I think my philosophy is ‘if I'm not making mistakes, then I am not learning’. But you can see them, they think that ‘if I don't speak perfectly, there's no point in speaking Chinese’. And [that's

CHANG: [OK, so you think that is not helpful.

DAVID: [No. Because for me, I was like that in Xiamen and the first time I was in Taiwan. It was like a strict jacket, you know like the jacket they put on people who are in crazy places. It was so … () you self-censor yourself. And it's SO BAD and SO NEGATIVE. It is SO important to speak rubbish and be corrected in a way that encouraging rather than ‘that's wrong’. So there are certain Chinese friends I don’t speak Chinese with because of how they correct me. I only speak English with them. But other Chines friends they are a lot more () you need the compassionate, that somebody with the empathy to speak Chinese with. Because they will help you. They will push you in the back, [rather than…

CHANG: [So I think you mentioned, that the point is whether they correct you or not, but the way they correct you, or at least you feel the empathy [is there.

DAVID: [Yeah, like how (to correct).

CHANG: I think you must have gone through these stages of gaining the self-confidence. That at the beginning you are a bit lack of the self-confidence, like you mentioned in the beginning, especially like you think there is a fellow student who () might be a little bit better in Chinese than you. So you have been through the process. How did you manage to gain such confidence? Cause I know that you are not having that in the first place.

DAVID: Yeah, yeah, uh () I say [uh ()

CHANG: [You must have the experience of being aware, like, there is someone who is better than me. Then gradually gain confidence. Then start to realise that you are getting better [than…

DAVID: Yeah, yeah. That there was an American guy in my class. And he () had a very laid-back attitude, and he spoke very () quite naturally. But his tones are awful. So I could notice that his tones were awful. But that he could speak more fluently than me. So I said that if he is
willing to try that and not feel ashamed or embarrassed, then why can't I? So I started speaking a little, uh (.) start copying things he did. So he would always, if he was trying to explain something, he would sometimes say, uh (.) or ‘wo bu zhidao zenme shuo’ (Chinese for ‘I don’t know what to say’) and that’s a really like, a really nice way to start speaking. But to say that (.) to show that you're really trying. And uh (.) connector words are really important, like ‘ranhou’ (Chinese for ‘then’) or… or uh (.) ‘erqie’ (Chinese for ‘but also’) and things like that just help you start speaking. So that's really helped. And so watching him and I became more confident. And he left when I wasn’t in the class. And he was gone. And I could see even the Japanese students, their Chinese were much better than mine. But they could not speak fluently like me because they were not willing to make the mistakes. And it seems like a big barrier that we put upon ourselves. And then if we were not speaking for a while because were self-censoring, our conversation goes down then we see like uh ‘what’s the point’. And I feel like if there is no little reward every day speaking Chinese by speaking to someone or using a new word you've learned, it becomes very demotivating. So they will go spent hours after class at the library writing characters and doing stuff. But they are not using the new words. So like, okay, great, you know, it is right to write those characters. But uh (.), where was the fulfilment? Like you got a 10 out of 10 for your ‘tingxie’ (Chinese for ‘dictation’). But that lasts for five minutes comparing to the feeling that when you use a new word with one person, and then you meet another person you can use that word. And then another person. So those are the little, like uh (.) little batteries that need to be recharged.

CHANG: But speaking of this, when we are talking about things in here. I guess you may have a lot less sense of achievement since you have much less people like this to talk to [using Chinese.

DAVID: [Yeah, (.) yeah

CHANG: But still I think you are quite motivated?

DAVID: YEAH! YEAH!

140 CHANG: But would you, like comparing your status while you were still in there (in China) and like in here (in Ireland). Would you comparatively think that at that time you are more motivated? Or similarly?

DAVID: So there were different parts. So I was in Taiwan (.) for two months and it was summer. I was very motivated because the class was higher level than me. And uh (.) I was kind of…another thing that was really demotivating for me, (.) which I thought was (.) my teacher in Taiwan was great. But (.) uh (.) she didn't really like it. But I sort of, I was kind of stopping myself.

CHANG: What did you mean that she didn't like?

DAVID: Uh (.) She didn't like when I use one word in English (and fill in the rest with Chinese). She did (.) she didn't mind. But I find that other people also they stop saying sentences if there's one word in Chinese that they don't know. So she (the Chinese teacher) could speak English and Chinese quite very well.

CHANG: But she forbid you guys to do this.

DAVID: Uh (.) YEAH.

150 CHANG: Or at least she was not happy about this.

DAVID: Well, especially for the words that we had learned or that we should know. So I understood that. But (.) I would do it and that American guy in my class would do it. And of course the Koreans and the Japanese couldn’t do it. But uh (.).I find it very helpful if I can use Chinglish.

CHANG: And the genuine content.

DAVID: YEAH, yeah, EXACTLY. (.) So I like it. I know some people are a bit uncomfortable with it. But for me, it gives me a lot more freedom and a lot more flexibility. The problem is that
sometimes it can be over-reliant. And that’s a problem. Because I will be lazy about learning the word. So…

175  CHANG:  But I feel like you know, you set up like the feeling, the standard that like you are trying to say as much Chinese as you could. But If I couldn’t then I am gonna use English to replace it. Like sometimes I require you guys to do. Like if the standard is there. It is fine there. Like I don’t feel like you guys are being lazy there. It’s always like sort of 70% Chinese and 30% English.

180  DAVID:  Yeah, yeah. (.) And another thing actually that was demotivating (.) so it wasn’t for me. That when I was in Taiwan and the teacher spoke Chinese all the time. It was nice. She spoke slowly. But then I went to Wuhan and the people were in my classes. It was like elementary 2 (Chinese class level). And the teacher only spoke Chinese. And everyone for the first month was in shock. And they were really scared. And they really hated it. While ((laughter)) I was fine because I had (.) two months ahead earlier. And so that was really demotivating for that people at first where I didn't care at all. While they were like ‘Oh you are so good at all. You should be two classes ahead of us higher’. But I was just used to it. So that's also demotivating when you were coming into a classroom (for the first time).

185  CHANG:  ((laughter)) So that was demotivating for others, but not you, right?

190  DAVID:  Yeah. It wasn’t for me. But when I first came to Taiwan, it was like, a little bit difficult. But (.) then the MOMENT that you get used to a teacher speaking only Chinese, it feels GREAT. Because you're in the class and (.) maybe the first few weeks you don’t understand. But the teachers specifically repeated a lot. The repetition is a lot. So like in the morning they will do the roll, call out the names. And you will hear things because you hear the repetitiveness. OK. Nobody has told me a direct translation or anything like that. But you just know from the context of the classroom. And you were like, 'Ah! I can understand the class in CHINESE!'. And that’s like a GREAT feeling.

195  CHANG:  I have an interesting point add to that. I mean that you must feel great. That you are well aware that you might be better than everyone else there. So, instead of making everyone else feel bad, would you rather wish to be a little bit conservative in a way?

200  DAVID:  Yeah, well. In Wuhan, they didn’t like people ask questions anyway, or talking naturally to the teacher. I was doing that because in Taiwan I was doing that. You can also understand because the class is a lot bigger. In Wuhan, it was about 30 students or 40 students in a class. So they don’t have time for that. But also, it was the layout of the classroom. In China, they (the Chinese teachers) were on the stage. So it’s a lecture. Yeah. But we did have some pair work. So that was really helpful. So I would do that (asking questions and talk naturally to the teacher). But it's interesting you say that about, would you be more conservative because you don't want to be the top guy in the class. And that’s truly... You DON’T. Nobody likes a show-off. But after a while you got to a stage [that…

205  CHANG:  [People started to get used to it.]

210  DAVID:  [No, no, not get used to it. You got to a stage that, it’s the people who want to learn were there. And the people who didn’t want to learn didn’t turn up to the class. So after a while, you know the people that they are just sitting there on the phones. They will be annoyed if somebody is always trying to speak Chinese in the classroom. Right? But they stopped turning up to the class. The people who are in the class are people who want to learn. So you are speaking and they are there to listen to you speak. So they don't mind that. And then they will copy you. Uh (.) uh (.) So, yes, that’s true. But I always try to speak with the people who don’t speak English. Like there was a North Korean classmate. So we will use a lot of hands in talking. And he was from North Korea, which was really interesting. So that was really interesting to talk. Talking to people who could not speak English (.) is motivating, because they are from countries that I never heard about. And they are talking about their counties in Chinese. It is very interesting. And especially when I am being the only Irish person there, and nobody is never known your country. It could be really interesting. But there were demotivating aspects. This is because of the chapters. It's good that you can have repetition because you know like Monday you will have ‘tingxie’ (Chinese for dictation) and you do this, this and this. But the repetition could get boring. So after a while the repetition just gets boring. So the people they know that, oh today is the dictation, nobody goes to the class. ((laughter)) And what I like about my teacher is that, he never checked our scores of the ‘tingxie’. We could just keep it for ourselves, which I like cause it is not embarrassing in front of all the class if you got it all wrong. But the other class they will check with everyone. And like they would shame the people who are not good, so that people just don’t turn up to their classes. But their class was relatively better
Because they work really hard. They were good at it. And then they will all correct each other. It was like a competition where they all like ‘oh, you missed this dot here’. And that was really precise. And we were all sitting there like ‘COME ON! JUST LET’S MOVE ON!’. (Another point about the teacher is that) she never gave a chance for free practice beforehand. So she did some really structured and very controlled exercises, and expect people to speak freely. But it wasn’t possible because they were all being afraid of making mistakes. [Yeah, it was crazy because I didn’t give a shit anymore and I was able to do it. And she was so happy. She thought that I was really smart, but I wasn’t. I didn't do a lot of the work (that the teacher assigned) but I was just willing to try.]

DAVID: Yeah. Uh (. ) The most important thing to do before going to the Chinese class is to throw your ‘mianzi’ (Chinese word for ‘face/pride’) in the bin. But especially Japanese and the Koreans there were just so, so scared. You have to just say…

CHANG: So this is about the ‘mianzi’. Yeah, yeah. ‘Mianzi’ is not just a Chinese thing. But when you were in a Chinese classroom, your ‘mianzi’ becomes stronger.

CHANG: That’s because of the culture or the language?

DAVID: Both. Because when you speak Chinese you are thinking differently, and then also, yeah. So the lack of free speaking in China Wuhan for me was very demotivating. So (. ) I ( . ) felt that where I would have improved my writing in Wuhan a lot more than Taiwan, because I had to do more dictation and had more hours of the class. My spoken was not getting enough chance to exercise itself.

CHANG: OK. Interesting point. Never know that.

DAVID: But I do regret not going to Chinese conversation corner. That would have been helpful. That was a time for free practice and with younger students, who are about your same age, to make much more empathy and much more understand the pain of learning Chinese because they are learning English. And uh (. ) It was only once or twice a month and I regret that. I think the Chinese corner is really positive (for learning Chinese). I did it in Xiamen and that was really motivating. (long pause)

CHANG: And you mentioned that point was very interesting. In the process you actually compared yourself with many of the peers, and you didn’t see overall like ‘I am better than them in everything’ or the opposite. That you see the advantages and disadvantages of different people and in different ways.

DAVID: Yeah. And you learn from their better traits, to set up the goals and to compare your better traits with them to build up the confidence. I think that’s very smart.

DAVID: I think that’s an important point because I also knew that, when I was in Holland I think that was a change that I have gone through. In the beginning, I will think of it as a competition. And if there is someone who did better than you, then you feel demotivated. But when you realise that we all have different strengths and weaknesses, we all had different experiences of learning, all our paths are different. And that because you have the
reading, writing, speaking and listening, we are all going to progress at different speeds, at
different rates and in different ways. Uh (.) So uh (.)

295  CHANG:  Nobody should ever feel like a failure.
DAVID:  NO! uh (.) like we all know that the Japanese are good at characters. So they all fly ahead
of you. But you know that [uh (.)
CHANG:  [Their speaking was not [as good as ...

300  DAVID:  Yeah. So, like people who are from Western are a bit of more outgoing backgrounds, so
they can be better because they're a bit more willing to make mistakes. And then other
people from Southeast Asian countries, like Laos or (. ) Vietnam, they are good because of
the tones. So, they will catch up with the tones very quickly. So, we all coming from our
own linguistics backgrounds and our own advantages. If you start thinking it's a
competition, you are setting yourself up to fail. You have to start focusing on yourself. I
became more demotivated the more I compare myself to other students. And I noticed that
in our classroom there is an elderly classmate, he compared himself to me sometimes. And
I can see him becoming demotivated because of that. It is a mindset. It's about attitude and
( .) we have to, sounds a bit strange, but self-care and self-love and (. ) be nice to ourselves.

305  CHANG:  Would you be indicating that in comparison with comparing with others, it might be more
helpful to sometimes just comparing with yourself? [Like your past and present self, and
see for your progress and ...
DAVID:  [Yes, yes... But the question is how do we do that? So the one thing I do is to keep all the
exams (papers) or all the school books. And I look at them and I feel ‘Oh that was so easy’.
Another thing I do is that I will have (the recording files of) my oral final exam in Wuhan.
Then I came back to Ireland, and I say ‘Oh my God! My Chinese is not improving’. But I
listen to it, and I feel like ‘Oh my god, I'm actually improving’. So having voice recordings
of old exams and stuff can be motivating cause I can see my progress, even though I may
feel like I've not made any. I also have another theory, but this may be a little bit difficult to
explain. Because this is for me for learning, and ESPECIALLY for Chinese. That well-
being, like mental health or how you're doing, is very important when learning Chinese. If
I'm relaxed, I like my life is going well and I feel like my brain is a little bit (. ) not soggy,
or it has to be very open, that I can learn Chinese very well. I could remember the
characters very well. So while I was in Taiwan, sunny slip into the classroom every day.
That I like my classmates, I like my teacher. 30 characters to learn every evening, which
were not simplified but the traditional ones, which was very hard. But I was in a good
mood and I was loving life. I was just learning so much. So if the brain is in a good place,
you are so productive. But if you are like (. ) stressed out and if you are anxious, lots of
stress in your world that you are worried, and you are looking at one character, and you
could be writing one character for a thousand times over five hours. And the next day
someone says ‘write that character’ and it won’t go out. So it's (. ) I find it very important to
tell myself ‘If I'm not in the right space to learn Chinese, don't bother’. It's like banging my
head off the wall. It's a waste of time. Yeah.

310  CHANG:  OK. Look at this point I have in here. Do you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese?
That you mentioned a little bit that you are a little bit demotivated after you are getting
back from China. That (you feel) it's gonna be a lot more to sacrifice, to gain the benefit to
meet your expectation in return. Would that make you doubt the benefit of learning
Chinese? Or just the efficacy?
DAVID:  ((self-mumbling)) doubt the benefit of learning Chinese. Uh ( .) I wouldn't say I doubt the
benefit, because (. ) especially when you see other people who can speak Chinese well and
you are like ‘wow’. It opens a lot of doors and opportunities, maybe not for a career but
even if just for friends and for hearing things and meeting new people. Uh ( .) I would never
say I doubt the benefit, I would say that I would doubt my ability to get there. I would say
that ‘God! There is no way that I could ever be able to do this. And that is really a very
demotivating factor for very high achieving learners, that people who do really well. They
got really annoyed and frustrated because they cannot move up the steps of a language like
other languages do. This is what my friend from high school, who you know, he always say
something to me and I always remember. He says, ‘It doesn't matter if the person is good at
language or not. Learning Chinese is all about the amount of work you put in.’ He loved
learning Chinese so much that he put in a lot of works, and it pays off. Which for other
languages, some people have a natural ear for it, or whatever. But there will be down
points. There will be points where you are demotivated. There will be points when you're
motivated. I knew the most important thing is the patience. Where the high achieving
learners who expect to get fluid after one year, with intensive Chinese (training). They become demotivated and they will GIVE UP. So it is really interesting. I really like meeting people who are good at Chinese. Because they have interesting characters. Because they are willing to have failed and tried again. And they are different from people who are fluent in European, Latin-based languages. Cause they can be just geniuses, whatever, you know. [uh (]

CHANG: [Like Chinese is fair for everyone.

360 DAVID: [YEAH, IT IS. The language is a bit more socialist in that way. (laughter)) But still the Chinese language teaching skill is still not modern. So some people (learners) will struggle. So it's gonna be interesting to see all those geniuses, will they give up and say 'Okay, I just gonna be a global leader. Or I will go to work in a consultancy in the UN, but I will just get a translator. And I think you have someone who has been learning Chinese in Hefei or Yichang, like some random cities (in mainland China), also some high school students who were dropped at the university and learning Chinese. They will be much more likely to learn Chinese than those geniuses who have the scholarships.

CHANG: But back to your goal, could you still recall that when you established your goal of trying to learn the Chinese language? Or what reasons?

370 DAVID: Oh Yeah. That was in 2009 when I did my exchange in Hong Kong. We went to the Guangdong province. I would have been 15 years old or 16 years old. We were in a small village called 'Jiabang' outside the city of Meizhou. And we went to a primary school, and we did a class. I remember when I was outside during the lunchtime. And there were all these kids who play ping-pong or football or badminton and running around. For the first five minutes all of us looked like aliens. But after that they totally included us. We got to play. There was a global language barrier, but it was an incredible moment [in my life.

375 CHANG: [That was amazing, yeah.

DAVID: [I felt totally equal to everyone. For me it was the first time in my life that I never felt ‘I’. I felt this really strange group feeling and I don’t know what it was, I can't understand it. Maybe I romanticised it in my head a little bit. But it was a wonderful feeling that there was a really nice feeling as a group. There was no Irish. There was no Chinese. There were no children, no adult. There was just us. And I said ‘Wow, that was an incredible feeling.’ I wanted to lose the feeling of myself and feel this group feeling, because it was amazing and I never felt this in my life. And that always strikes me and it was a motivational factor to learn Chinese and going back to China.

380 CHANG: Would that image come back to you when you are feeling down?

DAVID: Well I am not the most positive thinker. I think that if I would think about it often, it would really help. I don’t. But now as we have said it, I probably will when I become demotivated. Problem was, when I went to Xiamen in 2013 I was in a city and it was five years later. China had changed so much, and also when I was in the village the atmosphere was just totally different. While in Xiamen I felt it was so money-driven and capitalised itself. And I said ‘Crap, this is not what I hoped for. Oh my god I must have romanticised it.’ But what I really realised was that I just need to go back to the countryside. To the village area again. There are still many wonderful things.

385 CHANG: OK. And the next thing is that nowadays when you go to China, for example, the major cities, lots of Chinese people they actually (could) speak English.

DAVID: Yeah.

CHANG: Especially when we are talking about in here (Ireland), most (Chinese) people will speak English. Do you ever doubt the necessity of learning Chinese? Cause likely all the Chinese people you will ever get in touch with, if you stay here, will be able to speak English.

390 DAVID: Sometimes I do, and also not just because Chinese people speaks English. You have all these voice technology devices for you. You could hear them talk in Chinese and they will speak English to you. But with regard to the technological devices, they will never be as good as a human being. Because they won't know the nuance, the body language, the tone of voice, the facial expressions. There is so much more to years of experience of learning a second language and being in an immersive culture is much more than an electronic device. With regard to Chinese people speaking English, the problem is, yeah, when I go to China they won’t speak Chinese to me. Because they are so much more motivated to learn English. And the Chinese people in China are really good at throwing their Mianzi in the bin and not being feeling embarrassed for making mistakes. And that’s amazing to me, that I'm jealous that they can do that so well.
DAVID: Would that in turn be motivating for you, when you realise they are doing pretty much the same thing as you do? Like seeing how hard [they tried to...]

CHANG: [Yeah. That’s true. But (.) I cannot overestimate... and I cannot express how important this barrier is. That even if you see someone else doing it. That I saw my American friends in Taiwan. I even saw Chinese people learning English that they don’t care about the mistakes. No matter what, even comparing other people like if they could do it, then I could do it. It’s not something that you could just compare. It is something that you have to realise yourself. And only after doing that one day, and speaking and making mistakes and realising it's not so bad. And the next day you do it a little more. It’s something that a person has to go through himself. And you cannot learn it [from other people.

CHANG: [From observation.

DAVID: [Yeah. And that’s a problem. Many people just think, ‘Oh I will just copy everyone, and I will be okay.’ Maybe that’s just a personal thing, like it was only for me. Some people are. Some people can just do it. For me, it was an experience, it was a process that I have to experience myself in order to realise that it was okay to make mistakes in speaking Chinese. But I don’t think in any of these Chinese books, any Chinese teachers I had, they don’t understand how big deal it is to learn the Chinese language. It is HUGE! And it was not talked about in the (Chinese) language learning, the self-censorship, and the embarrassment, and the shame and the pressure to speak perfectly.

CHANG: Okay. Can I come back to that there are many Chinese people who speak English? What keeps you believing the necessity of learning Chinese?

DAVID: Oh yeah, yeah. So, (.) first of all, many Chinese English speakers have never been to an English speaking country. So they're missing out on a lot of things. What I really put it down to is, uh, when I think about myself speaking English and the non-native English speaker, and especially when me as an English language teacher, is that in my head I have a corpus. When I hear Chinese people speaking English, who hasn't been to the West or whatever, I've realised to myself that actually I spent a lot of time in China. I've learnt a lot about the cultural and the history. And that when I speak Chinese, my Chinese will have more value than their English because I understand the culture more. It’s a problem. There are some people who study business in Chinese, they will just learn the language, they just learn it and kind of like being fluent in Chinese. But they will make so many mistakes culturally and they will use the words in the book that people don’t speak. And many Chinese people speaking English, many English speakers who learn Chinese, they don't realise the value in learning the culture and the history of another country through the learning of the language. And that's what gives me confidence in knowing that if I have a job or have a future where I will be a mediator or negotiator or an interpreter or a translator, that I will have that knowledge. I can maybe start a speech like you said, you said this when you mentioned that to use an old story as an ice breaker. And they will be like ‘Oh!’. They will make connections with you because you care about the culture. You don’t just speak their language.

CHANG: So in here you are talking about that the gain in language proficiency is just one aspect of the communication capability. You are emphasising that the communication capability is much more complicated, and you get to absorb the other aspects through the leaning of the language. But what about in this context? Cause in there (China) you are talking about paying respect to the culture. But in here the working language would probably still be English, and the cultural context would also be Irish. Then why bother to achieve such a high proficiency in Chinese? Would it be more about the culture and the society than the language studies?

DAVID: There are two points. This is a very important point, and a point that I am not quite proud of, which is the ‘white privilege’. The white Laowai (‘foreigner’ in Chinese) is always wheeled out as a Chinese speaker. It's not something that I agree with, but it is something that I am actually benefiting from.

CHANG: Are we talking about a domestic context in China? [Or ...]

DAVID: [Yeah… But even if like this I work for a company with Chinese workers who come to Ireland and who could speak both fluent Chinese and English. But if they have a full video chat with China or Chinese people and they put me up, and I go like ‘Nihao’! They will be ‘Oht ’ Because it is very important to know that for Chinese companies and uh… the Chinese government, the image and uh... and how it was presented is super important. So right now it only lasts for the last 10 or 15 years. That people would say ‘Wow! Ni de Zhongwen Henhao! (Your Chinese is excellent!’). But I can benefit from that. It's not
something that I agree with. It’s wrong because so many Chinese people speak English and you don’t say like ‘Oh! Your English is so good!’ It’s expected. Where for me it’s like ((clapping hands)). That’s something that makes it still relevant. The second one is that if I would work in a company here, and the Chinese people here, uh… that… (.) There is a trust issue. If somebody is speaking Chinese to the workers, that they are complaining, or they are not happy… (.) People would want to know what is going on. Or if Chinese people aren’t happy, there is self-censorship that they won’t directly discuss the issue that there is a problem. If I hear them whatever or they will talk to me, they will speak Chinese because they won’t say it in English. I could help resolve the issue, or it could be very important. Because bosses are trying to do something amazing by having Chinese and English speakers. But they have not a clue. They don’t know any of these Chinese cultures. They just care about the money. When they hire someone like me, and they say ‘Why? What is going wrong David? Why aren’t these people happy? Why are they coming late or why they are not coming to the company’s party? Or they are not doing this…’ Well, because it’s all about alcohol and no food. And the third point is, that me studying Chinese culture and history and stuff, sometimes I know things about China that many Chinese people, they don’t know themselves. So if they say ‘We want to go to the Chinese market’ or… Let’s say the politics, for example the one that Chinese ministries always make a statement about, is that they always talk about the family. Because we had a terrible period in 1860, that lots of Irish people died. And we love to talk about this because we are talking about the problems that we had because of the British and the… you know…the 100 years of humiliation. And they (Irish people who are associating with Chinese people) like to talk about this and compare with the Chinese history. But those things in China are really bad and they are quite self-inflated. DON’T MENTION THAT SHIT! So I would understand that…sometimes we Irish people love to be the victim. And sometimes we could solely think about ourselves, while in China we probably shouldn’t talk about that.

CHANG: Okay. Then other than that, I am wondering do you ever feel that, or a certain period that you have a relatively very low motivation of studying Chinese out of interest, and you just only work to fulfil your GPA?

DAVID: So for grades?

CHANG: Yeah. (laughter)

DAVID: Uh (.) I used to be REALLY focused on grades. But I had a lot of problems because everyone was so focused on getting their GPA up. That I realised that I was fighting so much for a certain GPA, but I wasn’t learning. And I realised that the whole point of education is to bloody learn! But the universities and teachers control students by pushing them towards and get grades. And once as a student, I realised that I don’t care about grades. I want to learn as much as possible. Once I’ve done that, my stress level goes down, my learning ability goes up. And sometimes my grades actually increase. Especially when learning a language, when there is a great focus (on GPA) and done that. It closes the brain. Remember when I say you need an open brain to do…

CHANG: [Yes, the well-being. Yeah.

DAVID: [Yeah. People will cram to study a short period for good grades. But if you ask them to do Chinese speech or whatever, they won’t do it. Where weaker students who don’t care about the grades, they watch Chinese movies cause they are interested in them or they are into Manhua (Chinese for ‘comics’) or TV series, they will be much better to cope with the Chinese speech than those people who got an A. So I realise that learning Chinese, grades I don’t care…I don’t care…unless it's for a scholarship, to keep getting money. Grades are the number one killer in learning. Grades are pointless.

CHANG: But also that comes down to another question. Would you think there is a gap between…Because you mentioned the purpose of education and getting the GPA. Like if a course is perfectly well-designed, theoretically there could be a good synergy and balance together.

DAVID: Yes, it should be. But it’s totally… So this is also about the exam design, uh… and everything like that.

CHANG: If there is, let’s say a gap between the course requirement and the actual language learning, or the GPA and the sense of achievement in actual learning, how could you tell the differences? Like how could you make sure that you are improving? You need some sort of benchmark, right? Like GPA is a kind of benchmark. When you see your GPA goes up, you know you are improving and you gain the sense of achievement. How would you know that you are actually learning without caring about the GPA and the grades?
DAVID: (a longer pause) Well I could say that, remember when we are talking about the motivation, that I look at my old exam papers and hear about my old voice recording? I think it's maybe...like an oral exam...like I would say maybe a mid-term and a final. But maybe you would listen to both and you would want to see improvement. (For the exam, maybe) you listen to a series of podcasts, there is one called 'Slow Chinese' where they talk about topics each week. And then you would come in and examine me and ask me about one or two podcasts and ask me to talk about them maybe a bit, and allow Chinglish. And you can compare if I am using less English words the second time, and you can also look at my grammar structures. Because sometimes if you use Chinglish, you could use English grammar structure with Chinese words. It's for beginners. But then later on you could see that 'Oh, he is using English words, but he is using in a Chinese grammar structure'. But that's the real questions. Because the one thing I remember as being an English teacher is that, the whole purpose of an exam is that, it should be reflecting real life. But how can we make them reflects real life? So we have to ask ourselves what is real life. Real life is having a chat with somebody or...or watching a movie and seeing a movie and see how much they understood. So things like that...like...showing video clips, [having a listening exam...]

CHANG: [So it all comes down to course design. Like you said, the core is very simple, that the course and exam should be like a reflection of a real world.

DAVID: Yeah, that would be something that I would be interested in doing...that if I could do a Chinese course with self-directed learning. But what I have to say for the last point is that, I know if I want to improve my Chinese, let's say I got a scholarship to go to China, it won't be the classroom where I will be learning. It will be talking to other students in the university. It will be getting involved in doing something that I have to speak Chinese, or getting a job where under pressure, like sweating, and I have to do it (by using Chinese).

CHANG: Do you think that some of these could be the responsibility of the teachers? That they could be included in the course?

DAVID: Well. What they could do is...uh...Okay, for example, the worst thing, the most demotivating thing is that after class or I go to the canteen...and I go...and I want to buy some fruits...and I go to the fruit seller. And then they say...they are asking something and they say 'Ting Bu Dong' ('Don't understand' in Chinese). And I was just like ‘OH!!!!’ ((expression of frustration)). And you repeat it, and they go ‘Ting Bu Dong’. And then you will have to look up the dictionary and you say very carefully. And then they go 'Oh. Ni Shuo Cuo Le' ('You say it wrong' in Chinese). And you are like ((expression of depression)). And it is just painful. And it is just something so small like that. So for example, it would be really nice if teachers could include these situational Chinese. Like (the teacher think) ‘Look, we had students in the last ten years. And these (words) are gonna be what they need when they go down to the canteen or go to buy fruits.’ The fruit seller...uh...maybe if you know a word for orange, but it is not orange. It's mandarin. You need to know that right word. And so if they gave situational things and then you could apply it. And then you come to the class the next day and you say 'Teacher! Thanks for giving me that, because now I can say 'mandarin' and I called them ‘Shifu’ (a nice way to address seller in Chinese) and they are really happy. And now I can build up a relationship by buying fruit every day from them.’ So I think (to include) situational (content in Chinese) is really helpful. But they could give that to you, and you could do it in your own time maybe?

CHANG: See I felt we are finding something here, because when we said that lost of the grades and GPA, they come from the (test of the) textbook. While the things that you need and the things that actually give you the sense of achievement are from (the communication in) these situational real-life scenarios. But normally they will be treated as the add-ons of the course. Like ‘Okay we will learn the words from the book today, and by the way the word ‘mandarin' in real life is this.’ But it is not included in the book. And that won’t count in the exam. ((laughter))

DAVID: YEAH! ((laughter, recognition)) NO, it doesn’t matter!

CHANG: So...Okay, I think it is a comprehensive thing. It is something to do with the teacher, with the course design, with the book and with the background (of the course) as well.

DAVID: Yeah. It needs to be reflecting real life. When I was doing English teaching over ( ), I got some observation before being a teacher, We got some stuff like Daft. We work with Daft.ie and vocabulary and researching in Daft. They (the students) find that really helpful because they didn’t know what a ‘twin-bedroom’ or whatever. Same if I go to China and I
have to open a bank account. The bank account is really a big block for everyone (foreigner) in China. It cannot be underestimated. And trying to open a bank account, learn certain words and vocabulary. And if you have for the studying of one week class and you went to the bank with mind having that, they are talking to you like ‘Ah!’ ((pointing on the desk to express that those officers in the bank could understand the expressions)). And you would be like ‘Ah! The class is worth it! I am not wasting my money or my time.’ Well, we don’t do that.

CHANG: But in turn you would be very demotivating if like I learn shopping in the class, but ((laughter)) when I go to the canteen and I use what I’ve learned, and it WON’T WORK!

DAVID: Yeah! But then you could go the next day and ask them what you said. And you could say ‘Well, I did this.’ (And trying to find what expressions and words that works.) So that would be good. So I like what you did in your class, like if you gave tasks and that’s your homework. And that could also be your exam. We did the role play and like you say ‘Okay David, you are in a shopping centre and you are going to buy clothes and stuff.’ And you gave me a list of what I need to buy. And you gave me a piece of paper with characters written on it. And you say you are looking for a present for your girlfriend. And that would be really good exams. Because that’s real life.

CHANG: Yes. But I was given the freedom to do so. I have control over my course content and the curriculum design and the assessment strategy. [But (in some cases teachers don’t have this liberty…)

DAVID: [So if the students passed the exam like this, that means that student could go to the shopping centre and buy the clothes. And that’s reflecting real life.

CHANG: And that links to the confidence as well.

DAVID: YES!

CHANG: But if you only care for the GPA then you might get a very good GPA but you will have no idea how well you will do in real life.

DAVID: Yeah. And another problem with this is that, especially in exams or oral testing, we all trying to be objective and we all trying to say like there is a marking scheme. That’s rubbish. We have to look at each student individually and it’s about their progress. And I got jealous sometimes if somebody was really shit in my Chinese class, and they improved a lot. But they are still not as good as me. But maybe they got an A grade and I got a B grade. I used to be very jealous of that. Because I said ‘Actually, I did better in other exams.’ But the teacher is being subjective. They thought their rate of progress is higher than mine, so that student DOES deserve an A and I deserve a B. Because I was better at Chinese, but I was lazy. Because I knew the rest are not as good. I think it (the Chinese classes and assessment) needs to be done like that. The teacher should say like ‘Look, you Chinese is better. But David, you didn’t make the progress as he did.’

CHANG: But see I also curious about your opinion here about the result. Like if the grades are all public and students are comparing their grades, it might violate the privacy. And the comparison might have negative impacts on people, but also may be positive ones. But if you keep everything in private, that nobody knows what is going on about the others, naturally you will generate that kind of feeling (of being misjudged).

DAVID: Yes, so it is true. I think students comparing with each other could be very demotivating.

CHANG: And anything else about the teachers that could be improved? Except for the one-way teaching? Actually, would you consider that problem being more serious for teachers in China or in here? Or it is more of an overall trait of native Chinese teachers?

DAVID: No, I wouldn’t say it is just a trait of Chinese teachers. Because… (long pause) Most teachers when they were teaching, instead of thinking about their teacher training classes, 90%, even myself when I was in a difficult situation, we think back about our own learning experiences in primary school or secondary schools. NOBODY admits that! That’s a BIG secret that no one thinks or talks about. And that’s how I did it, just because that is the way that was done to me. In our head we say it like ‘If they did it, then it is okay for me to do it.’ And that’s a real problem. It’s about what we call it as ‘regime change’. Because it was passed down generation by generation, and it is very hard to break that. And teachers in Ireland and teachers in China both have that problem. Well, I even have friends who became secondary school teachers here. They will go to university and do those new modern methods. And then they will just get the grades and they will go straight to ‘Look, that’s all rubbish.’ And they will [go back to teach…

CHANG: [So it’s not only about Chinese teachers. There’s a whole lot of subjects that are…
DAVID: [Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah. Because it will be like ‘It is my job. I need to have a salary. And I need to go back home and not being really tired every day and be stressed.’ So, so often people just go into this default…this like original mode, and… (.)

CHANG: So I think it is more about people’s commitment, rather than capability. Especially when we were mentioning that they have already been through the educational training and they know how to conduct a more scientific class. But they went back to do whatever they could pay less efforts.

DAVID: Yeah. So the problem is, that student-centred teaching is really difficult. And you need to plan your class well. I know one guy who did the teacher training very well. But that’s because he is like very much into the whole theory of ‘I’m just a manager, that student can learn from each other.’ It’s amazing. But it is so difficult to change the mindset.

CHANG: Spot on. I think the most difficult part is to change your mindset. It’s not about the new methods. The core of the new methods is that what you need to do is to copy the real world. It is absolutely not that difficult if you think about it. But it is just that ‘I was trained this way, but I learned that way.’ You get used to it. You don’t want to change.

DAVID: But it is difficult also. I was working in a language school. And you do it that way and the students loved it. But then you realise that you need to give an exam on Friday and you haven’t prepared them with any of the materials. And my bosses…I actually liked them (the new methods) because they are more natural ways of taking exams. Because the people who studied hard won’t do good in the exam. Because the management in school doesn’t like this. Because you are not fulfilling the criteria that they have. And they are like ‘Why everybody is doing so bad for your exams?’ I said they might do bad in the exams, but actually their English is much better than all the other classes. But they got really annoyed. But I didn’t care because I knew they need me, whatever. So I just do whatever the hell that I want to do. But the students who would be very traditionally educated…some of the smart students would do well in class and they (the traditionally educated students) got really pissed off about me. And they say like ‘HEY! Why am I not getting the ‘A’s? I am not getting all the vocabulary that I need to learn for the exam.’ And I say ‘Look, that doesn’t matter.’ So you had pressure from above that the school wanting you to fulfil it, then you have pressure from below that the students want it to be done in an old-fashioned way. So you are like ‘What’s the point?’

CHANG: Okay. Then what about the teacher you mentioned in here? You know, that you are not a fan of the first-year teacher? Is it more about the qualification (of the teacher)?

DAVID: He didn’t know (how to teach). The first is that the person is too busy doing his PhD. I called the management or the school that it doesn’t matter who it is. No matter what, it is not about that person. If you are doing a full-time PhD and you have to teach eight hours of language classes to two different levels, nobody can do that. That’s too much pressure. We saw him just coming out from his bed and his hair would be sticking don’t believe this. The student knew how to conduct a more scientific class. But they went back to do whatever they could pay less efforts.

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really intense, but he hasn’t been prepared for class. And we would be like ‘Oh my god, what is this class?’ We would be stressed because he was stressed. He would get stressed.

CHANG: It was a chain. (laughter) [It would be a chain of demotivation.

DAVID: [OH MY GOD! It would be a perfect class to look at how NOT to teach. It would be really good for your PhD if you were seeing that.

Anyway. (sigh) Would you do something to…sustain your motivation of learning when you were getting into this kind of situation? How are the other people going?

DAVID: I didn’t know what to do. My motivation was low. I am just talking to myself that ‘I am going to China next year! I am going to China next year!’ That helped. And also last year we had conversation classes. They were run by our linguistic professor. And he didn’t know how to conduct a conversation class with people who had such a low level of Chinese. And he got annoyed and we got really scared. The same thing happened when we were in China, that we were all too scared to speak, because we were corrected. They were terrible. I was with a Chinese tutor (of the conversation class), but I was too scared to go. I got really nervous and I was trying to pretend that I was sick. But I felt really guilty because these were not part of the programme. They were done voluntarily by the professor. But it was a nightmare. But this year there are students of our age, who have gone through learning English (as a foreign language). They are freer to talk to. They don’t even need to prepare for the conversation class. We kind of came up with topics ourselves.

DAVID: Yeah. So, to the native Chinese people, that was kind of helpful. Or I don’t know, maybe not. But it would have been…we didn’t know…have the basis of the Chinese language for us to understand the linguistic theory. This was Chinese linguistic theory, so these names of categories and stuff have Chinese names. So I didn’t understand what he meant by the words ‘semanteme’ that ‘semanteme’ reflects to one character. And he was talking in a linguistic way where…when I say ‘Oh you mean a character’, he would say ‘No, no, no, we don’t call it like that.’ But it was actually a character. He could break it down simply for us. But because he was coming from a linguistic perspective…So I was lost. If that was brought in after I been to China, after we learned the basics, I could have gained much more from that module.

CHANG: But that’s knowledge about the language. That is not necessarily a part of the language course.

DAVID: Yeah, so that course was taught in English with Chinese words and Chinese linguistic concept. But I didn’t understand enough about the Chinese language in order for me to be benefited from that.

CHANG: Okay. So I noticed that you guys mentioned several times in my class, like ‘Oh, now we understand a little bit about [THAT course!]

DAVID: [Yeah, yeah, like NOW. Only NOW. So there are two ways to fix that. One is to bring it towards the end, and the second is to only admit students who have HSK level 4. And then it would be beneficial.

CHANG: Regarding another point, would you think sometimes the teacher was too strict on the pronunciation? Or the precision of the character handwriting? Would you find that demotivating, because I found these are quite common?

DAVID: Yeah. I was humiliated last year in one the conversation classes because I could not pronounce ‘Chuqu’ (Chinese for ‘go out’). And it was repeated in front of me maybe between 20 to 50 times. And I have to keep doing it. And I have to say like ‘no, no, no…’ And the teacher would say like ‘Everyone else has been doing it. David, why can’t you do it?’ And I kept trying and I felt REALLY REALLY low confidence, low motivated. I felt terrible. And I realised that, at that moment that I thought about my own English language teaching methods, and I say ‘Okay, since I cannot repeat it while you were saying that to me, I think the problem is that teacher, is the mechanic. I don’t know what to do with my mouth. Can you explain it to me?’

CHANG: Yes, yes, where should I put my tongue [or…
DAVID: Yeah, my tongue or... But that teacher couldn't tell me that and he just said that 'It doesn't matter. Just repeat after me.' And even my Chinese classmates could tell me that. And I felt awful for many months until I looked up the phonetics online on YouTube and watched a video and practised on my own for a couple of hours. I realised that...uh...I needed to put my tongue further for 'Chu'. I needed to put my tongue behind the bottom of my teeth for 'Qu'. Nobody told me that. That was such a simple solution that caused me MONTH and MONTH and MONTH of demotivation.

CHANG: So it is not about the requirement or the standard, but the teacher didn’t explain like how to achieve that. You can’t just put down the requirement there and then let you go for yourself. So maybe you don’t really mind the strictness of the standard about the pronunciation or the handwriting as long as you were supplied with these...like how to achieve that, how to put my tongue and the aspiration methods...something to achieve that goal. And like how to remember to write each of the character, the strokes, instead of just putting the standard there and letting you all go by yourselves.

DAVID: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: That still comes down to the lack of...I think...it is a huge problem of the Chinese teaching here, that it is lack of the delivering of the methods.

DAVID: [Yes, the ‘how’. And you realise that because the research is still behind the English language teaching methods. But I think that is a huge opportunity for you in that because it is so far behind that ANYTHING is better than what it is for now.

CHANG: But see I am quite interested in that students don’t get dissatisfied with their teachers. Like you, you said you would understand because the research is behind, but not directly blame the teacher. At first, I was thinking maybe because of the Chinese, that obedience is part of the culture? And the second is, as you said, ‘Oh the subject is not that well-developed.’ So you turn to forgive it much easier in comparison with learning other languages. Suppose you have the experiences of learning French? And you had a similar teacher like this, you probably had already reported to the school. ((laughter))

DAVID: That happened. In the undergraduate I studied French and I went to a high level class because I had a high score for Irish Leaving Cert French. And this was a teacher who was just covering one semester because the normal teacher was pregnant. But in Ireland when we learn French, none of us are trying to put on a French accent because you get bullied for trying to be like proper in secondary school, which is very bad. So I could only speak good French but with a strong Irish accent. And the teacher used to laugh at me. And that was in my language learning history that something I will never forget. And lots of the students were dissatisfied, and we gave back a feedback form, and that teacher was fired. But...

CHANG: The same thing happened to the Chinese teacher and you tolerated it.

DAVID: Uh...well...yeah. Because also the French teacher was also...uh...the French culture and the Irish culture, the gap was smaller. So I could understand why the teacher is laughing at me. Where the Chinese teachers laughing, they could be laughing at something that totally different, like one pronunciation sounds like something, like a funny word. So you could end up laughing with them, and everyone starts to laugh. Because everyone recognises that there is a cultural gap, so you were just like ‘There is nothing that could be done.’

CHANG: So that is what I found interesting, that Chinese students, lots of them they actually attribute these fault to themselves due to this (awareness of the) differences in culture.

DAVID: No, it is both. It’s both. Now I think that is a problem. Intercultural communication is a two-way thing. Both parties need to work on it. But because a lot more Chinese people speak English that Irish people speak Chinese, all the problems, the embarrassment falls to the Chinese person because they were expected to know English culture where rather than English language speakers knowing Chinese culture. So that’s a huge problem. But that is something that... (a long pause about 10 seconds) will take a lot more time to... that’s a political thing that’s to do with China, with the western values. But there need to be more responsibilities on the Westerners to realise this gap. The Chinese person is trying to stand in your shoes and you are not trying hard enough to stand in their shoes.

CHANG: Okay.
Transcript of Audio Interview 02 (Peter, T2)

Present: Peter  
Location: Coffee shop on campus  
Date: 21st April 2018  
Interviewer: CHANG Zhang  
Duration: c. 48 minutes

CHANG: Okay, in my memory you were always one of the top students in my class. But I am curious that, have you ever felt, like a reduced self-confidence in learning Chinese?

PETER: Yeah, absolutely. Like last semester…I don’t know whether you still remember Derek? His Chinese was always not great, and he admits it. And I got the same grade as him, a B-. And that’s just…quite shocking because of the people in the class that they did not good at Chinese and they get B or B+. And that’s because they don’t say anything, like you know. I don’t know, if you ask questions, it feels like you are an idiot. But it’s just the way...(to learn).

CHANG: So what do you feel? Is it feels like when the people keep silent, they don’t expose like weakness?

PETER: Yes exactly. And that was what the teacher thinks. But I think that’s the dumbest thing that anybody could do. And it completely crushes your moral. Because you come in full of energy, only to be slapped in the face because you try, and other people don’t.

CHANG: That feels like you were using…uh…sort of the GPA or the performance of the class to judge your ability in Chinese. But you have a very good hunch that in fact, in reality, how different you are in comparison with the people that you mentioned, in regard to the Chinese, the proficiency, the ability of communication. So it actually is the poor score that demotivates you?

PETER: Yes, OF COURSE! And even that the methods of teaching, the method of teaching is awful. It’s like…I regret studying Chinese now. After coming back from China, I was so happy. I felt that I have learned so much. And now it’s like every day you could feel that your Chinese is getting worse and worse. It’s an awful system, awful system.

CHANG: Let me just come back to the first question. Like to me, there are two dimensions to the problem. The first one is that you got a poor score, and you don’t think you deserve this poor score. And the second is probably the feeling of unfairness. You felt that, first it is not fair for me to get such a poor score. And also it is not fair for the people who didn’t really good at Chinese or who work hard to get better scores.

PETER: Well, the poor score is actually the reflection of the teaching. It’s like the teaching is just not interesting. Everybody in the class is either on their phone or talking to each other. Nobody is, you know, focusing. So when I started to ask questions, the teacher is like ‘Oh, you are not paying attention.’ But nobody is paying attention while I am trying to pay attention. So it is all this…It’s a complex problem. But you need...it needs a solution fast.

CHANG: Well apparently there was a lack of communication, right? Because it feels like the teacher didn’t actually know what is going on, right?

PETER: No. But I think she just wants to get her job done and get out. She doesn’t really want to communicate. This was like while I was in China, you realise that the way that people think is quite different. Because for Chinese people, if they get to a position, like a high position, they started to demand respect. In Ireland, if you get to a high position, you have to show me why you are in that position, like to prove yourself, not demand respect from strangers.

CHANG: So you mean they don’t really welcome challenges.

PETER: No, they don’t. They hate challenges. They feel embarrassed to get challenges.

CHANG: And you think that may affect your scores?

PETER: Of course, yes. Because you should challenge everything, challenge everybody.

CHANG: You think that played a part in your poor score.

PETER: Absolutely. Like people in the class, no offence, but, can’t speak two words of Chinese, they just keep quiet and don’t say anything. And they get good grades. It’s shocking. It’s absolutely…I don’t understand at all.

CHANG: Okay. Speak of the teacher, then let’s first jump to the problem of the teacher. One of the problems may be the cultural difference. Like the one you mentioned, like hierarchy. And what else? You also mentioned something about the teaching method?

PETER: Yeah, the teaching method is almost...uh...almost...you know...ANCIENT? It’s just she...uh...In the first and second year the teaching method was a lot more...uh...the use of
modern technology. Create slides, have some homework, you know, trying to make the old way of learning more modern. Using PowerPoints, video, you know, diagrams… Now it is like reading from a book every day. But I could read it on my own. So…

CHANG: It’s not helpful.
PETER: No, not at all. So, it’s like the traditional way of learning. No, the ancient way of learning.

CHANG: Do you think this is more to do with the course design or the teacher?
PETER: The teacher.

CHANG: So it’s a personal thing. It is not the course was being designed this way.
PETER: It’s awful. It’s very lazy, very uncaring, very…just no energy at all.

CHANG: If you say about laziness, then it’s not all about the method. It’s something to do with the commitment.
PETER: Yeah. No commitment, exactly. She just doesn’t care. She just wants to get in and get out (of the classroom).

CHANG: Could you think of any reasons? Why?
PETER: Because…like…Chang, I don’t want to be offensive, but in Chinese culture, you mentioned uh…the hierarchy, the structure. Once a person gets to that position, that they are SAFE. And then they could do whatever they want. They can read from the book and go home.

CHANG: Ah okay. So you think it’s fairly that this teacher has already got what she needs, what she wants. And she feels safe, that she doesn’t want to put in any more effort.
PETER: Yes, exactly.

CHANG: Or maybe she spent too much on her way to this position [and …]
PETER: Yes, EXACTLY, EXACTLY. When I had this teacher in the first [year…

CHANG: Ah so you actually had her in the first year as well!
PETER: Yeah, and the second year as well. She will put in a lot more effort, and now it’s like zero effort. She is asking us to do homework questions, which is irrelevant and we don’t get our grades for six or seven weeks. So it’s just absolutely laziness…

CHANG: [So must feel like two different persons.
PETER: Yes, exactly. She was unrecognisable. She worked hard to get to that position. And now she’s like, she’s late, she doesn’t do the work, like I don’t know. It’s incredible. And the grades are definitely a result of these.

CHANG: But I know you said that you regretted a little bit that (you chose to learn Chinese). But I doubted it. I think it’s just some angry words you just said. I don’t think overall when you calm down, you would regret learning Chinese.
PETER: No, but then…UH! ((frustration)) It is still very hurtful.

CHANG: But you are still working on it, right? Are you still working on it? Do you have any counter-measures to help lift your negative feelings? Or you think still it relies on more to her superiors to change this? Is there anything that the students could do?
PETER: No, I don’t think so. I don’t think so.

CHANG: Okay. Yes of course, because you’ve mentioned the feedback. That would get you poor score instead.

PETER: Yes. Good feedback is no feedback, you know.

CHANG: Okay, sure. ((sigh)) Okay, I also got feedback from the questionnaire that people are complaining that sometimes the Chinese teachers are being too strict on the preciseness of the pronunciation or handwriting, or something like that. I don’t know, like, do you ever think that’s a problem for you?
PETER: Uh, very rarely. And now it’s like very, very rarely. Maybe some tones, sometimes. But not…I’d say 90% of the time I know what the tones are or how to write that character. So I think that stage has passed me.

CHANG: Okay. Then let me…I am gonna jump back to the first question about the confidence. Like, people come to me and say, like, when they were in China, they had a lot of people to talk to. So comparatively, you got more sense of achievement by talking to people. While in here, obviously you have much fewer people to talk to. Thus you got fewer opportunities for that. And that might reflect in a less of self-confidence because you have nothing to prove, except for the GPA. And if you got a poor GPA, you would start to doubt yourself, no matter what. But in China, maybe, for the same scenario, like you mentioned, like you got a poor score, but in China, you could talk to people and [saw them talk to people, and…

PETER: Yeah, and that’s the amazing thing. The people who get good scores, they can’t even say ‘Bu Keqi’ (‘You are welcome’ in Chinese). I remember that I saw them, I met them, and they couldn’t say even the most basic things. They couldn’t talk to anybody. And yet they
are the people with good scores. So I don’t know the weighting system, like how you measure the ability of Chinese. Because like the way they measured it, I don’t think it’s accurate at all. Like I live in an apartment with five Chinese people, and they speak little English.

CHANG: Uh…Did the teacher give you the marking scheme? You remember that in my class, when I return you the corrected essays, there is always the marking criteria attached at the bottom and your performance? Like something about accuracy and complexity?

PETER: Yeah, I remember. But no, they just made that (score) up. No, we don’t know how we got the scores. It also happened with another teacher. So uh… I got the result from another teacher. I am not gonna say her name. It was very… like It was a C+. And I was like ‘Why is it so low? I mean what happened?’ And she was like ‘Oh, I am so sorry!’ And she just put my grade up. Like she was trying to give me a low grade because…you know… you ask questions and give her feedbacks and…they don’t want that. They work hard to get to that position, you know. They demand respect. So you have to give her respect to get it back.

CHANG: ((laughter)) I never imagined you as my former student could get a C+.

PETER: No, never, it was shocking. And the thing is that very few people are still doing Chinese now. Like every year it is getting worse and worse because of the quality of the teaching is getting worse and worse. (an anonymous person) told us it’s like, I don’t know why but, every year the amount of people doing Chinese is getting like, a lot lower. There was like something like 14 in the second year? And I think it’s only gonna be like 10 in the first year.

CHANG: Maybe because they need my research, but they don’t want my research. That’s why.

PETER: Yeah, exactly.

CHANG: I mean, I was in the same position as you. Like I gave them the feedback, but in turn I got poor a score. (laughter)

PETER: But that’s the thing. If you lean on others, you will never be able to stand straight. Understand? And you don’t bow down to anybody. It’s the moral. It’s for the truth.

CHANG: So let’s wrap it up about the (problems of the) teachers. Now the predominant problem is the commitment.

PETER: Yeah, they don’t have any.

CHANG: Like you said, they got to the safe position, and they don’t want any more input into the work. To me it’s like, they are taking this as a job, but not a career. They just want the money, [they don’t want the…

PETER: (consistently nodding) Yeah, it’s a terrible Chinese mentality. It’s like you work so hard to get there. Why will you want to blow it?

CHANG: May I ask is there any difference in the Irish context? Like you also need to work hard to that similar position, right?

PETER: Yeah, of course. And I never had a bad Irish teacher.

CHANG: Like for you, you definitely have other modules taught by Irish teachers, professors. And you don’t have such kind of feeling?

PETER: NO! They were like always trying to bring that motivation to the class every day. They always like to try to give their all. They always try to be fair.

CHANG: Then why it is so strange for Chinese teachers? Like why? I don’t understand.

PETER: Because…It goes back to the hierarchy thing, the emperor. These guys are at the top. It’s the hierarchy. It is the same in Albania. You love when people are under you. I mean the higher you get on the ladder, the social. So you do whatever the guy at the top says.

CHANG: Okay, so it’s a cultural thing. (laughter) Okay, so I am gonna move on to talk about what you said you are a little bit regret of learning Chinese. Like have you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese?

PETER: Yes, yes, absolutely. It feels like we were LIED TO a little, you know. It’s like…It feels like they need a lot more from us rather than we need from them, you know. So they were really keen to make all these fabrications, you know, like, told us all these great things. [And it’s like…

CHANG: I think you are talking about fairly the early stage of learning?

PETER: Yeah.

CHANG: Could you be a little bit more specific? Like is this about the benefit of learning Chinese, or…the job potential…or…?

PETER: Yeah. So in terms of that, it’s uh…learning Chinese and you could talk to all those people. But, if I am being completely honest, if you go to my class, I think the whole class have
about two Chinese friends all together. So that was just not true. Uh... for the job potentials, besides teaching English, you don’t really have a good chance of getting a job in China, you know. It’s very difficult. You need to apply for the visa, all the curriculum content, you know, the work history in China. But you don’t have any. So it is very difficult. I did not meet any Irish people, more foreign people who get a business job in China when I was over there. So, that was untrue. And also do you know that in China, 92% of the foreign business is failing? It is the highest failure rate in the world. So it is not a huge market. It’s a big market. But it’s not for us to work. You will have a higher chance of being successful in the UK or France than in China.

CHANG: Then what about the learning? Because you know I used to teach the second year, and I always got complain like ‘Oh, you guys are telling me that Chinese was so easy in the first year. And it is in the first year. But, like, since the second year, which is like you couldn’t

PETER: [YEAH! That’s how they get you, right? ‘It is so easy. It’s gonna be like this for the whole four years!’ NO! It’s okay. I don’t mind it anymore.

CHANG: So I am curious that, like you. I felt you had rather strong initial motivation in learning Chinese. Would you think it would be fairly better if they just tell you the truth? Like exactly, or fairly objectively what it is gonna be like to study Chinese, you know, since the beginning? And you just really have a steady course in terms of difficulty throughout the years, and like just keep it that way?

PETER: Yes, that’s what I am talking about. I think that would be better, but you get fewer students, you understand? Because only the real people who want to learn Chinese will be there. Because the people in our class, they understand, like I know them. They tell me that ‘I wish I could drop out. It was so easy in the first year. But it can’t keep going.’ I mean there are people like me and (an anonymous peer) and...uh... (an anonymous peer) and (an anonymous peer)...uh...Like we really love Chinese, so we will really stay. But like others, they would drop out. Because they only did it for the GPA.

CHANG: So you...but you lose them eventually.

PETER: Of course. Yeah, it’s like an extra filter. You understand?

CHANG: Okay, but we just keep you there and earn some extra money.

PETER: Yeah. VERY CLEVER, HA!

CHANG: Okay. I know when you go to China, you go to the major cities, like Beijing or Shanghai.

PETER: No? Beijing there was nobody speaks English. Shanghai, everybody speaks English. Beijing, no, no.

CHANG: Okay, like that context, Shanghai. And also like, in here, in Ireland, for example, me, I am speaking English with you. Do you think sometimes it is unnecessary to be able to speak Chinese? Like there is no point, like in an Irish context, that the job you get in here, or even in China, the working language probably won’t be Chinese.

PETER: No, I think so, really. Because when you learn Chinese, you create transparency, you know, in terms of being able to see through what you should be doing and what you are doing. If you only speak English and you have Chinese interests, you don’t really see those interests like whether they worth. So it’s like you have the lens to be able to see the perspectives of what it should be.

CHANG: So it’s not only about language proficiency. You also get something else.

PETER: Yes, of course, the culture.

CHANG: Speaking of the culture, I have feedback from people who especially are not majoring in Chinese, that they feel like that sometimes the non-language modules could be demotivating. It feels like they want to work more on the language, but they have to spend much time to study the non-language modules. And sometimes they found that it is not necessary, that the cultural studies, the society studies, that they are not always true, especially when you went to China. [You feel like...

PETER: That’s the thing about corruptions. Like, do you know about the (an anonymous institution) scholarship? Like you have to study two non-language Chinese modules? Those modules are just a waste of time. They had no relevance. Once you land in China, once you do land in wherever you need to land, those modules were throw out of the window. Those are just completely irrelevant. Business Law, I take Business Law, irrelevant. Temporary Chinese Society, irrelevant. You didn’t...Because it’s just like the (an anonymous institution), they created those modules that they have more footholds, so they could employ more Chinese
people and those people could build like opinions, so they could stay in numbers. So I thought it was very political, very...you know.

**CHANG:** But, let me...uh...let me ask you in this way. You are not learning Chinese as a major, right?

**PETER:** No. My major was [business.**CHANG:** Business, yeah. But I am sure you are interested in the language.

**PETER:** Oh yeah, sure. That’s the reason I picked this programme.

**CHANG:** But are you interested in the culture? And the society?

**PETER:** Yes, of course. But not the way it was taught in (an anonymous institution).

**CHANG:** Okay, because I was picking up the word ‘irrelevant’. If the course could be designed more RELEVANT?

**PETER:** Yeah. I think if the person who has been teaching these modules was Irish, it would help a lot more. The Chinese people just won’t be able to bridge the gap.

**CHANG:** That they use more of domestic perspectives?

**PETER:** Yeah, do you know that when we have guest speakers? We learned a lot more than in...uh...in the class. Because the Chinese people, they just couldn’t bridge the gap. They had too much culture behind them.

**CHANG:** That they use more of domestic perspectives?

**PETER:** They are Chinese culture-centred.

**CHANG:** Everything they say it feels like they are selling China.

**PETER:** Yes, exactly.

**CHANG:** Everything they say it feels like they are selling China.

**PETER:** Yes, it is! Like, OH MY GOD, like (an anonymous teacher) told us every day. Like we asked her why we are doing this homework. “To sell China.” You can’t sell something if nobody wants it. You have to show them what it is worth it. That’s a difference between Ireland and China. That’s why like (an anonymous person) is wondering what is happening. Because you are trying to speak, but you are not listening.

**PETER:** Yes, do you know that when we have guest speakers? We learned a lot more than in...uh...in the class. Because the Chinese people, they just couldn’t bridge the gap. They had too much culture behind them.

**CHANG:** Okay, because I was picking up the word ‘irrelevant’. But is there anything more to the course, like the qualification of the teachers? Like sometimes they are not so professional, sometimes?

**PETER:** No, like, I think we had the worst...we had Doing Business in China, (an anonymous teacher)? OH MY GOD! I’ve never had...I’ve never met a more unprofessional human being. Like the entire class said that like this can’t work. I’ve never seen someone so bad. I mean like, how do you even get to this position, like being able to teach? I mean...it’s just the Chinese way. Like if you have Guanxi, whoever it is, they can do it. Instead of, you know. It was just incredible. Every week, we had uh...and she talks about her dog, her children, what she eats for dinner, where she studied, the best place to travel, all that like...It’s an absolute disgrace. Like me and (an anonymous peer) we just like telling her like what are you trying to say? Then she gave us feedbacks, critics. But the critic makes no sense. She was just like saying words, and the whole class was like, don’t know what she was saying. You don’t make any sense, you know. And we saw her on Google, checking words. Because she didn’t know what they mean. So uh...incredible.

**CHANG:** Yes, yes.

**PETER:** Yes, yes.

**CHANG:** Yes, yes.

**PETER:** But do you think Chinese teachers are a little bit vague in that way, when they give instructions?

**PETER:** I think so. Like we have (an anonymous teacher), like you won’t be able to image the amount of email we sent to her saying like ‘We have a project due next week, but you haven’t told us what to do! Could you give us feedback?’ And she will reply to something in Chinese, and we are still confused. Because she hasn’t been able to bridge the gap. And so, ((laughter)) three emails later, we finally know what to do. So...very...very unclear.

**PETER:** But I also have an elective module taught by Deng CHANGe. She’s good. She’s very very good.

**CHANG:** I felt like for the native Chinese teachers, because the way of the collective thinking as part of the culture, we are not really used to, like, paying attention to individuals. We don’t give that much of feedback individually.

**PETER:** Yes, but that’s terrible.
CHANG: But I think could this problem also occur in your other Business modules? Like I know they have lots of people for the same course, it is gonna be difficult to give individual feedbacks as well, right?
PETER: But language course you have much less people, so it is much easier to do that. But I understand. I know China has a big population. And you don’t have much time to do the individual analysis. It is always a group, you know. I could understand that. But, you are in Ireland now. You have to adapt to this market, adapt to this environment.

CHANG: Then I am gonna ask you a question about me. Do you remember that I criticise you?
PETER: Okay. Then what about other teachers?
PETER: Okay, that’s the thing. The Chinese people, the teachers, they hate criticism. They were like ‘Oh, Peter, you are so good!’ And then you get B-. It’s like I can tell you are lying to me. And it’s like ‘Oh I am so sorry…’ No, just tell me the TRUTH! Just stop lying! I prefer honest criticism. That’s how you get better.

CHANG: You mean constructive criticism.
PETER: Yes, constructive criticism. But overall, like, you know, Chinese people like to say ‘No criticism’, but they still destroy you, you know?
CHANG: Can I put it this way, like…uh…When they were trained, they probably were told to try everything to motivate you. They should avoid as much criticism as they could.

PETER: That’s terrible.
CHANG: But they don’t really understand how to do that, how to motivate you.
PETER: No, because if they started to criticise you, then they start to tell you all your bad things, no positive.
CHANG: And sometimes they avoid criticise you in their speech, but their actions were doing exactly the opposite.
PETER: EXACTLY! It’s subconscious criticism.

CHANG: But the other side of this coin is that, they gave you compliments a lot. But they are very vague.
PETER: Yeah, they don’t really mean it. Very vague. Why?
CHANG: To me I think is that they don’t know how. Like personally I hate the comment like ‘Oh, you are so clever.’ Because that’s aptitude. I’d prefer ‘You works very hard.’ Because that’s something about your work. Or do you remember that the teacher just praises the whole class, like ‘Everybody is so good today!’ If you overdo it, it feels like nothing. If you do it several times in a row, nobody cares about it anymore. It all comes down to that teachers need to know how to praise. Like I always try to be more specific, like ‘Oh, your handwriting is great. This character looks really natural. That I think this one you wrote even better than me.’ [I try to give you specific…I try to let you know that…
PETER: [Yeah, yeah, it’s a motivator. Yeah, exactly. Because then you will know that you are not just telling me [what I want to hear.

CHANG: So you could tell, right? You could tell when a teacher tries to lie to you or fake praise you?
PETER: Yeah, and that makes you really annoyed. That just shows that you don’t value your students. You don’t respect them enough to treat them equally as a human being, more like a baby. It’s incredible. And I had a bad temper for that kind of thing. It’s completely demotivating. It’s like dehumanise a person.

CHANG: Is that why? ([laughter]) Because in my category you are always a higher motivated learner. But right now, you are giving me the impression that you are now sort of a little bit demotivated?
PETER: Yeah, sure. So, for one class of Chinese, I don’t care. Like I don’t even bring the book anymore. Because she just gonna read from the book. Then I am gonna just come for the attendance mark. Like, she is wasting my time. But then for the other class, I love that class. The notes are printed out. I bring my book. I always write the notes, record what the teacher says. So, like I said, those who want the respect, earn the respect, I will give my respect.

CHANG: So now you are kind of like only work towards the GPA.
PETER: Yeah, like get my two classes and then go home.

CHANG: May I ask, would you still want to get a job that relates to China or Chinese after your graduation?
PETER: Yeah, hopefully something internationally. Because, I don’t want to work with only Chinese people. Because I don’t want to be treated like what I have been treated right now.
I like to hopefully be like a blend of Chinese and internationals. So, when I was in China, I did meet people who were more internationally minded, and they understand the culture more. So that’s what I am hoping.

**CHANG:** That’s actually one of my personal preference. I don’t want to work in a pure Chinese people environment either. Because like even if they were in Ireland, they didn’t think of what the Irish people do and what they should do. You just only physically moved your office from China to Ireland.

**PETER:** Yes, it’s too stressed. I like a mix.

**CHANG:** Sure. So good luck with that. Then, you mentioned that your granduncle used to work in an embassy. Is his influence your initial motivation in learning Chinese?

**PETER:** No, no, no. [I was…

**CHANG:** [Could you still remember the core of your first intuitive? The one that got you to learn Chinese?

**PETER:** Yes, I remember. When I was 15, I had surgery on my back. And I couldn’t walk for six months. And I saw documentaries say that China has those super fast rails, that Chinese is the most spoken language, you know, the economy is booming, it’s the place to be, you know. So I was like, oh I will try to learn. So I learned bit by bit, and I really liked it. Then I started teaching myself. And then I saw some Chinese people, and I was like ‘Oh! Ni hao! Jintian de tianqi henhao!’ (Chinese: Hello! The weather today is so nice!) And they were like ‘Oh my god! Kan, Laowai hui shuo Zhongwen! Hen tebie! Hen bang!’ (Chinese: Look, the foreigner who could speak Chinese! So special! Brilliant!) And I was like, oh, maybe if I can do it, maybe anybody could do it. So I just try to be better and better every day.

**CHANG:** So that’s not a…okay…No offence, but to me that sounds just like a common thing. But that just became your initial driven for learning the language?

**PETER:** Yes, it’s a hobby at the beginning. And then it turned out to be, like, oh if I could get better, I got to this level. And then like, oh, I got to this level, maybe I will just try to get to that level, get a little bit better, hopefully get me fluency.

**CHANG:** And then when you got demotivated, like when you had a bad teacher…

**PETER:** [Yeah, or it’s the worst.

**CHANG:** [Or up until now, is there anything to back you up? Like just to keep you moving? Will something like this initial motive…

**PETER:** [I think just after the summer I will try to get back to courses. But for now, it’s just like…uh…A bad teacher is really like a bad parent. It really influences the child.

**CHANG:** So you have the hope that in the future you would get over all of these and [go for a better…

**PETER:** [Yes, a better environment for learning.

**CHANG:** So you are probably planning to continue learning Chinese after graduation.

**PETER:** Yeah, I prefer to go back and learn it by myself again. Because to be honest, when I was in (an anonymous institution), all the teachers except for one, they were terrible. They were awful, awful teachers.

**CHANG:** Wait, wait a second. Is this one teacher awful or only this one is good?

**PETER:** No, only one teacher is good.

**CHANG:** ([laughter]) Oh! Okay. In which ways?

**PETER:** No motivation. They just come in and read the book. [It’s just like…

**CHANG:** [Oh! Then it’s the same. It’s the same as what happened here.

**PETER:** Yes, it’s incredible.

**CHANG:** Oh yes. It makes sense as you mentioned the hierarchy thing. That must be more serious in China, in a domestic environment.

**PETER:** Yes, it would be worse. Because if anybody put their hands up, and they will be like ‘Ni you wenti ma? Haha? Ting bu dong ma?’ (Chinese: Do you get a question? Ha? Don’t you understand?) And it’s like ‘OH MY GOD!’ You know? It’s incredible. People wouldn’t put their hands up because they will laugh at your face. But the other teacher, Junyi, he lived in Canada, he lived in America, he lived in Germany. So he was very well-adjusted to, you know, international thing. But the others, like I said, the hierarchy. Have you ever seen a layered cake? It has this metaphor like, when you were at the bottom, everybody is like they just punish you. They treat you like you are nothing. And as you go up a layer, people still treat you like nothing. But you know, you have a bit of respect. Once you go halfway, it like now you got power. So for the first time in your life, you start to get your hands big, you know. And once you go higher, you treat anybody like shit. So it’s the hierarchy. You
work hard to get there, and once you get there, you want to get back at the system. It’s incredible.

CHANG: Okay. I am gonna move on to talk about some more specific questions, just to check with you. First, about academic performance. Do you think it is difficult for you to improve your grade? As you mentioned that, scores could be sometimes not objective. It could be highly subjective to teachers’ preferences. Once they set up an impression for you, then you could be stuck with that impression, then it is gonna be difficult to change that. And that relates to your GPA.

PETER: Yes, absolutely. Once like they get an idea of you. (sarcastic laughter) you can do whatever you want. You know, make them dinner, tell them that they are your best teacher, they just don’t care, you know. Once they had that impression, that’s you.

CHANG: But you don’t seem to have trouble with the workload.

PETER: No, she doesn’t give that much homework. In the second year, she used to give us homework every class.

CHANG: Oh, I thought you have me for the second year.

PETER: No, she had your for written, and I had her for spoken.

CHANG: Oh, Okay, yeah.

PETER: Back then she will try to give us some homework, at least once a week. Now it’s like she doesn’t even bother to give us homework.

CHANG: But back to that time you guys may complain about too much homework.

PETER: YEAH, YEAH! But the thing is, she tried to give us a lot of homework when our Chinese was really bad. And then she started to give us no homework, and our Chinese are getting worse. It’s like surely this would be the best time to give us a lot of homework. It’s just the complete opposite, you know. Like we only get homework three times this semester, just quite ridiculous.

CHANG: Do you think you ever learned some methods of learning Chinese from your teacher?

PETER: Are you talking about overall, the four years, or right now this teacher?

CHANG: Overall.

PETER: Overall, yes. In the first year and second year, I would always look at the slides you and (an anonymous teacher) made, and they were very helpful. Because you get the sample sentence patterns that you could use these for most daily life stuff. And also, you tried to interact with the students, so you would try to talk to me on my own and also during the pair work, that would help a lot. But now it’s like, it’s just read from the book. You just, you know, don’t know what is going on.

CHANG: I think I actually learned from you. Do you remember you used to make those flash cards?

PETER: And later I talked to (an anonymous peer) and (an anonymous peer) and someone else, I found out the website, the one that helps to learn the vocabulary, called Memrise. I actually learned that from you guys. And then I tried to give that back to you and the following students.

PETER: Do you use HSK Academy? That’s really good.

CHANG: Yeah, I used it for HSK 3 and 4, and continue to use it for the other courses.

PETER: Nice. The HSK Academy is very very good, I think. That’s what I use to pass HSK 5. So every day when I was in Beijing, I wake up like 7 or 8 am in the morning. It’s like do one hour of HSK Academy, and then when I woke up, I do another hour. Then in about three months, I knew all the characters. And then when I open the paper, I was like ‘Okay, I know what this means, what this means.’ I don’t think you need a Chinese teacher after you pass HSK 5, to be honest.

CHANG: Yeah, my personal opinion is that you don’t need a teacher from HSK 4 on. You could start self-study.

PETER: No.

CHANG: And speaking of this, this is evidence of the not objective course score. I mean, you have passed HSK 5 and I knew there are only a few people passed. So if the score is judged by your proficiency, you are not supposed to get a C. But if it is judged by the progress you made, that could happen if you were lazy.

PETER: Yeah, but I don’t think so, though.

CHANG: But you were never a lazy student to me.

PETER: No. And also this is the worse part. I think this is the biggest mistake. When people came back from China, the people that went to Hangzhou, people went to Xiamen, they didn’t improve their Chinese at all. They were living with their friends. They were living with people from this course. They were speaking English every day to each other. I was
speaking Chinese every day. And when they came back, I think it’s a terrible idea to have everyone in just one class. Because someone has only done HSK 2, and there is someone who already got HSK 5. And you try to teach this whole range of students, (HSK) 2, 3, 4 and 5. It’s absolutely ridiculous. You try to teach someone who got HSK 2, then the person who got HSK 5 is gonna lose interest fast. Because you are trying to compensate for two things. It’s a trade-off effect.

CHANG: That’s the course design, right?
PETER: But they don’t want to hear feedback, so.

CHANG: I didn’t teach listening and speaking modules, but do you think you did not have enough opportunities to practise Chinese during the class?
PETER: Absolutely. Like we never speak Chinese in class or at home. Very rarely, like a minute or two. We only have three hours of Chinese every week.

CHANG: I know it’s gonna be difficult in the Irish context, that you don’t have the Chinese environment. [But still…]
PETER: [No, no, no. There are what, 5000 or 6000 Chinese students in (an anonymous institution)?] That’s a lot of Chinese people. You think (an anonymous institution) would arrange better programmes. But they just don’t have the initiatives.

CHANG: So you mean, even if you had less opportunities during the class, you had the resources there. There should be plenty of opportunities that you could do after class.
PETER: Yes, like I will give you an example. So when I was teaching English in Beijing, I had these three and five years old. And through eight months, they had good English. They could understand well, they could talk to their parents in English. And that’s what you do if you are structured, motivated and really passionate about what you are doing. And the parents were so shocked. Like they said that they would pay me 10000 RMB a month, if I came back to teach their kids again. Because they have never seen that before.

CHANG: ((laughter)) So actually you have done a much better job than most of the Chinese teachers in here.
PETER: No, no, no.

CHANG: Because you are starting from scratch. And you don’t have the environment of English back in China, so I would say you did a very good job.
PETER: And these are babies, these are harder because they are babies. They have no logic. So if you are passionately driven, motivated, and you know, really love your job, you should do better than that.

CHANG: And in turn do you think Chinese teacher had a little bit lack of empathy for what is going on, the difficulty and the needs for learning Chinese as a foreign language?
PETER: I don’t think they had a lot of empathy. They just say like, ‘Ni keyi’. (Chinese: You could.) They don’t have real empathy. I don’t think they understand the situation, about what it is.

CHANG: Would you think this problem is more serious for teachers in China? Because you mentioned that they don’t even want you to ask questions.
PETER: Yeah, absolutely. When I was in China, especially when I was in (an anonymous institution), it is the worst. Because in (another anonymous institution), it is very international. So all my teachers have been outside of China. They worked in America, Canada, all of the UK. But in (an anonymous institution) it’s like, they had only studied in China. And the students in (an anonymous institution) were like, they were broken as in…We have a phrase in Albanian that ‘If you have a horse, the first you have to do is to break it.’ Then it takes orders, it doesn’t question anything. If you told them the river is black, and they believe you, you know.

CHANG: That they are too succumbed to the culture, they are too obedience.
PETER: Yes, to the hierarchy. Because it’s like a system, that if you started out young, you get there faster. If you started out late, you won’t make it in time. So these people, they just succumbed to the hierarchy. That was the Chinese way of thinking. They just study all day. But if you ask someone ‘What do YOU think?’ (They will reply) ‘Uh…’ (indicate no individual thoughts) You know? Don’t question anything.

CHANG: Uh…I think I could ask one last question and finish off. Actually, you’ve answered it, that you want a more international job, and Chinese could be related to it. But how would you picture the experience of learning Chinese in that job?
PETER: Uh… Hopefully I will work in an international company, like an Irish company or a European company. And I will be dealing with Chinese people. In my office I will be speaking English, but, you know, typing Chinese characters. And then if I had a meeting,
you know, I’d love to speak Chinese or knowing my local Chinese customers about the dos and don’ts.

CHANG: Do you have a preference for the geographic location of such kind of jobs? For example, if it is in Ireland or China, where will you prefer?

PETER: Uh... probably China.

CHANG: So you are willing to go back to China?

PETER: Yeah, I’d love to go back to China. But I like a more international role this time.

CHANG: Okay.
Transcript of Audio Interview 03 (Rose, T3)

Present: Rose  
Location: Campus Outdoor  
Date: 23rd April 2018  
Interviewer: Chang Zhang  
Duration: c. 50 minutes

CHANG: Okay, what’s the plan after your graduation?
ROSE: Uh… I’ve got a job with KPMG. So, I mean, it’s in their Dublin office. But I am the only Irish people who could speak Chinese that they are taking on. So they are planning to send me to China, to do some meetings and stuff there, maybe in the second year or third year. Like I don’t want to waste my Chinese, to forget my Chinese. Because it has been so useful. I’ve done, like, I applied for five companies, and all five of them got back to me after the interviews because they were so interested about me having the Chinese language, and also obviously show that you are a hard worker. And the fact that I lived in China for a year is definitely a useful thing.

CHANG: I presume that they need you there, part for the language, but also a part for the trust. They might feel that they could trust Irish people a little bit better to work with?
ROSE: Yeah, but also it is because that we understand the Irish culture and our way of communicating. Maybe it would be harder for Chinese people to reflect what we are thinking, the way that Irish people would. So it is important to have someone that understands. Like when we were doing interviews with businessman who do business with China, and they said that it’s great to have a Chinese interpreter, like a Chinese person interpreting Chinese and translating Chinese, but they leave out some of the key details which may be important to the Irish company. Or they might not understand exactly what the Irish people need to know. So, cultural difficulties.

CHANG: I think once the Chinese get you inside, it will also help you to be promoted.
ROSE: Yeah.
CHANG: So would you consider to continue studying Chinese after graduation?
ROSE: Well, I bought all these HSK 6 books when I was in China, cause I’ve finished HSK 5 and the next is (HSK) 6. Maybe when I am working and I have some spare time, like self-study?

CHANG: Oh I forgot you’ve passed HSK 5. Then I guess it is not that important to pass HSK 6.
ROSE: But I kind of like want to. Like, just pride? ((laughter))
CHANG: ((laughter)) Okay, look, if you really want to just keep in touch. At least we could give you some tips and help answer questions and explain some points.
ROSE: Thank you. It could be a while before I start HSK 6, because there are a lot of the vocabularies.

CHANG: I think practically, unless they ask you to stay in China for long, otherwise I think HSK 5 is more than sufficient. And also, you will have a lot to learn for communicating with Chinese, because HSK is only one aspect. The HSK is a little bit more about campus life, it is gonna be different from what you would need in KPMG.
ROSE: [Yeah, yeah, some business Chinese.

CHANG: Anyway, I am gonna start the official interview questions. ((laughter)) So I have been trying to find the things that could demotivate you when learning Chinese, and the reduced self-confidence is one of the most important reasons. So, have you ever felt a reduced self-confidence, like ‘I can’t do this’.

ROSE: Uh…Over the period of studying in Ireland, I never had a feeling of reduced self-confidence, NEVER. But when studying in China, I had this problem. Like in here, you and (an anonymous teacher) and (an anonymous teacher), you are so encouraging. And you never say like ‘Oh, you are so stupid. You say that wrong.’ or ‘That’s the wrong tone.’ You never laughed at us. But when I was studying in China, the Chinese teachers had a different way where they like treat you like you are stupid if you say a tone wrong or they will go like look at you and ((sarcastic laugh)) like you say something stupid or completely wrong. Or if you didn’t answer quick enough, they will move on to the next person. Or…like…just kind of when I was living in China, I couldn’t communicate with the people there because of the different dialects. So, like I lived in Shanghai for the first semester, and I couldn’t speak Shanghai Hua (Shanghai dialect), and all I knew was kind of like Beijing Hua (Beijing dialect, here she means Mandarin). ((laughter)) They will look at me and like
‘What are you saying? I don’t understand. I only speak Shanghainese.’
You know, that kind of struggle. Or people just laugh at you.

55 CHANG: Okay, set aside the strangers, let’s just first talk about the teachers. Do you think it’s just
their approach, like they did it a bad way, or they just took it wrong, that they are not
supposed to do this?

ROSE: I think…especially for someone who has been learning a different language, they are not
supposed to do that. They are supposed to be more encouraging because it just demotivated
us. Then we felt like we were too shy to open the mouth and speak out during the class.
Like if it was in here and we did that, the teacher would say ‘Good point, but the second
word is this. Thank you for saying something’. But like in China, it was like ‘No, it’s not
good.’

CHANG: They had a lack of empathy.

60 ROSE: Yeah, they didn’t understand. And especially with a lot of Chinese teachers in China, they
don’t speak English. They had never learned a foreign language. We had a teacher for our
oral class, and he learned English for twenty years. And he said ‘I still can’t speak English.’
So he understood for us learning Chinese, that it was very difficult. And he knew how to
motivate us, make us feel that we are doing a good job. But the other Chinese teachers, they
have no English. They only speak Chinese. And they were like ‘How come you couldn’t do
this? This is easy.’

CHANG: I suppose the thing is, you are an academically successful student here, like before and after
you went to China. But still you are quite affected by these things. Like wouldn’t you be
more resistance to these things, like ‘I am fine, but there is something wrong with you.’

65 ROSE: Yeah, but still, like that was the only thing that really demotivated us. Like when the
teacher would kind of look funny at you and go ‘BU DUI!’ (Chinese for ‘incorrect’) ((laughter))

CHANG: Would that completely crush your confidence, or you could manage to keep it to yourself?

ROSE: Uh…yeah, I kind of kept it separate from myself. Because I knew like, I was HSK 5.

70 CHANG: So you have an internal standard, like ‘I knew I could do this.’

ROSE: Yeah, and like even for communicating with you and (an anonymous teacher) and (an
anonymous teacher), people in China, and the teachers, they put SO MUCH emphasis on
tones. And they were like ‘Oh, that was wrong.’ And I thought I was saying that right! And
they will tell us to say it again and I still think I say it right. In here, you guys would
understand me. You would say ‘Don’t worry too much about it. I understand what you are
trying to say.’ But in there, like one tone is slightly wrong, and they just laugh at you.

CHANG: But what about in here? Would the over-emphasis on the accuracy of handwriting
characters and pronunciation be an issue? Or you are only talking about teachers in China?

ROSE: In China, writing characters is definitely a big struggle. They do more criticisms with the
writing of characters. Like if you did your character at the end a slightly wrong, or you
learned a little bit hard on the pen, they would say ‘Oh, this is wrong! You are not supposed
to do this!’ Here in Dublin, ever since the first year you guys have been telling us even
Chinese people don’t write characters that much. It’s mostly typing on your phone or
computer. So once we kind of understand the character and how the strokes work, we don’t
really stress about them that much. And most of our exams and assessments are done by
typing. So there was not much emphasis on it. But in China, it was all handwriting.

CHANG: But do you think we all telling you the truth about Chinese people typing all the time?

ROSE: [Yeah, that is the truth.

75 CHANG: [You don’t think we are tricking you, just making it easy.

ROSE: No. Like, I lived in Shanghai, and I am the only person from (an anonymous institution) in
Shanghai. So all of my friends are Chinese. And we go somewhere, and I find a character
that I have never seen. And I say ‘Hey guys, what’s…what’s this?’ And they look up and

80 CHANG: So you have an internal standard, like ‘I knew I could do this.’

ROSE: And like if you did your character at the end a slightly wrong, or you
learned a little bit hard on the pen, they would say ‘Oh, this is wrong! You are not supposed
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ROSE: When you go to China and [you see…

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Shanghai. So all of my friends are Chinese. And we go somewhere, and I find a character
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go like ‘Uh…uh…I don’t know?’ There was one time, like we were in a hotpot restaurant,

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90 CHANG: No. Like, I lived in Shanghai, and I am the only person from (an anonymous institution) in
Shanghai. So all of my friends are Chinese. And we go somewhere, and I find a character
that I have never seen. And I say ‘Hey guys, what’s…what’s this?’ And they look up and
go like ‘Uh…uh…I don’t know?’ There was one time, like we were in a hotpot restaurant,

ROSE: And we had to write down a character on a menu to hand it to someone. And my friend was
like ‘Uh! Zenme Xie?’ (Chinese for ‘How to write it?’) ((laughter)) And you know we just
looked at each other. And we took our phones and had to check. And then we wrote it
down on the menu. Yeah, so it’s not just us. Like my Chinese friends always say to me like
there were 80,000 Chinese characters, and sometimes you could forget a stroke.

95 CHANG: Yeah, sure of course.

ROSE: Even sometimes in the Chinese class where like (an anonymous teacher) start to write
something and then rub it out and go ‘No, no, no.’, and go again. So it’s the same in
English like there are certain words in English that I had to check my phone to see if I am writing correctly, you know. It’s…I don’t think there should be a bit of emphasis on characters.

CHANG: Would they mark on how well you write the Chinese characters? Like this artistic become part of the assessment? Or they just emphasis on it quite much?

ROSE: It feels like mostly the stroke order and makes sure it is clear and eligible. But I had a teacher who would say the line is too harsh. It needs to be more fluent and more rounded.

CHANG: Or she would say like ‘I could tell you did this part first before this part or this part’.

ROSE: Seeing where the pen went, sometimes? It’s kind of like when you are doing calligraphy and you start by pushing down hard and then go light? I don’t know. They knew, somehow.

CHANG: Did similar stuff like this ever happen to you when you were learning other languages? I don’t know whether you learned French or German something? Would the teacher ever tell you like ‘Your handwriting is not beautiful enough’ or something like that?

ROSE: No. Like I studied French and Irish. All the teachers ever say is that ‘Once I could read…what you are writing…is the main thing’. So maybe like when I was learning English, maybe my words are too small, or they were too crushed on each other, then the teacher would say ‘Try spread it out a little bit. It would make it easier for you and for me.’ And that’s it. They never said like ‘No. I hate your writing.’

CHANG: And that won’t affect their marking.

ROSE: No.

CHANG: But because for us, for the Chinese people (learn Chinese), we do. Let’s say, if you write the character more beautiful, your essay will have a bit better score for the same quality but crappy writings.

ROSE: No! It should be once I could understand what you are trying to [put down on paper…]

CHANG: [Still focus on communication.

ROSE: Yeah, focus on content rather than the presentation.

CHANG: So we are borrowing criteria from the one that for the domestic students to the international Chinese teaching, which is supposed to focus on communication.

ROSE: Eh. ((agreed))

CHANG: So, let’s continue to talk about the teachers. You’ve mentioned the lack of empathy, overemphasis on the accuracy. Anything else?

ROSE: I don’t know. I thought learning Chinese was all about the structure. When we had you, we learned very well because we knew that when we went to the class, we were given a list of vocab. We work through word by word, what this stroke means and what this stroke means. And you put them together and you know that’s the character. So you could break it down, and if you see another character that looks like that character, it’s using maybe the same radical. And you were thinking, ‘Oh maybe that’s something to do with this!’ And you start to figure it ahead. Now my main struggle is that we were just handed with the vocab list. It’s not explained. Sometimes the book’s translation is wrong. And it’s not good English. We don’t understand the meaning of the words. So yeah, definitely it is important that the teacher starts with the vocab, then move on to key sentences, and then to like paragraphs and pieces of text. Sometimes our class seems quite messed up and disorganised. She will kind of look at her watch and say ‘Oh yeah! Okay, there is some time left. We should…uh…we should do THIS! It’s…you know…

CHANG: Very unstructured course. Uh…Could you think of any reason for this? Is this about the teacher…is not professional enough?

ROSE: No, I don’t think she is not professional. I think maybe she lacks support from the institute? Or that she has too many classes that she is teaching? I know she is teaching second and fourth years, but maybe she is teaching first years as well? I don’t know, maybe? Uh…or that they just not standardise the content of the course that being taught and circulate within the institute? I am not sure. But definitely like formatting being very clear and precise, and not rambling too much is definitely important.

CHANG: So you think sometimes the teacher is taking care of the easy part of the teaching and learning? They give you the vocab, they ask you to comprehend the vocab all by yourself, and you do your homework and they start to judge.

ROSE: Yeah.
CHANG: Which should be...uh...they explain the character to you and then guide you to do the work. And when you have questions, they should answer it. Sometimes the feeling could be that the teacher is not necessary any more, [like...]

ROSE: [That’s IT!]

175 CHANG: [That’s like self-study with disguise. ([laughter])]

ROSE: And that’s what demotivates us. Like we are sitting in the class and sometimes my classmates will turn to me and go like ‘Why are we here? I could do this AT HOME, in half an hour! I could have slept in. ([laughter]) Or I could waste my time doing something else.’ It’s...uh...It’s hard to know what to do, like what the teacher should do. But right now, it’s more like having a friend sitting beside you and read for you.

CHANG: Is this...uh...do you think she is intended...like to spend the [minimum effort to...

ROSE: [Oh no, no.]

CHANG: [Or is it just you think she is genuinely don’t understand the needs of the students? Like they don’t really know that they should explain those things, they should guide you through the tasks, they should give your clearer instructions to carry out the tasks, or some other reasons that you could think of?]

ROSE: Uh...I don’t know. Every Chinese teacher I have ever had has been very very capable, and they have spent a very long time studying how to teach. It’s just...it’s not being taught clearly enough. Like as you said, maybe they don’t know their structure or maybe they had their structure in the beginning and they kind of move away from the structure?

190 CHANG: Uh...recently especially with the assessment, they’ve been so vague and we have a group chat of all the students in the class. And we basically just sent the message like ‘What are we supposed to do? I don’t know what I am being asked to do.’

ROSE: No.

CHANG: Is it because of the language, like lost in translation? Or it is just the way they put it is not precise enough?

ROSE: It’s definitely not lost in translation, because she is using simple Chinese to tell us what to do. But then when we try to do what she tells us to do, she used to go like ‘No, no, no. It’s not that! It’s this!’ And then you have to redo it. And that takes more of your time. Then like in the last instance, we emailed back to say ‘So, is there two assignments or this is one assignment?’ And then she emailed back answered a completely different question. And still we are confused. Uh...It’s nothing to do with competency. It’s probably a breakdown of the communication or a breakdown of what we need to progress versus what she thinks we need to do.

CHANG: So the instruction is not clear enough.

ROSE: No.

CHANG: Is it because of the language, like lost in translation? Or it is just the way they put it is not precise enough?

ROSE: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: But not for Chinese courses.

ROSE: No, not really. Like...

CHANG: If you need, you need to go straight to the lecturer, to tell her in the face.

ROSE: Yeah. Like we think if there is a problem, we need to go to the lecturer, or we need to go to (an anonymous person). And he is too high up to go to complain to in my opinion. So, yeah I [guess...]

200 CHANG: [Just suffer in silence. ([laughter])]

ROSE: [SUFFER IN SILENCE! YEAH! Or what most of us doing is when you get module feedback, the survey, it was really the last week. You could tick like if the module has improved your understanding or if you are satisfied, and you can give some comments. That’s kind of the only feedback we have.]

CHANG: And this is not that helpful, a bit late and artificial.

ROSE: Yeah.

CHANG: Okay, I am gonna follow my question in here. Do you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese? Because especially in this context, I could imagine lots of Chinese people that you met could actually speak English. And if you took a job in here, say like KPMG, of
course they might be interested in your Chinese background, but the working language is not gonna be Chinese. So for the most of the time you don’t need this language.

ROSE: For my experience in Dublin, the majority of the Chinese students and works, they all have very good English. We could communicate in Chinese or English. It’s not a problem. But when I was in China, I attended some business that I helped out, there was not English. You have to have Chinese. If you are doing an internship in China or if you are teaching an English class, to communicate with your manager, you have to speak Chinese when you are teaching English. So I think it is completely necessary if I want to return to China, and as I said earlier it is necessary like, yeah there are people out there who could speak both English and Chinese, but they are usually of Chinese descendent? And it is important for an Irish person who studied Irish business theory that I can adapt my Irish mind to the Chinese language.

CHANG: So you are saying the importance or the benefit of learning the Chinese language is not only about being able to speak Chinese. Like, first things first, I know other things. So when I speak Chinese, I could communicate these other things in Chinese. I can deliver, I can communicate. That’s even more important. It’s not only about the language. It’s not only about the proficiency, getting the HSK certificates.

ROSE: No, it’s about understanding the culture, the history, the politics of both China and Ireland, and being able to respect them both in different business dealings, I suppose. It’s just important to see both sides of the argument and to deal with both sides, what they need. As well as that, one of the major benefits I found was that I said earlier, from doing the interviews, as soon as an employer sees your Chinese or that you lived and studied in China, they are instantly interested. They put you in front of everyone else. That just gives you such a big advantage in finding a job.

CHANG: Since you had such kind of experience, I mean job hunting experience, can I ask the question that…to me it feels like they don’t care that much how good your Chinese is. They value your background of learning about China and Chinese, even a little bit more than how well you could actually speak Chinese.

ROSE: Yeah, so, I mean…Like when I was in an interview, they asked me ‘So, what’s your proficiency?’ You could say ‘semi-fluent’ or I could say ‘HSK5’. And they will say like ‘What is HSK5?’ So they don’t know. And you have to explain like in HSK there are six levels and I am on level 5. And then they kind of think like ‘Oh! Okay, so you are pretty good.’ So they don’t really care. They want to hear more about you as a person, that you are mature enough to go abroad. And you are dedicated enough to study a difficult language. Or that you are versatile enough to live in both Ireland and China. And they are just really interested in hearing about your different experiences. Yeah. I suppose it is not just about the language. It’s like you develop as a business person, to develop key characters in traits that they will find useful.

CHANG: I am gonna ask an interesting point about this. Because I had the feedback on the non-language modules could be demotivating, especially from people who are not studying Chinese as a major. Like they only want to study the language and don’t want the culture modules or the society, that they are not helpful.

ROSE: Yeah, I disagree, I disagree. I’ve learned so much, and they helped me appreciate the culture and to be respectful, and to understand why Chinese people are the way they are. They have those customs and beliefs. Because they all come from history and how they happened. The one criticism I have is that we were taught too much about the same thing. So after the first and second years, you’ve done culture and society and history and politics, and then just general collection of it all. For the last few semesters we were doing Chinese Economy and Doing Business in China, but the stuff are what we have already done, twice or three times. So there is a lot of repetition.

CHANG: Could you think of any reason why? Maybe because they were conducted by different lecturers and [there was a lack of communication…

ROSE: [It’s the same lecturer.

CHANG: Oh! Okay, then I don’t know why…

ROSE: It’s (an anonymous person) and (an anonymous person). ((laughter))

CHANG: Okay, I don’t have any thoughts on this. I thought it was different lecturers and they might have a lack of communication on the content.

ROSE: Well, perhaps it was (an anonymous person) who designed the modules and he gets tutors to teach them. So maybe that was the issue with it? Or maybe he believes that we were
supposed to build on what we have learned while we were in China and have them expanded and gave more discussion? But, I feel it was a waste of time.

CHANG: Okay, to the demotivating non-languages modules, some people would say that it is because the language module itself, the workload, has been overwhelming, and people value the performance of the language modules very much. So if you add on non-language modules, it could take a good amount of time, that they are quite demanding. So it’s gonna be very difficult to focus on the major, which is the language.

ROSE: Yeah, but for me, I value the non-language modules as much as the language modules. Because there is no point for learning Chinese if you cannot use it within its context.

CHANG: Okay, that’s fine. I hear information everywhere and nobody needs to agree or disagree with anyone. And some people think the content of these non-language modules are not practical at all. They are a little bit isolated from the real world. Especially at the earlier stage, sometimes they are giving too much of a nice image of China. Then when you go to China, you found that this is not true at all.

ROSE: ((laughter)) It’s kind of funny because when we do our exams, like exams that ask for opinions, like we have to write opinion essays based on the stuff we learned, and we all tried to be really nice in the essays because we know that the examiners are not gonna like it if we kind of like drag down China’s face. ((laughter)) So there is that. But like in final year it changes.

CHANG: Now you have more guts. ((laughter))

ROSE: Like in the first year and the second year we were all like ‘I love China. China is great. China is not communism. No, no. China is socialism! They love all their people.’ But now, yeah, it’s like ‘40 million people died in the famine. Let’s talk about that.’ So we have more guts and I feel like our tutors in final year appreciate more of a good and bad side all coming to our conclusion. I don’t know why that was changed. Maybe because we were older or more experienced, that they feel that I guess you had to have a view now?

CHANG: I don’t need to mention names, but I knew the lecturers that they say like ‘I want you to have a view of your own’ or ‘I don’t want you to be over-criticise or overpraise China blindly’ or something. But still they have such kind of tendency.

ROSE: Yeah, we had a tendency of not speaking too badly. But we do voice our opinions.

CHANG: Then you mentioned that you studied other languages as well.

ROSE: Yeah, just French and Irish.

CHANG: Then do you have a similar tendency as well? Like your French teacher would say ‘Okay, write me an essay about France.’

ROSE: [No. (.) I mean, it didn’t stand out that much because China versus the western world is such a big difference. When you think about France, like the flight to France is just over an hour. It’s not that far away. We are quite similar. So there is not really that big of an issue to point out… And especially for China, its government and politics and economy, those are the things. Because China had a closed-door policy for so many years. That’s just such a big difference that it wouldn’t really apply to Europe.

CHANG: So you know, there is a sort of obedience culture in Chinese culture. And it sounds like you guys were influenced by this kind of culture. Like obedience, just say the nice things? Don’t speak out, like self-censoring?

ROSE: Yeah. But, do you want an A? ((laughter))

CHANG: But rather at the early stage of learning, right, than the later stage?

ROSE: Yeah, at the early stage of learning. The later stage is kind of, like we reached the point now where we learned so much that it is impossible to only obey or to only point out the nice things. And especially when you go further with your degree, everyone starts to tell you that you need to say good and bad things. You cannot only sit on one side of the argument. So we understand now, to get a higher grade, it is necessary.

CHANG: Would you think there is a little bit kind of like ethnocentrism, that the teacher or lecturer would drop hints here and there to ask you to say only the nice things, even though they would claim that they want you to be objective, to hear about both sides of the story?

ROSE: Well, it’s common knowledge that lecturers could be quite opinionated when they are marking exams. Especially when they are not liking what they read, they are not going to give you a good grade. And when you are considering (an anonymous person) or (an anonymous person), they are very respectable older Chinese people, like you don’t want to offend.

CHANG: If this is an Irish professor who has been teaching you these modules, would you think the picture would be a little bit different? Or not necessarily, just the lecturer drops both sides
of the story at the beginning of the course, something nice and something like you said ((laughter)) about 40 million people died in the famine, would that change your mindset completely?

ROSE: Yeah, you would be more aware of the controversial things.

CHANG: So you think though they are no longer Chinese citizens, the Chinese culture or culture-centeredness is still embedded in that. They are trying to be objective, but the information you get from them could still lean towards China being a pure positive image.

ROSE: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: Uh…We’ve talked about the necessity of being able to speak Mandarin Chinese if you intended to work in China. What about in here?

ROSE: I don’t have the experience of that yet. I mean it helps get the job, but I imagine if I am working in a Dublin office, and I am doing a project in KPMG, maybe I will have people on my team who are from China. I feel like you will be most of the time speak English, but maybe if I want personal relationships or develop some Guanxi (Chinese for ‘connections’), I can speak Chinese? ((laughter))

CHANG: So it’s gonna be better for social purposes.

ROSE: Gaining favour, I suppose, or having an inside relationship with a Chinese person that I can use…((to benefit me…

CHANG: [(laughter]) Sounds a little bit more like you are trying to…

ROSE: [(laughter]) I am not gonna…No, I don’t want a Chinese boyfriend. You are twisting my words.

CHANG: No, no, no. So I would say you pretty much never doubt the benefit and the necessity of learning Chinese.

ROSE: No, not really. I mean I would never start a four-year degree or went to China if I had the doubt.

CHANG: Did you know that that clear before you enrol this programme?

ROSE: Yeah!

CHANG: Okay, then where did you get the information?

ROSE: My dad’s friend is a lecturer in Smurfit Business School. So I sat down with him for hours and we debated every language and every module. We were like ‘We need to do the right choice here.’ So…

CHANG: I am gonna ask you a little bit further, like when did you emerge the motivation of learning Chinese? Like when was the starting point? Could you still remember? Is this the starting point, the debate? Or it goes even earlier than this?

ROSE: It was probably the debate. In fact I did so many research indicating that China would be the No.1 country in the world regarding the GDP, and the fact that Ireland had already in 2014 started to talk about the trade deals, need for young people who could speak Chinese.

CHANG: So with all of these are happening, I knew it is gonna be a good thing. As well as that, even besides the benefits, when I thought about the other languages, I thought French, German, Italian, Spanish, yeah they are useful, but there are millions of people in Europe who could speak those languages. They are all easy to learn, why wouldn’t I challenge myself and be different, you know?

ROSE: It was probably the debate. In fact I did so many research indicating that China would be the No.1 country in the world regarding the GDP, and the fact that Ireland had already in 2014 started to talk about the trade deals, need for young people who could speak Chinese.

ROSE: I am gonna ask you a little bit further, like when did you emerge the motivation of learning Chinese? Like when was the starting point? Could you still remember? Is this the starting point, the debate? Or it goes even earlier than this?

CHANG: So that actually happened before you enrolled in the programme, before you started to learn Chinese. And that sort of never changed.

ROSE: No, no.

CHANG: Would you use that as a force or as a reminder whenever you are feeling down? Like [this is where I started.

ROSE: [Yeah, this is why I need to do this.

CHANG: Here are the two things. You’ve mentioned that you would use this when you are feeling down, like when you were trashed by an awful teacher and you will remind yourself of this and keep going on. But the other thing is, would this also help when you need a boost? For example, you are feeling a little bit tired today or you want to study a little bit more. Will you also use this as a positive reinforcement to make yourself more motivated to learn Chinese?

ROSE: Well, no. It’s kind of tough this year to motivate myself. Because I am tired, and I am so busy with so many projects. So right now, the only thing that motivates me to do Chinese is GPA. That’s the only thing that motivates me right now. But I know I made the right decision to study Chinese. And I am just gonna need to push through, even if I am demotivated or tired.
CHANG: I think it’s different layers of boundaries because GPA is more like the closest, the most recent one. And then when you are feeling down, GPA is really close because it tightens to your graduation. You would tell yourself that GPA matters, that you need this.

ROSE: I feel like I could enjoy Chinese again when I have my A. (laughter) It’s just so much pressure right now that it is hard to enjoy the language.

CHANG: But, if you are getting Cs for all the Chinese modules, would that initial driven pop out and save you? Or you would actively use that to save yourself, to continue learning Chinese?

ROSE: Yeah… I don’t know. I’ve never got a C in Chinese. (laughter)

CHANG: (laughter) Oh I regretted! I should give you a C back in the second year, (so I could ask this question now! Okay, I am just kidding.

ROSE: [NO!!! CHANG! (laughter)]

CHANG: Okay, I think so. I think that’s the last stoke. If that was overthrown…

ROSE: You just give up.

CHANG: Then I have this question here, have you ever just wanted to learn Chinese only because of GPA? (laughter)

ROSE: [NO!!! CHANG! (laughter)]

CHANG: Okay, I think so. I think that’s the last stoke. If that was overthrown…

ROSE: [NO!!! CHANG! (laughter)]

CHANG: Then I am curious, like GPA or not, like ‘I just love the language and I will go study’ or ‘I just need the GPA so I will go study’, these are all driven forces. But my theory in the past is that the GPA driven force is negative in nature. You were forced to learn, that you are not happy.

ROSE: Well, it’s not that… No, I disagree. The only reason that I was in this course because I chose to do it. I had an option, in the first year I had an option between French and Chinese, that I could choose whatever I want. So nobody is FORCING me to do this, like I WANT to do this. If I didn’t want to learn, I would have dropped out after the second year or after the third year, change my courses. So it’s never been something that I was forced to do. Nobody is holding a knife to my throat and say ‘Do Chinese!’ I want to be in this class. If I didn’t want to be in the class, I wouldn’t go to the class. So I do want to be here, but it’s just GPA is a thing now. It’s not a negative thing. I don’t feel it’s a negative driven. It’s also more so of encouragement, that you should get up and study.

CHANG: Okay, we’ve talked about Chinese teachers, but more about the teachers in China. Is there anything that teachers in here could improve, instead of the ones that we’ve mentioned, the lack of communication?

ROSE: Yeah, uh…

CHANG: Even for me, please.

ROSE: There is nothing that you could improve. (laughter)

CHANG: (laughter) Uh! That’s the second year Rose you just mentioned right there. I want the fourth year, critical thinking one.

ROSE: No, I mean what we have said is that more structure and explanation. Like I want someone to teach me, I don’t want someone to guide me through reading. I don’t want to be just handed with the material and say ‘Read that’, and then never look at it again. It’s a waste of my time. Especially as well with the assignment and assessment, clear guidelines, maybe even in English if you can.

CHANG: I think maybe they are trying their best, that maybe they don’t know what a clear instruction is. When I first came, I don’t know. Like ‘Hand in your homework before Monday!’ Then people would start to ask ‘When on Monday?’

ROSE: [When on Monday? (laughter)]

CHANG: Yeah, like ‘What time exactly on Monday?’ So I was like ‘12 o’clock’. Then they will say ‘12 in the mid-day or mid-night?’

ROSE: [Noon or… yeah! And then you say ‘PM’! And they say ‘Yeah! Got it!’ (laughter)]

CHANG: Okay. Then the last thing is about course design. We are talking about the overall modules, languages and non-languages, any suggestions?

ROSE: Uh… The course design is good. The non-language modules are quite structured, definitely you know what is happening every week. Uh… The Chinese modules, I don’t know. Like this year, it has been kind of like you do two or three chapters on a company. Like last semester it was KFC, McDonalds and IKEA, discuss that for 12 weeks. And this semester
it was P&G, Kodak and Sam’s Club, and discuss that for 12 weeks and do some
presentations where you stand up and talk about their strategies. Maybe the specific draw
on…the focus on a particular company shouldn’t be a thing? Like I don’t have problems
learning the vocab, could maybe have a chapter with multiple case studies, that you read,
work through and move on. Don’t spend weeks focusing on it. Clear guidelines, sentence
structures, but I don’t need you to tell me all about shampoo. I don’t need to waste hours of
my life reading about shampoo, that this one makes your hair shiner, this one makes it soft.

CHANG: Can I summarise one word as ‘irrelevant’ for all of this?
ROSE: Yeah, irrelevance.
CHANG: So it’s not about how many vocabulary. It’s not about the cases. It’ not even about the
quality or quantity of the cases. It’s just they are a little bit irrelevant.
ROSE: Yeah, the cases are good, but I can take the keywords like ‘Celue’ (Chinese for ‘strategy’) or
you know, ‘tactics’, ‘market entry’, you know, the keywords that we also use in English.
CHANG: So are you saying that could be very good material, [but just…
ROSE: [It is good material, but they are making it seems as if the word for ‘dandruff’ and the word for
‘market entry’ are the same importance. I never gonna go to China and talk about
dandruff with someone on the street. I am gonna talk about your market entry strategy, can
I see your business account?
CHANG: What is dandruff?
ROSE: Dandruff? Skin on your head.
CHANG: Oh! I don’t even know this word. ((laughter)) Maybe it is not that useful.
ROSE: That’s just my issue. Or like now with Kodak we are talking about colour films, ‘Caise
Jiaojuan’ (Chinese for ‘colour films’). I can tell you about colour film, but I cannot tell you
about the market entry. ((laughter))
CHANG: So uh…I had a point…I used to had a point that I want to join your business modules,
when I was teaching you guys Chinese, I really do.
ROSE: Yeah?
CHANG: I want the language teachers to learn a little bit about your majors and your non-language
modules, even for (an anonymous person)’s course, for (an anonymous person)’s course. If
we knew a little bit, we could bridge these modules, to make the language module go
around with your other modules. Like if this was in secondary school, I don’t want to talk
about the stuff on my book. I want to go into your history class, and see what you are
talking about in history class, and then we could talk about something similar using
Chinese, to go around like that. But my opinion was rejected, [because…
ROSE: [I accept! ((laughter))
CHANG: [Because they want general language modules. So when they open more programmes with
different schools and majors, everybody could join.
ROSE: It’s just, I want to expand on that point. When I signed up for this module, or for this
degree, it’s International Commerce WITH Chinese. I didn’t sign up for International
Commerce AND Chinese, you know?
CHANG: So the workload is too much.
ROSE: Yeah.
CHANG: Could you think of a way to reduce it, that in some way the workload could be reduced but
the same level of language achievement could be retained?
ROSE: I don’t think you need to worry about the workload that been given by the Chinese
teachers. It’s the business teachers. I don’t think those teachers understand that we have a
joint degree, and that we can’t dedicate all of our time to writing up reports and analysing
accounts, that we have to sit down and write characters over and over again trying to
remember what the hell it is. I feel like the workload is completely fine for the Chinese
modules. It’s fine. And the standard for your non-language modules, you have a group
presentation, and you have a final exam, and you have participation score for the class.
That’s not bad.
CHANG: And to me that sounds also like a problem of lacking communication, that there is a lack of
communication between the people who are in charge of the business modules and the
Chinese modules.
ROSE: Yeah, because it is completely separated. There are no (an anonymous institution)
people…like there is no office for (an anonymous institution) in the business school. There
is one in the agricultural school.
CHANG: What?
ROSE: Yeah, they have an office of (an anonymous institution) in the agricultural school. But they don’t have one in the School of Business.

CHANG: So they should talk a little bit more on this.

ROSE: Yeah, managing students’ workload, ensuring we are motivated for both business and Chinese studies. Because not even only for Chinese, a lot of my friends do French, and they say it’s exactly the same. Like, yeah, I understand it’s a major, it’s our major study and the other one is minor. But you still should have time to study both.

CHANG: Of course.
CHANG: I want to know that whether you’ve experienced a reduced self-confidence in the past, while you were learning Chinese?
ADAM: Uh…I didn’t until I went to China. And then in the classroom is fine because teachers speak a little bit slower. They help you understand. But sometimes if I am just in public, and I am talking to a Chinese person, and if I don’t understand, I kind of feel like ‘Oh! I should understand that.’ You feel a little bit unmotivated afterwards because maybe you learned something in class, and you think ‘Go ahead and do it.’ [And then…
CHANG: [May I ask, where did you go?
ADAM: Hangzhou, and then Beijing.
CHANG: Okay, like…there are two scenarios. Picture these two scenarios, one thing is that they speak a rather standard Mandarin but a little bit fast, so you couldn’t understand.
ADAM: Yes.
CHANG: And the other thing is that they are sort of saying semi-standard Mandarin and semi dialect, and you also don’t understand. I suppose you’ve experienced both scenarios, and maybe you would think the first kind would be even more demotivating?
ADAM: Definitely, definitely. Because the second one, you are not learning that. It would help if you understood, but it’s not…you don’t think ‘Oh! I’ve learned that before, I should understand.’ You think ‘Oh, I just don’t know it.’ It is the feeling that something you think you know, that you should know, but you don’t understand. That’s very demotivating.
CHANG: And generally, it doesn’t matter if the person is being nice to you or you notice that they started to be a little bit impatient or something.
ADAM: It helps if they were patient. And sometimes, I found the taxi drivers especially, they don’t try to help you. So if they say something and you don’t understand, they don’t slow down or they don’t try saying it in a different way. They just say it again, and again you don’t understand. That’s…I mean that’s worse.
CHANG: So the attitude of the person who’s speaking to you…
ADAM: [It DOES matters, yeah. But…not a huge amount.
CHANG: Then how serious would you take it? Like would it be better if you go back to the class and talk to other students, and then you find out like, okay, relatively all the people are having the same problem, that it is not just about you…
ADAM: [Yeah, I think it is the same with all the students. It’s not…I don’t think this is just me. I think it is in general for the person who just started learning Chinese. I think everyone has the same experiences.
CHANG: So when you know that, would you feel a little bit better?
ADAM: A little bit, yeah. I still kind of feel that ‘Ah! I should’ve known that!’
CHANG: Would you feel a little bit responsible? [Like…
ADAM: [Me?
CHANG: Yeah, kind of like a positive image that ‘I really wanted to know. I wish I could know.’
ADAM: Yeah, that’s how I feel.
CHANG: Then, any similar experiences in here? Because in here [I doubt…
ADAM: [You mean in here, in Dublin?
CHANG: Yeah.
ADAM: Uh…sometimes maybe for a listening exam or something, maybe? It’s similar. It’s a lot easier than talking to a Chinese person, but like… For me, I am better at reading and
writing. Then actually if I had a chance to look over, and I will try to understand. But sometimes you hear it for the first time, and you don’t understand. It’s the same idea.

CHANG: What would be the other things that will make you doubt your ability to learn Chinese? Maybe the scores when they don’t meet your expectations?
ADAM: Uh…no? Not really. Only if I did really bad, but normally I do okay. So, not really.

CHANG: If there were fluctuations, [you wouldn’t…
ADAM: [No, I wouldn’t.

CHANG: You will look at it in a long run.
ADAM: Yeah.

CHANG: Suppose if you got the first score and the second score is a little bit poor, [you wouldn’t…
ADAM: [Uh…if it was a lot poorer, I would. But if it was only a little bit poorer, then I wouldn’t. It doesn’t matter.

CHANG: And…have you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese? You’ve studied for four years now. You kept the [faith that it was well worth it?
ADAM: [No, I like it. Sometimes I might doubt the benefit of it, as in how much I could use it. But even then, I found it interesting. It’s a lot more fun than learning the business. So I liked the Chinese classes because it was interactive. For the other classes, you were in a big lecture hall. And the teacher speaks to a hundred people, but they never speak to them. But for Chinese, it is nice because it is small classes.

CHANG: So, would you think the overall experience will help you in job hunting?
ADAM: Yeah, even if I don’t use Chinese, it will look good on the CV. Like ‘This guy has learned Chinese.’ So comparing with a normal commerce student, it will make me stand out. So I think that would be helpful.

CHANG: And even like while you were in China, you found that sometimes you won’t be able to understand the local people speaking Chinese, would you ever doubt like ‘What am I doing?’
ADAM: Uh…in terms of the dialects?
CHANG: No, not about the dialects. Just when people speak fast.
ADAM: When I went first as the Erasmus year, we only studied business in Hangzhou. So we are a little bit rusty on our Chinese and it was hard for us to understand the locals. But then once you were there for a few months and you were practising… And while I was in Beijing, I was learning properly, it was a lot easier.

CHANG: So overall you never doubt, [you always think…
ADAM: [I think it is definitely useful.

CHANG: But like in China, you definitely need Chinese to communicate with the local people, especially when you are not staying in cities like Beijing or Shanghai, where there might be a little bit more people who could speak English. While in Hangzhou I presume…
ADAM: Less people speak English. Yeah.

CHANG: But, what about in here?
ADAM: In here?

CHANG: In here, like if you intend to get a job in Canada or domestically, in here, in Dublin, in Ireland, you have less chance of using Chinese as a working language. Have you ever doubt the necessity of learning this language?
ADAM: (long pause) Uh…not really. It was more when I was away, when I didn’t understand that I doubt it. I suppose if you have some Chinese friends over here, and I tried to speak Chinese to them several times, and if I don’t understand what they say, and I feel ‘Oh, I should understand that’. Then yeah, sometimes I feel it is inadequate. But other than that, not really. You don’t really get the chance to use it.

CHANG: What’s the nature of the chitchat or conversation in here? Is that overwhelmingly English?
ADAM: Usually. It would be English unless I say ‘Let’s try and speak some Chinese.’

CHANG: But I presume like occasionally, or not occasionally, on regular basis, you would speak some Chinese even if most of the conversations were conducted in English.
ADAM: Yeah, I would. Even if we were speaking English, I would say something in Chinese. Like ‘Hao’, something easy.

CHANG: Would you find that helpful in keeping learning Chinese? Just to keep it up.
ADAM: Yeah, definitely. Because I feel that what I learned in the classroom could actually be used (in daily life). But if I wasn’t speaking it at all, I might feel it is a little bit waste of time.

CHANG: When you guys were talking in English, I presume some of the content would still be course related or China and Chinese related, right? So maybe even if you were not
superficially practising Chinese, these kinds of conversations would still be helpful to keep it up?

ADAM: Yeah, for sure. It encourages you to learn.

CHANG: Then, when it comes to credit, GPA matters, and especially for the final year.

ADAM: Yeah!

CHANG: Do you have the feeling like you would be like forced to learn when you were bound by all these modules, the workload. Sometimes you are only learning because it counts towards GPA?

ADAM: Yeah.

CHANG: And for Chinese course is it the same?

ADAM: Uh…less so.

CHANG: Why?

ADAM: Because I enjoy it. But some of the Chinese modules this year are not very good. I find the one language class was useful, but the other two modules…

CHANG: Okay, you don’t need to mention names of the teachers if you don’t want to. But I need to know the names of the modules so to compare. I presume you are talking about the Business Chinese, and the Advanced Chinese is better.

ADAM: Yeah, the other two Business Chinese modules are not so good. I just don’t feel that they are useful.

CHANG: Could you give me a rough comparison between the two modules, like why the Advanced Chinese is better than the Business Chinese?

ADAM: Like the other two Business Chinese modules, we don’t really learn the vocabulary to understand the stuff that we are learning. So we might do a case study on a company, but there are a lot of new vocabularies in the case studies that haven’t been explained to us. So it is really hard to understand what is happening. So you have to do a lot of your own study, to understand what is happening. Whereas in the other language module (Advanced Chinese), they will go through all the words. The teacher will make sure we understand the words. And then we might read a paragraph.

CHANG: So what is the problem. Is it the overloaded vocabulary or the lack of explanation?

ADAM: It’s the lack of explanation.

CHANG: So if you don’t go through this, all the following procedures kind of like mean nothing. Because [you don’t…

ADAM: [Yeah, like you don’t understand the basis of what you are learning. Yeah, it’s hard to expand…If you don’t understand the first thing, then you are not going to understand the second and the third. So I think that’s the problem.

CHANG: Let’s dig a little bit deeper. Who do you think should be responsible for this? Is the course not being structured well, or is it the teacher who did not teach well?

ADAM: I think it’s the course.

CHANG: It’s just structured in a wrong way?

ADAM: I think so. I think it should be more emphasis on the language, the understanding of the language.

CHANG: It feels like the teacher is rushing, that the [teacher intentionally or being forced to…

ADAM: [I think it is just a little bit too hard, the language that used. Because we try to learn through Chinese about business, which is a good idea, but the words that we have been using are a little bit too hard. If we are going to be using them, they should be explained first. But, they are not. Maybe spend one class learning the vocabulary.

CHANG: If the first class was not occupied by learning the new words, then what has been occupied?

ADAM: Just going through the material, reading the texts and having us chat about the materials, giving opinions.

CHANG: Do you think the teacher is aware of this?

ADAM: No, probably not. I don’t think the teacher does that on purpose. I think it’s just…I think it would be hard to say it to her, just to make her feel bad or…

CHANG: Ah, okay. So what exactly is the feeling that prevents you guys from approaching the teacher? You mentioned that there are reasons that you don’t want to make her feel bad. Is there anything else? Is this the whole picture? Or you might also have the concern that this might affect your score or something?

ADAM: Uh…no, I don’t think so.

CHANG: So shall I attribute that more to a…more like the empathy, or it also has something to do with the Chinese culture? Like respect the teacher, [or…
ADAM: [Yeah, I think it is a little bit related to that. Because for the other business modules, you could just say (to the lecturers).]

CHANG: And also, I’ve discovered through my other interviews that the business modules kind of like have a coordinator. So you don’t need to go directly to the lecturer. You could go to this coordinator, maybe, I don’t know, the feedback could be anonymous?

ADAM: Yeah, we do, yeah, yeah. But we don’t have this for Chinese modules.

CHANG: So you could safely express your dissatisfaction or your feedback on the course, and that person could talk to the lecturer confidentially, sort of like a gatekeeper. But we don’t have this for Chinese.

ADAM: No, not really. I think it would be a good idea if we did.

CHANG: Or maybe if the lecturer was open-minded, that she could make some announcements at the beginning of the course, like ‘If you really have some suggestions, you could come to me.’ And also maybe it would down to the lecturer’s personality.

ADAM: I don’t think the teacher is…They don’t seem very welcome to suggestions. I think part of the reason is that, even if we say something, it’s not gonna be changed.

CHANG: Why…do you…

ADAM: Why do I think that?

CHANG: Yeah. Could you think of any reason why they don’t like the change?

ADAM: I am not sure. I think it is just the impression we get from the teachers.

CHANG: Could you be more specific like where did you get this kind of impression, maybe for some instances?

ADAM: I can’t think of any examples.

CHANG: So it’s just an [overall…

ADAM: [Yeah, sorry, I can’t really think of…It’s just the way that we all feel about it.

CHANG: Are we talking about a general trait for all the Chinese teachers, or this is a particular case for this one?

ADAM: I think this year, this is true for all of them.

CHANG: Okay. (laughter) Then it is a general trait.

ADAM: Yeah.

CHANG: Even for the other modules because I know [change quite well…

ADAM: [See, I think her class is different.

CHANG: Okay, I am not talking about her right now. I am going to talk about the general teacher group, the first year, the second year, including me. Would you say for most of the time, the courses are well-structured, or the structure could be a little bit stubborn, that model that established from the beginner course hardly changed.

ADAM: Uh…to be honest, I think all of the classes if they could be language focused, then they would be fine. I think it’s just the business Chinese this year not being good. It is the main problem. I mean like before, we are just learning the language. I think we are just fine. And I also think that because this is the last year, we are finishing now, that it won’t really affect us. So I think this might be a little bit to do with this, that it is a bit too late to change for us.

CHANG: Okay, we’ve talked about the teachers. I don’t know whether I take it correctly, but it seems most of the time we are talking about the course structures.

ADAM: Yeah, but I think the main problem is that she doesn’t understand our level of Chinese. I think she thinks us are a lot higher than it is. And a lot of the words that we use, that we have already known, but we don’t. It’s…I think she didn’t how difficult it is for us.

CHANG: That’s two different things to me. The first is one is about the corpus, the database. I always say that as a language teacher, you should have multiple databases of the learners’ language in order to talk and practise with the learners. That’s why you always feel easier to talk to the teachers. Because we could adjust, like, ‘Okay, you are HSK 3.’ Then they adjust their vocabulary set to HSK 3 database and they talk to you. But if the teacher is not aware of this, or the teacher does not have such kind of databases, that will cause some problem. But normally as a professional teacher, you would be able to do this. That would happen for the first few classes, gradually you either actively seek out what the students already learn, or just through the teaching, like ‘Oh, this you know and this you don’t’, you should set up this database. If you constantly fail to adjust and establish such kind of database, then you fail your professionalism as a language teacher, because this is important for language teaching. Because you want to repeat the things you’ve already learn, instead of throwing new things all the time.

ADAM: Yeah, that happens a lot, talking about new things.
CHANG: And the second one is that you mentioned the teacher don’t understand how difficult it is for you guys. To me that’s empathy.

ADAM: Because…see…she doesn’t know.

CHANG: That could be attributed to the lack of empathy.

ADAM: Yeah, sort of.

CHANG: Would you think this problem is more serious when you were in China, or in here, or it is about the same?

ADAM: For the Chinese teachers?

CHANG: Yeah, just the feeling ‘I don’t think they understand how difficult it is to learn Chinese’.

ADAM: Yeah, it’s more serious in China. But…I think…(long pause) When we learn Chinese in China, the classes were streamed. I think it is more difficult for teachers in China because they didn’t know us well. For example, the teachers here would have taught us before. I think they should be better in understanding our level. But in China, they only teach us for a few months. And there might be a wider range of levels in one class. So it is harder. So I don’t think…It is a problem, but I don’t think it is the teachers’ fault. I think it is just the way the class was streamed.

CHANG: Okay. Can I ask, do you study any other languages?

ADAM: At the moment, no. But I used to study French and Irish.

CHANG: Do you have similar feelings for French and Irish teachers?

ADAM: Uh…(long pause) No.

CHANG: And if you do, would you blame the teacher?

ADAM: Yes.

CHANG: Then what’s the difference in here? (laughter) Why do you think the Chinese teachers should not take the blame?

ADAM: I think it is more difficult.

CHANG: The language is more difficult.

ADAM: Yeah.

CHANG: Then that’s my point. I think because people have a general perception that the Chinese language is difficult, so the teachers are blaming the language, and learners are also blaming the language. But there are problems here that have been ignored.

ADAM: Yeah…

CHANG: Because you mentioned maybe if you recall the feelings and the scenarios, if you switch that context to French class and teachers, maybe instantly the first instinct is to blame the teacher, that you are not professional enough, that you shouldn’t do this. It’s not appropriate as a language teacher. But just because this is a Chinese teacher, you might let them get away from this.

ADAM: I think more likely.

CHANG: You may think, ‘Oh yeah, the language is so difficult, so I am not doing so well. I deserve it.’

ADAM: I agree, but I don’t think I deserve it. I think there is just a lot of emphasis on self-learning. So we are expected to do a lot by ourselves. So you put on a lot of responsibility on yourself.

CHANG: So this is very interesting, because normally the teacher should have empathy for students, especially for foreign language teachers. But in the Chinese learning context, it is the opposite. Somehow the students are having more empathy for the teachers, rather than teachers for students. In other words, you have more empathy that this is a difficult language, so the teachers are doing a difficult job. You have more empathy for the teachers than they do. They don’t think of this enough that this is a difficult language, that learners are doing well enough. That’s a very interesting dimension to the problem. I mean, it is not fair. It should be at least equal.

ADAM: Yeah. It should be. I agree.

CHANG: I think there is something to do with the language, something to do with the culture, that they are causing people to overlook this.

ADAM: Sure.

CHANG: Uh…Would you describe your motivation of learning Chinese rather steady, not that much of fluctuation? It’s not like going up and down and up. Or is there a time that you…

ADAM: Uh…I think when I was in China, it fluctuated a lot.

CHANG: Oh yeah, you mentioned, when you were interacting with the locals.

ADAM: Yeah, and in here it was quite steady.

CHANG: But I also get the complain that the first year courses are awfully easy.
ADAM: Oh yeah, yes. The first semester of the first year was VERY easy.
CHANG: And then you get to the second year...
ADAM: It gets harder. Yeah, I think it (learning motivation) dropped a little bit, just because it was more difficult. But I think, like the motivation as to how I feel about it, like how useful I think it is, it’s quite steady.
CHANG: Then what’s the core to that, like when is the starting point to this? When did you decide that you are gonna learn Chinese? Could you still recall that?
ADAM: Yeah. I remember. (an anonymous person) came to class. And he was talking about…uh…all the opportunities.
CHANG: So that’s actually after you’ve entered the college, right?
ADAM: Yeah, but I was enjoying it anyway. Because when I started, I did French and Chinese. But I didn’t like French, and I thought Chinese was interesting. And then (an anonymous person) came in, and he was talking to us about all these opportunities. That’s the moment when I decided to learn Chinese.
CHANG: And you believed in the words, pretty much what kept you going?
ADAM: Pretty much, yeah.
CHANG: And based on your experience, there were no conflictions between the initial image, the promise, the imagination, whatever and the reality?
ADAM: The only difference is…uh…I think…how long it will take to get to a good level. So I think like even now, I could have a conversation with a Chinese person in Chinese. But still I find it difficult to talk about certain things. And I think I am not at the level that I thought I would be at the moment.
CHANG: (laughter) When did you find out about this?
ADAM: When I went to China. (laughter)
CHANG: Okay, so still that related to the experiences of interacting with the locals. Now there were already several things that attached to that experience. So that’s not the benefit, it’s…uh…the efficacy. That there are two dimensions. It’s not the benefit, because you never doubted the benefit.
ADAM: No, not really.
CHANG: But, is it the amount of work that you need to put in, or the efficient, like how quickly you could achieve what you want, or maybe both?
ADAM: Uh…more efficiency.
CHANG: So, not the amount of work.
ADAM: The amount of work, I don’t think it is a problem. It’s how long it takes to improve.
CHANG: So to take your word, it is not how difficult it is, but rather how time-consuming it is, that the progress is slow.
ADAM: No, I don’t think it is the difficulty, not really. It’s slow. It takes a long time.
CHANG: Okay, when we are talking about the keyword ‘slow’, are you intentionally or subconsciously comparing your experience of learning French? Maybe?
ADAM: No, I don’t think so.
CHANG: Then, you must compare with something. Like ‘slow’ is a subjective feeling, you have to compare with something and you say that ‘Oh! This is slower than I expected.’
ADAM: I think because we study so often, like every week a few hours. And then you go to the country, and you think when you come back you would be fluent. And now of course we are not fluent. So…
CHANG: Still I am curious like where this expectation of being fluent comes from. Like it is unlikely you are doing a daydreaming and say ‘Oh! I am going to be fluent after the four years…’ It has to come from somewhere.
ADAM: Uh…It might be related to…uh…I studied Irish since I was young. And I am fluent in that. So, could have some sort of relation.
CHANG: Okay, if you do, then you do. Don’t let me lead your point.
ADAM: No, I think mainly…I am not sure. I am not sure.
CHANG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because like to me ‘slow’ is a subjective feeling, that you must compare with something to acquire it.
ADAM: I think it’s just slower than I thought it would be.
CHANG: So you mentioned the experience of learning Irish, but definitely not French.
ADAM: No.
CHANG: Why are you so sure? Because…may be in the first place you know Chinese is more difficult than French, so you know it is not right to compare these two languages?
ADAM: Yeah. (long pause) I don’t think my level of French was very good, so…
CHANG: Ah, okay. So you think it’s not enough to compare.
ADAM: Yeah, I think so.
CHANG: We’ve talked a little bit on the course design. Generally speaking there was something wrong with the first step, and the following steps just fell apart. Are there any more points you want to add to the course design?
ADAM: Yeah, actually I do. We are given assignments to do outside of the class, and it takes a lot of work, and it’s not many guidelines given for these assignments.
CHANG: Okay, the guidelines are not enough.
ADAM: Yeah, I think we are just told to do this, and send it to me on this day. Whereas there is nothing in between…of course there is a little bit explanation, but…yeah, not much guidance, as for how to do it. We were just expected to do it ourselves.
CHANG: Is this not sufficient, or not clear enough, or both?
ADAM: Both.
CHANG: Okay, and this has nothing to do with the workload or anything?
ADAM: For the assignments, yes. There is a lot of work.
CHANG: Is it because of this lack of clear instruction, like maybe it [won’t take that long to…
ADAM: [I don’t think the teacher understand how long it takes.
CHANG: So still it’s the empathy.
ADAM: Yes, I guess.
CHANG: I had feedback that this would be more serious in China because lots of them in a domestic context, they don’t speak English because they have multinational students. Many of them don’t have a high level of foreign languages. So they don’t have such kind of experiences of learning foreign languages, so they might have a lack of empathy for students. While in here, at least we all need to learn English. When we think of our own experiences, we might have a little bit more empathy for our students.
ADAM: I think so, yeah.
CHANG: Earlier you mentioned your initial starting point of learning Chinese, that something to do with the words of (an anonymous person), some promises. When you are feeling down, when you are feeling a little bit demotivated, will they pop out and help you keep going?
ADAM: No, not really.
CHANG: Okay. But when I asked you, you answered rather quickly, right? You remembered that quite clearly.
ADAM: I just think that…even regardless of the benefit of it, I just think for myself, kind of just self-motivating for improving. I just hope that one day I could…I could be able to speak it. And that’s…that’s it.
CHANG: So you set up a positive image, that you believe in yourself. ‘Now maybe I am not good enough, but I believe that one day I will…’ But, you were always a positive, easy-going guy. (laughter)
ADAM: Yeah. (laughter) So I try to be like that.
CHANG: Is this the same feeling…it should be the same sort of feeling, I presume it’s the same kind of feeling…uh…about the other modules…or your life attitude? Or this positive attitude is particularly stronger for learning Chinese?
ADAM: Uh…I think it’s just a general positive attitude, just trying to stay positive for everything? But it definitely helps when it comes to learning Chinese. Because I have seen other people get more demotivated than I do.
CHANG: Oh, really?
ADAM: I’d say so. Generally, I’ve stayed a positive attitude.
CHANG: So are you satisfied with the current achievement in learning Chinese?
ADAM: Uh…yes and no. Yes, but no, because I would like to have a higher level. After four years, I’d like to have a higher level. But I still enjoy it, which I think is good.
CHANG: So yes to the experience, and no to the outcome.
ADAM: Yeah.
CHANG: Would you believe that expectation, that there is something that could be improved to let you achieve your expectation, or you think that is just purely unrealistic?
ADAM: I think maybe more colloquial language?
CHANG: More what?
ADAM: More colloquial language? Like dialect language, will help in normal conversations.
CHANG: Ah, okay.
ADAM: Like teaching more how Chinese people would speak.
CHANG: So maybe more authentic content?
ADAM: Yeah, I think so. Because we learned a lot of words, a lot of vocab, but a lot of time we are not sure whether they are useful. One of the first words we learned was ‘Zhengrong’, you know, ‘plastic surgery’. ((laughter)) We don’t really need to know that.
CHANG: Speaking of the irrelevance, I have feedback that there are people who think that also some of the non-language modules, which were supposed to make you want to learn the language more, are not doing their jobs.
ADAM: Yeah, I agree. I think they are very repetitive. They just kind of say the same thing, and don’t really teach us much.
CHANG: Okay, but overall would you think that kind of modules helps boost your motivation, or…
ADAM: No, demotivation.
CHANG: [But…
ADAM: [Maybe not demotivation for the language…
CHANG: Maybe at the beginning, [the first few ones when…
ADAM: [No, I don’t think they are good modules. They are not good classes, very boring, and…
CHANG: But do you like the culture, the society, the…the…
ADAM: I do. But I don’t think it was taught well, in class. I DO LIKE IT! But the course, no.
CHANG: So it’s not you, like ‘I only want to learn the language. I don’t want to waste my time on these modules.’ No. It’s the courses that are not good enough.
ADAM: Yeah. I AM Interested in culture and stuff…but…Yeah, it’s not taught well.
CHANG: Could you be a little bit more specific, like in which ways? Are they not interesting, or not practical, or irrelevant?
ADAM: Not irrelevant. But, I think a lot of time the teacher likes talking about his own or her own experiences. And yeah…oh…I guess that WAS irrelevant. It’s not very useful.
CHANG: So are we talking about the teacher being a little bit pretentious? Like this is not using personal perspective to teach or analyse, but just talking about their own achievements?
ADAM: Yeah, that’s what it is. A lot of time, not all the time. There are some useful things.
CHANG: We had a professor when I was learning English back in college, he’d always say like ‘Oh, I went to this college as a visiting lecturer. I went there…’, which was totally irrelevant to our class. ((laughter))
ADAM: Yeah.
CHANG: And you mentioned ‘repetitive’? Is it within one course, or between different modules, at different times? I have people told me that the later modules, the content could be quite repetitive comparing with the earlier ones.
ADAM: I didn’t do any of the former Chinese law or Chinese culture stuff. So I am not sure.
CHANG: Then where is your ‘repetitive’ comes from?
ADAM: Like, for example, ‘Guansxi’ (Chinese for ‘connections’) is mentioned ALL THE TIME!
CHANG: ((laughter)) Okay, so it is repetitive [within…
ADAM: [It’s repetitive within the same module. As in, it feels like there were not enough topics. As in, it could be one main topic for all the weeks, and all the others were just seen to be there, because they need to be filled in.
CHANG: Any repetitive between the modules?
ADAM: Uh…maybe between the first year module and the second year module, from the same teacher. And then the second semester.
CHANG: Oh, so this happened to the same teacher, not different teachers?
ADAM: Yeah, not different teachers. Obviously if you were a learning language, there will be somewhere that’s gonna be the same among the modules. But that’s normal. It’s just…yeah, same teacher, but different classes.
CHANG: The range is too focused.
ADAM: Yeah, the range is too focused. Yeah.
CHANG: So what makes it feels?
ADAM: It makes it seems like there is not actually enough content in the modules.
CHANG: You feel that like ‘This guy only knows about this.’
ADAM: Yeah, not this guy only knows about this. But just, he doesn’t have enough things to talk about, so he just talks about himself.
CHANG: Okay. Then you mentioned the module Doing Business in China? Let’s talk a little bit on that one.
ADAM: Yeah…I think the…the tutor…I just don’t think she understands a lot of the things that she talks about. And she is not very experienced. So there is a problem there.
CHANG: So for this one, this module, the overall problem is the teacher, her qualification.
ADAM: There is also a little bit of problem with the content. I think it’s very narrow, very focused. There was not much being taught, not much really. But, the teacher is the main problem.

475 CHANG: Set the other perspectives aside, the teacher doesn’t have other problems like commitment, enthusiasm…like she is willing to do a good job, but she doesn’t? She meant well, but didn’t do a good job?
ADAM: I think she tries, but doesn’t have much teaching experience.
CHANG: See, this is the problem. Because normally when we describe this kind of teacher, that the teaching is awful, but they try very hard, normally even if the course is a crash, normally the students still get along with the teacher. It doesn’t stop them from being friends or at least being friendly. People would say like the course is awful, but the teacher as a person is nice.
ADAM: Yeah.

485 CHANG: But it doesn’t sound like this case. ((laughter))
ADAM: No. It’s not. I don’t really…It’s hard to explain, but…she’s not a very likeable person.
CHANG: You couldn’t feel the care inside of her for your guys.
ADAM: Not really.
CHANG: You don’t think she cares about you and the course.

490 ADAM: No. I think she cares about her job. But not really about us.
CHANG: So when you mean she tries, she tries for the job, for the salary, for the money, for the survival, not for educating you guys.
ADAM: (.) Yes, I think so. I don’t think…I think she just does it because she has to.
CHANG: As you know I have been studying demotivation of learning Chinese. Basically, I study what kind of things cause learners gradually don’t want to learn Chinese, you know, something like that. And you’ve been learning for more than four years, and now you are working in China. So your insight is gonna be very helpful.

LEO: Okay.

CHANG: One of the things that I found being responsible for the learning demotivation is the reduced self-confidence in learning Chinese. I am wondering for you, have you ever experienced a period with reduced self-confidence? Like you started to doubt whether you could do this, whether you could learn Chinese well? Something like that?

LEO: Yeah, absolutely. I think the time I experienced that the worst was when I first came to China, say September of my Erasmus year. Because you know, you study for two years and you go over to China with your Chinese and the confidence. And then you try to speak it there, it is hard for them to understand you. You lose confidence like that. Like you go and know what you want to say, but you can’t say it. And you are like, you think ‘Oh! It’s been two years, but I still can’t ask the simple questions!’ For me that could make me lose confidence and that was quite demotivating for me at the start.

CHANG: So, I guess things turned a little bit better later?

LEO: Yeah, definitely. After a while, anyway, I became less embarrassing speaking it. And I really started to get better. So, I just try to say it again, or have something they say after a while, like ‘Ni Zai Shuo Yi Bian.’ (Chinese for ‘You say it again’), like ‘You just repeat that’, you know, trying harder. But at the start…at the start it was very difficult. That was probably the time that I felt the least confident for actually learning the language. Uh…but now, even funny, that I came back to China, after graduating, I don’t know why, I didn’t study after I finished in (an anonymous institution). I haven’t really done more, but, even still coming back, I don’t know why, but I just feel a lot more confident in speaking it, which is nice.

CHANG: So, still I think the gradual learning built up your confidence, and you mentioned that you no longer, like after a while…for the first time you were in China, you started to care about it a little bit less…uh…like we call it ‘Mianzi’, so you are more willing to try, and embrace the mistakes, and probably just build up on it.

LEO: Right, right.

CHANG: Yeah. I think it’s a good thing. But what about when you were in here, in Dublin, in Ireland, while you were still in (an anonymous institution)? Have you ever felt a reduced self-confidence? I mean in here, you have less opportunity to speak Mandarin with native speakers.

LEO: Uh…I suppose just the fact that in Ireland kind of the hardest thing for me is that you learn it in the classroom, but of course you don’t really have opportunities (to practise) unless you have a language partner, or you have a Chinese friend. For me I found it difficult to actually use it. Like useless of Chinese outside of the classroom, which kind of demotivated me. I am like ‘Oh, what’s the point? I don’t need this right now.’

CHANG: Okay, so you say when you were in China, even if it was a little bit demotivating when talking to the locals, and you found their response is…that maybe you don’t understand them, or sometimes they don’t understand you, but at least you have…like…uh…feedback that you could trust. Because these are the locals, if they do understand you, you would be like ‘Oh, I did learn this. I could use this in an authentic context.’ But in here, like, maybe even if you do relatively well in class because you don’t have native speakers to talk to, you don’t know FOR SURE.

LEO: Yeah, right.

CHANG: Any other things would harm your confidence? Like have you ever doubted your ability in learning Chinese, sometimes maybe because of the GPA, or because of the course results, the exam results? Sometimes you get a poor result, would that affect your confidence? Or
sometimes when you compare yourself with the classmates, that some of the others are
doing better than you, and you started to doubt your ability in learning Chinese?

LEO: Uh…I kind of agree with that. I think it is only natural that the class wants you to compare
yourself with the others. There are certain aspects that my classmates are much better than me. I always find my strength lay in like reading and writing aspect, but when it comes to
spoken Chinese, I felt I was below the standard of the class. Uh…sometimes I struggle to
keep up, like keep up with the best speakers in the class, like some of them would be
VERY VERY GOOD. And for me that was hard, like ‘Oh! Will I ever get to their level?'

Will I be able to keep up? Is this for me?’ You know?

CHANG: But would that also in a certain way, motivates you? Like set up a model for you to look up
to, to work towards? Or is mainly demotivating?

LEO: Yeah!

CHANG: Then how did this work? Like when would you think they are demotivating, and when
would you think like in turn motivating? What would change your feeling?

LEO: Right. I think…like I said obviously it would be demotivating when like I take it like ‘Oh!
When I ever get to their level? Are they just naturally better than me in Chinese?’ That
could be quite hard. While it could be definitely motivating at the same time, like a certain
amount of pressure and competition, like to keep up the level. You know, you want to keep
up the pace with the class. You don’t want to be the worst in the class. In that way, that a
little bit of pressure on you could definitely help to motivate you to work a little bit harder.
That’s what I found anyway. You know the people in our class, they are the best. For
example, my partner in the group was (an anonymous peer). He was naturally better and
strong in spoken Chinese. So I always try to…do my best to match his level and work a
little bit harder.

CHANG: Yeah. I spotted two keywords in here. The first is ‘natural’, and the second is ‘work hard’. I
think…let me put it this way, and you let me know whether it is true or not. Maybe when
you interpret…attribute (an anonymous peer)’s success in listening and speaking to the
natural ability, like someone just naturally good at learning Chinese, maybe that would be
more frustrating. When you do get in touch with them, you may see that ‘Okay, they
actually work very hard.’ Then when you attribute their achievement, you may attribute it
to them working hard or maybe some good methods. Then that actually could become
motivating.

LEO: Yeah, definitely, like (an anonymous peer), he works VERY VERY HARD. He makes
maximum efforts, he made a lot of Chinese friends. And that’s why he speaks a lot of
Chinese outside of the classroom, in Ireland, he did that. And that’s how he got so good at
spoken. We used to just presume that he was naturally very strong at speaking, where
actually it all comes down to hard work. It might be what you said, seeing his good
methods definitely helps me, he passed on some to me. OH YEAH! OF COURSE!

CHANG: Speaking of the methods, do you think you’ve acquired your own set of methods in
learning Chinese by now, after the four years?

LEO: Uh…(long pause)...My best method I would say would just be…I like some…um…for
me, If I am studying characters, the best way for me is to write them out, so I know that.
For spoken Chinese, I think I just need to go to an empty classroom or just record myself
and speak over and over again. Then play it back and see what I am pronouncing right and
what I am not, and work on that. But to me like, I always need to be writing, you know. I
can’t just read a book. I can’t just read characters and just memorise. I have to be
practically doing something, like writing down, speaking, listening…even listening to CD.
I find that for me was always the best.

CHANG: Yeah, kind of interact with the language rather than just observe, just take in.

LEO: Right.

CHANG: Okay, I am gonna refer back to the…about the academic performance. As you know that
sometimes, that there are certain rules in college, you might feel…like there is a sort of
requirement on the distribution of the scores, so sometimes within the classroom, students
could find that it is difficult to change their academic performance regarding the Chinese
course. Like everybody has been set to categories. Some of them are ‘A’ and some of them
are ‘B’. It’s very difficult to change that. Even if you do make progress and you have a
good hunch that you are actually improving, that might be difficult to be reflected in scores.
Do you have such kind of feeling? Do you recognise what I am talking about?

LEO: Yeah, I do agree with what you are saying, yeah. A HUNDRED PERCENT.
CHANG: Would you find that demotivating or in a way a little bit unfair, that the score couldn’t reflect your improvement?

LEO: Uh…I don’t think it’s unfair. I think of course that’s normal in academic, that you have to be marked based on your current level. You can’t be marked based on how hard you work or how much you have been improving. I think if you are improving, you will see a grade slightly move. So even if it was not great, like you move from a C to a B, that could be motivating itself. You can’t expect to move straight to an A.

CHANG: Okay. For you, what is your way of treating the scores? Or is there any other benchmarks, like internal benchmarks or something, standards, that will allow you to know that you are making progress besides the scores that you get from the teachers and the course?

LEO: Uh…I think…I think definitely the score, like your mark, is the best method to allow you to see the progress. And in China, I suppose a good way to measure your progress is just practising your speaking and see, like talk to people and have conversations, and if you feel your conversation is getting better, or they understand you better, you will get that you are getting your progress. Obviously, that’s not always possible in Ireland. But, I still think there are ways to measure your progress without a grade. Say even sometimes like, for example, I changed the language of Siri for my voice recognition to Chinese when I was in China, just as a way of practice. And for me it was like, all the progress that I could notice is that I tell Siri to look up something in Chinese, and if it gets it for the first time, and that definitely helps. Uh…I do think you could see your progress that way. That’s just one way, you know?

CHANG: That’s quite smart I think. Okay, then when talking about the overall experience of learning Chinese, do you ever felt you were overwhelmed by the workload?

LEO: Uh…I would kind of anticipate and assume that if you took Chinese, it would be a heavy workload. I think in (an anonymous institution) the workload for Chinese is definitely no more than the European languages. I think it’s just as much. And, I don’t think there is any more workload. So I didn’t feel overwhelmed. Of course, going into you what a tough language it is to learn, so I don’t think so. I wouldn’t say I was overwhelmed.

CHANG: Okay, I have some more questions regarding you have already taken a job in China now. Do you ever doubt that you could gain the benefit of learning Chinese? Like ‘Oh, I will never be able to get to a level that I could use my Chinese to get a job in China?’ Or get a job that requires Chinese as a working language? [Do you have those certain moments?]

LEO: [Yeah! DEFINITELY! Yeah! Like, throughout college I was like I want to go to accounting or finance, so I wanted to train in one of the big four, like Deloitte or KPMG, doing my accounting exams and become a registered accountant. That was always my plan. And I was always thinking like ‘Oh! How would I ever actually integrate this? How would this play in my future career? Is this a waste of time? Should I just do a general business degree?’ I did always question that. But, I think at the same time, I don’t have my career, like 50 years of career set out. I don’t know what I will be doing. And I don’t know where my career would take me. Even if I don’t gonna use my Chinese, there are skills that I have gained from it. And I think even like, the year abroad in China itself, the experience I’ve got, immerse myself into a different culture. I’ve learned about, you know, different people and how to, like, embarrass different cultures, you know, something. That element definitely is a life benefiting experience, I suppose? And also, I am absolutely open to, like, you know, I don’t know where I could use my Chinese in the future, but I think there will be an opportunity. I don’t know which company I would be working for 20 years from now. If it is an international company, maybe they will have Chinese clients. They could have a head office in China. I think it could be definitely opportunities there. I think if I well equip myself with these skills, it would benefit me in some way.

CHANG: So you do kind of like you don’t doubt the benefit of learning Chinese, but you…

LEO: [It happened in the past, but at this stage, no. I think I will be benefited from it in some way.

CHANG: Then you mentioned it happened in the past. I am curious, what happened? (laughter)

LEO: Yeah, just because, like I said, kind of new in college, like ‘What I want to do?’ For example, I wouldn’t need Chinese to get into one big accounting company, you know? It wasn’t a necessity, I suppose. It feels like it’s more of a benefit. It’s something that on my CV now, just stands out. I knew from recently my experiences of job interviews. It would stand out, that employees are very interested in it. They asked a lot of questions about it. So from that I think, I had a bit of change of heart.
CHANG: Yeah. I have two more questions regarding this. The first is that you mentioned, it appears to you that you doubt the benefit more at your early stage of learning. Would you say you become gradually more believing in the benefit of learning Chinese along with the four years’ study, or were there fluctuations in between?

LEO: Uh…I wouldn’t say that. I kind of went to phases, where I was like at the start, say the first year I was very motivated, very excited. Then maybe at some stages of…it’s not exactly some stages in the second year, I was like ‘Do I need this?’, you know. Once you passed that, even after graduation, I was like ‘Ah, do I need it?’ Because I got an offer to start like in this coming September to start in Deloitte. So I know I would have my job. So I was like ‘Oh, do I need it? What was the point of doing Chinese?’ I thought that for a while. But now after I came back to China now, like I said, I gain more confidence in speaking it, feeling a lot better about the language and how I got here. My motivation is back. My excitement is back. So no, I don’t think it’s a…I don’t think it is a one way… I think it is very much back and forth.

CHANG: Okay. May I ask what got you still staying in the programme when you do feel down. I presume that would be something to do with…probably something to do with academic performance? Like you are not doing so well on Chinese, and you think like ‘Is this worth it?’ or something like that. What’s…what kept you in the programme?

LEO: Uh…I suppose…(long pause) I guess I was never…uh…I was never gonna drop out. I knew where I wanted to be. I knew I want to get my degree and progress to get in an accounting company. So I always gonna stay in here, and my motivation behind sticking with Chinese…uh…I think partially because after the four years I want to get to a good level? Or it’s gonna be a waste otherwise? But it’s also the pressure of GPA, and keeping up your GPA, and I knew I have to stick with it, work hard, you know, and graduate with a good degree.

CHANG: Yeah, and also, yeah…And also I noticed that, especially in the fourth year, you teamed up with (an anonymous peer) and (an anonymous peer). And you guys were getting along so well, it’s more than a team, that a bunch of friends. Would that kind of friendship and a little bit competition here and there within the group, that would help keep up your motivation in learning Chinese?

LEO: ABSOLUTELY! DEFINITELY! YEAH! Say like in the first year and second year, I would consider myself to be better than (an anonymous peer). The third year I thought maybe we are nearly on the same level. And in fourth year I am happy to admit that he passed me out. He worked harder than me and he was better than me at the end. There is a kind of rivalry in here, you know, where I want to be at his level, I don’t want him to be better than me.

And that’s DEFINITELY helpful. Not in a really competitive way, but you know, a friendly, friendly rivalry.

CHANG: Yes, I think you guys maintained a very healthy and lovely competition and friendship sort of the thing. It’s actually not a very usual thing, not that common. I appreciate that very much. And also, you mentioned a little bit about the GPA. Then I want to ask, have you ever felt that you work only for getting the GPA at a certain period of the study?

LEO: I wouldn’t say necessarily just for GPA.

CHANG: But it plays a part.

LEO: It DOES play a part, yes. For example, when I chose to study Chinese, I didn’t expect the Chinese could be good for my GPA. I knew it would be challenging and I thought, you know, more people would kind of like getting ‘C’ s and ‘D’ s. To be honest, you guys are very generous in your marking. We definitely appreciate that. But I expected my GPA to suffer for studying Chinese than I suppose to be benefited. And then throughout, in final year I chose Advanced Chinese as elective for both semesters. Uh…in first semester I expected that again, I expected that it’s not gonna be really good for my GPA because the aim of the Advanced Chinese is quite intimidating, you know? Like ‘Oh my god! I didn’t think my level of Chinese is advanced. How can I cope with this module?’ But I think doing the Advanced Chinese in the final year is one of the best things you could do along with the Business Chinese. Business Chinese, that module, you know, you get the business vocab. And the Advanced Chinese, you continue to improve your level, you know. And also, it’s kind of, they are mutually beneficial, that some of the vocab I learned in Business Chinese could be used in my Advanced Chinese class. And the Advanced Chinese class, the grammar, the structure, the things we are still learning about, that could be helpful in Business Chinese module. So those two are very much hand in hand. I think my score in both went higher as a result of doing both.
CHANG: Uh... You mentioned that Chinese to you is more like an add-on benefit. Like, it never gonna become an essential quality for you to get a job, especially in an Irish context, or in a European context. So, how could you keep up the motivation to gain this additional benefit? Is this a sort of investment in the future?

LEO: I think so, yeah. Like, if I ever got an opportunity to move to China, or even transfer companies based on the opportunity that was open, I would be absolutely willing to do that. Say for example, in ten years down to line, I am not happy with my job, my position in Ireland. I felt like it was repetitive, I feel like with my Chinese ability I would be in a good position to kind of, I don’t know, either transfer to China or work in a multinational company and deal with the Chinese. I feel like I would be in a rather better position to get a job with it. So, yeah, it is an investment in the future. But also, it’s also an interest. Like I do, I genuinely love to study Chinese, and I still do. Being back here and I am just like, I am still learning it. Like I have the HSK5 book. I haven’t looked into it, but I will probably pick it up at some stage. So it’s an investment, but it’s not like me doing something I don’t want to do for the sake of it. It’s an interest for me, and I also think it would be beneficial in the future.

CHANG: Speaking of the interest, may I ask, do you still remember what got you into the learning of Chinese in the first place?

LEO: Like why I took Chinese?

CHANG: Yeah, [do you still remember…

LEO: [Yeah! Well, because in the first year, first semester, you know you have to take two languages. During semester two, you choose to proceed with only one. Like for example, I studied German in secondary school, and I am studying Commerce International. I always intended to take German and do one year Erasmus in Germany, and pursuing that. And then, the first semester I chose to study Chinese as well, not thinking much of it, never thought I would pursue it. And I think the way that Chinese was taught in the first semester of the first year, it’s very well done. It’s very motivating. The module was made very interesting. I think a lot of people including me had a change of heart and started to do Chinese as a result of the first semester of the first year Chinese class.

CHANG: So you are not entering college and decided to do Chinese. That actually happened probably towards the end of the first year, or at least towards the end of the first semester.

LEO: Yeah, about halfway through.

CHANG: Okay, so you don’t have a clear starting point like ‘I am gonna learn Chinese after this.’ No. It’s a gradual process.

LEO: Yeah!

CHANG: Okay. Then I suppose like when you do feeling down…because I asked and some of them will have a clear incident or moment as the initial driven for learning Chinese, but for you it’s more like a gradual process. Like, when they are feeling down, this may pop out and help keep them in the programme. I am wondering, do you ever experienced such kind of serious situation, that you want to abandon the programme, if you do, I’d like to know what would prevent you from doing so.

LEO: Uh… I don’t know, the closest I came to that was my first week in China. That like culture shock, and I was like ‘Oh my god! I would never want to live in here. I would never see myself working in here. What’s the point in this? This isn’t for me?’ That initial culture shock made me feel like ‘What am I doing studying Chinese?’ But in a way that was partially my fault, you know, I didn’t research enough about life in China. I was quite shocked for a lot of things. But then after the coming week, you know, I kind of adjust it. You kind of embarrass the culture more, you get used to it, you settle down. And then it’s okay again. So, I guess I never had that kind of experience like ‘Oh! I don’t want to do Chinese anymore.’ That would be the closest.

CHANG: Okay, I am gonna jump back to the point that you mentioned you think you didn’t research enough about life in China. I am curious like, would you think partially that’s the responsibly of the programme, of the teachers? I mean you do have… I need to ask first, did you take the non-language modules beforehand?

LEO: I… I studied Chinese culture and Chinese politics beforehand. They helped in some way.

CHANG: But, I don’t think any responsibility should be on the teachers. To be honest, I think I just wasn’t prepared. I should’ve looked up. I don’t know, maybe. UH! It’s a TOUGH ONE! Maybe we should’ve learned more about like say...UH! I don’t know whose responsibility should be about this, to be honest. You know, it was all the initial struggles at the start, like get accommodation sorted, setting up your bank account, setting up your phone and stuff.
like that. Like that’s what makes the first week really hard. Because you had these problems, like people couldn’t be contacted, people didn’t know how to get the 3G, and that was messy at the start. And then, once the problems get solved, you settle down and you are fine, I don’t think it was really the responsibility of teachers at that stage. I just think that I should’ve…that we all should’ve just been more prepared than that.

CHANG: Think about this and this is very interesting. I am gonna start with the non-language modules which talk about China and Chinese, you know, Chinese culture, society, that kind of thing. At this stage, you mentioned that the content was useful in some way. But, could you think of, for example the Chinese culture class, have you actually ever applied anything you’ve learned in that class into real life? Like understanding people, helping you to do the work while you were in China, or it was more like just an interesting module?

LEO: (long pause) Uh…yeah. You DEFINITELY raised a good point there. There were DEFINITELY a lot of interesting things, but a lot of them are not practical. I do agree with stuff like that, like learning something about Chinese, say Chinese art and traditional Chinese medicine. It’s very interesting, but I don’t know whether it is helpful. Some stuff I suppose, you know like, you learn about Chinese food, like at the table, polite manners, business card culture, that could really help. But I think a lot of it, sorry, I think a lot of it was just interesting than practical, in some way.

CHANG: So, when you first experience culture shock, I mean, you have actually been learning Chinese and Chinese related modules for two years. And it never occurred to you that maybe the programme needs a little bit of improvement in helping prepare you for such kind of culture shock? You only think that ‘I am not ready. I am not prepared enough.’ But like, have you ever been pointed to the directions, even if just teacher says ‘You need a little bit research here and there’, or at least point out the necessity of such kind of research? You didn’t think there are any responsibilities for the programme and the teachers?

LEO: Not really. I think all the information, it is all online. And we could definitely anticipate the issues that we had, you know…uh…(.) Maybe we could have one or two classes, like how to go setting up a bank account or things like this. But also, I also feel like, you know, when you were running problems in China, a lot of the time people won’t speak English. And you were forced to use Chinese for certain circumstances. And it could be very frustrating at that time, where I do think these are opportunities to speak to people. In a wired way, these are opportunities to really use your Chinese. Because you were forced to, that you don’t really have a choice. And I think actually in the end, it is nearly beneficial. It gets you speaking. It gets you listening. It gets you to try, you know? Does that make sense?

CHANG: Yes, yes, of course. Like you were forced to survive in using Chinese.

LEO: Right.

CHANG: Okay, I am gonna ask a few questions about the teachers. Are there any traits of the teachers that you think could demotivate you?

LEO: Yeah…uh…I don’t think I’ve experienced it. I am not just saying this to you now. I genuinely think the teachers that I had in (an anonymous institution) have been very good. They demonstrated interests in their students and gave me that kind of one on one care. I do think it is possible that a Chinese teacher, that they could demotivate you. For example, I told you planned on picking up German and keeping up German and pursuing that. Say I didn’t like the teachers first semester of the first year. I really didn’t like them. They didn’t want to be there. They were boring. They had no interest. That demotivated me and that ruined my interest in pursuing German. So I do think the teacher could demotivate you. But in my experience that didn’t happen to me, the Chinese teachers that I had.

CHANG: Okay, then I will give you some incidents and you could tell me whether you had such kind of experiences or not, how they work on you. First of all, there are people criticising that Chinese teachers could be too strict on the precision of accuracy when it comes to the pronunciation and the handwriting of Chinese characters.

LEO: Uh…I think it is necessary. You need that…like…strictness…and, I don’t know. I don’t think so. I do get what you are saying, but I don’t think they made to that level.

CHANG: Okay, don’t worry. You don’t need to agree with me. I am looking for different views from different people and try to draw a rather objective conclusion. So you don’t think that was a problem, you don’t think that would demotivate you, right?
LEO: I don’t think so. I wouldn’t. If teachers are getting out to me about my tones or something about my writing, I wouldn’t take it personally. You just look at it and try to improve based on it. I’d appreciate they did that more than anything. I wouldn’t be pissed off.

CHANG: And you did mention that the teachers in here you had, they do have a one on one care for the students.

LEO: I think so, yeah. I think in some way the teachers in (an anonymous institution), maybe they weren’t nearly picky enough. I think when we came over to China, we study Chinese with other internationals, there were aspects that they are a lot better than us. Say like, I think maybe the teachers in (an anonymous institution) are too casual about our tones, and that kind of made us very difficult to speak to the locals, because our pronunciation was not accurate enough. It was one thing we all noticed comparing with the other internationals, that maybe we were okay if we were reading or writing, we are good. But the accuracy of our spoken was not as good. And the teachers in China, a lot of time they were picking us on that, and we were a lot stricter on the tones, a lot stricter than we were in (an anonymous institution).

CHANG: Then what about the feedback? Because care on a one to one level is one thing, and there are criticisms about the feedback system, like the Chinese teachers are not so good at giving feedback on a personal level. They care more about the whole class.

LEO: I think when it comes to feedback, for example, I am thinking about Chinese in the fourth year. I know when we got a score based on one thing we did, you gave us the score kind of breaking down to pronunciation, complexity, you do that with a specific break down, which I think is good, to see what us are doing okay and what us don’t. So I think in that way, we do get feedback if one of the break down scores was good while one was a lot lower. For example, if your complexity was good, but your accuracy and pronunciation were bad, then you know. I don’t think you need any more.

CHANG: So you think to give you transparent marking criteria, that is a kind of feedback, right?

LEO: A hundred percent. It’s important, yeah.

CHANG: Okay. Then this is about the early stage. I am wondering do you have…if you could recall now, I think you got a lot of praise and encouragement. Maybe in some way you’ve realised that they might overdo it. They might even cheer you with your mistakes. They are really afraid of pointing out mistakes. They are trying to encourage you in many ways, but there is a lack of constructive criticism. Like what you’ve mentioned, maybe we could be a little bit stricter on the pronunciation before you go to China. That would narrow the gap between you guys and students from other different countries.

LEO: Yeah, I DEFINITELY think so. It’s a fine balance between trying to keep you motivated and keep you interested, and also being strict. But I think for my experience, yeah maybe the teachers could be stricter with us. Even with a little bit hash on marking. Yeah, uh…we were talking in the classroom, more corrections on tones. Because it is for our own benefit. It would make our life easier before we go to the Erasmus year if we were better at speaking Chinese. Then we will have fewer problems. So I think so.

CHANG: Then what about the nature of the Chinese classroom? Do you think it is a little bit teacher centred?

LEO: Um…let me think. I think in year one and two, I think it is fine. I thought it was fine the way it was. You know, the teacher teaches it, but there are a lot of like in class participation, a lot of making students speak, and a lot of role plays. I think the balance was okay. I think the fourth year, probably it was just too much group work, and, you know, as one teacher overlooking over five or six groups of students. It was kind of hard, like you only have a certain amount of attention for a certain amount of time. I think it was probably not balanced in that way. The teacher should be speaking more time, and then a little bit less on group work. Because when you were like observing, the group was great. You were able to help us, critic, correct us. But, through the course of the time, you will be occupied by other groups. And then, it’s not as beneficial, you know?

CHANG: Okay, it needs a little bit of balance between the lecturing and all those activities.

LEO: Uh…would you think you have enough opportunity to practise Chinese during the class?

CHANG: Uh…I think there are enough opportunities, yeah. I think it’s good how we were assessed, you know, the role play, the case studies with presentations. I think that gave us good opportunities to speak. Yeah, I think it was enough. I wouldn’t have any criticism there.

LEO: Uh…do you study other languages? Oh yes, you do, you study German.

CHANG: I studied German in secondary school. But, I haven’t done it anymore.
CHANG: Do you feel more or less stressed when you were learning Chinese in comparison with learning German?

LEO: I would say less. I’d say that comes down to the grammar. I’d say they are kind of the opposite. The German vocabulary was very easy, very easy to speak the language, as the way you look it is the kind of way you say it. Just pronounce every vowel, and you kind of like can’t really go wrong. Where Chinese is the opposite. The reading can be hard, the writing can be hard, but the grammar is very refreshingly easy comparing my experience in learning German. And the grammar is the most stressful part in learning a language. In that regard I think Chinese isn’t that bad. And also I was a lot more interested in learning Chinese than learning German, and when you have an interest in something, it’s easier to learn and less stressful.

CHANG: But, I presume the sense of achievement you gain from learning German would be more…uh…efficient than learning Chinese?

LEO: Uh…

CHANG: Not necessarily?

LEO: I don’t think so. I think they are very different, the way you study German and the way you study Chinese. I told you my methods in learning Chinese was like always writing down, writing down characters and in that way, recording myself. I don’t think that’s necessary ways for German. For me, the way I studied German was more like reading, studying the grammar, sentence structures. There wasn’t much need to practise my writing or practise my speaking, because they were the kind of easy parts.

CHANG: But like at the beginning of learning Chinese, it is impossible for you to know all these methods you are using or describing now. I presume you would borrow the methods you learn German to learn Chinese, at the beginning?

LEO: At the beginning, yeah. But, like I said, I don’t think they are necessarily effective ways to study Chinese. I thought like, of course that’s the way I know how to study a language, and I adapt that to Chinese. But, soon after I started to change. I kind of realise more efficient, more effective ways.

CHANG: So overall would you think your experience of learning German is beneficial in learning Chinese? Not in a way that you could borrow those methods, to apply them in the learning of Chinese, but to compare the differences between the two languages, and that lead you to understand the differences between the two languages, lead you to the right methods of learning Chinese?

LEO: Um…my honest answer would be no. I don’t think it was beneficial. I don’t know. I don’t think it had any effect on my learning of Chinese. I mean, learning Chinese was a whole different experience. I wouldn’t even compare it with studying German. That’s my answer, yeah.

CHANG: Yeah, I just need an honest answer. I am just curious like what would be the effect of your experience in learning German to learning Chinese. To you it seems like you isolated the experiences of learning different languages relatively well. You didn’t let them impact on each other.

LEO: Yeah, I wouldn’t compare them, but it was very very hard.

CHANG: Have you ever compared them? If you did, what stops you from comparing them? Or if you didn’t, how could you know that you shouldn’t compare them in the first place?

LEO: (a very long pause, about 25 seconds) Uh…it’s a tough question. Of course you are….of course. Oh, it’s a really tough question. I don’t even know how to answer that. I just wouldn’t. I just naturally wouldn’t compare them. Just like, you learn German vocabulary, you learn a word, you learn a meaning. And you learn Chinese vocabulary, you learn how to pronounce it, you learn the tone, you learn the character, how to recognise it, how to write, you learn measure words, you learn radicals. Like, it is SO SO DIFFERENT.

CHANG: So it was the difference you probably sense since the very beginning. As you mentioned, you were quite sensitive…that after the experience of learning German, you were quite sensitive about the grammar when learning a language. So when you started learning Chinese, you instantly notice that at least for the grammar, these two are quite different.

LEO: Yeah, I suppose that’s a very good point actually, yeah. Studying another European language, yeah, that’s a good point.yeah. The European language will make you kind of recognise what’s easier and what’s tough for Chinese. Yeah, exactly, highlighted how much easier the grammar is for Chinese. And also highlighted how much hard the writing
is, the spoken is. Yeah, definitely, a hundred percent agree what you have said. You said it better than I did.

CHANG: Maybe like if the case is when you were learning German, and you were studying German and French in the first year, maybe you would compare a lot more between the languages and experiences. Because maybe, maybe they share more similarities? Then you might compare like ‘Am I progressing as efficient as I progressed in German in the past?’ Maybe that could affect you a little bit more.

LEO: Yeah.

CHANG: So I am thinking use that to reflect in the teaching. Like, because there are students who constantly compare their experience of learning European languages and their experience of learning Chinese and got demotivated. Would you think it would be a good idea, that the teachers could point out the differences in Chinese language, in a way to let students experience it at first? Maybe this would help them differentiate the languages and let them just turn to stop comparing the languages.

LEO: Absolutely, a hundred percent, yeah. I think it would be beneficial to highlight ‘This is something very different from European languages, and you can’t compare them.’ You can’t say ‘Oh, I’ve studied French for two years and I’ve studied Chinese for two years, and my French was so much better.’ You can’t do that. Yeah, I think it would be a good thing to highlight. And people would stop comparing them on the same bases.

CHANG: And actually I could remember from our beginner class, we do have a slide, a brief introduction on the characteristics of Chinese language, like what kind of grammar that Chinese has, in comparison with the European languages. But that’s a little bit too general. It’s just a summarise of all the differences. Maybe it would be a good idea to give a little bit more details to that, make some examples. Like ‘See, this grammar in German is like this, this and this. While in Chinese it is like this. They don’t have all the genders.’ I don’t know the terminologies of all of this, but like ‘They have different genders in vocabulary, and this in French as well. But see, Chinese doesn’t have this. But Chinese has this.’ You know, something about the grammar.

LEO: Yes, definitely, spot on.

CHANG: So maybe it would be worthwhile explaining all these differences into details, rather than get it over with and rush to the class.

LEO: Yeah, I would be a hundred percent agree with that. I think that would be very beneficial, at the start, like in the first semester of the first year, week two, yeah.

CHANG: Just to make the students realise, like we always say but we didn’t really put a lot of effort to make them genuinely realise that it’s not a DIFFICULT language, but a very DIFFERENT language.

LEO: Yeah.
CHANG: Okay, now these are the six perspectives that I found, which would affect people’s motivation of learning Chinese after they have enrolled such kind of programme, and the first one is the reduced self-confidence. So I am wondering did you ever feel a reduced self-confidence when you were learning Chinese? What would be the scenario, like what could cause such kind of feeling?

ETHAN: I think in general, learning Chinese, or learning any other languages, it is a difficult task, it’s not easy. So in general, you have to…before learning any languages…you need to have some kind of level of confidence. Because you are gonna fall and fail a lot, and you will have to get up and just be comfortable. If you did make a mistake, you got to be comfortable, because that’s the way to learn a language. If you don’t make mistakes, or if you are not comfortable making mistakes and let people correct you, you are not gonna improve. So you need to be comfortable basically…you know…

CHANG: Like to have a foundation of confidence.

ETHAN: Yeah, like being ignorant and jump into the unknown.

CHANG: Are you referring to general learning or learning a foreign language?

ETHAN: In general learning too, but Chinese is especially a difficult language. I put up with Arabic as well. These are very difficult languages. Most people get used to…uh…the Latin form of a language, not only the Chinese alphabet, it is also a toned language. And tones could make differences, you know, change the meaning. So I think, that’s (have a foundation of confidence prior to learning a language) very important. I think it is also important for learning Chinese or any other languages, which is the small classroom. Because I think you need to get a certain level of attention from the teacher, but also if you have a big class, it’s gonna be very difficult for the teacher to get your level. And also a small class makes you more comfortable. Bigger classes are less comfortable. The small class makes you feel more like a family. And you get along with everyone very well. So it would be more comfortable to…you know…making mistakes and failing, you know. Everyone knows everyone, you know. It’s just a more comfortable environment. It would also make the teacher easier to tailor the class, the class which could be more suitable for the specific students. But for a big class, she has to…you know…or he has to…uh…what’s the word I am looking for…less considerate for each personal level and tries to find a middle ground, which is really difficult, very hard to do in a big classroom.

CHANG: I would say that a small classroom, teachers and students tend to have a good relationship, like you mentioned, as a family. That would reduce the…sort of the level of anxiety? So you are making mistakes and you are more willing to make mistakes?

ETHAN: Yes, definitely. I was thinking back to…when I was studying Chinese in (an anonymous institution), we had a very…it was a classroom with 15 (people). I think the ideal classroom would be five or six (people). When I was studying in Taiwan, it was five or six people per class. And I developed a very close bond with the teacher, but also with my classmates. We became close friends. We used to go out together. Even the teacher would go out with us. Some of us would cook dinner and everyone would invite each other to cook at their houses. That bound definitely helps with the learning of Chinese. When we were in (an anonymous institution), our class was with 15 people, people with VERY different levels. I wasn’t very good, I wasn’t the best at that time. The reasons that I started to learn Chinese were because I want to learn Chinese. It was either a choice of…uh…continue to learn Spanish which I was never good at it, or start with Chinese. So basically I chose Chinese because it was a fresh start. Everybody was at the same level at the start, so I would have a better chance. And it was only after that when I went to China, that I was falling in love with the culture and the language, but also to realise the importance of it. And also our course didn’t really help with the fact that only our final year counted. So it wasn’t…not that great of a thing, but it does help to give something that worth working for. It allows you to…you know…to work something like if you don’t work
well, you are not going to get good grades. And they gonna count. But for the first three years it didn’t count, so kind of felt that we were learning for nothing.

CHANG: Okay, when you are talking about this, you are emphasising the importance of a good peer and teacher relationship in increasing individual attention, the reduced pressure and more willing to try and make mistakes. But would you think this could help reduce the negative impact of competition between peers? Like in a class, of course there will always be someone who’s a little bit better. But within a smaller group, everybody knows each other, would that reduce the feeling (of being not good enough)? Or maybe think of a larger group, maybe like in a lecture room, for the people who are slightly better, they don’t know you so well, and you don’t know them. So it will sort of creating a gap in between, you might not feel that much of a direct impact on you? Do you know what I am talking about?

ETHAN: I think so, like they all have advantages and disadvantages. But I think that the advantages of a small classroom outplay the disadvantages. For the teacher, it would be easier. First of all, because when I was in Taiwan, we were divided by our language levels. So with a small classroom, it is easier to speak with people with a similar level in the classroom. That kind of removes the anxiety. We have people who are really good at Chinese and people who are not so good. It makes it difficult for the teacher because she had to find a level that is engaging for both the very good students and the ones that are not so good. That is very difficult, because if it is too hard for people who are not so good at it, or not at their level, they start to feel not that engaging, you know, their motivational level might fail. And the other side of it is that if you make it too easy, for the people who are really good, they are not gonna bother trying hard because, you know, ‘This is too easy. What’s the point?’ They might even stop attending classes. So it is hard to balance that with a bigger classroom.

CHANG:Speak of this, I do have criticisms from interviews and the students, that we are talking about generally speaking, Mandarin Chinese teachers, they had a lack of attention on individuals. Sometimes they care about you more as a group, and they have slight attention for individuals. They tend to offer less individual feedback, one on one feedback? Do you have such kind of…[uh…]

ETHAN: [Now that you mentioned it, it could be because the culture of Chinese is collective. CHANG: Wait, you do study other languages, right? ETHAN: Me? I studied Arabic when I was small. CHANG: And just in comparison with other European languages that you speak? ETHAN: Spanish? Well, I studied Spanish in secondary school and [uh…]

CHANG: [That would be different experiences. ETHAN: Yeah, it would be. We don’t really have good teachers. And so basically when I had the opportunity to let go of that, I did, because I want a fresh start. If I were to continue, to continue with the level that I suppose to have after the Leaving Certificate, and I wasn’t very good. But for the Chinese studies, I guess you are right. It’s more collective and the teacher looks at the overall picture, or the class. But again, when I think of my experience of learning Chinese in Taiwan and in (an anonymous institution), it was a big classroom. It’s hard to get individual feedback because you don’t get to focus on each student as much as you like, because you don’t have enough time. But when I was in Taiwan, it was only five or six people. It’s easier for the teacher to give individual feedback, because at least…she could define each person with their strengths and weaknesses and stuff like that. And she can point that out like ‘Focus on that’. But like…our teachers in (an anonymous institution), when you ask them about feedback, they don’t give it. So you would also have to take the initiatives at the same time. But it was hard to do in a big classroom, of course. But, yeah.

CHANG: And also I have information regarding…I am talking about the early stage of learning, where probably the teachers received some training to sort of to encourage students. So sometimes they overdo it. Like they always praise you and they are a little bit afraid of giving criticisms, even for the constructive ones. Like even if you pronounced a wrong pronunciation, they would just cheer you like ‘Good job’. But sometimes you may feel that they didn’t really mean it. They just want to cheer you up. They just want to encourage you.

ETHAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But that’s hard to find a balance because each person would take the feedback differently. So it’s better to get it started with the students, and then find the balance. Because people take this in different ways. Some students may need those encouragements, but others might want more tough love, you know, constructive criticism.
The reason I think is the individual difference. But I think in general Chinese people are very…uh…very encouraging…uh…very…what’s the word I am looking for…

CHANG: more tolerant?

ETHAN: Yeah, yeah. But not that. They are more…uh…they praise a lot, which is a good thing. It’s a positive thing.

CHANG: Okay, I am gonna jump back to the reduced confidence, where we talked about how a small group class could benefit in gaining confidence through building a rather intimate relationship between teachers and peers. But I think there are also potentials in amplifying the comparison between the peers, like the scores, the academic performances in the class.

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ETHAN: You would know that someone’s performance would be a little bit better. Would that cause demotivating effects?

CHANG: Well, when we were in a small class, we all started at the same level. I guess I could say this, we all had a…same start. So like for me I felt when somebody is better than me, it encourages me to do better. Because you built a close relationship with those people, it’s more of healthy competition. It’s not when it might come to a big classroom, to build a close relationship with everyone. So when in a big classroom, one person get a higher score and you would be like ‘I am down there. I will never be able to catch up.’

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CHANG: So still you think it would be more positive, that sort of like model effect. Because you share a rather closer relationship in comparison with a big class, you get to know what she or he actually is doing, so you could learn from maybe the methods, the way they learn.

ETHAN: Yeah, exactly. You study with each other as well. I also was one of the better ones, in the smaller classroom. If you know what I am saying, it’s not like you are the 15th in a 15 person classroom. You won’t look at that as all negative, as you feel like you are not far behind the others. And one thing I think did help was that when I was in Taiwan, none of them was native English speakers. We have one Korean girl, two Japanese girls, one Indian and one Malaysian. He (the Malaysian) was a native English speaker, he lived in the UK for many years. But uh…we were all forced to speak Chinese. It was part of my frustration. But it was a positive thing, to learn a language not based on an English-speaking environment. It definitely helps a lot. Also, I think my Chinese improved a lot when I was in China. And that’s how important it is. When I came back, I worked harder, probably the hardest I ever worked in my final year. (laughter) I didn’t do so well in the first semester of my final year. But then I took that as an encouragement to work harder. I went to Hongfei and ask for feedback, and then I got the details for my ‘B’s, so…

CHANG: In terms of the benefit of learning Chinese, I think…have you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese?

ETHAN: At the start, I wasn’t very motivated. Also, it’s because I just wasn’t that interested in all of it. I think it is important that the programme or the people who are in charge of the teaching of Chinese to try to always highlight that benefit. I think the best way to do that is to organise events. I think it is also important to get the government involved. For example, the Irish government if we are talking about studying in here, in Ireland, is to get government involved and get people given talks about, you know, like ‘There are opportunities open to study Chinese and you could do that and that’…

CHANG: Career talk.

ETHAN: Yeah, career talk. I think that’s very important. We didn’t have that. At least we didn’t have much of that. And I also think it is important to get the Chinese embassy involved. Because I know there are scholarships for European citizens and also Irish citizens. The only reason I know about this stuff is because that I researched it myself. But it would help if, you know, other than just the (an anonymous institution) scholarship, the (an anonymous institution) scholarship. There are other kinds of scholarships, but we never aware of this.

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There was an event this year, which is good. That’s a positive step forward. Even get companies to give talks, I think that’s important, companies either work in China or Chinese companies that work in Ireland. I think it is important to at least give students insight into what they could be doing.

CHANG: Instead of just stuck in a school scenario bubble.

ETHAN: Yeah. I mean there were social events, which was good. But you also need something…uh…a career goal. Because, you know, when we graduated, there wasn’t a lot of Chinese opportunities. You have to seek it out yourself. There wasn’t anything like ‘Here, you have this and this and this options’. We didn’t really have that. But also the course was fairly new as well.
CHANG: So you don’t really doubt (the benefit of learning Chinese) because you see aspects that could be improved?

ETHAN: That’s my level. But I am not happy about that. I want to improve. After all these years I feel like I should be at a much higher level, but I am not. And I feel that demotivates me, especially when I see people who learned less than me, and they are much better. That really demotivates me.

CHANG: Which period of study are we talking about? When did you feel that, I mean the dissatisfaction towards the achievement?

ETHAN: I didn’t take Chinese seriously at the start, and that’s more of regret for myself. But when I see people who studied for only one year or two years, and they are nearly fluent. That really…uh… It kind of hurts, like ‘I could be that’. I understand for someone who studied one year, I mean one year in China, they would be much better than someone who studied four years in here. Going there and living there was harder, while advantages are the outcome you could come up with learning Chinese. Because you live in the environment. You were forced to communicate by using it, if you don’t stay in the English bubble, you know. For the one year study abroad could change a lot.

CHANG: I noticed that there might be a point which was brought up in the past already. Like, for Chinese, when you attribute the success of a peer, like someone is doing better than me, or someone is fluent after two years’ study, you didn’t mention the attitude. Normally that’s a result of hard work. It’s not like someone who is actually naturally good at this.

ETHAN: Yeah, I tend to compare, which is not a good thing. People have different levels, you are right.

CHANG: Or people just tend to think that because the language is difficult, so maybe in some certain ways, this language is rather fair for all the learners. It’s not like some of the European languages, you could instantly feel that someone is naturally good at learning them.

ETHAN: Because we know people who do have advantages in learning European languages.

CHANG: So I think that’s actually a positive thing, because people wouldn’t consider for someone who is in the group, like ‘Oh, he just naturally good at learning Chinese’, but mainly because he is working hard or his method is good.

ETHAN: But I will never compare a European language to Chinese. I would only compare people in China who learn Chinese and people in here. Like learning Chinese was definitely much more difficult than learning other Latin or European languages.

CHANG: Okay. We have talked about the benefit, what about the necessity? I mean we are now in Ireland, what is the necessity of learning and speaking Mandarin Chinese in this context?

ETHAN: In Ireland?

CHANG: Yes, I mean, the working language won’t be Chinese.

ETHAN: It’s true. There aren’t many opportunities in Ireland. So it’s not very encouraging for someone who wants to stay in Ireland and use their Mandarin, because there isn’t a lot of opportunities. It would be very limited. You have what, Enterprise Ireland and maybe a few jobs here and there. But for me, personally I wanna go live in China, even for only live there for a year or a bit. It is like another home to me, the same with Taiwan. Some of my best friends are over there. Now if I went there, I have my connections. It’s hard to build that connection in here though. But it’s fine for someone who wants to stay in here. The business relationship and political relationship between Ireland and China are improving. But so far, the opportunities aren’t many. Like there are more Chinese courses. There are more people who study Chinese now. So there are more people doing it now. It’s getting more competitive. Now you have (an anonymous institution), you have (an anonymous institution), you have (an anonymous institution), you have (an anonymous institution), (an anonymous institution), and also a few other places and universities as well. So there are more people. It is more competitive now. Before it was more obscure. People just say it is special. Now it is more competitive. So for people who did not see many opportunities but good at it, they kind of can get demotivated.

CHANG: So it’s not necessarily a bad thing. I mean when they romanticise it, when the necessity of being able to speak it was not that obvious, it is not necessarily a negative thing. Like that (the experience of learning Chinese) would make you special, may give you more
opportunities. While in here, when people, the general public started to realise the benefit of being able to speak Mandarin, there will be more opportunities, but also a little bit more competitive.

ETHAN: Yeah. The disadvantage would be becoming more competitive, the advantage would be there are more people doing it. There are more courses, because obviously China is trying to increase the number of people who could communicate in Chinese, because it increases the trade between Ireland and China. So that is positive. But it will get competitive. But I don’t think you can really really learn a language without immersing yourself in that culture, or a country or a language for AT LEAST, AT LEAST a year. If you don’t do that, you could learn as much as you could, as much as you like, but it won’t be the same. To learn the language, you also need to understand the culture. I think that’s very important. If you learned a language, but you don’t understand the culture… And it would be very difficult to understand the culture if you haven’t lived there. I think it is the very least that you need to live in that country and use that language.

CHANG: Would you agree the opposite, that it would be impossible to understand the culture if you don’t learn the language?

ETHAN: Only to a certain extent. Only to a certain extent. Like, language is the gateway to culture.

CHANG: So it is important to study both, maybe at the same time?

ETHAN: If don’t you understand the idioms, or like the sayings, that you didn’t study the language, you know. Because you know certain characters they have stories. It’s very difficult to understand the stuff. For example, like 520, ‘Wo ai ni’ (Chinese for ‘I love you’), you know, stuff like that, you don’t really understand unless you understand the culture.

CHANG: And speaking of the culture, would you think the non-language modules are helpful in studying the language? What’s your comment on that?

ETHAN: Yeah. I think that’s good, because…I don’t know. I think they are very good. Because you know, you need other contents, like business. Like if you are studying business, it is symbolic that you understand how Chinese people do business. If you study law, I suppose you should understand Chinese law because you want to know what they are saying. They are important. They might not be the most fun, but they are important. Not everything will be, you know, fun.

CHANG: You mentioned you didn’t treat Chinese that seriously at the beginning. (laughter)

ETHAN: I didn’t treat anything very seriously at that time in general. (laughter)

CHANG: So, would you think working towards GPA is one of the important driven for you to work on a language?

ETHAN: No, I don’t. But I think it is important to have a consequence if you don’t put into work as well. That won’t be enough. But it might be enough for someone, let’s say, not to do any work. Like, if you have consequences, at least that will get someone to a certain level at least. But when I did my course, it wasn’t my first choice. I wasn’t really sure about the course. So, that’s the difference. It would be different for everyone.

CHANG: I am interested in this. Like, normally I would ask people when was their initial starting point that they wanted to start learning the Chinese language. But for you, obviously this is not the case. In the beginning, you didn’t set up your mind for this. But what’s the turning point?

ETHAN: The only reason I did this…when I went to China, that was the turning point. I realised how important it is, you know, and how I should have used it and how should I work. I didn’t choose my year in China as much as…I didn’t use it as my advantage as much as I would it like to be, so I came back, and I was like ‘I really need to go back’. That was my goal, to finish the final year and go back to China as soon as possible. That didn’t really work out.

CHANG: Do you still remember the trigger, when you…like some scenarios, like when you talk to the locals and you realise that [it was not enough for you to…

ETHAN: [I would say my interest is in technology. I was always into technology. So when I went to China, there were always a lot of great Chinese tech companies. The Xiaomi was really the first company that I was interested, that I was really fascinated about. It is still really young. It started young. So that was kind of like ‘I want to work in this company, ONE DAY, or at least a similar company.’ So it’s like, I need to get good at Chinese if I want to work in a Chinese company. So I think that was the trigger.

CHANG: And still when you are talking about that you are more than willing to go back to China, somehow to me it feels like it was not purely career driven.

ETHAN: It’s not purely career driven. I like the culture. There are also similarities among the Chinese culture and Arabic culture, and also Irish culture. But also I feel like, I have
Chinese friends who speak English as well, but I think sometimes I met the people, I want to build a closer relationship with them. And if you can't speak Chinese, and your English is not so good, it's hard to do that. So it's like to immersive yourself more in the country or the culture, to improve your language. Otherwise it would be very hard to do so. It's like I want to understand more. But in order to understand more, you need to learn more.

I picked up that like companies like Xiaomi, you are really interested in those companies or something. Would such kind of feeling, such kind of...uh...sort of...admiration come into play when you are really feeling down, like really demotivated that you don’t want to learn Chinese anymore. Would they be like the last stroke to prevent you from maybe dropping out?

It can be. But also I think when it comes to the demotivation of learning a foreign language, you need a good support system. You kind of like when you are feeling down, there should be people who could support you.

What is the support system? Could you elaborate a little bit more about this?

Well, it depends for everyone. Like this is...in life you will be demotivated for a lot of reasons, you had to have something to...encourage you, to push you forward when you are feeling down, or put you up when you are down. It might be friends. It might be a teacher. It's hard to pin down. It depends on each person, what kind of thing would make them tick.

Is there anything more to your sudden increase in motivation after you came back from China? You are much more willing to work on Mandarin Chinese. Is that all that you have described, like your realisation while you were in China, your interest grew up in the Chinese IT industry, your willingness to work and gain a place?

I think the teachers, they matter of course as well. If they can motivate students, you know, they can also demotivate you, you know, push you to give up. For example, when I was doing my Leaving Cert, I picked up economics. And I was really good at it, and I really liked it. But when we went to (an anonymous institution), we didn't have really good lecturers. It’s kind of make me lose interests. Now I am not interested in economics anymore. So I think the teacher plays an important role to keep students motivated, but also they create those injuries. But obviously that’s not just teachers’ role. It depends on the students. But they are definitely one of the key ingredients.

Then when you talk about the teachers, could you think of any traits that could be improved, or some of the behaviours or attitude?

Ah, I don't know. I had fun with my teachers. ((laughter))

Don’t just be nice! ((laughter))

No, no, I was not just being nice. I had fun with the teachers, like (an anonymous teacher) and (an anonymous teacher), and (an anonymous teacher). We had (an anonymous teacher), he wasn’t that good. ((laughter)) I would be honest with you. I didn’t like him. He was just like...I don’t know. He was just not good at teaching us. And don’t tell him that. ((laughter)) He was a nice guy. I liked the guy.

That’s why, like we could just point out what’s wrong with him. What are the traits that Lichun had that caused you guys to dislike him?

Not that...I don’t know. He was not good at English. He wasn’t able to explain things, that makes it hard to...you know...people have different preferences as well, you know.

So it’s more about the professionalism or the personality?

I don’t know. I think it was more of the professional perspective. For personality, he was a lovely guy. I got along with him very well. But in terms of...uh...he wasn’t...he needed maybe more experience. (an anonymous teacher), I love her. She was great. But she was too easy on me. I remember that year I was just like very lazy. And she still gave me decent grades.

Everybody is easy on you. ((laughter))

Why? ((laughter))

Because of your personality! ((laughter))

Ah, okay. ((laughter))

Anyway, we consider that was a kind of ability and we appreciate that.

No, but sometimes like someone may feel demotivated. And like sometimes you need a push. If the teacher pushes you, sometimes you might be willing to work hard. For example, in my final year when I got the ‘D’s, I was really upset. And I went down to Hongfei and like ‘Why did I get this when I did so well?’ And I took feedback from her. And I really wanted to do good, but also I really want to prove myself to her. But also I felt like...like...I don’t know, not necessarily a sensitive teacher...I don’t know...I wanted to
impress her more. Because I care what she thinks about me as well, because we built a…not a student relationship, but also a personal relationship. And I think it is important to foster a good relationship with the teacher. It keeps you for being motivated, you know. If you had that relationship, if you see disappointments from them, it might push you to work harder.

CHANG: So you do appreciate constructive criticism.
ETHAN: Yes, of course. I think everybody needs it.
CHANG: But if I put that scenario into your first year or second year experience, would you feeling be changed completely?
ETHAN: I don’t think it is…It didn’t really have to do with Chinese. I just wasn’t sure whether this course was for me. I mean, it was not my first choice. It WAS my choice. I wasn’t really sure what this is going in my life. It’s not just about Chinese, it’s…uh…the course (commerce with international language studies). For the first year…for the first half year, I was thinking to drop it. And then, I didn’t really know what I want to do in business and stuff. I didn’t do in terms of interest. I wasn’t as motivated as many other students. So that’s not that personal, not just about Chinese.

CHANG: Here I find it very interesting, because you said that you set up your mind when you were in China, that you witness the things by your own eyes and you get to know the Chinese IT industry, you get interested in something like Xiaomi. From your personal experience, and you mentioned that at the early stage, if we want to motivate the students, we really want to invite people from the Chinese embassy or who work in the companies that have something to do with China. BUT, the lecturers, the courses, the programme, they DO try to sell you…let me put it this way…they DO try to sell you that image, right? I believe in (an anonymous teacher) course or some other courses, but you are not so easy in believing that, right? Because they DO try to send you those messages, but you only got truly motivated, or eventually decided that you want to work towards a career path that has something to do with Chinese language, only until you went to China and witnessed all by yourself.

ETHAN: Yeah. The masters I did when I was in Zhejiang, like then went to Alibaba, they went to Higher, they went to Phillips. They got the Jili’s vice president to talk to us, to the students. They got the Neteasy as well. So, sometimes they came in, they just talked about a lot of craps. But just seeing them there, it just shows the potential, you know, like if you want to be there. That stuff, you know, it motivates you even if the talk wasn’t so great. It’s just like…the POTENTIAL. If you could get people like that to speak to students, it will definitely be motivating. That’s one of the reasons that I want to go back to the masters, even though the masters itself is okay. It could be better. It’s a new masters. It’s just the potential, the connections you could make.

CHANG: So you value more about the platform, rather than the content.
ETHAN: Yeah. But for Chinese the content also matters. I think the books need to be improved.
CHANG: Which ones?
ETHAN: The (an anonymous institution) ones. They are not very good.

CHANG: I don’t even remember which books you used.
ETHAN: It’s just the books in general. They are not that great. When I was in Taiwan, we used the National Taiwan Normal University’s book. It’s called Practical Chinese. I could show you the pictures. I just felt the contents are more interesting.

CHANG: I think that was co-written with some English people. It’s not purely written by Taiwanese.

ETHAN: It might be that, yeah, yeah. It’s one of the best books that I ever had. It fits all Chinese learning in Taiwan. I studied at the National Taiwan University, and they were using that book along with many other universities. It’s just the content was more interesting, more you can relate to. That’s important.

CHANG: Okay, the content that you could relate to. So in here the content of the books are bit irrelevant.

ETHAN: Yeah, also the explanation of grammars, I thought was better in that book.

CHANG: Do you have any comments on the overall course design or programme design?

ETHAN: Yeah, there are a few things obviously that have already been changed. When you start, when we start, we start with pinyin. This thing was really wrong, because she always starts with pinyin. Obviously, you learn pinyin, but then move on to the characters…I think it is important to get familiar with the characters as soon as possible. So, yeah, that’s one thing. And also, things they have already changed it. For the first semester (in China), you should study business, then study Chinese, because you want to come back to Ireland strong with the language. That was another good improvement. But year, other than the things that I
410  have already mentioned, I can’t think of… Take DIT, I know a person who has been studying Computer Science and Chinese, with Xianshu, you know. Xianshu, their class was only five. That’s brilliant. That size was perfect. I think it’s very…especially in the early stage of learning, it is very important to have a small classroom. Maybe when you get better, having a big class even might not be a bad idea. But having a small classroom at the start is very important.

415  CHANG:  Okay, I want to mention this point. You know, teachers are bounded by certain rules of the college, sometimes you need to give, for example in (an anonymous institution), you need to give a…like normal distribution when it comes to the academic performance of your students. So this may cause that sometimes students find it VERY difficult to change their academic performance for a module. Do you have a similar feeling, like it is rather difficult to break the gap between the levels? Like if you come to the class as a student who always get a B, it’s kind of like you always gets a B. It is very difficult to break the level, to become…to enter the A level or something?

420  ETHAN:  For me, in general, so long as I get a decent grade, I am happy. Because I know that in the end the grades don’t matter, though it would be great to have nice grades. Nobody complains about that. But if I am getting a B, I couldn’t care less so long as my practical use of Chinese is good. Because with language, it is very hard to test your level on paper. Especially like I think sometimes HSK is a little bit irrelevant. There are people who might not do so well in HSK, but their spoken Chinese are VERY good.

425  CHANG:  So how could you know your ability to use the language is actually improving if the external exams are failing, such as the HSK? Sometimes you could fail the assessment of the module, or you get consistent similar scores, what other aspects you could...how could you identify your level?

430  ETHAN:  The tests, of course, they give indications. But they are not the full picture. That’s what I think. Obviously interacting with people who speak Chinese, you will notice, other people will notice. You are able to speak about more topics or different things, to understand more. So you will notice yourself start improving.

435  CHANG:  But that would be a little bit difficult for this context because there are fewer people who you could interact with.

440  ETHAN:  It’s definitely harder. That’s out of the teachers’ hand or the programme officers’. But, take the Chinese society, they tended to be just a Chinese society for Chinese people, so it’s actually quite hard to…it’s not like you don’t feel welcome, it’s just that it feels like…uh…it wasn’t designed for Chinese society, not for everyone. So I think…uh…just having more activities and people would have more interactions. That would help, that would give you indications. And as you said, it is hard to do it here in Ireland because it’s not a language that is being spoken. Like for example, I think they do now in Zhejiang, in campus, they have a canteen like on Monday it is the Chinese table. So for the people who sit on that table for lunch, they need to speak in Chinese. Such kind of initiatives could be really helpful. Every often or so it was filled with teachers, or not even teachers, just filled with Chinese students, and you could only speak Chinese on the table. For some people, language partner helps, like all you need to do is to sit down and speak for like half an hour. But I felt like it was too forced. I’d rather just make a friend, and then speak Chinese.

445  CHANG:  It is too artificial, it is not spontaneous enough.

450  ETHAN:  Yeah, but it was for ME. For some people, it works. But for me it just always feels like, it’s just too pushed, too artificial. I’d rather just make a friend. Because I have an interest in that fellow and he has interest in me, we can…you know…he can improve English and I can improve Chinese. So for the bilingual partnership, I used to try them. ((laughter)) But when I do, I kind of like always make excuses. We didn’t build the social connections. It was so…so structured.

455  CHANG:  Being too aware of the purpose, like ‘I am here to practise a language’ rather than genuinely communicate with the person.

460  ETHAN:  Yeah, because to me it’s like…AH...language is a medium to understand the culture and understand other people, it is not so much like you learn the language just because of the language. It’s a way to understand the culture. It’s a way to immersive yourself in a culture. I think I only have one last question regarding the…you actually have already mentioned this…the breakdown between the learning of pinyin and Chinese characters. Because especially for your batch, lots of students got demotivated because at the beginning they weren’t given the CHANCE to learn characters. The module had been overselling the
easiness because they only teach pinyin. The character was only introduced in a later stage, to be honest which was too late. And you have already [commented that…

ETHAN: [Yeah, I was very happy THEN. ((laughter)) Because I wasn’t very motivated, so it was easier for me. But thinking of the context...in a...in a...[like in a positive…

CHANG: [in a long run

ETHAN: [yeah, in a long run, it sucks.

CHANG: So did you regret that?

ETHAN: Yeah I regret that. It was important (to study character early). It is obviously important to focus on writing. But it was hard. I think it is easy for the Chinese people. So long as you are comfortable with typing, it is okay. Though if you want to get good at writing, I think that was difficult. That’s something I always try to achieve, the writing. But typing is much easier.

CHANG: Do you think that would be more reasonable, just to require them to do typing, especially considering they are not learning Chinese as a major. It’s just a minor study, or double major, only part of your degree.

ETHAN: No, I still think writing is important. Especially at the start, it was a lot of time. So it’s just to find a balance between writing and typing. Because of course they are both important aspects of a language, and if I can pick up writing or get good at it, I’d love to. But it takes a longer process. Aspects like speaking, it’s obviously easier, listening as well. But obviously writing BY HAND is much harder.

CHANG: So when you were learning the characters, would you compare how much time you spent on them and your previous experience of learning pinyin?

ETHAN: So obviously it is easier with pinyin, but there is another thing that I need to focus on, which is the tones. It is important to focus on, but…I don’t know. I just never mastered a way...to find a way to memorise the tones or to memorise the characters. I can recognise a lot of them, but I just won’t be able to write them. Like when I try to practise, I just look over and over and over again, but it only stays for a short time.

CHANG: When you mentioned that, we have the concern that language teachers generally only pass on knowledge of the Chinese language. Sometimes people, the students, spend an awful lot of time doing meaningless practices, doing the ineffective practices, while the teacher could offer a little bit more guidance on how to. Like for example, for the characters, you said that you have to practise them over and over again. You might find the effect of that is actually quite limited. While there could be better ways that teachers could provide.

ETHAN: Sure. But there is the thing. People learn in different ways, so maybe like the teacher could give options, give ideas on how to learn things. But one option might work for one student, and one option might not work for another student. Some people are more like auditory learners, they learn by listening. Some people are visuals. So I think trying to give those tools to students, so they can try out and see what’s best to suit them. For me like, the recognition of characters was fairly easy, so long as I regularly type or use them. It’s not so bad, not so bad. But the writing is always difficult for me, listening tests as well. While speaking is easier for me, though my grammar needs a lot of improvement.
CHANG: You know I have been continuously doing this research on demotivation of learning Chinese, and I actually have just finished the analysis of the questionnaires. So basically, all these questions are about the general factors that would cause demotivation of learning Chinese. The most important thing I found which demotivates learners is the reduced self-confidence. To be honest, you were like always one of my top students in my class in my memory, but do you ever feel reduced confidence in learning Chinese? Have you ever doubt whether you could do well in Chinese, whether you could achieve your expectation, something like that?

PADDY: Yeah, like…even when you actually speak Chinese to someone, like really really basic stuff, even when I was in my fourth year or whatever, and they can’t understand me, you were like ‘What am I doing studying Chinese for four years or three years and people couldn’t understand me?’…you know…just communicate on a basic level. But you just have to put it down to sometimes the Chinese people aren’t used to foreigners speaking Chinese.

CHANG: Okay, so this to you is not only happened at the early stage of learning, but it actually spread throughout different stages?

PADDY: Yeah, like I am trying to speak to someone using Chinese now. Some people would quickly kind of catch on, while others do not understand me.

CHANG: When you say this, do you mean at your workplace over there?

PADDY: Yeah, it’s just me and the Chinese people here.

CHANG: Okay, and your solution to [that is to…

PADDY: [Just speak more, I suppose. ((laughter)) Actually get to speak to Chinese people, which is the toughest part. Even in here, people’s English are so well, you kind of naturally communicate in English, switch to English.

CHANG: Okay, I actually never anticipate you would have such kind of problem, cause to me your pronunciation was quite standard. And your fluency is good as well.

PADDY: I think I dropped after the graduation, that my speaking was not as good as back then. But I tried to keep up a good level, so if I go back, I could improve.

CHANG: Are you still learning Chinese?

PADDY: Uh, I was doing classes in Dublin, and I always do a bit on my own, you know, like flashcards. I even looked at HSK 6. But it is just tough, work and trying to speak to a few Chinese people. I would say my Chinese was maintained at a certain level. But I feel like if I could go back to China, which I want to do, I would be able to improve prettier.

CHANG: Okay, let’s talk about when you were still in college. Normally…at least to me I think…normally you will get very decent marks for your academic performances of the Chinese courses. And also, you would have comparisons between you and the peers, you know, other students in the class. You would know that in that group, you would be a better learner.

PADDY: Yeah.

CHANG: But…would you say that, even if you had that, you would still have the same experience you just mentioned. Even if you had all of this, when you were talking to Chinese people, you know, native speakers, and if you experienced that like they don’t understand you, or you don’t understand what they are talking about, you would still feel the same way?

PADDY: Yeah…I guess I feel…like ‘What I have been working for?’ When you do well in class and you can’t transfer that into the real life, that’s probably the most frustrating things that I have ever experienced.

CHANG: So the recognition from the real world actually trumps everything.

PADDY: Yeah, I guess so. Like when you were actually in China, you go for a shopping and have a small conversation. That to me was the biggest motivator. And it’s like if it goes well, you would be like ‘I can do this’.

CHANG: And would you sometimes have the opposite feelings, like sometimes…I don’t know whether you had this, or maybe you did get bad scores in class, but you feel like you really
COULD communicate with the locals, with the native speakers, that actually…that kind of feelings would overwhelm the negative impacts of the scores? So you don’t feel that demotivated?

PADDY: Yeah, that’s true. I mean when I was in Shenzhen and Beijing, I was in tough enough classes. I wasn’t doing that well. But I do feel I learned a lot more than I did in Dublin, just for being in a higher level and stuff. And I feel like I was better at communicating than in Dublin.

CHANG: Okay. And I actually just interviewed (an anonymous peer) this morning.

PADDY: Ah, yeah, he’s in Beijing.

CHANG: Yeah, and you, (an anonymous peer) and (an anonymous peer), you guys, and maybe I think with (an anonymous peer), had a very nice…kind of like…small group. And I think you occasionally, maybe consistently, have a little bit competition between you and (an anonymous peer).

PADDY: Yeah, definitely, we have like friendly competitions going over there. (laughter) We weren’t afraid to try hard in class at all.

CHANG: And would you think that plays a part in your learning motivation?

PADDY: Yeah, definitely, I mean, sometimes if you were in class with friends, it might be a negative effect. You don’t really want to speak up in class. But I think we all just kind of want to speak whatever we wanted to speak. I think it’s that. It could motivate you to do better.

CHANG: And I am actually curious when did this kind of competition grow into forms?

PADDY: I think it was after China. (an anonymous peer) got a lot better, I think. (laughter) So of course you don’t want to lose to him.

CHANG: Yeah, I don’t think I’ve noticed that kind of thing in the second year.

PADDY: Yeah.

CHANG: But is there any kind of demotivating incidents or moments for that kind of competition, or it was just overwhelmingly positive?

PADDY: Uh…I thought it was kind of…all positive, pretty much.

CHANG: To be honest, because you have already graduated, do you think that kind of small group would be a little bit demotivating for the rest of the students?

PADDY: I don’t think we were taking over classes. We were still pretty quiet in class, which sometimes isn’t right.

CHANG: So you mean it’s still down to the personality, like you were not being a show-off. You just…do this a little bit more internally.

PADDY: Yeah, I think we were showing off a little bit. (laughter)

CHANG: Okay. Anyway, I am going back to the reduced confidence thing. Other than talking to the native speakers, sometimes you feel an insufficient capability for communication, other than this, are there any other reasons that could cause you to feel a little bit less confident?

PADDY: I feel it when only English was used in the classroom. I kind of didn’t get enough chance to speak Chinese for certain classes, that kind of demotivates me. And I come out of that class and feel like ‘What am I actually learning?’ While when I was in China and only Chinese was used in the classroom, I felt like I came out of the class and feel like ‘Yeah, I had a good class and it is well worth it.’

CHANG: Okay, so fewer opportunities to practise and absorb Chinese during class hours.

PADDY: Yeah, even the classes with tutors on Friday or something. I kind of like came out there, and enjoy my Chinese learning more than some of the business Chinese classes where there are a lot more English.

CHANG: Okay. Then what about the after-class activities, because there are also chances to arrange opportunities to speak Chinese, give a little bit of tasks after class?

PADDY: Yeah, I think you should definitely use that more, get them to do homework by actually talking to Chinese people. One thing I regretted more is that I didn’t speak more Chinese to Chinese students in (an anonymous institution). I lost lots of opportunities to really meet them and stuff.

CHANG: So I guess your biggest demotivation would probably also be like your biggest reason to feel the sense of achievement, in terms of like getting the recognition from the native speaker in your ability of communicating in Chinese.

PADDY: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: But in an Irish context, of course it would be more difficult to find such kind of opportunities.

PADDY: Yeah, that’s true.

CHANG: Then what about the academic performance? Have you ever got a dissatisfied score?
PADDY: Uh...not really. I mean sometimes test could even get a little bit easy. And you will be like 'Yeah, this is so easy. I don’t really need to study for it.' Because a lot of the students are getting the 80s and 90s. And maybe there are some...it would be at the end of the exam, there are some very difficult questions to make them work for that high 90 or 80 grades. Because I think it is easy to get ‘A’s, or ‘A+’s as well.

CHANG: What...uh...when was the time that you are talking about? Because I don’t think in the fourth year or second year, [you would be like getting many...]

PADDY: [First year and second year were quite...90s and 95s are quite...they aren’t that...they aren’t that difficult to get.

CHANG: But that would drastically go down since the second year. I don’t think a lot of people could then get like 70% or 80% in Chinese class anymore.

PADDY: Yeah, I suppose.

CHANG: Probably you kept it up, so you did not notice.

PADDY: Well, there is always room for improvement. Even in our Chinese class, the type of students varied a lot. Some of them are quite weak and some of them are very good. Unless you have something to motivate the good people to be even more, you know, some extra works for them, it might motivate them a little bit more.

CHANG: Speaking of the different students, do you think this has something more to do with the aptitude, or it’s mainly because of the different amount of work that people put into it?

PADDY: I think it is a little bit down to earth the natural ability. Some people found that they pick up like characters rather easily. While some people just couldn’t get around with it. Another thing that would be a motivator is, some people just see themselves doing Chinese and just drop it completely. And the others want to pursue it as a career, obviously they put into more work.

CHANG: For you, what is the biggest reason to keep learning Chinese? Is your motivation kind of like steady, or it changes in different periods?

PADDY: Right now, I am kind of like don’t want to waste all the effort I have put in since college. I don’t want to lose it, just push myself to get better, speaking it a little bit at the workplace here as well, and that, hearing Chinese. But I am also trying to study some French when I am here. ((laughter)) All I need to do is to speak French at the office all day. So still French gets its way, but...

CHANG: Then when you were in (an anonymous institution), was there a general reason to keep it up?

PADDY: Yeah, you know, I always thought myself going out and work in China. And I just always had the idea that I will become decently fluent someday.

CHANG: When you mentioned always, could you think of a starting point for this expectation, your dream or your goal? When did you actually established such kind of expectation? Could you recall?

PADDY: Probably either after I went to China for a month, I thought like ‘Oh, yeah. I like this place. I could work here.’ And it’s quite early. Definitely after I spend a year there, when I left I thought I would definitely go back for it.

CHANG: So it is not at the very beginning, at the beginner stage. So it happened while you were in China.

PADDY: Yeah. And I guess once you started it, and you get better. After maybe the first six months in the first year, you start to think ‘Yeah, could actually see myself learning this language properly.’ Then you think like ‘Yeah, I could make this part of my career.’ Once you get your head around initially, you would realise it’s not that hard of a language.

CHANG: I got the feedback from several interviewees that most people experienced serious culture shock when they first went to China. Lots of them review the amount of work they have been put into the Chinese study for the past few years are not well worth it. Or maybe it’s like, when they get into contact with the locals, they find it is rather difficult.

PADDY: Yeah, yeah, it’s true.

CHANG: So you also experienced these feelings as well?

PADDY: Once you go over there and you start to speak with them, they kind of don’t realise I have been learning Chinese for about two years in Dublin. They think you just started learning.

CHANG: So it’s the same to you as well.

PADDY: Yeah.

CHANG: But you didn’t mention it spontaneously when I asked you about your experience (in China), so I presume you overcome such kind of feeling rather quick?
PADDY: Yeah, I mean you just have to. I mean, you have to have those times that they just don’t understand you. If you had a few successful conversations, you got a bit of motivation. Then in terms of the confidence of learning Chinese, would you think rather…uh…you got stronger confidence at the beginning, or you gain more Chinese along with the study of Chinese, or it fluctuates depending on your experience at the moment?
PADDY: Uh…I think it’s just gradually, I mean in your first and second year, you realise that the grammar isn’t that bad and stuff. But then I guess in the intermediate level, you kind of passed that. I think it’s a little bit demotivating, because to get VERY VERY good is VERY VERY difficult. And when you finish HSK 5 and you start looking at HSK 6, you were like ‘No, I will never be able to do it.’

CHANG: So you had the feeling that there are a few thresholds in different stages, [like intermediate…
PADDY: Yeah, yeah. It is not that hard to get to intermediate. But to go beyond that, you are gonna actually put into a lot of time and effort.

CHANG: Have you ever doubted your efficacy, like the possibility for you to get a job in China and using Chinese as the working language?
PADDY: Yeah, right now it looks like just you said, but not the company I currently work for, they don’t have… I don’t get the opportunity to go there. I am on a two-year graduate programme. When I realise that, I was like ‘Damn it! Am I ever gonna get over there? Will my Chinese just disappear?’ And now I am forgetting about it. So I think getting there as soon as possible after graduating is very important, otherwise it just might never happen you.

CHANG: And you are afraid to lose the proficiency by gradually not using it.
PADDY: Yeah. But I am sure that there are jobs that could get me to it.

CHANG: So like right now do you still want to get a job that is China or Chinese related?
PADDY: Yeah, yeah, definitely. So after I finish with this company, I am taking either go back and study masters in China, possibly, or Singapore or elsewhere, and then try to find a job right there, I think I would enjoy a lot more if I had the opportunity to speak Chinese.

CHANG: So I presume you don’t doubt the benefit of learning Chinese?
PADDY: Yeah, I mean it’s a major language.

CHANG: Would you say you never doubt or there are certain moments, like ‘What’s the point of doing this?’ It’s not about your ability to do this, but the benefit of the language, like it is useless in finding jobs, or at least it is not essential in finding jobs, or pursue further career or education.
PADDY: Sometimes, I kind of like running into Chinese on the street and it’s like, because the English is so widely used, you start thinking like any Chinese person who is going to work in a bank or anything international, they would definitely have English. So you are like ‘Why do I bother in the first place?’ But then again, if you actually do work in China, you definitely need it. And I do want to work in China.

CHANG: So you were convinced that if you were in China, you definitely need Chinese, for the work purposes, not only for the survival.
PADDY: Yeah, I thought so.

CHANG: But for your personal career preference, do you prefer to work in China, or to work in Europe, in Ireland and get a job that is related to China?
PADDY: My preference would definitely be to work in China for a few years, get better with the language, and then move forward to probably just working with China.

CHANG: Then you mentioned a lot of times that you want to take the advantage of your career to continually improve your Chinese, I am curious that would your ultimate goal for the career purpose is to be in China? Or would you like to use your Chinese proficiency and the experience in China as a ladder to a higher career purpose (in European or Irish context), or indeed you prefer to stay in China for a long term for the career purposes?
PADDY: Uh… I would definitely go for a short term, to get a good level of Chinese, and then either move back to Ireland or Europe, or if I could make a career and [enjoy the living in China…

CHANG: [If you have a huge opportunity in China, then you would take it. Otherwise, you still prefer to work domestically, in Ireland or in a European context.
PADDY: Yeah, definitely.

CHANG: Okay, just be honest, like why…what are the reasons behind this preference? Is it just the overall environment?
PADDY: Yeah, I think so. I don’t know. I would never fit in. I would never be totally immersed in Chinese culture. (.) Ah! It is difficult to admit that you won’t be able to live somewhere like that. (((frustrated laughter))) It’s daunting.

CHANG: Yeah, even for just some countries that you aren’t that familiar with, like the one that you are staying right now. I presume you don’t have that much knowledge of it before you took the job there, right?

PADDY: It’s just like a project, I knew nothing about Luxembourg. ((laughter))

CHANG: Okay, then I think you have already talked about the doubt regarding the necessity of being able to speak Chinese in an Irish…or European context, especially the necessity of achieving a very high proficiency.

PADDY: Yeah, I mean any Chinese person who is travelling to Ireland for work, they will soon have a decent level of English. So you kind of doubt like, it would be either to be nice to have a little bit Chinese, just to impress them a little bit, show that you understand Chinese culture unless your Chinese is better than their English. I don’t see it being… You are not going to use it in a business context in Ireland.

CHANG: This is probably something to do with the influence of English being a global language.

PADDY: Yeah, yeah, exactly so.

CHANG: But you did mention that Chinese would be a good ice breaker or a language for social purposes, just to show your interest…your respect…that you actually learned about it or something.

PADDY: Yeah, it’s a good point.

CHANG: So would you rather say like…uh…I am gonna ask several questions in a row and let you think about it. Is it NECESSARY to speak Chinese? Is it BENEFICIAL to be able to speak Chinese? And is it about to be able to speak Chinese AT ALL, or only for a HIGH level of proficiency? So, first, would you agree that it would be beneficial to be able to speak Chinese in this context, I mean in an Irish or European context?

PADDY: Yeah, it is definitely beneficial, but…it’s like a year of studying Chinese is equally beneficial with four years of study, if you are only gonna use it in an ice-breaking context. Being an advanced speaker, or an intermediate speaker, isn’t gonna impress them that much more than having it studied for maybe just for a year.

CHANG: For the (an anonymous institution) structure, it is that only the last year’s GPA counts, right?

PADDY: Yeah.

CHANG: Then, do you ever feel that you only learn for the sake of GPA, or it was mainly occupied by this purpose?

PADDY: Uh…it probably wasn’t. It probably just a small influence on why I chose Chinese over French or other European languages. But it was definitely not the deciding factor.

CHANG: Then why did you choose Chinese in the first place? When did you decide to learn Chinese?

PADDY: I guess it was just the structure of the Chinese courses in the first year, that it was just fun to learn. I realised that it just wasn’t what it looks like, it wasn’t really impossible to learn. And the way it was taught was just a lot much fun than French, which was just grammar classes. And I never actually…I barely started to work on French in the first year. I think it (learning Chinese) was just the amount you learn was high, so I just keep going and see how far I can go with it.

CHANG: Besides French, what other languages you have studied?

PADDY: Uh…I just done French in secondary school.

CHANG: Okay, then I am gonna describe it and you let me know whether it is correct or not. When you do decide to choose Chinese courses, it happened like in the first year, probably after the first semester.

PADDY: Yeah, first three months.

CHANG: It didn’t really happen before you enrolled in the programme.

PADDY: No, you just have the chance to choose two languages.

CHANG: And also, you mentioned that your determination of studying Chinese and gaining the expectation that Chinese could be a part of your future, that only happen until you went to China.

PADDY: Yeah, that actually happened after I went to China.

CHANG: So can I put it this way, that at the beginning, you didn’t really choose Chinese, you choose Chinese OVER French.
CHANG: You are not yet deciding to do Chinese, you only choose one over the other.
PADDY: Yeah.
CHANG: And it was only until you went to China, you witnessed things, you calculated your efforts and the benefits, you saw the future. Probably at that moment you started to like to decide to learn Chinese only because of Chinese.
PADDY: Yeah, I guess when you were looking at…between French and Chinese, you were also thinking…you were seeing that there probably will be jobs if you do learn Chinese, and China is like an increasing economy and a growing superpower. When I did choose, I was aware of that. ‘Hey, it might be beneficial in terms of jobs.’
CHANG: But I presume in the first year and the second year, people were throwing information to you regarding your possible future with China or Chinese.
PADDY: Yeah, yeah, all right.
CHANG: But it sounds like you were not that convinced until you do go to the country and see for yourself, and like experience everything in person.
PADDY: Yeah, that’s true.
CHANG: Would you say there is a sort of trust issue, or there are things more to that? ((laughter)) I presume some of the courses will talk about, I mean not necessarily always, but they will definitely mention the potentials, the benefits or something. But why you were not convinced?
PADDY: I guess it’s just…you really need to go there if you kind of like want to live there, see whether you like the lifestyle, and the people whether you like. So you don’t know whether you want to….really…committed to…wanted to work there until you actually see it.
CHANG: Okay, then the next question is about the Chinese language teachers. Do you think some of the behaviours or attitudes of the Chinese teachers could demotivate their students? You did mention something about the methods, like the teacher talked too much in English during class.
PADDY: Yeah, yeah, that’s probably the biggest thing for me.
CHANG: What else, is there anything more?
PADDY: I don’t know. I like when we get the chance to speak. It’s actually difficult to get the students to speak in front of the class, but I think getting them to speak Chinese as much as possible.
CHANG: Why is that? Why do you think it is difficult to get students speaking during the class or in front of people?
PADDY: I think it’s just…just…shy about it, trying their acts and their tones and stuff like that…in front of their friends. But I think in a small group, it is definitely easier.
CHANG: Okay, why a smaller group is easier?
PADDY: Just you know, less people listening to you.
CHANG: And maybe people are more familiar with each other? It might be easier to lose face or something?
PADDY: Yeah, yeah, that’s true.
CHANG: Let me separate these two scales, because there are two dimensions to this question. The first is a small number, which means less people. And the second is how well you know about these people. Like if there is a lot of people, but people don’t know each other, like a huge lecture, like more than a hundred (people), it would be still daunting for people to speak in front of these many people?
PADDY: Yeah.
CHANG: Even if nobody knows about each other, and nobody would probably like contact each other after class or something like that, it is still frightening?
PADDY: Yeah.
CHANG: And for a smaller group, even if still people don’t know each other that well, it would still be much less stressful.
PADDY: Yeah.
CHANG: Could you maybe think about these three scenarios and rate on the anxiety level to me, like more than a hundred students, nobody knows each other; more than a hundred students, everybody knows each other…
PADDY: And if I need to speak Chinese in front of them, that would be a nightmare.
CHANG: Ah, okay, so still a smaller number would be much better.
PADDY: Yeah, I think so. So you leave us in the class with smaller groups and periodically get them to talk to each other, and with tutors and stuff.
CHANG: Okay. Could you think of any room of improvement for the teachers?
PADDY: Uh... just getting away from the textbook a little bit and teaching more spontaneous things like... things actually like everyday phrases in Chinese and stuff that you REALLY REALLY need, rather than textbook Chinese which sometimes could be artificial, and you couldn’t really benefit from it, like in Dublin and also while in China.

CHANG: So that’s about the course design, teaching materials and methods as well. You want a little bit more authentic content.

PADDY: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: Okay, so now I will give you some of the feedback that I gain, and you could make some comments about them. First is that...I am talking about the whole group of the Chinese teachers, native Chinese teachers, some of the feedback that I gain is that in comparison with teachers of other modern foreign languages, the Chinese teachers sometimes lack concerns for individuals. They would rather give feedbacks and comments based on a group, but there is a lack of feedback for individuals and learners’ performances.

PADDY: Yeah, I guess I DID agree with this, a little bit, like teachers don’t really know your name and stuff. And they just kind of get out for the course even like...like other teachers like asking people about their lives. At the start, when you want to meet them. We don’t really do that.

CHANG: Are we talking about teachers here in Dublin or also teachers in China?

PADDY: Ah...I think a little bit of both, probably more obvious in China, that they weren’t really interested in getting to know you at all. And they didn’t really care about training us and stuff.

CHANG: Also I want you to think about your early stage of learning, that people say sometimes Chinese teachers are a little bit afraid of criticising students, I mean constructive criticism. Probably they were getting the idea of encouraging students, but they overdid it, maybe sometimes they would even cheer for your mistakes, and sometimes they would tell you that you are doing a great job, which you could even realise that it was not. Like they are so frightened that they will hurt your confidence, but sometimes you feel that they were just faking their complements. They don’t really mean it.

PADDY: Yeah, sometimes you feel a bit like you were treated as a child. It is important to find out the middle ground for not being too tough and not being too...I don’t know...soft on them. And treat them as adults.

CHANG: And some people think even during the late stage of learning, they still think they don’t have a good method to learn Chinese, that they don’t really know how to learn Chinese. But the interesting thing is, they don’t think this would be part of the teachers’ responsibility, that only relies on the learners to find their own methods. Do you think as part of the responsibility of a language teacher, you should also teach some methods of learning this language, especially considering Chinese which is a very different language?

PADDY: Yeah, I think it is definitely the teachers’ (responsibility). Even in day one, show them things like Pleco, stuff like that, I mean, show them how to find resources of any, like give them a little homework like watch some Chinese television, and use the internet to translate some of the subtitles or something like that. It would be useful to know how to do that kind of stuff, figuring out it is not that hard and being able to do it yourself in your spare time.

CHANG: Okay. Then, do you think there is any problem with the course design? Of course, you’ve mentioned about how much amount of Chinese should be spoken in the classroom.

PADDY: I don’t know. I mean it’s like very structured, like going through book chapters and stuff, so it is very difficult to move away from that, I guess. Even for the spoken class, if it could be less about the book, and more about...sometimes just more about...just have a conversation in the class.

CHANG: Okay, then I want to talk about the non-language modules. Would you say they are helpful in general, whatever you say, your interest or motivation in learning the language?

PADDY: Yeah, I think so. I think so. I love the gain a little bit of knowledge about the country. I enjoyed them first of all. Some, they are actually quite tough, even for the first-year ones. But now I gain in more interest in what’s going on in China, the past and the future, being able to talk about the knowledge, about the culture with Chinese people. I think they did well in that. I gained a better understanding of the country and the culture.

CHANG: Okay, I get the feedback from some of the interviewees, that they think the content of the non-language modules, some of them the contents were not very practical. What they learned from these modules seemed useless in real life.
PADDY: Yeah, that I still think about the Chinese Culture, Chinese Law and stuff. ((laughter)) [I think they are…

CHANG: [Okay, so you don’t work in that domain, and you think they are…

PADDY: [No. Yeah, I suppose.

CHANG: But you mentioned like the social functions of the knowledge, like maybe for the Chinese Culture, I don’t know how much you could apply in your work. I mean serious working scenarios, but you mentioned that it could be some fun things to talk about when you met Chinese people. It could be…it could also be like an ice breaker.

PADDY: Yeah, and even…because some of the classes have events and dinners, and the rest of the Chinese students in the meantime…get some opportunities to meet some Chinese people because of that.

CHANG: Okay, so the social function of those non-language modules.
Transcript of Audio Interview 08 (Carlos, T8)

Present: Carlos  
Location: Coffee place on campus  
Date: 26th April 2018  
Interviewer: Chang Zhang  
Duration: c. 67 minutes

CARLOS: Wait, so what’s your thesis, dissertation, PhD? What’s it about?
CHANG: This is the second half, I study why people don’t want to learn Chinese while they were learning Chinese.

CARLOS: Oh, that’s very interesting! Because this is something that I think about A LOT! Like my year of studying Chinese, I was like ‘Why am I doing this? What do I hate about it?’ So, something like that.

CHANG: Yeah, so you wonder what happened. But normally you ask people, like teachers, when we go together, round table, lots of teachers, and people start to talk about ‘Oh, we have some many dropouts this year.’ But when you ask them what happened, ‘Ah, it’s just Chinese. It is too difficult!’

CARLOS: Oh, NO! It must be WAY deeper than that!

CHANG: Yeah, sure, that’s my first reaction. And everybody is just like ‘Yeah, yeah, just leave it there.’ Because first thing first, it is highly likely that there is something to do with the teacher. And as a teacher, you don’t really want to talk about it, of course. But still, you have to, especially in this text, right? In this context, you got English and you got relatively rare opportunities to speak Chinese, the environment is not there, it’s hard. So these things are…so my thesis is to first identify the real problems, how many aspects and their roles, whether the natural difficulty of the Chinese language really plays that an important role in…I call it the demotivation of learning Chinese. And these are the main perspectives of demotivation, and I could start with the first one. The first one is called reduced self-confidence. I presume this would be much less serious for you, but this might be much worse for the Irish learners. But still I am interested, because you are from Singapore. It’s a little bit different, but I have some very interesting questions for you later on, a little bit outside of this. But we could start with this one.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, that’s fine.
CHANG: So for you, did you ever experience a reduced self-confidence, like ‘Oh, crap! Did I choose the wrong language?’

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I don’t think that’s something…okay, I am not gonna say it affects me as much as it affects the Irish students, but like, because I have learned Chinese for so long, I feel like sometimes the frustration could be a lot greater. Because you know, you kind of like ‘Oh! I’ve seen this character’, you know…a hundred times already, like I’ve seen it two years ago, and again last year, and I am learning it at the minute, and I still don’t know how to write it. So the stage I should be at is not the stage I am at, sometimes. And so that is really punching in the gut, dropping confidence. You are like ‘Oh Jesus, am I really cut out from this?’ And then really obvious things like, you know your exact exam results…you know…you think you did a lot better, and you know you get hard marks. Or you go in and you realise after studying for the exam, you find it hard to do half of the questions. That’s…you know…you were like ‘Jesus! I am a crap about this!’ That does affect my confidence, sometimes.

CHANG: It sounds like this is not just a periodical thing, it happened maybe more often at the early stage of learning, but indeed spread throughout the whole learning process, like every few months, it happens, they will jump out. ((laughter))

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, sure.

CHANG: And it is more about reality and your expectation?

CARLOS: Exactly, yeah.

CHANG: Because to me, like at least at the current level, you are one of the top students. But it doesn’t really matter. It’s not only for people who do not do so well in the class, who would have frustration. It is for you as well.

CARLOS: Sure.

CHANG: Okay. But have you ever doubted your ability in learning Chinese? Because what you mentioned is mainly about the results. Like, for instance, as you described, you know you’ve already learned this character, and maybe after a while when you see it, you
couldn’t recognise it, or you could recognise it, but you couldn’t write it down. What would you think, like what are the reasons? Have you ever think a little bit deep? Would you blame yourself for not working hard enough? [Or…

CARLOS: [Of course I blame myself. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because it’s not like, it’s not a result of bad teaching. It’s just like physical learning. Either it is not clicking, like it’s not falling into place, or…I don’t know, like…honestly, I don’t know.

CHANG: Because naturally you forget.

CARLOS: Yeah.

CHANG: Do you think sometimes it is difficult to improve your academic performance? Like I know probably most of the time you would get good grades, at least from me. ((laughter))

CARLOS: I don’t believe that happened that often. ((laughter))

CHANG: But do you find it is a little bit difficult to improve? Even if you do get ‘A’s, if you are aiming for ‘A+’, sometimes it would be difficult to achieve that. It is very difficult to break the gap.

CARLOS: Yeah, uh…yes and no. Because on one hand, I do not like self-believe. Like if you kind of look at the way you were years ago, back to secondary school, yeah, two or three years ago, I was bad at Chinese. Like when I mean I was bad, I was probably HSK 2 or 3 level. I couldn’t really read or write well. I could like speak and listen. But then kind of coming up to the level I am right now, I am like ‘Oh Jesus, I am actually kind of capable of learning Chinese!’ And it is just because I didn’t apply myself back in school. But then on the other hand, you kind of look at the vocabulary list of HSK 5 and 6, and you were like ‘How the hell can I learn all these characters?’ So, like, yeah you kind of do doubt your ability at times, but at the same time you kind of like…I think it’s just a balance. You need that doubt, but you also need that self-believe.

CHANG: When you mentioned the self-believe, you were talking about you constantly look at the past-self and compare yourself now, the sort of improvement, that gives you confidence.

CARLOS: Yeah.

CHANG: ((laughter)) But sometimes when you were looking at your expectation a little bit too early or too advanced, sometimes that gets you a little bit frustrated. But you need the balance.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

CHANG: But when you get the poor score, how would you handle it? Would you do the same? Would there be an internal standard or benchmark to help you get over it, like ‘Though I am getting a poor score, I am actually improving’, or the score will trump this feeling of improvement?

CARLOS: Uh…I think you need to use something like, I use it as something productive. So still you are dwelling on it, like ‘Oh! I am crap at Chinese! I am not going to be able to improve!’ and things like that. You actually need to like flip around and be like ‘Well, something is clearly not right. I need to work harder.’ You know, I got a different style of revising. And it would be obvious…or maybe it won’t be obvious, but like the right kind of remedy, almost, would be obvious in those circumstances. You know, you kind of look back at how you were revising, whether you revised hard enough, things like that. So, yeah, I use it sometimes. You got away if you build on it, and make sure next time you will…Fail is bad.

CHANG: Sometimes for my module, if you did do well enough to meet MY expectation, sometimes I will say like ‘Oh, you are being lazy.’ I would say like ‘Look, this time is not so good, but I know you are being lazy.’ I think that in a way, it kind of help other than giving you nothing. I mean, if you did work hard, or you didn’t realise you didn’t work hard enough, or you worked hard but your methods were not effective, you might genuinely doubt your ability, your talent, your nature, like ‘Whether I am capable of doing this?’

CARLOS: Yeah, I think it does affect you, that you are being told that you were lazy, that you need to work harder. Like I said, they don’t mean to insult you, like it’s all kind of constructive criticisms.

CHANG: Yeah, that was meant to encourage you, to attribute it to your work rather than aptitude. Because normally people would consider working hard is something everybody could do, given the opportunity and right attitude. But when you were mentioned that you were not doing well in school, you only gave me the language proficiency. Were you actually comparing yourself maybe with the classmates, just comparing with their standard?
CARLOS: Yeah, see, that’s the thing. So at the time when I was in school, the level of Chinese that they were teaching was WAY higher than what I was at. Because they were all Singaporeans and Malaysians and a couple of Chinese nationals. They all knew the language inside and out. Because essentially it is their native language. So it is me trying to keep up with everyone. And the teacher was like not tending to my needs and tending to their needs. And so I think I took a real blow because of that. As a result, I felt dehumanised, I hated the language, like I hated to study Chinese for my whole life pretty much, my entire life. And I thought that after I finish school, I will drop Chinese and never do it again. And here I am in the university, you know, me doing Chinese, so…((laughter))

CHANG: I think it was something to do with the lack of instruction from the teachers, also I think in that culture it is highly dependent on how CRAZY hard you work on the subjects. And sometimes I know that Asian students could be really crazy. So it could be frustrating.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, the other thing is that there were competitive students as well. So they won’t be like openly shut you down and stuff, but it was kind of like just the atmosphere that it wasn’t an enjoyable subject to learn. Because, you know, the teacher wasn’t on your side, the other students weren’t on your side. And it was frustrating, you know, with all the frustrations building up, like I wasn’t able to read and write, things like that.

CHANG: While in here, it’s a different context. Your classmates, most of your classmates are Irish students. So to me actually I felt normally the course should be fair for everybody regardless of the background (of students). Of course, students from…not an Asian background, just any Chinese related background, would have a little bit advantage.

CARLOS: Yeah.

CHANG: But for the teachers, would they overthink about this…how big the advantage really is. Sometimes if you are coming from a…not necessarily Chinese related background, just Asian background, they think you don’t need to work, or you just work A LITTLE BIT, and you will get good results. I think sometimes that is REALLY unfair for students from that kind of background. Do you have that kind of feeling from your experience?

CARLOS: Yeah, I definitely feel it, but just not that directly.

CHANG: Yeah, nobody would say that in your face. GOOD! I am glad you didn’t feel that obviously. But you know, I guess I could talk about this now. When you first came to my class, there was another student from Thailand or something, another Asian country?

CARLOS: Oh, yeah, the Malaysian. Oh, yeah, yeah.

CHANG: Uh...a little bit of both. So, yes and no. Sometimes I do think I am overestimated. They were like, when I get bad results, they were like ‘Oh Jesus, how could you get that result!’ I don’t...while I don’t...you know. They must think my ability is much better than I actually is. So, yeah, I definitely feel it, but just not that directly.

CHANG: Yeah, yeah, nobody would say that in your face. GOOD! I am glad you didn’t feel that obviously. But you know, I guess I could talk about this now. When you first came to my class, there was a bit of issue. When you came to my class, some of the students in the class were very concerned about their GPA, because it has something to do with the scholarship.

CARLOS: Ah, right. (an indication of remembering something)

CHANG: So when you came in, they saw you have good marks, and you are from an Asian country. They saw you like...it’s nothing personal, but more like a threat.

CARLOS: Yeah, sure.

CHANG: Because they were told that the scholarship was not for everybody, so they got really anxious, and they approach me and approach the (an anonymous institution) and say ‘Look, it’s not fair. We don’t want any more students in our class.’ And you remember that there was another student from Thailand or something, another Asian country?

CARLOS: Oh, yeah, the Malaysian. Oh, yeah, yeah.

CHANG: They were really unhappy for him to join the class as well.

CARLOS: This is ridiculous. ((laughter))
CHANG: I want to emphasise again, this was nothing personal. They made it very clear that it is nothing to do with you. I think I am pretty sure that one of the ladies even had a crush on you back then. (laughter)

CARLOS: Which one? Which one?

CHANG: I will not tell you. (laughter)

CARLOS: It’s a good thing to find out. (laughter)

CHANG: But you do see that coming.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHANG: So actually, I need to work that out. I talked to the institute that since you were in different modules, it doesn’t really matter what kind of score that I give it to you…

CARLOS: Sure, it won’t affect their score.

CHANG: They won’t affect their score, and I talked to the institute like whether I could let the students be aware of this fact. And we had a discussion and they say that was fine. And now what I think is ridiculous is…something like the guy from Malaysia, I do have a student from Thailand. (laughter) Like, their background has nothing to do with the Chinese language, but they look ASIAN. So, these things got way more serious among teachers. Teachers are becoming more biased. They see Asian students, instantly, as you said, they overestimate them regardless of their actual background, whether there is anything to do with China or Chinese. They (the teachers) think they (students from Asian countries) could work much less hard to gain a beautiful result, which I think is not fair.

CARLOS: I actually felt that, but maybe more is gone unnoticed. I think it is one thing that how I think about myself, and it is another thing like how people who didn’t know me see me. But anyway, maybe that would be the case.

CHANG: It’s good to hear that given the fact. And I should warn you that this interview process could be demotivating as well. It gets you to realise some of the…

CARLOS: (Yeah, Jesus I am about to say that! (laughter))

CHANG: Probably you were still in a small class, you and Bevan. If you do join the other first year class, you might feel just a little bit more obvious. But anyway, if you don’t feel any jealousy from others, you probably are doing crappy for your life. You shouldn’t feel that way.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, exactly, exactly.

CHANG: It’s changing, and my research is intended to change that as well. In this case I think the peers are actually doing a much better job than the teachers. Because among the teachers, like me, I KNOW it, but sometimes it is really difficult to fight it. The people who look similar, you just kind of considering they are the same with you. I guess it’s just human nature.

CARLOS: Yeah, I think so.

CHANG: Anyway, uh, let me check. I am actually more curious about how you deal with these problems. Like when you were in school, you hated Chinese, that they got you. But then, what was the turning point? You hated Chinese, and then you enrolled in Law and Chinese, what happened?

CARLOS: I think it is just the teaching style and the curriculum.

CHANG: That’s not possible, I mean you need to enrol first.

CARLOS: What do you mean?

CHANG: You need to enrol the programme first, then you could experience the teaching style. But your decision needs to be made before that. Or is there something in between that I missed, between you hated Chinese in school, you graduated from school, and you enrol the programme?

CARLOS: Yeah, it was basically…my mom had a big influence. She’s really…like she’s been a huge influence in my life in terms of language, and others, but in particular language. Because you know in my whole life she’s been encouraging us to kind of like speak different languages, learn different languages. Like you were forced to do so, but not in a bad way. So she never let us stop. So she was like ‘Look, I found a course which you could learn Chinese. Let’s go and talk to (an anonymous person).’ And I was like ‘Okay, fine.’ So I went to talk to him, and after that meeting he changed my…like he said a few things in the interview, the meaning, about the course. One of the things was like, basically like, everyone else who is enrolling the course has not a very high level of Chinese. And that was a very big factor for my choice.

CHANG: You are pure evil, but anyway… (laughter)

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. (laughter) But like…he wasn’t saying that in a bad way.
CHANG: Yes, it was a strategic thing. I get it.
CARLOS: It was kind of suit you, you know what I mean. And then I was like ‘Okay, I will see how it is.’ And then I went and tried it out. Obviously the first few weeks I was in the elementary, and I was like…

CHANG: [Are we talking about my course?
CARLOS: No, no, no. I didn’t go straight to your class.
CHANG: You did come straight to my class, no? You didn’t? Did you? I forgot. I remember I gave you a little bit [small talk before…

CARLOS: I think I came in since the second week or something.
CHANG: Ah, okay, you joined the first-year class first! You tried it out and then switched to my class.
CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [And then…
CHANG: [It felt so good. ((laughter))
CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. ((laughter)) But it was...like...my level…
CHANG: It did not suit you anymore.
CARLOS: Yeah, but…anyway. So like going into HSK 4, it was intermediate …wait, intermediate or advanced? That was actually a step down for what I have been learning in school. And so it was meant that I could go along a lot easier, instead of, I suppose, you know, always stressing out and trying to keep up with others. I could do things at my own pace, because the paces of a lot of people around me are a lot slower. And also the changing style…the teaching style changed as well. Because in school I had a crappy teacher. I always have crappy teachers for Chinese.

CHANG: Let’s talk about that a little bit later. I have also questions regarding them.
CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. ((laughter)) I was meant to talk to you about that.
CHANG: But here, here is the problem. You do feel…I respect that…that was a strategic thing, it’s kind of like the same way I choose to study teaching Chinese to foreigners. Because I had two paths, continue studying English or study this one. I said instead of competing with those crazy students of English, I am gonna be the BEST English speaker in this major. ((laughter))
CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. ((laughter)) Strategy, strategy.
CHANG: Anyway, what I wanted to say. Oh, yeah. Yes, but it is a double-edged blade. When you do attend a rather easy course as a strategic move, you do get less sense of achievement. Because when you were facing a task, you pretty much know you could do it. It’s unlike you work your ass off for it and [you get the result…

CARLOS: [Well, the thing is, that was not really the case. Like I don’t go…I don’t go to exams doing that thing you think I was doing. No, like I still going to tests, Chinese tests, being like, you know, FREAKING OUT. When I see the exams, I was like ‘Jesus, I would never be able to do well on these.’ It was…I think it was when I speaking to (an anonymous person), he was like ‘Oh yeah, you know, it’s like elementary level stuff. We can accommodate your needs.’ He was actually kind of like…selling it quite well. And that was kind of like really attracted me. And I was like ‘It’s not gonna be very bad. It is not gonna be what I did like in school. There are not so many graduates with a good standard of Chinese.’ Like it is a strategy in a sense that it was not as challenging for me as for others in the course, because not so many have been learning Chinese as I did. But it was also like…

CHANG: Okay, we don’t need to compare, just speak for yourself. Say my course, because I meant my course is still challenging for you. Because I know your strength, but I also know your weaknesses. It’s not an easy course for you. Nobody gets an easy pass in my class. ((laughter)) You could get good marks, but you have to earn it. And I think you earned it. So just speak for yourself, because still it was challenging.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, I mean, it is, it IS still challenging.
CHANG: But that also in turn gave you the sense of achievement. The strategy, say it in a bad way, the intention for easy credit, that thing gets you started. But when it came down to the course, that was not the reality. You didn’t get easy credit in my module, you earned it, and that gave you the sense of achievement. And THAT let you stay in the module, right?

CARLOS: Yeah.
CHANG: Use it as your strength.
CARLOS: Sure.
CHANG: But, do you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese?
CARLOS: Uh…no, never.
CHANG: Even when you hated the Chinese?
CARLOS: In the past I did, but now, not at all.
CHANG: So I am interested, when you say you hate Chinese, do you doubt the benefit? Was it like ‘Oh, I know it is beneficial, but god damn I just hate it.’ Or it’s like ‘I just think it is useless, so I hate it.’ Because these are two kinds of thing.

CARLOS: Uh… I didn’t see it as something completely useless, but I didn’t think it was full of benefits.
CHANG: What changed? Could it be the context? Like in there, there were tons of people who learn Chinese. But in here, it’s just a couple of people…

CARLOS: I think it’s just…it’s maturity. I think it’s just that I grow up. Because now I am in university, you know, studying doing business in China, learning about Chinese culture, which I wouldn’t mind say something about that as well.

CHANG: Yeah, a little bit later, we will have that.
CARLOS: Yeah, so now I am learning Chinese culture, Chinese doing business and things like that. It’s…

CHANG: It’s gradually improving your understanding of that?
CARLOS: Yeah, yeah. It’s improving my understanding, but also kind of like showing me how useful the Chinese language is, especially in today’s world, in terms of… you know… Chinese economy and China in globalisation, things like that. So I think it is really a useful language to have. So yeah, yeah, I am like seeing everything that is beneficial.

CHANG: So back then, when you got really demotivated, when you hated Chinese, you don’t think and also it was something to do with maturity… you don’t think the Chinese language is gonna be…
CARLOS: Yeah, obviously, you know, technology is developing. I could type Chinese, why am I writing it? Why won’t I learn to speak, know a little bit about China? You know, I used to go back to China and speak to my grandparents, and I hated it. But I don’t hate it anymore, like I am ready to go back in two weeks, learn a bit about China, that I know for a fact. But now, as a vision about my future, I do see myself moving to China and, you know, interacting with Chinese people. And so the language is VERY VERY important.

CHANG: But do you think it is necessary to achieve a high level of Chinese if you decided to live and work in the local context, or in general, in Europe?
CARLOS: Generally, no, I don’t think that would bring lots of benefits.
CHANG: So the necessity, the many benefits that we have been talking about, that would still need to be realised in China.

CARLOS: Yeah, exactly.
CHANG: So Chinese is still a closed-circle language. It is very important, it also sounds important, but still it’s more about the domestic market. It is still not a very international language. Okay, there are lots of people speak Chinese, but they are Chinese people.

CARLOS: And I think there is also another aspect because it is very personal to me, you know. It’s part of my identity, like I am Chinese, but my whole life I never identify myself as Chinese. And I kind of wanted to start doing it more and more. And also it also benefits me hugely in that, it kind of helping me to feel like Chinese.

CHANG: When did that wake up? I presume that has something to do with maturity as well.
CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, exactly, maturity.

CHANG: Could it also be something to do with the context? Like in here, you are much more different than in Singapore. That might get you to realise that…
CARLOS: [Sure. YEAH, YEAH, YEAH! I was actually thinking that, because I think it was the move out of Asia, it really made me kind of like… because when you were in Asia, you were kind of seen as a westerner. But in here, you were seen as an Asian. And so, over there I was kind of like… you know... I am not Chinese. I mean, first of all, I am not the friends of all the Singaporeans. We won’t be that close friends. And you know, I didn’t speak the language, things like that. But once I moved, I am kind of like ‘Damn, I really like Asia.’ I am actually not as European as I thought I was, things like that. So, yeah. I really like to learn Chinese because I am half Asian.

CHANG: I really like this part when you say you realised that you are not European enough. ((laughter)) It’s all about your face. Sometimes people are that superficial. Then, do you ever feel that you only study Chinese because it counts for GPA? I think this probably also happened in school. You hated it, but you needed the score, so you just kept studying.

CARLOS: Yeah, absolutely. Part of it was my family, like my family wouldn’t let me quit Chinese. Or it isn’t like they don’t let me, it’s like ‘I really don’t think you should do this. If you really do this, I would be really upset.’ But that GPA was a huge part of it as well, because again
it was kind of a strategic thing. I’ve been learning Chinese for my whole life, and there weren’t many subjects that I really felt passionate about. And so I thought Chinese would be one of those subjects while I was in school. That would give me an easy ‘A’ or easy ‘B’, because…you know…I already have an extensive background. But then at the same time, I get it…it was really challenging, because of everything that I’ve said in terms of like teaching style. So, yes, I DID feel Chinese was just for GPA.  

CHANG: Good motivation or bad motivation, it is very difficult to judge. Because when you were just working for GPA, you could still work VERY VERY hard. Sometimes it could be even harder than when you were genuinely interested in the language.

CARLOS: Yeah, I mean it’s motivation nonetheless.

CHANG: But would you think it was negative in nature.

CARLOS: Yeah, I would. (paused for about 10 seconds) Well, no, no. I actually wouldn’t. I think it’s just like being smart and clever.

CHANG: What do you mean by that? You want to use the GPA to prove your intellectual capability?

CARLOS: It kind of gets back to the whole strategy thing that we talked about. You know, it’s irrelevant whether it is negative or positive motivation, as long as the motivation at the end of the day kind of improving you as a person and make you learn abilities.

CHANG: Here is the thing. If you like have a dictation test in the first year, and it counts for performance, for GPA. And you did it because of that. And then since the second year, you still have this test, but it no longer counts for GPA, would you still put your effort in doing that?

CARLOS: Uh…yeah, but you know, only because it passed on to me. I mean, it won’t take priority, but it didn’t mean that I would work any less hard. It is the choice between…you know…writing a law essay which will be graded and practising for dictation which won’t count anything. You know, I will write the essay any day over the dictation.

CHANG: So I think that is still something to do with the maturity, and something to do with…uh…it is hard to describe…maybe habit or achievement? Like you’ve already been doing this for quite a while. Even sometimes you hated it, you did it anyway because of the GPA. But after a while you do get the sense of achievement by doing this, it’s a little bit difficult to let go. Like what I got from some of the graduates, like ‘I am not that really into Chinese. But I’ve got the HSK 4 or 5. It would be a little bit stupid to just let go now.’ So they just continue to learn, just to keep it there, just in case it is needed some day. Sort of like that?

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Sort of.

CHANG: And you don’t think that’s negative at all.

CARLOS: No, not really.

CHANG: Okay, we did talk about how this kind of motivation could grow into a habit, could be combined with something else, could be integrated, sometimes even maybe grow out to be an interest.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: Finally, we come to the teacher. ((laughter)) Do you think that sometimes the teacher could demotivate their students?

CARLOS: Absolutely, I think it is one of the biggest factors.

CHANG: Just to be clear, when you are talking about the teachers, just let me know the context, that you are talking about in school, in here or in general. Just let me know in advance.

CARLOS: Sure, sure. As I mentioned before, the teaching style is one of the main factors. It kind of shifted my hate in Chinese…almost to my love in Chinese. Because back in the day, back to when I was in school, when I was learning Chinese, the teachers weren’t empathetic. Kind of agree what you were saying, it kind of started to make sense now, how…you know…because they saw me as an Asian face. I have been learning for…at that time it must have been like 17 or 18 years. They saw that obviously I would be at the same level as other people, you know, other Singaporeans, because they’ve been learning for their whole life as well. And so…but that wasn’t the case. They weren’t tending to my needs, like I was telling them on multiple occasions like ‘I was struggling in here’ and things like that. They just weren’t very helpful. Even in class, they would teach at the best person’s level. For example, there was a spoken class and there were three of us. And there were two very good Malaysian and Singaporean, and me. And he [was teaching…

CHANG: [to the needs of the top students.

CARLOS: [Yeah, exactly. Because he wanted them to improve [as opposed to…

CHANG: [He already gave up on you guys.
CARLOS: [Exactly. I just feel...and they didn’t make it entertaining either. It was kind of like...you know...write out ten times. It was kind of like really boring works. They weren’t engaging, weren’t funny, weren’t charismatic.

CHANG: A little bit teacher centred.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And you know, came to here, everything was changed. I was doing a different curriculum. I was doing...I wasn’t doing HSK. I was doing another proficiency test. They just kind of started to make lessons more fun. They would...you know...having discussions with you in Chinese. There won’t be much pressure to perform. It was taught at a slower pace. There was a lot more intimacy and...personal. I think that was super important. Because instead of like...they still have that teacher-student relationship, but it is not as defined as in like...you know...’Do this, this and this!’ It’s like...you know...’How can I help you?’...and just basically just tend to the need of the students.

CHANG: Anything else you could think of?

CARLOS: Uh...not really, no. I can’t think of anything at the moment.

CHANG: I want to talk a little bit more on the empathy. Do you think the teachers here have more empathy rather the teachers back in there?

CARLOS: Yeah, definitely.

CHANG: Could you think of why?

CARLOS: Sure, it’s about the western context. I don’t know whether this would be part of the teaching training? But they have to tend to the needs of their students. And here I think they identify that as a difficult subject to learn, especially...you know...if it is not your first language. And so I think they adapted their teaching style and curriculum and everything to suit the needs of the students here in a western context and also in an Asian context.

CHANG: I think that is spot on. I think the training of teaching Chinese lacks the training of methods for learning. I think maybe a teacher ask you to pronounce a voice, a vowel. Then the teacher may say, ‘It’s not standard. Listen to me.’ Then you repeat it many times. They ask you to repeat and try to get you there, but they never mention exactly how to pronounce that voice, like where to put your tongue, how to form your mouth. They just put the result there and ask you to get there. There is a lack of instruction...the method of learning.

CARLOS: Sure. At the same time, I think it also falls partially...like the teachers are not necessarily responsible for that. I mean, the whole plan of the university is independent learning. So they won’t gonna tell you, no, exactly where to put your tongue, exactly things like that. I mean, yeah, it definitely helps. Like, I am not saying that I against it, that they should not teach you that.

CHANG: You don’t think that much necessary.

CARLOS: No, not really, no.

CHANG: I think that’s something to do with your background.

CARLOS: Maybe, maybe a little bit. (laughter)

CHANG: Also, there is a criticism about the Chinese teachers, that they had a lack of individual concerns, individual feedbacks. This might have something to do with the lack of training, something to do with the background. There will be a collective concern about the whole unity of the students. Sometimes it would be worse, which is the collective unit of the TOP students. But there is a lack of individuals, what the individual students need.

CARLOS: YEAH, YEAH, YEAH! Absolutely. Personally, I haven’t felt too much of them, that might be because I am quite Chinese in a sense that I am all part of a collective family.

CHANG: Ah, okay.

CARLOS: And even though the individual is important, I kind of like get it, the whole collective thing.

CHANG: Okay, another thing is that, the Irish students here told me...it’s a culture thing...that they demand a very high level of requirement on the clarity of instructions. While sometimes, even if the teachers’ English proficiency is quite enough, they tend to give rather blur instructions. I don’t know for you, do you have similar feelings or not?

CARLOS: Uh...yes, I have. Because I kind of like living in a foreign culture for my whole life, I always have to...basically I have learned to understand what people mean.

CHANG: That’s another thing, your tolerance of understanding vague or unclear messages.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And also as students, you also have to identify that teachers, it’s not teachers’ first language, and it is probably hard for them just to speak English as for us speaking Chinese. And that kind of made you...you kind of have to understand them, and kind of...you know...make inferences and assumptions, things like that, and get a general idea about what they say instead of literally the words that coming out of their mouths.
CHANG: It is very interesting because according to my theory, when we talk about empathy, I found
for students of Mandarin Chinese, the learners actually have more empathy for their
teachers rather than the teachers have for their students. ((laughter)) Like when I compare
your empathy for your teachers in here and the empathy of your teachers in Singapore, your
empathy is actually more than theirs. It’s such an interesting thing. Even for the Irish
students, they understand. They think ‘Oh, this is a very difficult language to me. It must be
difficult to teach as well.’ They actually have more tolerance for their teachers
rather than their teachers for them. They were like ‘Oh, your handwriting is awful. It is
trash! It is not standard enough!’ But that’s your strength, because you were exposed to
both sides of the culture. Maybe it would be rather easier for you to adapt to that. So for me
I will definitely quote that in my thesis, so I will thank you for this first.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah. Oh, it’s my pleasure. ((laughter))

CHANG: I think that’s pretty much all about the teachers. About the course itself, the course design,
is there any inappropriate things about the Chinese course design?

CARLOS: I think one of the biggest issues in Chinese classes is the monotony of work. Basically, it’s
boring. It’s repetitive, like it’s one style. It’s all kind of like writing characters. And that’s
something I actually see in the lectures here, where basically every lesson’s structure is
exactly the same. And you will be literally working through a textbook, you know, working
through the exercises. It’s almost like doing maths. It’s kind of like just PRACTISE,
PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE as suppose to actually applying. So I think there
should be a little bit variance added to lessons, because that could be like a demotivating
factor. It is boring and you kind of like losing motivation. You would be like ‘Oh Jesus,
I’ve done this…you know…same lesson structure like a hundred times already.’

CHANG: It’s too structured. It is too predictable. There is no surprise at all.

CARLOS: Yeah. Like when learning different contents, yes, that’s true. Every lesson is learning
something new, but you are learning in the same way. And maybe that’s the right way to
learn Chinese, by doing that? Maybe not? But it affects me personally as a student.

CHANG: Maybe not overall, just a little bit changes here and there. Overall the structure could still
be the same because it provides a safe feeling, like you walk in the classroom and you
know what’s gonna happen overall. But a little bit changes here and there, like this time for
the beginning of the course, the way of doing the introduction, we do it that way. And
maybe next time, for the course text, we could learn it that way. Maybe we will get a guest
speaker to talk about the content, something like that. Overall the core is the same, but add
a little bit of surprises. It would be less repetitive.

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHANG: Okay. I am gonna jump to the non-language modules because I think you were about to
make some comments on that. But I stopped you then. What did you want to say?

CARLOS: Basically that, part of the whole…like…coming to the realisation that Chinese is extremely
beneficial, you have to study the culture, and the society and the people, and…you
know…what they believe and things like that. Because in doing so, you learn…like you get
inside of how Chinese people…Chinese society works, and how the Chinese individual
works…in like their mindset. It then comes back to the whole thing about the empathy, like
even though they do things differently to…you know…how conventional westerners would
do it, you know, in terms of teaching style or approaches to lessons. So that’s…it’s
essential to understand…I am sorry, it is interesting to understand the reasons they do
things. And that’s what I think things become very apparent to me looking back at living in
so many different cultures, but learning specifically about Chinese culture. Because that
also adds in completely different aspects to the Chinese courses. Because in school, it was
pure language. And as I said, it got really boring. And here it would be boring as well, if we
didn’t have that additional modules like ‘Oh, this is China in English.’ You know what I
mean? And I think that…that…

CHANG: Can I link these two parts about you said that, your empathy for the teachers. You
mentioned that these non-language modules actually offer you insights. When you do these
modules, and when you sit in the classes of the language modules, or you just connecting
with the Chinese lecturers, when they are doing things their way, which are not totally
similar to other courses, they did not integrate the local educational concepts and
pedagogies, would these differences actually get you to witness and think about the
differences between the Chinese culture and the local culture? That could actually allow
you to have a better understanding of the whole…like the Chinese philosophy, the culture
thing, regardless of the fact that the teaching might not be perfect enough? It is actually beneficial in this way? ((laughter))

CARLOS: Sure, yeah, yeah, exactly. ((laughter))

CHANG: And it will get you to have more empathy for the teachers, rather than them for you. ((laughter))

CARLOS: Yeah, yeah. ((laughter))

CHANG: So, to flip that around. I am thinking about the teacher training. Because most of the teaching we receive as Chinese language teachers is about language teaching itself. So it would be reasonable to predict that if they have similar non-language teaching modules, like Irish culture, Irish society, Irish philosophy, they would encourage empathy for the students.

CARLOS: Oh, absolutely.

CHANG: And you, because you think like ‘Yes, I am learning the language. But I am not only interested in learning the language.’ The language, the culture, the society, they are not separable. And it is actually very important to understand them all together. So in terms of teacher training, it is very important to understand the local educational philosophy, the pedagogy. But if you don’t understand the culture, the background of the students, the society, that couldn’t just stand alone. That couldn’t be integrated, and you could only learn superficial things. You won’t understand at all.

CARLOS: Absolutely.

CHANG: But some of the people do consider the content of the non-language modules to be rather interesting than practical enough to apply in real life. So it is not that beneficial for their future career.

CARLOS: Oh, yeah, sure. I mean, it depends on everyone, because everyone is going to go down to different career paths. But yes, I DID think they didn’t get a lot of practical applications and use, but you need that, in my opinion, as a foundation. Once you have that basis to work from, you could then go…for example…the Chinese market and apply everything you know…like not from…like the Dao influence in what you do, like everything you know about business and whatever you do in China. But you have that basis like understanding Chinese mindset, trying to understand the way the society’s setup, things like that.

CHANG: So maybe just try to combine that, like maybe more interesting at first, for maybe the first year and second year module, and then gradually shift to more practical perspectives. Maybe at the beginning, you could generally talk about culture, the interesting perspectives. But later it would be like how exactly could you apply your understanding of the culture in your career, how would that affect your interaction with the Chinese people; add a little bit more practical perspectives.

CARLOS: Yeah.

CHANG: But you need both. You couldn’t begin with the practical perspective in the first place.

CARLOS: Yeah, exactly.
Transcript of Audio Interview 09 (Cian, T9)

Present: Cian
Location: Common area on campus
Date: 26th April 2018
Interviewer: Chang Zhang
Duration: c. 63 minutes

CHANG: Do you ever feel a reduced self-confidence in learning Chinese?
CIAN: Uh…Never. ((laughter)) Not once. But you know what is interesting is that I think (an anonymous peer) would be…ask (an anonymous peer) about this question. Because the Chinese Bridge Competition, you know, he participated, but he didn’t win any prizes. I thought this could be something that demotivates you, you know, if you participated in such kind of competition and didn’t win anything.

CHANG: Something like a lack of sense of achievement?
CIAN: Yeah, yeah. But I think for Chinese, you always DO get recognition for studying it. Just like for other people, like ‘WHAT! You study CHINESE!’ You know, like that.

CHANG: So are you talking about external recognition like speak to Chinese people outside of class and get good feedback, or internal recognition like getting good marks?
CIAN: Both, but then there are also recognitions from people who don’t speak Chinese and admire you for speaking Chinese, for learning Chinese, you know, which could act as a kind of motivation.

CHANG: Do you think there is a hierarchy of these different recognitions, like one would make people feel much better than the others? For example, if you get poor marks but you still get very good feedback from native speakers…
CIAN: [Yeah, but still it depends on why you are learning the language. For me, yeah, I don’t mind about exams. The exam results, I don’t really care about. But I think…yeah…I could prioritise native speaker…complementing your Chinese WAY more important than exam results, for me.

CHANG: WAY more important, okay. Why is that?
CIAN: Well, I learn the language because I want to speak like native speakers.

CHANG: Instead of getting good marks.

CIAN: Yeah, yeah. I compare…there are different types of students. There is…you know…(an anonymous peer), she’s really like…she’s been learning for a long time. She’s really good at reading and comprehending Chinese, but speaking, you know, she is kind of…lacks a little bit, I think. Or say she wouldn’t be as strong as in listening and speaking as in her reading and writing, I feel. That is just me as how I feel. But I think then I will be…I learn a language in a way that suits me more. And I want to be better at speaking and listening for Chinese.

CHANG: Do you think that was rooted in some sort of aptitude, or it is more to do with your personal goal of learning the language?
CIAN: Personal goal.

CHANG: But not all the people have such kind of specific goals. Normally they would just kind of like have a general goal like ‘I want to learn Chinese well.’ And it’s just all down to the structure of the course. If the course emphasis more on listening and speaking, [then…
CIAN: Yeah, but that’s the thing. You eventually feel like most of the people…you learn the different aspects of the language, the reading, the writing, the listening, the speaking at different speeds. And I just like to progress in spoken quicker, because again that’s the most important aspect of a language.

CHANG: But back to this question, you never felt a reduced self-confidence.
CIAN: Yeah, no.

CHANG: I should give you some shit marks when I was still teaching you. ((laughter))

CIAN: ((laughter)) Ah, that’s just because I work hard at it. I studied a lot.

CHANG: Then I have an interesting question for you. Do you feel that sometimes other students attribute your achievement more to the aptitude rather than the hard work? For example, I know you do put in hard work. But, sometimes, it could be affected by your life attitude, people could tend to think like ‘Okay, Cian is just naturally good at learning Chinese. He didn’t really work that hard.’ Do you think that’s true in a certain degree?

CIAN: Yeah.
CHANG: And I mean that they didn’t really mean that in a jealous way. They might genuinely think that way.

CIAN: Yeah. I don’t know how learning a language works, but yeah, I believe that some people just pick up the language more easily. It happened to me. I pick up languages faster and easier than the others.

CHANG: Sorry, are we talking about multiple languages, other than Chinese?

CIAN: I think the language in general, yeah.

CHANG: How many languages have you studied?

CIAN: Well, I study French for Leaving Cert, and I was the same in French as I was in Chinese. I am the best in my class. But there were two things, yeah. I picked it up quite easily. While I always say it that I think it has something to do with the music and the languages. Surely, they are related or something. So I pick them up easily, so… But then, it’s never… uh… I do work a lot harder as in… my vocabulary is WAY bigger than others because I spent HOURS and HOURS on Memrise, learning those words. I know so many words that my classmates don’t know. I know that.

CHANG: So it’s a fair result for you, for the combination of both aptitude and also, of course, necessary hard work.

CIAN: It’s completely fair.

CHANG: And it would be unfair to judge that easily, that you didn’t work hard.

CIAN: I don’t mind if people think that way. Yeah. I know I work hard so well. I am perfectly happy with it, you know.

CHANG: Speak of other languages, do you constantly compare your experiences in learning different languages, or you’d rather see them quite separately? Or it would be different at the beginner stage of the learning, would you tend to compare it a little bit more often? Or you didn’t do this anymore for now?

CIAN: I think… yeah… sometimes at the beginning, in the initial stages, I would compare and wonder maybe how good I was at French when I was learning it for… you know… three months and how good I was at Chinese.

CHANG: Progress speed or something like that?

CIAN: Yeah, progress speed.

CHANG: In terms of methods, would you borrow your methods of learning French in learning Chinese?

CIAN: Yeah, what I did for French, well one thing I do was just watch Chinese TV programs. And I did that for French.

CHANG: Let me go back to that one, when you do compare progress. I presume the speed of improving your Chinese is slower than French?

CIAN: I haven’t noticed the difference. I think I speak now, four years of studying Chinese, I speak Chinese better than I spoke French.

CHANG: Are you continue learning French?

CIAN: No. But I studied French for six years.

CHANG: Ah, okay. So you are comparing your four years’ achievement with six years’, the two languages.

CIAN: Yeah.

CHANG: But, would the intensity of learning be the same, the workload, the hours you put into? I mean four years is four years, but it could be very different hours you have put into.

CIAN: Yeah, yeah. Well, there would be some more hours I put into Chinese.

CHANG: But anyway, you didn’t find such kind of comparison in any way has a negative impact on your Chinese learning?

CIAN: No, no. Nothing has ever been a negative impact on my learning of Chinese. ((laughter))

CHANG: Was there anything be a negative impact on your French? ((laughter))

CIAN: No, I just enjoyed it. Double crossed.

CHANG: I am curious, like multiple languages, it seems that you don’t have a… a preference. They just equally interesting and beneficial for you?

CIAN: I am never gonna have another interview with a Hippy. ((laughter)) You are giving me nothing.

CHANG: ((laughter)) I know, yeah.

CIAN: Yeah. Well, I am starting learning Japanese now, myself. I just do whatever I want to do. I will go back and revise my French. I want to just live in France for a year.

CHANG: I just put down ‘whatever’ for every question.

CIAN: Well, yeah, just ask me one of those questions.
CHANG: No, don’t worry, I am just joking. (.) Do you find sometimes it is difficult to improve your academic performance in Chinese? I mean, of course you get good marks, but do you find it difficult to sometimes break the gaps between levels? For example, you could have stuck in ‘A’ level for quite a long time when you aim for the ‘A+’, but you could just couldn’t get there.

CIAN: Yeah, maybe. So do I feel it is difficult to progress to the next level of grade? I don’t really…((laughter))…pay attention to my grades. I know for Chinese in university I got consistent ‘A’s. I don’t really know if it was an ‘A+’ or not. So it would be different to get a ‘B’.

CHANG: Okay, then here is the thing. Even if you were consistently getting ‘A’s, if you didn’t pay much attention to it, you are not going to get a lot of sense of achievement. In order to continue doing anything, you need a continuous input of the sense of achievement. Where did you get these? Like, what keeps you going? If you don’t pay attention to the scores, there got to be something else that keeps you going.

CIAN: Just genuine interest in learning the language. So it is what it is. ((laughter)) I know.

CHANG: You are answering questions like a three years old obedience kid. ((laughter)) ‘Oh, my life is great, and I love all my teachers!’ Like that Lego movie, like ‘Everything is awesome!’ ‘Yeah, I know. ((laughter)) ‘Everything is awesome! Everything is good when you are part of the team!’ I know yeah, I know sometimes I sound like I was brainwashed. I just really enjoyed it.

CIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, because I try them with the music. I try to do them together.

CHANG: That would cause your motivation to be very steady, instead of fluctuating under external influences?

CIAN: Yeah, but that wouldn’t be just for language. I be that way about everything in my life, the learning process in general, you know.

CHANG: Do you think you now have a good set of methods for learning Chinese, the particular ones, the effective ones? Maybe Memrise would be one of them?

CIAN: Memrise, yeah. But I wouldn’t use Memrise for French, kind of, you know, because it is just efficient in learning characters, learning vocabulary, you know. And then just listening. I found that…I am watching ‘Aiqing Gongyu’ (iPartment, a Chinese TV show). ((laughter)) And if I watch that, I watch that in the morning when I eat my breakfast. And when I go to Chinese class, I feel so much more…

CHANG: Slow?

CIAN: No, quicker.

CHANG: Which one is quicker?

CIAN: Oh, no, yeah, the show is quicker. But then when I go into class, yeah, I feel that classes were so much easier because I was in the set of Chinese minds.

CHANG: Yeah, me the same. I watch Big Bang Theory for English, I watched it before I took the IELTS. I listen to it right before I go to the listening exam, and I found that it was so slow. Just immerse in the language, in the mood.

CIAN: Yeah, so the media of the thing…I try to find music, music would be good for me. But I can’t find Chinese music that I like. It was old. ((laughter))

CHANG: Okay, since you don’t have such kind of problem, I am gonna talk about others. Since you were consistently getting ‘A’s, that would be peer pressure for the others. Would you think your achievement in here could be demotivating for the others?

CIAN: Uh…

CHANG: Do you have friends in the class? ((laughter))

CIAN: Yeah, yeah. ((laughter)) You see, everyone just…everyone just…I don’t know, it was weird that everyone just assumes that I will get an ‘A’, you know. As in everyone just like ‘Okay, that’s Cian. He is the best in the class.’ So in a way I am like…I feel like I am not even in the class. But if…I don’t know.

CHANG: How could the feeling of recognition be formed? How? When? I never noticed. When was this established?

CIAN: Just like…maybe when I went away for the first semester on my own, I think people may assume that my Chinese would go crazy. And then when I came back, yeah, maybe in Beijing, for the second semester, people just make comments, you know. Yeah, I don’t know really. It’s weird.
CHANG: Okay, I am gonna move on. Do you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese? Do you ever think Chinese is not very useful, maybe for social or for career purposes?

CIAN: No, because for me my motivation is to learn it. My motivation is just to learn it and be able to speak it.

CHANG: That pure? It’s all about the language itself?

CIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHANG: Is there anything to do with the culture, the society or something?

CIAN: Uh…culture is interesting. I am interested in the culture because…it’s pretty much the same way I am interested in learning Japanese now, because China and Japan are so far away from Ireland. I like the…I really like…I am interested in cultures that are really different from my own. Because for me, it is not that I learn Chinese, so I could get really good jobs or something. That’s not my motivation.

CHANG: Could you still recall the initiative of your motivation in learning Chinese? What got you to learn Chinese in the first place?

CIAN: Oh, it was completely by chance really. When I was doing the Leaving Cert, I’d like to do this course. Yeah, I applied to do Commerce with International Languages, you know, commerce with two languages in the first year. And I always want to do French, because I loved French. And then I picked Chinese as well, you know. And then we have to drop one language in the first semester, and up to the first semester I hated the way that French was taught. I thought it was really bad in methodologies. So there was a huge demotivation for me to do French, because it was not about the language. But that is one thing, because all the French students and Spanish students were demotivated, because all they learned were these dramas and plays and novels in Spanish and stuff. And they answer in English, there was nothing on the language. They all wanted to learn the language. That was not the same. That’s why I hated French anyway. And I also wasn’t keen on Chinese at the start. And a couple of days before we needed to decide, I just said like ‘Okay, screw it. I am gonna pick Chinese!’ And I just loved it from then on. It was really interesting. But in the first couple of months, I wasn’t really that interested in it. I think because I wanted to keep on French.

CHANG: I want to ask a little bit more about this, as I have two more students who gave me similar answers. They also did not pick Chinese intentionally in the first place. They were not interested in Chinese, but choose Chinese simply over the other languages, because the other one was more demotivating.

CIAN: Yeah, yeah. ((laughter))

CHA: But from then on, it was different. One person thinks that due to how the first-year course was taught, was structured, he gradually grows interested in the language and the course. That’s the first one. And the second is that he didn’t think he grows much interest or enthusiasm in learning Chinese until this person went to China and witness the modern aspect of China, and experience to apply what they learned in real life. And he felt that he DO have a career, a future of studying Chinese. At that time, only until he went to China, he set up the mind to start to take the learning of Chinese seriously. Of course, you could learn it all the way but not taking it seriously. So would you consider which one fits you better, or for you it is still different from these two scenarios?

CIAN: Well, when I was applying for my college, universities, my first choice was this course, and my second choice was in Cork, for Business and Chinese even though I never studied Chinese before. So I was curious about it. So even if I never studied it, I was willing to go to Cork and study it for four years. ((laughter))

CIAN: So you have that background, which is different from the others.

CHANG: You didn’t do any research on it?

CIAN: No. It was just different, so I like it for that. ((laughter))

CIAN: I didn’t know you are a hippy since secondary school. ((laugh)) ‘Okay, I am gonna be whatever for my whole life.’

CIAN: Yeah, anyway, I kind of enjoyed it a lot in the first few years. And then once you went to China, once you use it in real life, whatever scenarios…

CHANG: But it is also interesting that your motivation is not like many other people that…like the other person I was talking about. They were like a flipped coin. They don’t really know why they learn Chinese for the first few years, only when they saw career opportunities, they got a serious commitment. For you, it’s not.

CIAN: It’s enjoyment.
And the enjoyment builds up quite…quite steady.

But do you feel any fluctuation over the four years?

No, it’s been very consistent actually. It has been a very consistent level of enjoyment. I am interested to see what will happen next year. I want to keep studying it. I want to go back to China and study for a year, like study Chinese. And then I am thinking about doing Chinese teaching.

CHANG: Here or in China?
CIAN: Well, I have to study in China.

CHANG: Then you want to teach Chinese in here?
CIAN: Yeah, here in Ireland.

CHANG: Okay, then you really should keep in touch with me.

Because it is gonna come onto the Leaving Cert. I think it’s a good time. So next year I am planning to keep studying Chinese, even though my degree has already finished.

Then do you ever doubt the necessity of reaching a high level of Chinese proficiency in here?

Yeah, sometimes I feel like, there is a certain level that I need to get to, that I could comfortably express myself in Chinese. For me, one of the motivation is to be able to write music in Chinese, write songs in Chinese. So maybe once I reached that…I tried to write several songs, but they are…they are a bit weird. But if I need to teach Chinese, I will need a higher level. (laughter) At the moment that was my motivation. But I wasn’t planning on working as a Chinese teacher, I am just working on getting to a level that I am happy with. It depends on…yeah, that’s when a career comes in and its influence on your learning, I guess.

Do you have any preference for the place of the jobs? Like, would you prefer domestic jobs in here, or like at least in a European context, or you don’t mind working in China?

No, I don’t mind working in China.

And there is no preference?

You know, I probably pick China, just because I want to leave Ireland. I don’t know, this could change in a year, you know.

Then let’s talk about the Chinese teachers. Do you have any thoughts on the teachers could demotivate their students?

Yeah, I think, yeah. Obviously, the teacher plays a big role. But this year I feel like people are critical about the teacher. But in my opinion, I still enjoy the class. And I think people are critical, but they don’t really have any reasons to be. They were like ‘Ah, this teacher! Why is she teaching us this?’ All of a sudden they are experts of teaching Chinese, you know. I am not saying that they shouldn’t voice their opinions. I just feel like they are making themselves out to be more knowledgeable than the teacher, you know.

Trying to feel a little bit superior, but lack of the foundation for doing that.

Yeah, so I also experienced bad teachers. That’s the thing. I didn’t really experience a bad teacher in Chinese. But I think that is because of my perception, you know. As I am enjoying Chinese, I am not going to be looking for negative things about it, you know. And that comes to teachers as well.

Okay, I am gonna dig a little bit deeper for that. I know you study multiple languages. But, do you compare teachers of different languages?

Yeah.

Then, what about the Chinese teachers? Are they all as professional as the other modern foreign language teachers?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yes, absolutely, yeah.

Okay, some people say that in the first year, at an early stage of learning, teachers tended to not give constructive feedbacks. It feels like they were trying to oversell Chinese, or they wanted to encourage you for whatever causes, so they tended to praise you all the time. Even when you do make mistakes, they don’t dare to criticise you, instead they just praise you all the time. And sometimes this could be demotivating, because people could spot what they were doing, that they were too keen, too on purpose. It will work for a few times, but as soon as you spot what they are doing, it won’t work again. It won’t be encouraging any more.

Oh! I don’t think I had that in my first year.

It didn’t ring a bell?
CIAN: I mean, we had Hongfei for our first year. I didn’t think she was necessarily overpraising. But then everyone in the first semester in the first year, in Chinese, everyone gets good grades. But then I think it was very basic stuff for a language, that everyone should get good grades. If you don’t get good grades, then you shouldn’t do the language. But maybe they gave good grades to make people think they can do the language. But it won’t work. You can’t just give someone a good grade, if they don’t get a good grade, right? Okay, at the end of the day, I didn’t feel the teacher was being too keen or too overselling something in the first year.

CHANG: You didn’t feel a drastic increase in difficulty in the second year, after you no longer could change your choice for the language?

CIAN: No.

CHANG: No?

CIAN: No.

CHANG: That actually happened to a lot of people.

CIAN: Really?!

CHANG: And that’s actually one of the reasons I am doing this research, because I always teach the second year and students always complain about the contrast. It feels like they left a mess for me, you know.

CIAN: Because…okay…this is the thing. I was well prepared for the second year as in the first year.

CHANG: Your teacher is Hongfei. She is a lot stricter in that way.

CIAN: Yeah, and I worked a lot outside of the class in the first year.

CHANG: But there are a lot of people who had a really bad foundation for the first year. Anyway, I am gonna move on to the next question. Do you think the Chinese teacher had a little bit of lack of attention or concern for individual students? I mean, they still care much about the whole student unit, but sometimes it could be a lack of individual feedback.

CIAN: Is this over the four years, or?

CHANG: Yeah, generally speaking.

CIAN: I think in any subjects there will be teachers who focus on individuals and teachers who don’t. No?

CHANG: Yeah, sure. But is this relatively more obvious for Chinese teachers? Maybe this would be more obvious for your teachers in the third year?

CIAN: Uh…oh yeah, yeah. There wasn’t much individual feedback in the third year, in China.

CHANG: Unless you ask for it. And someone mentioned that sometimes even if you ask for it, you might still not get it, and they (the teachers) are not quite happy about this.

CIAN: Well, I always ask for it. In my…yeah, I am thinking about my teachers last year, and there wasn’t much individual feedback. But then it depends. Like I would ask for feedback. So it also depends on how interested you are.

CHANG: It also depends on how active you were.

CIAN: Yeah, I think part of the responsibility is on you as well. It’s okay for the teachers to…you know there are more than 20 students in the class. You can’t just give…you know…it’s hard to equally divide your attention to each of them. So those who really want to learn will want to learn. But still I think that individual attention should be given. It’s just some student time, you know. But no one takes a record of that, you know, ‘I talked to Chang five minutes today.’

CHANG: Sometimes it is just a general mindset that reflects in many things. But again, I am still not quite clear on the topic, so I am not in a position to judge. And some people said that sometimes regardless of teachers’ English language proficiency, sometimes their instructions are not clear enough. They are a little bit vague in a way, regarding maybe requirement of an assignment or description of a task.

CIAN: Uh…I am thinking about my Chinese teachers in China, and all are clear, like our homework is clear. And in Ireland, it was also, yeah (clear). But also that’s like…let’s say (an anonymous teacher) gives us homework, and she sends us emails and says this is the homework. She would send in Chinese, so people may not understand the email, then they will not be clear about the homework. But like, is that their (the students) fault or her (the teacher) fault? I don’t know. I don’t have any problem with it. You know a couple of weeks ago, she emailed us the homework. People are…people are wondering…people are looking at email and using Google Translate on Gmail and reading it. Maybe that’s why?
CHANG: Okay, the last thing is about the teacher, that Chinese teacher seemed to have a lack of empathy, that they don’t understand how difficult it is to learn Chinese. And they commented that teachers in China appear to have a more serious problem in this way.

CIAN: Uh…I don’t know. I am looking forward to going back to China and going to class again. Maybe like a ‘Gaoji’ or something like a higher-level class. Because in all the classes I have been in, I have been the best in class. Well I like to be not the best, I’d like to be the worst in class, you know. No, I can’t say that I will experience Chinese teacher being like…[being…

CHANG: [Okay, you don’t need to continue commenting on this. I have finished this question and I have some other questions for your particular case. As you said, you don’t want to be…at least not always the top one in the class. Could you elaborate on that?

CIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because the teacher…people would think that…teacher is not sympathetic about the difficulty of studying it. But for me, it’s never been a problem, any great difficulty in it. So there’s never been something that I can’t understand or having difficulty in understanding. I never look for empathy. I don’t NEED empathy. Like I could study by myself, FINE. So I never have been challenged enough to know.

CHANG: So you want to experience this?

CIAN: Yeah, why not? ((laughter))

CHANG: Okay, good luck with that! ((laughter)) Okay, since apparently you don’t need to pay much attention in this respect, would you need to pay some attention to maintain the relationship with the classmates? I mean, I believe that you would notice, that sometimes it is the majority who’s been struggling with Chinese. So when it was not a problem for you, would you be a demotivating influence for others?

CIAN: But I don’t like that. I don’t like…does display in the classroom where people try to show how good they are, you know, a la…language, especially a language. It’s like…the teacher gives…like ‘Okay, answer this question.’ And then, you do very quickly and say ‘Teacher! I have finished! What can I do now?’ No, I don’t like that.

CHANG: Yeah, nobody likes a show-off. But, would it bother you if the teacher always set you as an example?

CIAN: It would bother me if I know it would bother other people. It wouldn’t be teaching fairly, you know.

CHANG: That’s what I want to ask. Would you perform rather conservatively when you DO notice that others are not as good as you in a group?

CIAN: I do perform conservatively in general. I feel like I am not a show-off at all. But I do enjoy myself. I enjoy being in class. But I don’t want to step on others, you know.

CHANG: So sometimes you would rather sacrifice some opportunities for practice in return for a more harmonious relationship with the others.

CIAN: Yes, of course.

CHANG: Could you give me an example of this? Like how far you will go?

CIAN: So, in (an anonymous teacher)’s class, she would, you know, if we are studying a case study, she will ask like ‘Why did they do this?’ And I answer sometimes. And sometimes I just don’t answer. But I don’t think it matters, because there are always people who want to answer and keep shouting at the teacher, you know. But I think if you know the answer, it is fine. If you know the answer in your head, it’s fine. So that’s it. I would answer questions less even if I knew the answer, I just don’t say it. And then, if we had a Kouyu class (speaking class) where we have Fudao Laoshi (tutor) coming in, we were split into groups like three or four, and we talk to the Fudao Laoshi. I don’t know…I just…was…kind of in a way…no, I would only talk less. What I would do would just talk to the other classmates. I’d like to make sure that everyone talks some equal amount (with the tutor). But then, a lot of them as well, it’s personality. I think in the classroom, I have a big personality, not only in Chinese, in my business class as well. I like to participate, (but not show off). And people know that, so…if I ever wanted, I would never feel restricted in a classroom. Because if I want to have my own experience in my classroom, I will, you know. Some people participate in class more IN GENERAL. But I will never restrict myself too extremely. I will never come to that.

CHANG: Then, what about the course design. Is there any space for improvement for the course design?

CIAN: I always find those questions hard to answer. Like when I talk to my classmates, everyone criticises…everybody LOVE to criticise the course. And they say that like…a couple of weeks ago, maybe four or five weeks ago, in (an anonymous teacher)’s class, we did…she
did a tone (class) with us. And it was like, you know, if there were two third tones, the first one was like a second tone, you know. And people were like ‘Why are we doing this?’ And they were kind of like criticising it. But then I said like ‘Your tones aren’t so good, so why are you criticising it?’ They think that they shouldn’t be doing this because we were in the fourth year. But I said like everyone still has problems with tones, you know, they are so difficult. So, who are you to say that like ‘No, we shouldn’t be learning this.’ So…I think your attitude towards it is reflected in… Like I don’t really necessarily criticise because…

CHANG: It is wired because I didn’t notice many conflicts between the teacher and the students. Why is there a sudden dissatisfaction towards (an anonymous teacher)’s class and the teacher?

CIAN: Yeah, I don’t understand. I have fun in class. I don’t know really well. I don’t know what it is. I honestly don’t know. Because (an anonymous teacher) is particularly the person that people complain about. And I don’t know why. Every time people complain, I just say ‘I thought it was a good class’, you know.

CHANG: I was not there, so I don’t have enough evidence to judge.

CIAN: I think maybe…it’s the content? People can’t really keep up with the content, maybe?

CHANG: Anyway, in a way, this could be a positive thing. Because there is a theory that, at the beginning of the learning, people kind of like attribute their failure more towards themselves, but that would harm your confidence. While after a while, you start to build up the confidence, you have to say that you become more confident to judge the course. And that would allow you to attribute the failure to external causes other than yourself. That could be mentally healthy for them.

CIAN: Yeah, yeah. It is interesting.

CHANG: Think about it, at least part of the reason why (an anonymous teacher) taught the tones MUST BE that at least some of the students were still not good at tones. But to admit that, like in the fourth year you were still not good at the content of the first year, that could be really frustrating for the person. The harm that they took from the reality might be even worse than they blame the teacher for it.

CIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But do you think that it should be done? Do you think it is bad? For example, for (an anonymous teacher) to teach tones, Again?

CHANG: I had valuable comments say that there was a lack of communication between the teacher and the students, for Chinese module particularly. Because you DO have a coordinator, a third person in between, for all your business modules. If you had any sort of dissatisfactions, or you need a little bit more clarification, you could go to that coordinator, and that person could reflect the opinion to the lecturer anonymously. So people have more opportunities to voice freely for themselves. But for the Chinese modules, you need to go directly to the teacher. So it is all down to your personal relationship with the teacher.

CIAN: Yeah, like I am just not critical at all, REALLY, not critical at all. Maybe there are problems with the course that I didn’t notice.

CHANG: Oh, there are always space for improvement, it depends on how you see it.
Transcript of Audio Interview 10 (Chris, T10)

Present: Chris  
Location: Coffee place near campus  
Date: 28th April 2018  
Interviewer: Chang Zhang  
Duration: c. 58 minutes

CHANG: Basically, my research is to study what kind of factors would cause you a reduced…motivation for learning Chinese.  
CHRIS: Right, yes, we know about this.  
CHANG: And the most important factor so far is that people feel a reduced self-confidence or self-doubt. This is the number one reason that people are feeling demotivated. So, I am wondering…correct me if I am not, that I felt you have been through a transition of building up your confidence in learning Chinese.  
CHRIS: Yeah.  
CHANG: To be honest, I think your performance in the fourth year is better than yours in the first year and second year. So, do you ever feel less confident in learning Chinese?  
CHRIS: Absolutely, I think that’s the biggest factor to cause students demotivation, because I found that I was in China initially, I was struggling to communicate with Chinese people. When I try to express something, even if I say it correctly, they won’t understand. And it kind of makes you feel a little bit…uh…you just won’t be confident to speak with them day to day.  
CHANG: That’s what I think cause the majority of the class to lose confidence. Because I found that in the first and second year, we don’t do enough speak in class. There was too much emphasis on the reading, writing and listening, and there was not much oral communication in class. And I guess that’s just too passive that the students take, and they wouldn’t have any confidence, that they wouldn’t try, or else they would make an effort to try to improve.  
CHRIS: And that’s what I have done in China, I made an effort to…you know…some kind of put myself in uncomfortable situations. You know, even if I was not sure whether people would understand me, I would try my best every day in different situations, you know, communicate and try to express what you want to say. And that’s when I noticed that, you know, people would understand me better, and my confidence started to build up. That kind of gave me more hope to keep going, to make an extra effort to keep improving. So I think, once you made the effort, even if it DOES be difficult, and if you question yourself, even if you made that effort, you will see results, and that motivates you to keep going, you know, in the future.  
CHANG: Then I am interested in what got you started in the first place? I presume the experience would be, first like culture shock. It couldn’t be like, you’ve already set up your mind, like ‘Even if I do worse in China, even if the locals couldn’t understand me, or I couldn’t understand them, I would just try.’ It’s more like you went to China, you found out like ‘Crap, they didn’t understand me.’ Then, somehow, after a process, you start to think ‘I am gonna do it anyway.’  
CHRIS: So, what makes you start?  
CHANG: Yeah.  
CHRIS: I think the most important thing is that you have to set yourself a goal. If you haven’t got a goal, you have nothing to work towards. But I sense that maybe a lot of people, they didn’t have a goal at the end of the semester. I knew that when I came back in the fourth year, I want to do HSK 5. That was my goal, to kind of improving every day. And I have something to work towards, to give me the motivation to work from day to day. And I found that even if you only work on a very small amount of work every day, like learn five characters or talk to five people, that’s gonna help you to improve a lot quicker. I knew that the most beneficial thing that I have done is to find language partners. So I help them with their English and they help me with my Chinese. And in that way we get about one hour or two hours, just spoke Chinese on a daily basis. And that for me is the biggest motivating factor. Because for me, it’s like vocabulary improvement. We kind of talk about more complicated topics and subjects, and that helped me a lot in class. That I guess was the most beneficial thing.  
CHANG: When you are talking about language partners, are you talking about in here or in China?  
CHRIS: Both, yeah, both.  
CHANG: Roughly when did you start this?
CHRIS: Uh... I guess, when we were in China, the first semester was all business. So you are not doing any Chinese in the first semester, you didn't really try. But when I went to Beijing

the second semester, I still thought my level of Chinese was quite low comparing some of the other students in our class. I felt like I would be in the bottom, so just kind of like raise my own level. We got a coordinator who would bring us to the forbidden city, the wall, you know, that kind of thing. Just from chatting with them, they were also hoping to improve their English. It kind of like all started there. In terms of the language partners, I had two in Beijing, then back I had two in the fourth year as well. We meet nearly every day. I meet one of them even for just half an hour, just practise or... And it really benefited us both, and I would advise any students who are learning Chinese, no matter what stages, to find a language partner. Because, you know, you could ask them any questions, you know, some of them maybe you don’t want to take to the class. You know, to just practise ten minutes every day, to speak Chinese, I think you get so many benefits from that. I think that should be something that is encouraged as well, you know, in the first year and second year.

Because I never thought of it before I went to China.

CHANG: And you mentioned that there was a lack of practice, speaking Chinese during the class.

CHRIS: Yeah.

CHANG: But would you consider that was still different, that you do get a good amount of practice during class, maybe with the classmates or pair work, they are still quite different from the practice with the language partners?

CHRIS: Well, in class is definitely beneficial in class, but it is always on a certain subject. You always need to talk about a topic, maybe you studied in class. Whereas if you have a language partner, you just have conversations. It could be...you can talk about any subjects, you know, it could change constantly. You don’t need to focus on one thing. And your vocabulary would be broadened to, you know, like ten subjects. Whereas in class, it depends on what you do, it is always about...like...you know, about the hobbies, you are just going to learn the vocabulary about that. And you kind of just prepare any oral exams about that, but not improve the others.

CHANG: So a little bit artificial.

CHRIS: Yeah, a little bit. It’s not natural. Like when you talk to people, it’s not gonna be like just talking about one subject. It’s gonna be a flow in the conversation. It will change maybe from your hobby to your...you know...family or holidays, you know, whatever. You might end up talking about ten subjects with a language partner, in comparison with speaking in class, you speak a certain set of vocabulary about a certain subject. So once you improve one subject, you kind of neglect several other important subjects.

CHANG: And you found that important.

CHRIS: Absolutely. That’s the most natural...you know, if you meet somebody for the first time, in a personal situation or a business situation, you are not going to focus on one topic. You will change the conversation at some certain stages. You have to build up your confidence so to express what you want to say in nearly [all...all...]

CHANG: Yeah, we call it like the domain of the language. So let me put it this way and see whether I understood it. Probably because the content or the structure of the courses are more towards campus life domain, you could speak a lot about this aspect of life. You could get really high proficiency in this perspective. But maybe after graduation, like now at your workplace, you don’t really use that much of vocabulary or expressions that you learned in class.

CHRIS: Yeah, yeah, no, no.

CHANG: You really need some more content for the social domain or business domain, so it’s a set of things that you study to improve the language. In a certain way, it is. But also, it’s a little bit detached from your real life, your real needs.

CHRIS: Yeah, I felt maybe there was a lack of emphasis on the...how to put it...what students do after graduation. Like it’s a Business and Chinese course, maybe there wasn’t enough focus on the business aspect of the Chinese class. I remember when I just finished, I had a meeting, that was me and the other six participants who are all Chinese. And it was about web design. So the whole meeting was in Chinese. And I didn’t understand about 50%, because it was all about the technical vocab. I know after four years it would be difficult to manage that anyway, but when you are not doing that kind of speaking for certain subjects regularly, or learn about it, it would be quite difficult.

CHANG: So do you think it is necessary to bridge the Chinese module and the other areas, especially your major area? This probably won’t be restricted to the Chinese language course context,
but other languages as well. Because you study commerce, you would want a little bit more elements of business in your Chinese class.

CHRIS: Yeah, exactly. The whole degree is called Business and Chinese, and I think most of the people in this major would consider a business job in China. Of course, we need to be proficient for conversation in general in Chinese, but also Chinese that you are gonna use in business scenarios. I know we did a module in the final year, but still I think that was only for two semesters. Probably that was not enough throughout the whole course, to prepare for a life working in China.

CHANG: So would you think that might be more beneficial to tone it down a little bit about the difficulty and start it a little bit earlier, like in the first year and second year?

CHRIS: Yeah, absolutely. I think it is important to study all the areas, not like the oral…I don’t think writing is important. I think maybe we emphasised too much in the first year. I think typing should be enough, because I VERY VERY RARE to use handwriting. It’s all typing now. It’s VERY VERY little writing…

CHANG: [You think it is not practical.

CHRIS: Yeah, there was nearly too much time spent on that. It could be spent on other areas, for example, oral communication with tutors, or that kind of thing, you know.

CHANG: To you it’s like…you know some people say that writing is the only way they could memorise, but to you that is not the case, right?

CHRIS: No, I think to learn characters you could write. I think there is too much emphasis on the exams. If the exams are on computers, that would be better.

CHANG: So only writing for communication purpose.

CHRIS: Yeah. In the first and second year, I spent a lot of time handwriting characters, but my level was still…I thought my level was still very low, even though I studied Chinese more than any other subjects in college. I just write the characters, try to memorise them. And it was only until I changed that in the third year and fourth year, I started to focus more on practical Chinese, you know, communicating, that’s when I got the most benefits. Because when you are learning more characters orally, I find it easier to memorise the character, you know, by seeing them and typing them. I feel that oral is definitely the most important, but it was the most neglected as well.

CHANG: Okay, you also mentioned that you noticed that someone is better than you, and this happened actually even before you went to China. I am thinking would that kind of peer pressure could cause you a reduced self-confidence, you know?

CHRIS: You mean in class? I don’t think that would cause a reduced self-confidence, because you notice that the majority of the class are at your level. There are only a few, like four or five very good performers. But the majority of the class would be the similar level in the first and second year. I think it would be nice to be in the top level, but you do recognise that most of the people would be in a similar position to you. We all go through the same kind of feelings as yourself.

CHANG: So when you saw those top players, they won’t affect your confidence.

CHRIS: I don’t think so, no. You know, not everyone could be the top player, so you might think that in any domain, you probably would feel a little bit inadequate in some way. But I don’t think that affected me that much, no. That’s just my personal opinion, but maybe other people would. It didn’t affect me too much.

CHANG: Then how about the poor marks, occasionally?

CHRIS: Poor marks, yeah. Honestly, yeah, you want to get good marks. When you do get low marks, it DOES kind of give you a…it DOES reduce your confidence a bit. Because you saw other people get…like we are all friends in the class. If you are not playing at the level of the majority of the class, then you started to question yourself. If you are around similar marks of everyone else, maybe you think that’s just the standard marks of the class. It’s only when you practise a little more and you see your marks improving, that of course gives you the attitude to keep working, keep improving. I am speaking my fourth year, when I came back from China, I was in the top few performers in the class. And that kind of gives you more motivation to keep pushing yourself to…you know, keep getting the marks and try to improve on that.

CHANG: Can I say that in the fourth year when you say you are comparing, you are actually comparing with yourself, yourself in the past. And you see your improvement and it’s not comparing with others.

CHRIS: I don’t think it’s a good idea to compare yourself to other people. You could only compare yourself with yourself.
CHANG: So you mentioned the sense of achievement, that counts, you actually compared with your former self and see improvement, rather than ‘I became the best from a mediocre learner. I used to be the majority of the class, but now I am the best in the class.’ No.

CHRIS: I don’t think it’s good if you just study and just be somebody else. You should just study for yourself, and kind of improve your own performance. That’s just the way I think, maybe other people would be more competitive and against other people. I just kind of want to be better than me yesterday, that kind of thing. Or in the fourth year, or in the second year, and I think it was only in the third year I started to think like that. Up until then, I was kind of just have a mediocre level of Chinese. But it was only until I see my Chinese improving, I feel more confident, that’s the time that I started to want to improve every day. That was what I think really helped my Chinese to get to a higher level.

CHANG: You mentioned the gradual gain of confidence and the feeling of achievements, and you also mentioned that there was kind of like a specific time point that you set up a serious goal like to achieve maybe HSK 5. Apparently both these sides played a part in your increased motivation for learning Chinese, and these all happened in the third year while you were in China. Which one happened first? Was the goal go first, then the feelings come, or it’s the other way around?

CHRIS: Uh…I think in the third year it was kind of a necessity because you have to pass HSK 4. I got the scholarship, so you have to pass HSK 4 as part of that. So I think it was the goal that kind of began…you know, your motivation to study, to improve. Once you have seen yourself improve, and you feel more confident, it’s more like a hobby, like something you want to do rather than you have to do. It doesn’t just become goal orientated, it becomes more personal…or achievement orientated. You know what I mean? You WANT to do it, not you NEED to do it. So that’s when you started to look at it like ‘Oh I have to study Chinese’. It’s like ‘I want to study Chinese’. And that’s when I found the most benefitted. I think you need the external achievement to start you, but once then you see yourself improving, you see yourself progressing, it becomes more of an internal thing.

CHANG: A whole lot of people actually don’t know why they are learning Chinese in the first and second year. Because you were not signed up for this programme, lots of you, you chose Chinese over another language, that’s what happened in the first year. And you were like don’t know what to do with this part of the minor studies. Then when you go to China, like for you, you did say that it was required by the scholarship. It really sounds like you are working for GPA or something, a little bit compulsory. That was a little bit forced at the beginning. But as you work towards that goal, it feels like the motivation became more integrated, maybe accompanied by good feelings.

CHRIS: Yeah, the HSK 4 in China was definitely the start which pushed me to study. Then when you actually started studying it, you actually kind of feel like ‘I enjoy this’, you know. And you could be like in any situation, like in a supermarket where you don’t know…I don’t know…maybe buy the chicken, and you were kind of like…the first, you might be a little bit worried, you might just walk around yourself. But now you are kind of more confident enough to go and ask somebody to help you. And that’s the kind of thing, that’s the kind of situation where before you would question yourself, you might not do anything. But now you want to do something, even if you made some mistakes, you will learn from it. So I think sometimes you DO need some external exams or something to push yourself towards it. And then it becomes…as I said…something you want to do rather than something you need to do.

CHANG: So do you have a clear starting point that you realise that you want to do Chinese?

CHRIS: There wasn’t really…no. I guess I was never…I guess in the first and second year, although my performance was not good enough, I never thought I was in danger of failing Chinese. I always felt like even if I didn’t put into much effort, I do mediocre, but I felt like I need to put more work into my business subjects. Where in the fourth year and in the third year, it was just Chinese, that mindset completely changed.

CHANG: Ah, that’s very important. I never noticed this thing! I never noticed this thing! All the past interviews, nobody ever mentioned it, it never came to me! Yeah, in the first year and second year, even in the fourth year, because you are not learning a sole major, you DO need to balance the major and minor studies.

CHRIS: Absolutely, yeah. And I think a lot of people take business as a priority, and that’s why their Chinese in the first and second year were lower, that they might suffer.

CHANG: That’s very important. But to you, probably you work harder in the fourth year than in first year and second year. Because business modules do count, that’s your major.
CHRIS: I think in the first year I would have studied a lot more business. But when I mean studying Chinese, it was mainly just writing the characters. Whereas in the fourth year, of course your level of Chinese was improving, you find everyone is different. Everyone has their own way of learning Chinese, like it would work for me, but it might not work for other people. I knew it worked for me, and I knew how I feel when I do good in Chinese. But you can’t just neglect Chinese and try to improve your business, and you can’t neglect business and try to improve just Chinese. While in the first and second year, I definitely had the mindset that this was a business degree to me rather than a business and Chinese degree. So I definitely put more weight on business. And I felt like in Chinese you were never in doubt of failing. So when you haven’t got that fear, the push that kind of get you to study, you never…you maybe neglect it more than you should be. Because you only start in college, I guess you are kind of insecure about exams. You probably put too much focus on that as supposed for Chinese, if you know what I mean.

CHANG: Yeah, so at that time, you don’t really have a specific goal of being a high achiever in Chinese. And you feel safe about this, so of course you would redirect your attention to the ones that you do feel insecure.

CHRIS: Yeah, exactly. I mean, you just started college, nobody knows what it was like, you know. We were all in the same weird situation that we all come out of six years in secondary school, we were new to the system. You’ve never been to the top level of the secondary school nor the bottom. You don’t know the way it works, how strictly the marks would be.

CHANG: It might also have something to do with maturity.

CHRIS: Yeah, yeah, so. I think that’s…I don’t know whether I have already mentioned that before, I think it is an important point.

CHANG: No, no, it’s a good point. It’s a really good point. It never comes to me. In terms of competition, you mentioned that you don’t think it is a good idea to compare with others?

CHRIS: No.

CHANG: But here is the thing, I interviewed (an anonymous peer) and (an anonymous peer), and you and Ruairi, at least the four of you did form a small group and some competitions were going on there.

CHRIS: Yeah, I was just about to say.

CHANG: It was some nice competitions, yeah?

CHRIS: I think personally, up until the fourth year, I didn’t. But it was in the fourth year, I started to improve, I started to gain nearly the top of the class. I am gonna name, (an anonymous peer) was always the best in class, and I want to…be the best, okay? ((laughter)) I wanted to be the best, and he was the one who’s always the best. I thought I had to…I thought he was a lot ahead of me from first and second year, and I think he was ahead of everyone though. So I think I wanted to beat his HSK 5 score, beat him in class. I think it was only in the fourth year, in the first and second year I wouldn’t have that at all. I wouldn’t be competitive at all against other people. But it was only then when the class started to get small. You would only start to realise the packs and the order in the class, to be at the top. And then you realise that you were close to the top, you do want to be the best.

CHANG: But that’s not the competition that you were talking about, it was a different kind of competition. Because you guys did form a really good relationship over there, friendship. I think it was built on friendship, right?

CHRIS: Oh, yeah, of course, yeah. It was never like ‘I need to be (the best).’ I was a kind of friendly competition, you know what I mean. I think that’s good for everybody.

CHANG: Were you guys become really good friends first, and you realise that like ‘Wait, what happened to my friend?’ And then you started to want to beat him?

CHRIS: Oh, yeah, yeah, of course. I think it would be strange if we didn’t talk to each other but just focused on beating each other. It’s kind of like, if I got higher marks than (an anonymous peer), I would joke about it. Say it like ‘I just barely know these things’ like that, like a friendly thing. When he gets higher, he would do the same thing. And we would all be like that. Yeah, it was definitely friendly. It was never vicious, you know.

CHANG: But the friendship comes first, friendship is kind of like the foundation of this healthy competition.

CHRIS: Oh, yeah, of course, yeah.

CHANG: It probably won’t go the other way around. ((laughter))
CHRIS: No, no. I don’t think all of us are gonna focus on beating people. You are never gonna form a friendship with them. I think friendship definitely has to come first, then, you kind of get that healthy competition going, after that.

CHANG: Okay, I am gonna continue asking you about this. You also mentioned something about the methods. I think you’ve also been through the process of finding your own methods, I mean effective methods in learning Chinese. You did mention that you spent tons of hours writing characters.

CHRIS: In the first and second year, yeah.

CHANG: And you found that was not very effective. This actually happened to a lot of people I know, this specific method. I know a lot of people who don’t really have some good methods of studying Chinese.

CHRIS: Well, I think it depends on what your goals are. If your goal is just to memorise a single character, it is effective. If your goal is to communicate what you want to say, in writing, you know, or in typing sentences, then writing characters is just not good. I think it is just not a good method, because when you write characters, you learn one character, and you don’t know how to use it, you don’t know the context to use it. It’s not a character that you would feel comfortable to use in a sentence when they communicate with you. Whereas if you practise more oral communication, or even writing out sentences and ask someone to correct them, you understand not only what the character looks like, and how to use it. That adds more confidence than in using that and try to incorporate it into your vocabulary whenever…you know…you want to say it orally or in an essay.

CHANG: When did you realise this point?

CHRIS: I thought that even might be in the fourth year. Sorry, it would be after I came back from China, in the summer, when I came back from China. Because that’s when I set up my goal of HSK 5. In HSK 5 there is a section where they give you words and you have to put them into sentences. So it’s kind of like that, I then realise that it was not enough to just know what a word means, you know, that’s really not any use. You need to know how to use it.

CHANG: Would you think it would be beneficial if you realise that kind of thing…if such kind of information was [introduced to you in a…

CHRIS: [Earlier stage? Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Even if you make a mistake, I think making mistakes is probably the best way to learn, to remember. Whereas…that’s the thing I have done, I’ve done a section of HSK 5, and let my friend…the language partner to see whether it was correct or not. If it wasn’t, I will ask them to explain why and give me an example. I found that I was MUCH MUCH MUCH more like to remember that, not only how to recognise and write the character, but also how to use it by making a mistake. I think taking risks and making mistakes should nearly be encouraged. It is in my opinion the best way to learn.

CHANG: And you mentioned like…for example, writing the character. You did mention two dimensions of writing the character. When you were aiming to remember this one character, it is one of the effective ways. But if you spend too much time on this procedure, overall it would be like…it’s a structure thing, because learning a language is not all about being able to write the characters. It’s about listening, speaking, reading and writing, four skills. When you do emphasis too much on this, you lose the balance. You overall growth of proficiency, communicative ability, would suffer. And it might be difficult to realise this at an early stage of learning. You did mention that you probably realised this probably towards the end of the four years study.

CHRIS: Yeah, I think it is something that a lot of people maybe figure it out on their own. I can’t remember exactly how we were encouraged to learn in the first year, but I certainly remember that I didn’t spend any time practising…you know…outside of the class…listening and practise how to speak in Chinese. It would all be writing the characters. And then, it’s not really any benefits you are going forward.

CHANG: You mean you don’t really know how to [study…

CHRIS: [No, no.

CHANG: So writing character is just a huge part of you studying Chinese.

CHRIS: Yeah, of course I agree with that. But as well, when you were just doing the same thing, just study Chinese every day, just writing characters, it becomes…you don’t want to do it. Because you are not getting enjoyment, you are not seeing your oral level improving. Like, if you speak in Chinese in class that you didn’t understand them, it doesn’t give you the motivation. I felt like it was quite a boring way to study, just constantly writing and then you don’t see massive benefits from them. So I think you should really make it clear to all
But you never doubt the benefits of it?

CHRIS: Yeah, I didn’t follow that in the first year and second year. I thought I was doing the right thing. But obviously I wasn’t. I was only in the fourth year, I guess maybe late in the third year, I kind of realised that I was approaching learning Chinese wrong. And once you found…like this works for me, but this wouldn’t be the only way to learn Chinese. Once you found what works for you, then you see the benefits almost instantly, simultaneously.

CHANG: Also maybe in the first year and second year, your motivation was not that high. You are okay to be a mediocre learner. But you also mentioned that at that time your method was not that effective. So when you think of the result, which one would you attribute to more? Because at that time, you haven’t realised yet, you haven’t realised that the methods were not effective. So what would you think back then, would you think that you were less capable then, or you didn’t put into enough amount of work?

CHRIS: Yeah, I think it was not just one answer to that. I think sometimes you do question yourself, like whether you are good enough to learn Chinese, because it is…what I think…a very difficult language to learn. And sometimes you do realise that you are not getting the level that you should be in terms of study hours. You know, the right thing outside of the class is to put yourself in a position to learn, which obviously for what I am talking about is to get language partners, not focusing on one aspect and neglecting the other three. I think yeah, sometimes you do question yourself not being able to learn Chinese, and you have the additional external pressure for the other classes. You know, sometimes you may have a lot of continuous assessments that you didn’t do good. One personal I struggle in the business…one that I struggled with was accounting. I never failed it, but I remember that like in mid-term I might get like six out of twenty, that kind of thing. So then come to the final exam, you need to spend a lot of time focusing on that, and work on that rather than worrying about Chinese, which you feel rather safe. So I felt like other classes have a role as well. You know, for business in first and second year, a lot of the modules you do, you don’t have a choice. You have to study certain modules. And I didn’t like accounting or finance, and I just wasn’t very good at them. I’d be better at management and marketing, that kind of thing. So I found myself nearly put too much time on these subjects, just to make sure that I pass them rather than Chinese, which I was happy enough that I could just be okay. I guess there are three factors, one is you just didn’t know whether you are good enough to learn Chinese, two is maybe…you know…you didn’t put into too much time, and three is that you focused too much on other subjects.

CHANG: So you have the experience of doubting your learning ability. But do you ever doubt the benefit of learning itself?

CHRIS: Like in the future?

CHANG: Yeah.

CHRIS: Uh…I guess when you were in college, you don’t think that far ahead. It’s only when I was in the fourth year I started to think about career, I realised that I wanted a career that has some way involve in China, not necessarily work, you know, or spend my life in China, but something that related to it. It was only then, that might be another factor that pushes me to get better and improve. I knew I wanted a career that is in some way related to China, that I have to have a certain level of proficient in Chinese. I think as well as a lot of students in the class, they just…by then the time of the fourth year coming around, they are not interested in going to work in China or to have a career that related to Chinese, you know. Then, maybe they reviewed from the point of ‘I will focus more on business’, you know, just pass Chinese and done with Chinese for good. So I think quite a few students…that was part of the mentality. And that’s maybe why they didn’t improve. They just did enough to kind of do okay in exams. And then, you know, by the time of graduation, ‘I am finished.’ Me personally, I wanted to do something that related to China, I am in that additional motivating factor in studying and improving Chinese.

CHANG: But you never doubt the benefits of it?
410 CHRIS: No, no, I don’t think so. I think everyone knows the benefits. Everyone knows China’s economic growth.

CHANG: But it only becomes more concrete when you think about your future, your career in the fourth year. But in the first year and second year, you would have a good haunch, like ‘Oh, yeah, study Chinese is gonna be useful one day.’ But you don’t know exactly how.

415 CHRIS: No, as well as in the fourth year, you have Doing Business in China class, you have Chinese Economic class, and I feel…you know… I think everyone realises that even now, China is gonna be more and more important as a global player. You gonna have to have some knowledge about the Chinese language and culture. And there are a lot more opportunities now in businesses that related to China.

420 CHANG: So these modules would help to come to [a clearer picture of…

CHRIS: [Yeah, you learn more than just the Chinese language. Like the only module like that I had in the first and second year was the Chinese Culture. Even then, you are not getting the facts like the history of China’s economic surge since 1978, or you are not getting the idea of how important China is as a global player in business, politics, economy, that kind of thing. Until the fourth year, you know that there are a lot of opportunities in business that related to China. So if you don’t have a good knowledge of Chinese, then maybe it would be a lot more difficult to have a career in that.

425 CHANG: Speaking of the non-language modules, I have some feedback from people saying that…please comment on that and let me know whether they are true or not to you. First, non-language modules are helpful in that way, but also the content could be a little bit irrelevant. It might be interesting, like the Chinese Culture class, but the content you learn is a little bit irrelevant. You couldn’t really apply that knowledge in your career or even just for the social life.

430 CHRIS: I am not sure whether I agree with that. Maybe not all of them are relevant, I don’t think all of them is. But I think there are certain aspects that I would do…maybe unconsciously now. Because I am now working in a Chinese environment, in my office where all my colleagues are Chinese. I am the only Irish person. Maybe you just pick up that stuff naturally. But I think it is good to have some formal knowledge of it as well. I found the economy class REALLY REALLY interesting. So I am not sure whether I agree with that.

435 CHANG: How many non-language modules did you take?

CHRIS: Like related to Chinese, but not language modules?

CHANG: Yeah, maybe you could list them for me?

CHRIS: I did Chinese Culture in the first year, then Chinese Economy and Doing Business in China in the fourth year. But both of them were all core modules, they were not optional modules, only the Chinese Culture was an optional module. And I pick Chinese Culture more as an interesting module rather than a…you know…beneficial…I thought it was just rather interesting than it would really benefit me in the future.

440 CHANG: I think the case here would be a little bit different. Because the comments that I gave you are from people who took multiple optional modules, and they found that between modules, some of them are quite repetitive.

CHRIS: Yeah, I think…I know a lot of people in our class did Chinese Culture and Chinese Society, they found like they are nearly identical. But I didn’t do Society, I just did Culture. And again, I did that more like…even like a relaxing module. I thought it would be just interesting, so I wouldn’t be too stressful, or you know…focus on a lot of work that involved. I found it was beneficial for the Chinese Economy module because I was not quite familiar with the Chinese economy prior to it. I just wasn’t familiar with it at all. My knowledge about it was quite like the 1950s, you know, now we are in 2000s. China has become this power in the world stage. I found it very very interesting. So, that’s just my personal thought on it.

445 CHANG: Yeah, that’s fine. I only need your personal insights on it. Another thing is about the teachers, could you think of any reason that the teachers could demotivate the students?

CHRIS: Well, if they don’t encourage you to work on the oral aspect, if you just constantly doing…you could say boring work, focus on the reading and writing, that kind of thing. There was not a lot of engagement in class, where I think the most important thing should be the interaction between the teacher and the students. In class it shouldn’t be the teacher just kind of teach at you.

450 CHANG: We call that one-way teaching.

CHRIS: Yeah, I don’t think that’s a good way to learn. Even in our other classes, like business classes, I found myself struggling to pay attention. It’s just boring as the way to learn it. I
think the more interactive, the better. And I kind of enjoy the presentation aspect, like the little role play. I used to like the class when the tutors would come in, because then you have more opportunities to learn, you know, you get more personal attention. You could improve those little points that you weren’t too sure, you know, more questions so. I found that was probably my favourite kind of class.

475   CHANG: You do mention ‘individual’, because there are criticisms about…like… I am talking like a general impression about the native Chinese teachers, some of the students criticise that probably it is because of the different cultural background, somehow the Chinese teachers had a little bit lack of attention for individuals. The one-way teaching is also a reflection of this. They tend to think students as a group, as a unity, rather than to give you more individual feedback, unless you ask for it. You will need to approach the teacher and ask specifically some feedback just about yourself.

480   CHRIS: Well, I think everyone’s level in the class is different. I don’t think the one-way teaching would work. There are some people particularly in the fourth year, there are some people who are really good, and there are people who are not so good. So it’s just one-way teaching, it doesn’t kind of address that. Everyone kind of needs their own…uh…individual time to find what they need to improve, what plan and place to improve that.

485   CHANG: Could you clarify that, are you talking about the teachers both in China and in here, they all have such kind of tendency, the one-way teaching?

490   CHRIS: Oh, in China we’ve done the presentation in class. Every single student…while all the words we have learned, each of us gets three of them, and you have to go in front of the class and make some sentences.

495   CHANG: So you think the issue in here is more serious?

495   CHRIS: Uh…I found that was a really good way of learning words, really. Actually, I should’ve said that. You know, when we were doing a new chapter in China, there was like fifteen students in the class. There were forty or fifty words in that chapter. Each student would be given three words, they would be given five minutes, and you have to go in front of the class and explain the words, what they meant and put them into sentences. I think that’s something we could have done in here. I think the students would pay a lot more attention as well. The teacher could correct…you know…if they misunderstood or put into wrong sentences. I think that would be a good way to learn. I think there weren’t enough interactions really in the class. And as well I think a good point in China is that you met some many different cultures, and the teachers then…I thought we had a lot of Koreans in our class, so would be matched up, like me and a Korean student. So they don’t speak English and you don’t speak Korean, so you have to communicate in Chinese. And that’s not something obviously we could do in here. In here, like English is everyone’s first language, if you are kind of struggling what to say, you sort it back to use English. Whereas in China, you were nearly forced to improve your Chinese, you know. I think, I don’t know how well it would work, like a no or non-English…like you are not allowed to speak English in the class at all or something like that. I guess that’s not the luxury you could get in here. It is not a really multicultural class. There are different nationalities, but everyone speaks fluent English. Whereas in China, you know, the teacher would just mix you up, and you would meet persons who didn’t speak English at all.

500   CHANG: Okay, remember we talked a little bit about how to manage…like balance the different aspects of learning Chinese in order to improve the language ability comprehensively. But like even if the teaching is encouraging, is motivating the students, if the emphasis is not balanced, sometimes it would still cause the problem. For example, if I do encourage you, but I always encourage you to write more characters instead of saying like ‘Hey, Chris, I think you should start to focus a little bit more on the speaking.’ That in turn could be even harmful actually.

505   CHRIS: Yeah, it’s nearly self-reinforcement. If you were constantly being told to study characters, that’s all you are going to do. You are not going to focus on…I guess a balanced approach in Chinese. That could be detrimental to your overall improvement of the language.

510   CHANG: Would you think the teachers are sometimes being too strict about the accuracy of the pronunciation and also handwriting? They are being too specific on how the tones should be pronounced or how the characters should look like, even if it won’t affect communication.

515   CHRIS: Right, as I said, I don’t think writing Chinese characters are quite useful, so… Regarding speaking, I think as much as possible you should let the students speak, and at the end,
correct them, rather than...you know...I am trying to speak a sentence, mid-way through you kind of stopped me. First of all, it is a little bit embarrassing. And it kind of demotivates a little more, like you are not improving a little more. If you let them speak, even if they were not speaking correctly or they are making mistakes. Then at the end, maybe go back and correct them. I think that would be a good approach to take, so...

But to build on that comment, we do have the comments that like at an early stage of learning, sometimes you will feel...it feels like the teachers were told to encourage you no matter what. Of course, there are teachers who would break you in between, and don’t let you finish and just correct you instantly. But there are also teachers who don’t correct you at all. If you made a mistake, they just try to encourage you. They may even cheer that for you, like ‘Good job!’ But you do realise that you made mistakes. People find that when you do realise you are making mistakes, but the teacher didn’t correct you, like they are being too keen to motivate you, that in turn was demotivating. Because it feels like you didn’t really mean it from the bottom of your heart. It’s a little bit artificial.

CHRIS: Yeah, it could be. So there’s two...this didn’t happen to me, but in the class when I was in China, we had a teacher. I thought she was a really really good teacher. I really enjoyed the class, but she would stop you after a word you mispronounced. And the other students in the class found it really really annoying, that they weren’t allowed to speak freely. So in here I am kind of talking about many people’s experience rather than just my own. They found it rather frustrating when you were stopped like mid-sentence, being corrected.

Personally, I wouldn’t have too much problem. I would rather I said everything that I needed to say, and then we went back and ran through it and kind of get it that way. Another thing I found very beneficial was, you know about the Google Translation? You can just speak into it and the words would come up? And you know then, based on the words that came up, whether it was right or not. So I use it to practise certain things on my own. If the characters are right, I might not be a hundred percent perfect, but...you know...they would understand what you say. I found that really beneficial, too. And I only found that in the fourth year. I don’t know whether I would make a word out of it in the first year and second year. But that’s the thing, you know, if I could prepare my oral exam using that kind of thing, I could do it on my own instead of needing to find someone and say it, and ask them to point out the things. You could do it in a car, in a room, anywhere. So, it’s a good tool.

And you feel safe at the same time because there isn’t someone who’s there to judge you. You know for sure that feedback is for you personally.

CHRIS: Yeah, but somebody would feel it more to talk to a teacher or tutor, you know, they are there to help you. I don’t think most of the people would feel bad or ashamed if they couldn’t say something right. I think if you are making the effort to learn, and the other person would see that. It would be a supportive environment. But some people might not have the confidence to speak in front of other people. And I think to them it is a good tool, they could just practise on their own.

Okay, I am also still thinking about the thing, that the teacher would break you in between (while you are speaking). Is it culture related, like is there anything in Irish culture...well I suppose in any culture it wouldn’t be too polite to break someone when they are talking. It is a sign of lack of respect.

CHRIS: Yeah, it is rude.

Would it be part of the reason...

CHRIS: It could be, but I never thought of it like that before. Like if we are talking in general prospect, if we were having a general conversation in English, and you just cut in. I classify that as quite rude. Maybe subconsciously you would think of that? I am not too sure...you know...you might make the connection in your head. So maybe subconsciously it might be a factor, that you would prefer to be corrected at the end rather than be split in the middle.

I think I have already finished all my questions. Is there anything you want to add to it?

CHRIS: No, not really. Uh...as I said, if I was to give one piece of advice, I think it would be to give students at the very start to find a language partner straight away. I think that should nearly be compulsory in some way. For example, in (an anonymous institution), there are what, like 30 people from BJUT. And then I don’t know what, how many from other universities. There are probably 50 Chinese students. Another one is the Connect2 society, but I feel like the students are not paired up good. And they have to...just say...meet twice a week for an hour. I felt that should be...I felt that should nearly be part of the class, to be honest.
There was a little bit waste of resources because you do see there are Chinese students there, why not pair them up?

Yeah, and I mean, even for them, to integrate in Ireland, to make friends in Ireland. Because, you know, I had language partners. But when they were in class, they were together. They didn’t make many Irish friends, or many international friends. It is understandable I guess, because, you know, we were the same in China. You know, we didn’t do that either. We kind of stuck together. If it is encouraged that students have to do it, I feel like they would make use of it. And they just wouldn’t waste the opportunity, because it is a great way in my opinion to learn Chinese.

It is very important to increase your opportunity to practise and use Chinese.

Yeah, and the other thing is…to some degree…you know that not everyone is gonna be the same, but I think to some degree, everyone who picked Chinese, like they are interested, first thing the language, but also the culture, and you know, just the opportunity to learn something about China. You know, at the start you would just be students, then you become friends, and you become more comfortable with each other. And I think that’s a very good opportunity as well, to learn something about the culture while improving your language and, you know, make some friends for life. I still keep in contact with my language partners. I actually met one of them in January. She was my first language partner in Beijing. The way we met was just, we went on a guided tutor for the forbidden city, and she was our guide. We just get to talk, and she just wants to improve her English. But she’s studying a masters now in Germany. So during the Christmas holiday, we met for two days over in Germany, so…kind of making friends for life in that way, you know. And I am sure a lot of people would like that. It’s great. It’s great.
Transcript of Audio Interview 11 (James, T11)

Present: James
Location: Coffee place near campus
Date: 3rd May 2018
Interviewer: Chang Zhang
Duration: c. 71 minutes

CHANG: I am wondering do you ever feel that you would be less confident in learning this language?
JAMES: I mean, I don’t know when it happened, but I think I just accepted that I will never be perfectly fluent in Chinese. I think it is impossible to get, in my mind. Just to me, I don’t know.

CHANG: So you mean you consistently feel this way?
JAMES: Yeah, I mean I think I could get by perfectly, but Chinese people would always be able to…not looking at me, just by listening to me and know that I am not a native speaker. I don’t think I could ever get to the perfect level. But I think you could get pretty high.

CHANG: To me, to be fluent in native speakers’ mind and to be fluent in learners’ mind are quite different.
JAMES: Yeah, but I like…when I started learning I thought, okay, I want to get to that. But I don’t think it is really possible to get that.

CHANG: Do you think you could achieve the learners’ fluent?
JAMES: Uh…yes. But I think it is the further you go up, the harder it gets. I think I kind of close to day to day life fluency. But the next step, to get to working fluency, business fluency, I think that gap is huge. So, I don’t think I could work in a Chinese company in China. I think that gap is huge.

CHANG: I don’t think you could become fully working fluent without working in that environment for like four or five years. So don’t worry yourself too much about it. Anyway, but you couldn’t remember when you started to feel this way?
JAMES: Uh…I think it must be when we went to China. The first and second year, I think obviously there are lots of stuff that I don’t know. I don’t know, I think it was when I saw other people who maybe have been studying in China for years. And you hear them say it like ‘Oh, yeah, I am still not that fluent.’ Then it kind of ‘Oh!’ ((laughter))

CHANG: Okay, I think we have two parts of the story here. The first is that you met someone who has been working on this language for years, and you got influence from them, that they told you they are still not fluent, regardless that some of them might be modest and some of them may genuinely think so. And the second, you did mention that you go to China, it could be that you were blindly setting up the goal, like ‘Oh, yeah, I am gonna be as fluent as the native speakers!’ But when you were in China, you would witness the authentic conversation and something like that, and you might feel like ‘Crap!’ ((laughter))

JAMES: But I think it’s much easier to get to that level in like Spanish, German or French.

CHANG: Where did you get that impression?
JAMES: Well, I mean I learned Spanish for six years in school, and I am going to do Spanish as part of my masters. But just from learning it, I think it is much easier to perfect it. I think it is probably just because it is more similar to English. Like if you have perfect Chinese, you knew everything. But you still may not know how to say stuff in Chinese, because you don’t say it the same way where…if you translate from English to Spanish, you still say things the same way, so you still have that level of fluency.

CHANG: You mean the grammatical structure or pronunciation?
JAMES: Yeah, just the way that the language was spoken. I think English was spoken the way more or less like Spanish, but Chinese was spoken in another way.

CHANG: So you would compare your achievement in different languages, the progress?
JAMES: Yeah, I think it’s just how you learn. I think Chinese is just…it takes a lot more real-life experience. I think you need WAY MORE real-life experience than you do with other languages.

CHANG: Why? I picture when you learn Spanish, it’s not like all your teachers are from Spain?
JAMES: No, but that’s the thing! My Spanish teachers were English, or Irish people, sorry. But I think it would be much more [difficult to learn Chinese…

CHANG: [If you don’t have an immersive experience.
JAMES: Yeah, I think you need the experience to teach Chinese. Because even if you [know everything…

CHANG: [I am sorry, you mean to teach Chinese or to learn Chinese?

JAMES: I think you need both. I think you need to learn Chinese from an experienced person.

CHANG: When you mean experienced, you probably mean someone who learned Chinese as you did?

JAMES: No, I mean that as a native person. Because I think somebody could learn Spanish on their own, in their room, with books and the internet. I don’t think you could learn Chinese with books and the internet.

CHANG: So I want to dig a little bit deeper on this. You mean you could learn Spanish on your own, with good teaching material or learning material. Then for Chinese, you do need guidance. This are we also talking about method, learning method?

JAMES: Yeah.

CHANG: You probably learn Spanish the same way you learn English, that’s probably why you need less guidance, because they are similar, so you could borrow that kind of methods, experiences, techniques and adapt them in learning Spanish. But for Chinese, it won’t work. ((laughter))

JAMES: No, you can’t like…I don’t think you could translate.

CHANG: Yeah, you could try staring at the characters and try to pronounce them, good job! ((laughter))

JAMES: Yeah, like if you have a Chinese piece, and you translate every word perfectly, it won’t make sense, no. So, I think I just realised that it takes a lot more time to learn Chinese than…

CHANG: Yeah, speaking of this, some people would say Chinese is a difficult language, some would say it is different, and some would say it is neither difficult nor different, it is just time-consuming. Which side would you pick?

JAMES: I actually think to get to intermediate or beginner level, I think Chinese is easier than other languages, than European languages. I think it is easier to get to that intermediate level. But then to get to a higher level, I think Chinese is much harder than European languages.

CHANG: Would you be more confident that after four years of study and now you have achieved this…accumulated these experiences and methods, would you be in a position to do a little bit more self-study?

JAMES: Yeah. I think so.

CHANG: You are confident in that way?

JAMES: Yeah. I think most of our class, we kind of passed that intermediate level, but it’s hard pushing it to the next level. It’s hard.

CHANG: So as we said, probably at a beginner stage, you would borrow a lot of methods and experiences when you learn other European languages, you know, phonetic languages. But it won’t work, it wouldn’t be effective. And you may feel the progress was much slower than the other languages.

JAMES: I could picture you do such kind of comparisons at the early stage of learning, but you have to realise that this is a different language. You shouldn’t compare that much with the other languages. When did you start to realise this and stop comparing, or you still couldn’t help…like it is unavoidable that you would still compare?

JAMES: No, I don’t think I compare them anymore. I think it was just at the start, I did. But I still think having learned Spanish was a big help in learning Chinese. I think learning another one again, it becomes easy.

CHANG: You are confident in that way?

JAMES: Yeah. I think you were just more patient, you know, and you just have to make mistakes. I don’t think it’s just very kind of general. I don’t think it’s the methods of learning the language, it’s…you know…mentality.

CHANG: In which ways, like some general methods?

JAMES: Yeah, I think you were just more patient, you know, and you just have to make mistakes. You are not afraid. I think it’s just very kind of general. I don’t think it’s the methods of learning the language, it’s…you know…mentality.

CHANG: Okay, so back to the confidence, it actually would happen if you feel less likely to meet your expectation. But you have already changed your expectation. When you realise that is not possible, you set up another goal.
JAMES: I think so.

CHANG: Would you feel less confident for any other reasons. For example, the score you get from the course, or some peer pressure?

JAMES: Uh…not really, to be honest with you. I think grades are usually fair in Chinese. Usually the higher grades are given to people who do more work, I think most of the time. Obviously, there are exceptions, but I think in general.

CHANG: It’s pretty much you get the good scores, so you don’t feel demotivated because of this.

JAMES: Yeah, maybe. (laughter) But I also think I put into more work. Like I don’t think necessarily study more than others, but you just kind of do more because you like it.

CHANG: Speak of this, do you still remember what got you in the first place to study Chinese?

JAMES: I get this asked from people all the time. (laughter) I don’t know. I think I just want to know something new, to try something new. And my aunt…Helen was in China for a few years, and she speaks Chinese. So I always thought it was really cool. And I said that I will try it for one semester. And I ended up really liking it. That’s the thing about Chinese. You could learn so quickly at the start.

CHANG: So to you, do you have a clear incident, like one thing that got you to learn Chinese, or it is more like a gradually accumulated interest?

JAMES: I think it is just the whole big picture, like this is Chinese. Because you always hear like, ‘Oh, Chinese!’ And you were like, ‘Oh, yeah, I can do this.’

CHANG: But I think your aunt, Helen, would have a positive influence on these things?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, sure.

CHANG: And that would be way earlier than your college time, right?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: So you would say you have a little bit interest in Chinese before you make the decision (to study Chinese in college), even though you never had the opportunity to learn it in school, right?

JAMES: Yeah.

CHANG: What’s the other language that you picked, Spanish?

JAMES: Yeah.

CHANG: So you just decided to give up these six years’ efforts and to learn Chinese?

JAMES: Well, I had it in my head at that time that I thought I’ve got to a stage that I could learn Spanish by myself. But I was just too lazy, so… (laughter) I thought I would, but I didn’t.

CHANG: Back then, did you have a preference between these two languages. Like have you already decided when you picked them, like you were going to learn Chinese, or still it was not decided yet.

JAMES: Yeah, no, I thought I was probably gonna do Chinese.

CHANG: Okay. So there’s Helen’s influence, so any other influences?

JAMES: Uh…I think it’s just that we hear more and more about China all the time. Uh…I am trying to think, I don’t know. As well I like travelling, to go to new places. So I think again that might…but that’s again why I choose Chinese. I am trying to think about the early years. I am trying to think, but I wasn’t interested in Chinese movies or music or something as a child.

CHANG: Then I guess your aunt played a big part in this that you might not even realise yet, the family influence.

JAMES: I think even the small things like in secondary school, if we are studying business in class, you know, you began to hear more and more about China, and how well it was going in growth. I think younger people are becoming more and more exposed to…the Asian in general. It’s like the US, you know. We always hear about the American dreams, America this, America that. So America is kind of always be there. But I think China is also you hear about it more and more.

CHANG: I put you in the category of ‘academic successful students’, I don’t think you would mind. Now here is an interesting thing about this group. It’s like, when they realise that they are not going to meet their expectation, their reaction would be even more drastic. They would tend to give up rather than set up another goal. But for you, it’s different. For example, if someone is studying Chinese, who’s very very good in the first two years. And then when she or he go to China, they realise the things that you realised, like ‘It’s no way I could talk to those native speakers! It is way more amount of work that I thought it would be.’ They would tend to be like ‘Okay, I am gonna just study business.’ But you adapted, you set up a more realistic goal instead of mentally drop out. Could you think of any reason for that?
James: I think you just have to like the language itself. I like to be able to speak it, even if... like my grammar isn’t the best, like I make a lot of mistakes and I know that. But I just like to be able to communicate in a different language. I think I just enjoy it.

Chang: Okay, I get the point. As I may have mentioned, they probably did not have that. They are the ones that simply pick Chinese over other languages in the first year, for maybe academic purposes or for career purposes. When they realise that the study of this language could not give them the grades or career that they wanted, they simply find another solution to get there. But for you, you do have the interest. So that would keep you on the same track, but with different approaches maybe.

James: And I think you have to have that. If you look at our class and see who the top people are, whoever, I think you have to. I think you can’t learn Chinese by just doing what (an anonymous teacher) says in class, just doing that work. I think you kind of have to have your own interest and do a little bit on your own yourself as well. Because what we are learning is quite technical business stuff at the moment. But like, we never learn the kids’ stuff when they learn the languages. We just kind of all skip that part. If we don’t learn like, trees or grasses, I don’t know, all that sort of stuff. I don’t know any of that stuff in Chinese. But that’s the kind of stuff that you probably have to pick up by yourself by having an interest in it. If you don’t have that interest, I don’t think you could ever pick up that stuff. If you don’t learn, you can’t pick up them.

Chang: Yeah, it’s like the difference between doing a course properly with a marked language level and master that level of the language. If you did a HSK 4 or 5 course, it didn’t really mean you instantly just gain the level of the language. There’s much more to that.

James: Yeah, it feels like any Chinese courses, they do fill in certain blocks. But you need to fill in the gaps in those yourself. I think learning Chinese, it skipped a lot of the basics when you are learning other languages.

Chang: Do you think a lot of the students actually realised this? I think it could be an aspect that lots of people don’t even think about. I don’t normally think about this.

James: Yeah, I think it was more than I realised when I went to China, that actually I was good. And I think it was the same for Chinese people to speak English. We are kind of good at talking about business related stuff, but we are pretty bad at talking about just basic daily life stuff. For the kids when I was teaching English class, like they are talking about some really basic stuff, like playing games and stuff. I don’t know how to talk about these stuff. And that’s the kind of stuff that gets you to enjoy speaking it.

Chang: Okay, I got your point. We call it the domain of the language. When you learn a language, you normally learn a certain aspect of the language. Like you, yours is the businessChinese, so it mainly works in the business domain. And it is very important that you pointed out, that sometimes the sense of achievement comes from the interaction with the native speakers or talk to the language speakers. But you have to adapt to their domain, which is normally the social domain. You need to have enough language to socialise with the people in order to gain the sense of achievement. But like those words, that won’t be covered in class. So you could only gain the sense of achievement in class, you know, from the score of the exams or something. But it won’t help for the real-life interaction.

James: Exactly. And I think it was the same way that Chinese students learn English. I remember when I was over there, one of my buddies, she was preparing her English exam to come to Ireland. She was showing me the test, and I didn’t have a clue. I didn’t know loads of the stuff. It was really a technical difficult English stuff. And I did talk to her and I didn’t think her English was really good, because she wasn’t very good at talking about the basic daily conversation and stuff. But she was REALLY better than me at the difficult part of the language. ((laughter)) So I was thinking like, I was going to take a picture of the book and show it to my brother, because lots of the stuff I didn’t know about. So I think there is a big gap in between that we didn’t learn. That’s why I think for the people who like it, they could fill in that gap themselves, because they want to. But for people who don’t fill in that gap, there is an important part that is missing. Like you have the real basics and you have a higher level, but you need the chucks.

Chang: It would be... to be honest... difficult to fill in the gaps by courses, but I think at least we could point it out and see for the possibilities, just to let people know. Okay, I am gonna move on to the next one, otherwise it gonna take forever. Anyway, do you ever doubt the benefit of learning Chinese?

James: Yes I think? I think when you see Google Translate getting really good, and you were like ‘Oh!’ ((laughter))
CHANG: So modern communication technology.
JAMES: Yeah, and I think another reason is that Chinese people are learning English so much. When you were communicating with Chinese people, more than likely English would be the language rather than Chinese. I think the two of those would probably...so...

CHANG: But you didn't give up! (laughter) So what is holding you? What, do you think there is some special benefit?
JAMES: Yeah, I think if you want to work or live in China, then I think it is.
CHANG: So we are talking about the differences in contexts. Maybe it is not that useful in here, but it would be definitely an asset once you live and work in China.
JAMES: Yeah, I think so. I mean, when people say...I don’t think you need Chinese to go to China.
CHANG: Okay, I need to ask first, where did you stay in your third year?
JAMES: Uh...I stay in Hangzhou for the first semester, then I was in Beijing for the second.
CHANG: I presume that there were more people who could speak English in Beijing? But I doubt there will be many people who will speak English to you in Hangzhou, or maybe I will be wrong?

JAMES: Yeah, see I think when we were going there, we were on student campus in colleges. So pretty much all the students, like all the smart people in China who could at least speak some English. So I suppose when westerners go to China, they are mixing with the people who can speak English as opposed to...you know.

CHANG: So we should drag you to the countryside, to the pig farm. (laughter) You Chinese would soar.
JAMES: Yeah, yeah, I think so. (laughter) It’s probably the best way. That’s why I like taking a taxi and stuff. I like to talk to taxi drivers. I think I learned more from taxi drivers. That’s the best practice I got, always. I always sat in the front seat because you could talk to the taxi driver. They could never speak English, so you just have to speak Chinese all the time.

CHANG: Okay, then may I ask, do you have a preference for the future jobs? Would you prefer to work domestically in here, or in Europe, or you would prefer some job opportunities in China, in Asia?

JAMES: I don’t know, I want to experience...see, I never worked in either...so I think I’d like to work in Asia, but maybe for a short while, like a couple of years maybe. I think everyone wants to come home at some point, so. I don’t know, I guess I have to try that.

CHANG: But you don’t against it. I mean some may, like their best choice is to stay but do something that is related to China.

JAMES: Yeah, for me starting out, I don’t want to be in Ireland. I’d like to be somewhere else. It doesn’t necessarily have to be China, but just somewhere else.

CHANG: Okay, and you actually have already answered my next question, which is...do you ever doubt you could achieve the level which you could gain the benefits of the language. To you, you actually have already realised that the previous goal was impossible, and you have altered it.

JAMES: Yeah, I think what the employers want more is people who understand Chinese life and how to do business in China as opposed to the language. But I think learning the language helps a lot.

CHANG: Otherwise they could just hire a native speaker, which they don’t do that. Language proficiency is part of their requirement, not all of them. It might not even be the most important criteria.

JAMES: Yeah, but learning the language helps you understand the culture. I remember I talked to Niamh Madden, the girl who works in Enterprise Ireland, and she never uses her Chinese. And she’s in Beijing, in China, so.

CHANG: But when you say ‘it helps’, would you say ‘essential’, or ‘help’?
JAMES: ‘Help’ I think, I don’t think it is essential. I think it would be really sad to live in China without Chinese, because you wouldn’t really enjoy it as much as you could. But I think to work in China, you don’t need it. Because there were loads of Irish people over there teaching English, they wouldn’t know...

CHANG: Yeah, there are concrete examples, so. It is much more convincing than our speech. (laughter) ‘You need Chinese to work in China!’ ‘No, I know a guy.’ (laughter)

JAMES: But I think to go far in China, it rises up. I think then you probably need it. But just to work at an entry level, I don’t think so.

CHANG: Entry level you don’t need it, but to be honest, the very high, top level, you also don’t need it. You could get an interpreter or something.
JAMES: Yeah, but I think if to climb the ladder in China, maybe you would need...do you need to be able to...I don’t know...immerse yourself more?

CHANG: And when we talk about a domestic environment in here, not that important?

JAMES: I don’t think so. I think getting a job it is a BIG HUGE help. And I think that’s why a lot of people do. They look at your CV and like ‘Oh! Well!’

CHANG: But after you get the job? (laughter)

JAMES: Yeah, honestly, I don’t think so. (laughter) I don’t think I am gonna ever use it.

CHANG: So do you think that could explain a lot of people’s demotivation in learning Chinese at the late stage? Because their minds have been set to, or they have already got a job in here, the part of Chinese study has already fulfilled its destiny.

JAMES: Yeah, but I mean that’s just the fact of life when you are a native English speaker. I mean the language of business, no matter what language you want to...if you got to Spain, Russia, wherever, the language is always going to be English over the local language.

CHANG: The influence of English as a global language and also your native language.

JAMES: Yeah, so I mean there is nothing you could do to change that. That’s just the way it is. Unless a new language...see it is different if you were...say...I don’t know, a Russian person, that you can speak English and Chinese, then you could choose. But we don’t have to choose, so. I think for us, English is always going to be the dominant language.

CHANG: Do you ever think you only learn Chinese for GPA purposes? I know you have a genuine interest in learning the language, but do you have that kind of moments?

JAMES: Yeah, I mean there are certain parts that we study, and I know I am only studying this for GPA.

CHANG: Then why?

JAMES: I am trying to think of an example, maybe it’s just a part that doesn’t interest me at all.

CHANG: Ah, okay, so the content. Like overall you are interested in the language, but some certain parts are really boring.

JAMES: Yeah, if it was up to me, I wouldn’t learn this part. For example, for a test yesterday, we have to learn like a all these ‘Chengyu’s (Chinese for idioms), and some of them have that really abstract meanings, and I was like ‘Okay, I am learning this for the exam, but this doesn’t matter.’

CHANG: Is there any other reasons?

JAMES: Uh, no. I don’t think I’ve put into a lot of effort in Chinese for the exams. I don’t do as well in exams as I probably should.

CHANG: Now, let’s proceed to the problems of the teachers. Do you think sometimes the teacher could demotivate their students?

JAMES: Yeah, but I think...for different...like this semester, I had two teachers. I had...uh... (hesitation)

CHANG: You don’t need to mention the name, you could just mention the course.

JAMES: Oh, okay. I did Advanced Chinese. I chose that as my elective. And I also did Business Chinese. And in Business Chinese, it was more like a normal lecture. We just sat there and reading. There weren’t any interactions there. Well, there were some questions, but we weren’t forced to speak. Most of the time we didn’t speak Chinese in our class ever. And I’d say, half of the class...people are just indifferent. A lot of the people actually liked that, that they weren’t been put on the spot, they weren’t been pressured. I would prefer using it and interacting with it and learning. So I didn’t like it. I know you are just sitting there and reading and not concentrating. But for our other class, the Advanced Chinese, there’s only six of us in the class. And we are all speaking constantly, we are all using it constantly, and I WAY prefer that. I think it depends on the person, while I prefer a more interactive class.

CHANG: Then I need to be clear first, something about these two courses, one is compulsory and the other is elective. The elective one you choose, that means you must really want to learn the module. So when you mentioned that half of the Business Chinese class do like the way it was conducted, which sounds more like one-way teaching or teacher-centred classroom, there was a lack of interaction between teacher and students and also between students themselves, generally it’s more like a lecture. When you mentioned that people actually like this kind of course, they don’t like the courses, they just like the format of the course.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, I think so, yeah.
JAMES: Yeah, I also think for Business Chinese, it is a more difficult content to interact with. It is more difficult. It’s like case studies and business and stuff, so.  
CHANG: I think case studies are the best materials for you guys to discuss.  
JAMES: Yeah, but unless you know about them quite well, otherwise it is really hard to interact with it. So it would be really hard to put people on the spot for that kind of stuff, I think. Especially I think when we came back from China, there was a kind of big gap there. People in the class have been spread between levels. It also makes it harder for… it is probably unfair for the… to put people on the spot for interacting.  
CHANG: Okay, so something to do with the course material, something to do with the teacher and the structure of the course…there is a lack of opportunity to practise Chinese in class, and also something to do with the different levels of the students.  
JAMES: Yeah, I think it would be unfair to put…force people on the spot because… what could be done maybe is…we used to have tutorials, but we don’t have any more tutorials for discussion.  
CHANG: You mentioned a lot of times of the putting people on the spot. I hate to mention this word, but it sounds to me like ‘Mianzi’. ((laughter))  
JAMES: Yeah. I know, but it’s like… unless people know about all of this, but if you just start to learn about this, it’s quite hard to ask them some of the questions. I don’t know, I don’t know, maybe it is.  
CHANG: Okay, so something to do with the course material, something to do with the teacher and the structure of the course…there is a lack of opportunity to practise Chinese in class, and also something to do with the different levels of the students.  
JAMES: Yeah, I think it would be unfair to put…force people on the spot because…what could be done maybe is…we used to have tutorials, but we don’t have any more tutorials for discussion.  
CHANG: Then why it is? If you got picked up, you got picked up. If you didn’t do well, you didn’t do well. Nobody cares.  
JAMES: But maybe… I don’t know. Maybe it’s just people who don’t want to be forced, they don’t want to… I am not really sure, but I don’t think it is because people are afraid to make mistakes. I mean, we all know each other pretty well and spent time together, so.  
CHANG: Mysterious, what could it be?  
JAMES: I think also, it could be quite complicated for the stuff that we were reading. It’s harder to interact with the material, maybe. I think you really need to get down and study and learn it BEFORE you can interact with it. Whereas in Advanced Chinese, it was just stories for your reading.  
CHANG: To me that is not a problem. Based on what I hear, you could be given opportunities to study in advance, and then you could still interact with each other during the class. And probably eventually you could get to know the material a little bit deeper and get more interested in it. Because, come on, you are the fourth year, you are a final year student. You are too mature to talk about stories if you could talk about business cases, in Chinese. If there was a little bit like… we call it flipped classroom, if you were given the material first. You have done this for tons of times for the other modules, for the business modules. ‘Oh, here is the next week’s reading material. We are going to talk about it during the class.’  
JAMES: I mean, it’s not like we didn’t have to… like we have presentations in front of the class. So it is not that we haven’t had to talk and present. But I think it is just in a class on a daily basis, there wasn’t much. I mean she did ask us loads of questions, but it was more of the same two or three people answering all the time.  
CHANG: Okay, I think I could move on now. Are there any other issues you want to bring up about the curriculum design, something about the setting of the Chinese courses?  
JAMES: Uh…  
CHANG: This could be about both language and non-language modules.  
JAMES: Well, for the language modules, I don’t think so. Personally, I like more about the tutorial because I get to use it. But again, I think that’s just me. For business Chinese, I think they are better than the other ones, like the other languages courses in here. And even compare other Chinese programmes in other universities around the world, because we studied with them while we were in China, and from what I understood, our courses are actually much better than what they did. Like we were studying with people from (an anonymous institution), and I think our level in understanding Chinese was much better than theirs.  
CHANG: Uh, okay. That’s very interesting, because I also have people say that for students from other countries, they found their proficiency was much higher than theirs.  
JAMES: REALLY?  
CHANG: I don’t know, I thought they are talking about students from other European countries.
JAMES: Yeah, but even with our course design, none of the other universities could believe that we got to spend two semesters in two different universities. I think we are quite unique in that way. I remember them being really jealous of us. I think (an anonymous institution) is punching above its weight when it comes to China.

CHANG: What do you mean? I don’t really understand that phrase, sorry.

JAMES: Like, it’s just...if you compare (an anonymous institution)’s ranking and it’s partnering with the best universities in China. Whereas some other universities in Europe, they go to pretty crappy universities.

CHANG: Oh, yeah, of course. That would affect your experience.

JAMES: Yeah, I mean we set up with the best.

CHANG: How could you meet the students from other...I mean, normally you would just meet students in the same university, right?

JAMES: Oh, for example, you know the UCC, they go to...they were all went to Shanghai for the whole year. And they were in some...I can’t even remember the name of the university. But it was definitely not as well recognised.

CHANG: Okay, in that way.

JAMES: But also, even when we were in Hangzhou, some of the (an anonymous institution) students would be studying in (an anonymous institution) or (an anonymous institution), you know, they couldn’t believe that we had the choice to go there and chose not to. So to think the fact that (an anonymous institution) was...that’s what I say about punching above, like it’s doing a lot better than the other universities.

CHANG: Okay, and I feel that you have something to say about the non-language modules?

JAMES: Yeah, I personally found them a little bit boring. ((laughter))

CHANG: Wait, you find what boring? You mean generally all the non-language modules?

((laughter))

JAMES: Yeah, well no, just more like the culture modules I find it just a little bit boring. Like I don’t mind sitting there and talking about it, but I don’t want to be tested on culture. Maybe just I don’t test well. ((laughter))

CHANG: Do you like the culture? Like not the course, just the title, Chinese culture, Chinese economy, Chinese society? Are you interested in these things?

JAMES: Yeah, I find them interesting. But...like...

CHANG: Then why don’t you like the course?

JAMES: I guess I just like more to experience them, rather than just being taught be them.

CHANG: Or the courses are not so good, something to do with the quality of the course?

JAMES: Yeah, maybe. I guess it’s just something that I don’t really like that much.

CHANG: So we could roll out the reason that you don’t like (the culture). Because I do, I do have people in the business school, they just learn the language as a tool. I think you have friends who are like this.

JAMES: Yeah, I know. Maybe it is because I don’t see the fully practical side of it.

CHANG: Spot on, I have it here as well. People criticise that the content of these courses is not practical enough. In some way they are interesting, but there is no way you could apply those things in your real life and your career.

JAMES: Yeah...even just like...I know you don’t like the word, but I do spend loads of time learning ‘Guanxi’. But I still don’t [know like...

CHANG: [What do you mean a lot of time? People do mention this word repetitively.

JAMES: Yeah, well I know it is a bit repetitive. But I think it is also our choice. Because see in the first year and second year, we chose electives like Chinese Culture and...like...say...Chinese Society. So we knew about it going into the final year, but some of our class never learned about it before. So for us we just hearing things again, but for them it is the first time.

CHANG: Then this is very interesting. I am thinking about the word ‘empathetic’. See, you are quite empathetic about the course. Like you have already said that, you knew you are going to have repetitive courses, but that’s nobody’s fault? Like if you let me know I am going to have repetitive courses, you should change that. I am not supposed to have repetitive courses.

JAMES: I think it is just only certain aspects that you are repeating. I mean for some stuff, no matter what you are talking about in Chinese, it is gonna come up in some way, like I don’t know...I suppose ‘Guanxi’. ((laughter)) If you are talking about culture, it probably would come up. If you are going to talk about doing business, it is going to come up.
CHANG: Have you come across such kind of phenomenon for all the other modules that you have studied?

JAMES: Yeah, for sure. I mean, for finance, there is definitely a massive overlapping between the stuff that you are talking about. It’s like the same concept behind a lot of stuff, which just branching up into different directions. But a lot of them come back to the same things, time and time again. But I mean, of course I DO think there was a little bit more overlap in Chinese than there was in our business classes, in our other Chinese classes than they should be. But I think there always…there has to be some bit of overlap, like they come from the share…the same things. Whatever it is, you know, I don’t know. I don’t really good at those modules, so I don’t really know. (laughter)

CHANG: See, this is interesting. First thing, you are not so sure like what kind of things should go into these modules, which is natural. And second is that, you were influenced by the Chinese culture, you do have a lot of respect, or sometimes I will put it…but it does not sound nice…the obedience to the authority. So when you come across these things, you tended to accept them instead of challenging them. If you have the same degree of repetitive in your other business modules, you will be either welcoming them because you want the easy credit, or you hate them because you feel that you didn’t learn enough. And it would be easier for you to challenge the other modules. But to put this issue in Chinese modules, would you think maybe somehow you tend to let them get away with it? Or sometimes you might not even realise it. I mean sometimes because you don’t know, you might think ‘Okay, this concept might be very important in Chinese’. So you let it go.

JAMES: I don’t even feel if that is a problem, the overlap. But I feel like sometimes if we are only hearing one side of the Chinese culture and Chinese society, I mean we only hear the positive side of it. (laughter) I mean, I never knew there was a Korean War. Because we study Chinese history, but that chunk of it was left out. And it was someone said to me that do I know something about the Korean War, and I was like ‘What Korean War?’ Like I knew Chinese history well, but we only ever like… I suppose maybe because it did not sound good or it wasn’t the best part of the Chinese history, that they just left it out.

CHANG: That’s just another issue. Some of the modules conducted by the native speakers, even if they studied or stayed abroad many years already, they consider themselves with international thinking and multiple identities, even if they claim that they try to be objective, but they were deeply influenced by their Chinese background. There will be a little bit of culture centeredness. They tend to leave the good things to the course, and filter something out.

JAMES: Yeah, I don’t think it was actually accidentally. I think it was quite deliberate. It is actually something that annoys me. We only talk about…you know…the positive opportunities. We never talk about the potential drawbacks, potential negatives…you know…the bad side of things.

CHANG: And some people do report that could be demotivating, not when you were learning it. Because sometimes when you were learning it, you might not have realised it yet. It could come after you learn something…like you said…outside of the class. So you would know, like ‘Crap, this is very important, but I never learned it.’

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, I think…you know the other modules, you learn about it. But you also learn like why this might work, why this might not be the case, you know, the bad scenarios. I think in Chinese, we never do. We only hear the good things, and it made it unrealistic. Because obviously, there are other parts, but we didn’t hear about it.

CHANG: Would you say that’s a kind of feeling…like being deceived?

JAMES: Yeah, I’d say it a bit. And I could imagine some people could feel quite strongly about it. And I think maybe people learn some really nice things about China in the first and second year, and then when in the third year, when they witness themselves a lot of things which clash with their cognition about China. It doesn’t even have to be negative in nature, but they will still feel a little bit…(deceived). If they did learn a little bit objectively, they might just take it. But you just build up a TOO NICE image of China…

JAMES: I think it just makes it really hard to ask questions, to challenge anything. Like I think we would be all…like our class in general, would probably be too uncomfortable or afraid to challenge the material. But in other classes, you know, it is not a problem. I mean, we could challenge, we could question, we could say like ‘That is wired.’ In Chinese, I don’t think we could ever do that. But I think maybe that’s also, like when you go to China, you can’t really do that either.
CHANG: You probably would feel about this stronger while you were in China.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, I think so. I guess it is harder to question stuff when you were there. But it is also in the class, you know, even when we were doing the… writing an essay or doing an assignment or stuff, I think you are still a little bit conscious about writing the negative things. ((laughter)) So you kind of have to stay on the positive side of it, being unrealistic.

CHANG: Even in here, even when you are not in the culture? You could still be influenced by the language you study?

JAMES: Like, in language assignment, I don’t have that problem, or in my other business modules. It’s only in the Chinese business ones, I feel as if… you know… we have to be… And even when we were giving presentations, like…

CHANG: I need to get back to that point, like, you know the modules are repetitive. Then why don’t you just choose some of them, and make them not repetitive? Like for those people who only studied these in the final year. Since you’ve known that you will study these things in the final year, why still do it?

JAMES: Well, the reason we did it in the first and second year was because we thought it would get us the (an anonymous institution) scholarship. ((laughter)) That’s the only reason that I chose them at that time.

CHANG: So you were FORCED to choose those modules, in a way.

JAMES: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

CHANG: But again, ((laughter)) you take that very well.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. ((laughter)) I don’t get worked up that easily, like I am a pretty relaxed person.

CHANG: But yeah, we probably were.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, probably, yeah. I mean, there are some aspects that I like, but if I had the choice, I probably wouldn’t pick them.

CHANG: Okay. We mentioned a little bit about the score you get from the course. To my knowledge, again, you were always to me an academically successful student. Do you think sometimes it is a little bit rigid or stubborn about these marks? I mean, yes, you would get nice scores. But it would be very difficult to break the thresholds, to improve your score. You could always get ‘A’ or ‘A-’, but it is very difficult to improve and get an ‘A+’.

JAMES: Yeah. Well, I mean, I never get any ‘A’s in Chinese anymore. ((laughter)) So, I would like to try. But I think… you know (an anonymous teacher) was asking us about this. I think she tried to find a way to increase it, but I think Chinese is getting some criticisms for their number of high grades that they are giving us. She’s asking us like why the other modules didn’t give that more.

CHANG: She’s asking you?

JAMES: Yes, like she was just wondering why the other modules, why so few people get ‘A’s in the other languages, like French or Spanish. So obviously I think there was a kind of… I think part of the problem for the other languages is that they are in the same class with all the arts students, you know, with other people who do those languages. So they have to share the grades with someone who only studies French. So maybe a lot of the ‘A’s are gone? So then… If they hear that the people who are doing Chinese… because obviously they are also competing with us for GPA and stuff, so if they hear that Chinese people, the people who study Chinese, like us, we are getting like ‘A’s and ‘B’s, I think they would start complaining stuff?

CHANG: So you see, when we sometimes see these things, we only see those things that uniquely related to the language courses. For example, for the other business assignments, of course it would be something to do with your aptitude, but I think overwhelmingly it depends on how hard you work on that. If you work hard enough, you get a really good score. But if you didn’t put that much of effort into it, you could get a really bad result. But for language modules, it becomes way too similar to a standardised proficiency test. Like if you only measure it like a proficiency test, but don’t count in enough elements like how hard they work, then YES, it is gonna be very difficult to change the performance. Because it is gonna be like every time it is a HSK exam. So for the people who have a rather low proficiency, no matter how hard they work on the assignment, they won’t kind of see those improvements in the assignment.

JAMES: Yeah, I think it is true.
CHANG: And I think it is also something to do with teachers’ impression, sometimes even stereotype. For example, if you were with me for the whole four years, and you always get ‘B’ or ‘C’ in the first and second year. And if suddenly you just improved in the fourth year, but not THAT obvious, I might still tend to give you ‘B’ and ‘C’. Unless you do really good, like ‘A+’, then I guess I would notice.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

CHANG: Then, I don’t feel that you ever feel you were overwhelmed by the workload?

JAMES: Uh…no. I probably should be a bit more, but…I mean I tried to not worry too much about college and exams. I think our young people in general, we put too much emphasis on exams, to be honest.

CHANG: We talked about the structure of the Chinese course, that it was too similar to lectures, that it has a lack of interaction. But do you also feel that sometimes the Chinese teachers have a lack of concern for individuals?

JAMES: Yeah, I think more so this year. I think it is just we don’t have a tutorial class.

CHANG: Just out of curiosity, you don’t mind the tutorial class become part of the official part of the course, rather than scheduled outside of classes? Because I know different universities do it differently. Like here in (an anonymous institution) they take it as part of the course, but some universities they arrange it outside of the class. It could be several lecturers or tutors, like on Monday you would have a tutorial hour or something. But it is not compulsory, like you don’t need to attend it.

JAMES: Yeah, that would be good, I don’t mind.

CHANG: Okay, one last question. After all these demotivating incidents, do you have some sort of methods to recover from that? You know, when you feel like ‘Ah, I just really don’t want to study Chinese!’ Is there any driven forces that would pop out and like [remind you…

JAMES: [Uh…I think seeing the people who have done the same thing and they progress too, probably.

CHANG: So the model effect.

JAMES: Yeah, like a role model.

CHANG: So you do have a role model, or just a general impression?

JAMES: Yeah, not really. Like you see people who were studying (Chinese), and now they are like working…you know…using it.

CHANG: Could you give me some of these examples? To be honest, I don’t think there would be many people who could give you such kind of impression.

JAMES: One person that I was always really impressed was…do you know (an anonymous person)? He was maybe like two years ahead of us. And seeing him maybe, like…he used to never get that kind of good grades in Chinese, but he really liked it. So he went back to (an anonymous institution) last year when we were there and was doing masters in finance.

And he was taking…he studied Chinese…loads of them when he was over there. And now he was working in a bank in China. It’s in Hong Kong, but I think he uses his Chinese. So I mean I was kind of always impressed by him. Because I know he was the one who didn’t like learning it when he was here. ((laughter)) He said like he never got like a…

CHANG: That’s VERY interesting, because your role model is not someone like…really really good at Chinese. It is actually more of someone you could relate to. It’s like ‘Oh, he didn’t even do Chinese that well, but he still managed to develop a career out of it.’ That’s something you could really relate to. It’s not like ‘Oh, I know a genius who learn Chinese so well.’ You know, not that kind of.

JAMES: Yeah, I don’t think that’s necessary. Similar to that, we met a lot of people like that in China who had done similar things. I don’t know whether you know Will? He went to DIT, and I think he won the Chinese Bridge Competition. He played Ping-Pong in the Bridge Competition. And he was working over in China. And now his Chinese was really good.

CHANG: Would you think yourself quite active in approaching this kind of people? Because I didn’t get much of this info from the other students.

JAMES: Uh…no. I think I am just kind of a very practical real-life kind of person. I am not really a fan like really sitting down and learning stuff if I am not gonna use it. Like if I don’t think something is useful, I am not gonna to learn it. So that’s why I like to see real-life examples of people who have done this and use it.

CHANG: So nowadays education is not like that. It’s not like day 1 you learn it, and then day 2 you could apply it. So you need a little bit to convince that this thing would be useful someday in the future.
JAMES: Yeah, to give a little bit of motivation. Like my aunt is a very big motivation like that as well.

CHANG: Still?

JAMES: Yeah, I think so. [Like…

CHANG: [How is she?

JAMES: Not great, but I am still really impressed with what she remembers. Like she always tosses herself down always. But she still remembers loads of Chinese. And it’s been like…I think she’s in China from 1992 to 1997. So but she still remembers a lot of it. So, I don’t know, when you see people who could actually use it, the useful side of it, it’s pretty (motivating).
Transcript of Audio Interview 12 (Emma, T12)

Present: Emma
Location: Coffee place near campus
Date: 17th May 2018
Interviewer: Chang Zhang
Duration: c. 60 minutes

CHANG: To be honest, I feel like you never have trouble for learning, so I want to see your insight on the topic, what kind of difficulty you would come across. For example, the first one is about the reduced self-confidence, which is the number one killer. So I am curious, do you share such kind of feeling in some way at a certain time or moment?

EMMA: I have to say that actually sometimes, it’s not like that even or…it’s a lack of confidence or reduced confidence, I feel like…it is about being comfortable to say things? I think the main problem I had is when I JUST started the learning, I couldn’t pronounce the words. So I was kind of like ‘Oh, I don’t want to bother anyway.’ Like I don’t want to try it because I am gonna do it badly. Then I kind of think that it just depends on the people you talk to, then like the more you practise, the more comfortable you will get. Then I guess if you are not motivated and practise in the first place, then you won’t increase your confidence.

CHANG: So it would be a negative chain.

EMMA: Yeah, so I think it depends on the reasons and like people, how you actually practise, like to motivate yourself to practise. Then it’s like to bring that practice back and like ‘Okay, I feel more comfortable now to speak to somebody.’ So then you gain confidence to speak it.

CHANG: But some people they do have the courage to try, then you said that when you try, you get confidence. But there must be something happened, like people give you compliment or you achieved a better result or something. But that does not necessarily happen to everybody. ((laughter))

EMMA: I know, that’s true. But I think it is…like…it needs to be validated in a way. For example, say you are learning something, and the teacher just like maybe 30% of validation that you need. I think you also need…like…if I watch a show or something and I heard something that I learned, and I understand them that way, I actually understand that. That adds to that confidence. If I talk to somebody and they understand the words that I said, it adds to that confidence. [So it’s like…

CHANG: [But none of these you are talking about are in the classroom.

EMMA: Yeah, so it happened to me in the PAST. So that’s what I am saying, that only 30% comes from like the teacher saying ‘Oh, well done!’ or the teacher correcting you and giving you accurate change. Because it’s like if you are thinking about (an anonymous institution) classes, it is only 40 minutes in class, and you have all the materials that you need to get in. When you were in class, there are a lot of people, fair enough than the other classes that the teacher actually have time to stop and correct people, but not that enough to like giving them one to one…like one to one teaching. Like I said, one to one teaching will have more room in correcting you and telling you. It’s more like that kind of contribution to their confidence could increase to maybe like 80%. But like in here the teaching environment, like (an anonymous institution), just for the size and time, like I think it’s just 30% or 40% (of the validation you need), just depending on whether a person is active in class. You know what I mean, like if I am not participating in the class, you won’t be able to correct me, because I didn’t say anything. So for me like someone who likes talk a lot in class, like maybe you and Hongfei would contribute to that class and be 40% or even 70% to ME, but for other people who didn’t come to class that often or won’t talk, might just be between 20% and 30%, because they won’t talk so much.

CHANG: You also mentioned that the class hours are quite limited.

EMMA: Yes, but I think there are different types of classes. You could only give them like 80% or 100% towards their self-confidence for one to one class. There ARE one to one classes available, or you could get like…for example if I come to you after class, and I ask you that I have a particular issue with this, that’s almost one to one, so you could be like ‘No, I think you said that very well.’ So I start to get confident. But it’s like…it is up to ME to come to YOU.

CHANG: Is there any other way to…help…other way around? For example, you know the coursework? I tried to mark it for you and sometimes I try to leave you some comments.
And sometimes I tried to like underline some good sentences, and of course I would mark
them as well. In a way I try to enlarge the communication on a personal level and try to
build up the relationship, try to see whether these could help, other than like you are just
one person in a public course, just you as [one of...

EMMA: [many people. I DO remember that, yeah. And I think that was useful in many ways, like it
helps...uh...I wouldn’t say it helps my confidence, more so it’s like it increases my skill?
Does it make any sense? Like I know that (the underlined sentence) is a good thing, so I
will put it in my notebook and star it, like this is my
good sentence, you know, that kind of
way. But for me like that won’t increase my confidence. I don’t know for other people. It’s
just been like ‘Oh, okay, this is a good one. I made that sentence.’ So I will use it again
next time I am writing something, then I am confident to use this sentence again. Do you
know what I mean? But I think that context is just like writing and comprehension stuff?
But when it comes to speaking, it’s different.

CHANG: So you mentioned the pronunciation is one of the barriers?

EMMA: Yeah, for me when I started, yeah it is definitely. It’s like when you are talking to
somebody, kind of like...maybe some Chinese people who speak English, like you try so
hard to express something and it’s not coming across. So you know you were like ‘Oh, I
will just leave it. I will just speak English.’ Or you were like not saying it at all. Sometimes
even like if you forgot something, like you were trying to say something and you forgot the
words you want to say, it could be like just ‘Oh, I won’t say that word’, you know, ‘I will
look for something else to say’. So in a way, yes, I think I hate pronunciation as a barrier. I
think, again, I don’t know for other people.

CHANG: Like for reading and writing, even if you have tons of vocabulary, if your pronunciation is
not that good...as teachers we could always comprehend that, we could understand you,
but if you go outside to the public...sometimes they won’t.

EMMA: Yeah, that’s it.

CHANG: Somehow it is detached from your actual proficiency, if your proficiency is not at a certain
level, like a comprehensible level, for the people outside the classroom, they won’t
understand you. It’s gonna be demotivating.

EMMA: That’s what I think.

CHANG: That actually happened to a lot of people I know when they first come to China. Did this
happen to you as well?

EMMA: Yeah, yep, yep.

CHANG: Could you just roughly describe what happened to you, maybe like the culture shock, in the
beginning, what happened to you and then how you manage to recover?

EMMA: The first thing was because Xiamen was smaller, I think compare to other cities. So the first
shock was that there was very little like a sign or stuff, there was like no pinyin. It was just
characters, which was kind of the first big thing. I was thinking like I need to actually know
that character to be able to do that (check the character). I was like...that was the first
shock.

CHANG: You mean the phone, right?

EMMA: Yeah, yeah, the phone, to have like on Pleco, the writing function. And then like when I
first saw the sign thing, it was actually because I was trying to find somewhere, an address.
And I was entering...what it is called...the phone app, like it was the maps. And I didn’t
know the pinyin for that character (on the sign), and I was so frustrating. And then I was
like ‘Oh, wait, I have this thing (the camera recognition function for characters), but I have
to install it first.’ So for me kind of like the first initial thing was that. And then the SPEED,
like people speaking, and the accent, very different. And I think the shock was more like, in
Xiamen it was Minnanhua (a Chinese dialect), but because I didn’t realise that Minnanhua
was not Putonghua (Chinese for Mandarin), so when I heard them speaking I was like...I
actually don’t understand Putonghua.

CHANG: Then how could you improve that much? Did you get language buddies or something?

EMMA: Yeah, so I think the initial shock was just like getting used to the change in like...hearing
you speak Chinese and like my Chinese friends speak Chinese. Because in here I think
they have some foreign friends, they can adjust it a bit, wherein Xiamen...like...they don’t
care. So they were like ‘I will just speak it’, and it was too fast. And I was like ‘Okay, first
thing first, I really need to like make Chinese friends.’ So it actually helped because before
I went to Xiamen, I already made friends on Wechat. And I made her through, it was a long
story, but I had a friend in Beijing from the summer school, and he knew someone who was
in Xiamen when he heard that I was going. He gave me the contact. So I texted her (the new friend in Xiamen) and like ‘Oh, I am going to Xiamen, will you help me from the airport to (an anonymous institution), because I don’t really know?’ And I actually met her at the airport, and so for the initial stage like from the airport to the actual university, she just did everything, you know. (laughter)

CHANG: So she gave you aids in life rather than just being a language partner at first.

EMMA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so it was more like she would speak to the taxi driver for the first time that I arrived. I didn’t need to speak much because she just did the speaking. So I suppose that initial shock…it kind of…I escaped that one.

CHANG: What about communication with other Chinese people, like the students or teachers?

EMMA: Yeah, yeah, so this friend, it was Chinese. And then like I spoke to her in Chinese, so I can start from there. She was like a resident in Xiamen. So she will help me like that. If I ever have a question or something I didn’t understand, I call her and ask her ‘Could you help me with this or something?’ And I think she is very supportive, because I didn’t have the shock of not knowing what to do, and I don’t have the shock of not knowing what to say in Chinese. If I don’t know how to say it, I just message her, and she texts me, and I will just do it. And when I actually started to go to class and stuff, I think because in the economic school, actually the majority of the class…the students are still Chinese. So we have group work and stuff, and my groupmates would be Chinese. Actually, their English wasn’t great. So some of them, their English were really good, but I suppose that actually works in my favour! Because their English wasn’t so great, so we always speak Chinese in the group meeting and stuff, and I throw some English a little bit, like Chinglish.

CHANG: Do you think that those people, when you do the group meetings and you speak Chinese, were they kind to you, or they were like ‘Oh, yeah, let’s just speak Chinese.’

EMMA: Yeah, initially they were like ‘Oh, okay.’ (an indication of being weary). I try to mimic the way they speak, so that actually helped my pronunciation. Most of the time I listen to them speaking, you know, try their way to express, you know. I just express the same way, like if I heard ‘Oh, no, Meiyou La!’ (Chinese for ‘The pleasure is all mine.’) I will say it again to somebody else, and they were like ‘Oh, well!’ That increases my confidence because I am using something that I am familiar with. As suppose like we learned the lines in class, but we might use them in class, but I heard my friend say ‘Oh, Meiyou La!’ I just start using it as well, and then it seems more colloquial, and I feel more confident like I can speak like them. And then when I can speak like them, the response was like ‘Okay, she can speak Chinese. Let’s speak Chinese together.’

CHANG: Then…uh…because my main focus is still here, for students who spend more time in here rather than in China. I want to know your first incident of communicating with native Chinese speakers in here.

EMMA: Yeah, I am trying to think. Apart from the tutors, well teachers and tutors, I actually remember it was one of the Chinese international students in our class. She was in one of the classes with me. I can’t remember what happened that day, but it’s just kind of my personality, like my personality is if I know where this person is from, I will try to speak a little bit of the language to them, just to make friends, you know. But like, I noticed her name was ‘Fu’, and I was like ‘Oh, are you from China?’ And she was like ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah.’ And I was like ‘Nihao! I am studying Chinese.’ So she was like a Chinese friend I made in normal class. So we spoke English, we chat on Wechat, once in a while she will say something in Chinese, and I would be like ‘Oh, what does that mean?’ Then she tells me. So it’s kind of like that was my first kind of buddy.

CHANG: So how early did you start this…friendship?

EMMA: Uh…second year. It was after I came back from the summer school. I think in Beijing, oh yeah of course, that would be the first…you see what is happening…so Beijing would be the first…that summer would be the first proper chance I got to speak to native speakers. Occasionally in here I would have opportunities to say Nihao.

CHANG: Okay, so the first time I referred to culture shock and you were thinking about Xiamen. So to me it’s like unconsciously your experience in Xiamen was more challenging than your experience in Beijing.

EMMA: Yeah.

CHANG: Then, care to explain, because your proficiency would be actually higher at that time. It was another year.

EMMA: To be honest, I completely forget about the summer school. I always forget. But I think the culture shock for that was mostly on the language side, because we were in a group…
huge group of Irish students. So this is for summer school after the first year, it is only five weeks in Beijing. We all came together, we all arrived together.

175  CHANG: In Xiamen, were you the only one?
EMMA: I arrived alone, yeah. And then, Paddy and Wendy joined me a week and a half later. But still it was like only three of us. And we are all kind of like very different, like we have different classes as well, so it is not all the same. Where for the summer school, we all have the same classes, and it was like two classes a day, and it was like very casual. So I think because of the group, we had it going, everyone was comfortable enough in the group. So the main shock we had was about the place. So it was more like, the ‘er’ as in ‘Dongmener’ (Beijing dialect for East Door), all this kind of stuff. I will be like ‘Oh my god, what is that?’ But like I don’t really try to understand it because me and the other Irish students would just be like ‘Oh, that’s so weird.’ We just notice it, but we really like didn’t talk to the native speakers. So like I didn’t make one or two friends when we all went to the club. ((laughter)) And then you might speak to a Chinese person every now and then, like in McDonald’s and the cab drivers. But that’s about it. Maybe in class, but in class there were always international students.

180  CHANG: What’s your impression of that five weeks? Would you consider it a very nice beginning of the impression?
EMMA: Yeah, but also again up to the person, because I found…[like…
CHANG: [not for everybody. (laughter))
EMMA: YES and NO. (laughter)) I think it is probably best for the people who were on the fence about learning. Because if you definitely don’t like it in the first year, [and…

185  CHANG: [Then why would you come to the summer camp? It doesn’t make any sense.
EMMA: So that’s the thing. Like for people like ‘I am not sure’, it’s the ‘I am not sure’ people that should go, do you know what I mean, or the people who really like it, but they are not sure whether they want to live there. Does that make any sense? Because I went because I like the language, but I never been there before. So I wasn’t sure if I could live there for a year. ((laughter)) So that’s why I went. But other people went because they weren’t sure whether they want to keep it or not, even though by that time it was too late (to change language). But it was like they still want to know whether or not it was for them. So they went, and some of them actually didn’t like it at all. Then there were people who really loved it.

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200  CHANG: I didn’t see many people drop out or they express they want to change their language after that.
EMMA: Yeah, because I think it was more so like living wise? Like first year you have to adjust a lot and kind of like missing home and stuff like that. But then again, they didn’t really have a choice at that time. Do you know what I mean? Because you made the decision, so you can’t drop out anyway until like the final year. ((laughter))

205  CHANG: But for your understanding, if they have…let’s say opportunity, it feels like a decent amount of them would?
EMMA: Like drop out?
CHANG: Or at least change the programme.
EMMA: YEAH! Someone did! So I think like there are people like…they didn’t like it, but they still want to stick it through. And I think that comes to one of the other questions there, like about the grade. I think some people also felt like…yes it was really hard to learn itself, but they are willing to go through it because they know like if they improve their language, they could get a better grade. So there is like another aspect to it.

210  CHANG: Than other language modules?
EMMA: Yeah.
CHANG: So it’s more about the GPA. But like it doesn’t matter, a motivation is a motivation, as long as it gets you going. Then do you have any insights on the people who did not feel so good while they were in China, both the five weeks and…you know…the later third year?
EMMA: It was more so I think it was moments.

215  CHANG: You mean incidents?
EMMA: Yeah, yeah. So it was like I feel generally people like it, because it was different. Uh…the food was different, but then the other types like…some students thought they did not sell well for their stomach. So there was like all these kind of things feed into feeling down. It could be like homesickness. I did like homesick, but that was like because I never leave off home at that point.
CHANG: You also have such kind of incidents, right? But does it mean that you also come across some really nice things or feelings that would change you to look towards the more positive side of things? Is there anything like this?

EMMA: Yeah, yeah, I think the main...okay, I got to be honest with you...it’s just the...foreigner thing in China a little bit threw me off, ((laughter)) like you know, taking pictures and constantly asking questions. I was just like ‘Okay, no, it’s okay.’ And then some other time I meet up someone like calm about it, they understand it. They will ask me more like ‘Oh, what music do you like?’ as opposed to ‘What do you wear?’ or like ‘What do you eat?’.

It’s just the fact that there are different types of people. I think that was the turning point. It was just some other day, there were too many people. I was on the subway, it was crowded and sweaty and all this. And I was like someone come to me and like ‘Oh, let me take a picture of you’. And I was not in a good mood, I was like ‘No, no, no!’ And they just insist, and you just want to leave, you know, I don’t want to stay there anymore kind of way. Probably it was a little bit extreme to be honest.

CHANG: Probably the other students also experienced this.

EMMA: YES! A LOT!

CHANG: But what changed?

EMMA: So again, when I was like meeting other people, things still changed. I think it comes down to the people. So like I meet someone who was really friendly, and they were like have me as their friends. So they were like I think more like the younger generation. So they weren’t like ‘Oh my god, why your hair curl like this? Why is that?’ So I think it was like the people you meet as well. For me it was the people who made the difference.

CHANG: It’s actually quite simple. I was expecting something extreme, like some people being extremely nice to you or something. But no, it’s just like...normal friends hanging out in here. To me it’s like...it’s a kind of feeling that being a foreigner but people don’t treat you like that kind of foreigner anymore.

EMMA: Yeah, and also like when you connect with someone, I know it sounds weird, but it’s also that you find something that both of you like, and it goes beyond like you are meeting somewhere and like ‘You like this too?’ So for example, I like dancing at that time, and I met someone who likes dancing as well. And we were like ‘Oh we both like this!’ So we were like talking about it, research it together, all this kind of things. So it’s like, it’s past only the language, do you know what I mean? I like stuff like that. On top of that, I think generally the accompany helped as in you have someone to complain to. It might have been harder if I spent that five weeks alone. I might have a different impression.

CHANG: I want to poke a little bit more about what you say people taking pictures and stuff like that. Could you just be completely honest? Would you feel in the first place quite good about it? Would you feel something like a privilege?

EMMA: No.

CHANG: Not even at the beginning of it?

EMMA: No, I don’t like it at all. No, no, no.

CHANG: Why?

EMMA: It was just weird, because it was like...it was not only like this, it was like they were watching you as you were doing everything. You feel a little bit uncomfortable, because you don’t want to anything, because...it was just me personally, even in here, if like people are watching.

CHANG: So is it a feeling of a weird way of...racism?

EMMA: Uh...yeah, I got what you mean, but like...at first, I did think it was like that, but then over time it’s just like...it’s shock for them as well. As if I were imaging someone blue walking down the street now here in the middle of Dublin, will I not look? But like I will not stare.

CHANG: But that’s how it is like for them.

CHANG: So you understand where it comes from and you understand why they behave like that way. But still at the end of the day, it is not a pleasant experience.

EMMA: Yeah, it is not a pleasant experience. But it’s just like you don’t feel agitated. You still feel like at this time people should already over that, people should have already been exposed to it already. But...I wouldn’t say empathise, but you don’t feel agitated.

CHANG: So...for you to compare three kinds of feelings, the first is that nobody cares about you, nobody notices you, or people just treat you like a normal people, or you would feel a little bit privileged.

EMMA: Which feeling do I want, or which feeling did I feel? ((laughter))

CHANG: You could give me both.
EMMA: So it’s like initially, I obviously want the middle one, kind of like just want to be like a normal people in there. But then I think at some point, I think the ideal situation was like you feel in there like as one (of them). But like, I think the sudden realisation made me feel like…actually…uh… I am gonna be honest, which might be a little bit too much…but I feel like sometimes more like less as less privileged, does that make any sense? So as in some time people would look down on us in a way.

CHANG: In which way?

EMMA: So like even when I was talking, like I remember someone told me like the foreigners are cold selfish something. So I am like, you don’t even know me, how can you know whether I am selfish or not? But again, that comes down to like preconception or whatever. But at some point, it was face up and down. So sometimes when I first went there initially, I was like I didn’t like (taking) the pictures, but I think they were like think me cool or stuff. And then you meet someone else, and it is more so like, actually they didn’t think you as cool, they think you are weird. So that’s the feeling you went through. So obviously you just want to be normal and people would just talk to you and stuff. This is what I felt when I met my friends, you know, connecting. So I think it varies, but ideally what I strike for was the middle one, to be just like normal there.

CHANG: So actually, it was a mixed feeling. It is not always like…when I talk about my impressions, sometimes I think the Chinese people are always trying to please the foreigners. But maybe that was too shallow, that was just only on a superficial level, and maybe deep inside there, they do look down. I also know that people would tend to praise that your Chinese is so good, but when you do get more familiar with those people, when that becomes a long-term relationship, they actually tend to correct you a lot. And they started to say, ‘Okay, this is wrong. That is wrong.’ So sometimes you feel that their compliment…like they didn’t really mean it. It’s just a gesture, and that would only happen at the beginning. After that honeymoon stage, [it’s gone. And then they actually look down on you as lower than them.

EMMA: [It’s going down, yeah. And gradually it goes down. ((laughter))

CHANG: So, do you share the same feeling? ((laughter))

EMMA: Yeah, that’s probably quite accurate.

CHANG: So it was actually quite nice to find someone who actually treats you quite…as a friend.

EMMA: So it’s like always find someone who understands that you are learning Chinese, that they understand the fact that you are learning it, but they don’t fool you with the faults. Because that’s the thing like they could come back and knock down your confidence. Someone gives you that false sense of security that you have good Chinese, and you come back five minutes and you were talking to someone, and they don’t understand what you were saying. And you were like ‘But that person says my Chinese was GOOD!’ But in this situation, you know, you start to doubt yourself again. So I think it was the conflicting message that could bring your self-confidence down a bit.

CHANG: So when you are comparing other people’s FEEDBACK and other people’s REACTION, and sometimes they are conflicting.

EMMA: Yeah.

CHANG: They could say ‘Oh! Ni de Hanyu zhen hao!’ (Oh! Your Chinese is so good!) And then, they will list one, two, three, four and five that they are all wrong. ((laughter))

EMMA: Yeah, yeah, precisely. ((laughter)) Yeah, and I think, it depends on who. Like I got actual friends and stuff, the more I talk to them, they were like ‘Oh, I am correcting you to help you improve it. You Chinese is good, but it could be even better. So I wanted to help you.’ And I am like ‘Okay, that’s cool.’ So maybe like my pronunciation was wrong, something like they just correct me a little bit, it could be once in a while. But there are other people who are constantly, like I will say something, and it’s not like they don’t understand what I said, but they were like ‘No, it’s MA!’ (prolonged dramatic pronunciation) You know, they were like…

CHANG: a little bit pretentious.

EMMA: Yeah, not even nice. And they were like ‘Oh, such a simple word’, and you might not get it. And they were like get frustrated, like ‘Oh, Suan le.’ (Oh, forget about it.) And I was like, okay, fine. ((laughter)) It’s not my language. So like it’s almost like initially they think you are one of them. They put a bar higher for you. So it’s like you need to reach this bar. And sometimes you don’t meet that expectation, and they realise like, oh yeah, you are still a foreigner. So I feel like, it has pros and cons, definitely it is a mix.
Would you think the international students from China in here, would they have similar traits? Or it would be better?

CHANG: I think it would be more so...uh...they might say your Chinese is good and stuff, and they will correct you as well, but it is not as intimidating as them, because they could just switch to English. But like I feel like when it was like my native friends in there, they couldn’t explain themselves in English, so they were like ‘Oh, forget it’ and get frustrated. They were like ‘Oh, I can’t communicate with you.’ I don’t know, I have to think that’s true. But I think they (Chinese international students) are more understanding because they are surrounded by English. Does that make any sense?

EMMA: [the struggle.

Or they have more empathy or...

CHANG: So like even if the behaviour is purely the same, even if they don’t mean it, if they put it down first like ‘Okay, I am gonna correct you because I want you to improve’, that’s gonna be a completely different kind of feeling.

EMMA: Yeah, and also like it depends on the way as well. So it’s more so like...some people have a way of correcting people, you know, they made you feel like ‘Oh, you tried, but this is a better way to say it’ or something, or more so of condescending what you were saying, like ‘How would I know what you just said’, you know, that kind of way.

CHANG: Because to me that’s two kinds of feeling. When I told you that I am going to help you, that means you are not necessarily wrong, or even if you were wrong, I am talking about the space of improvement.

EMMA: As opposed to your current skill level, yeah.

CHANG: But if you don’t, it could make you feel that all you did was wrong. It’s all negative. That’s two different directions, even though the behaviours could be the same.

EMMA: Yeah, yeah.

CHANG: And that would hurt your confidence.

EMMA: Yeah, that’s true.

CHANG: And so like the feeling that you receive, is that you could do this, even if you didn’t meet the standard this time, you could do it next time. It’s just a matter of time and effort. Nobody likes to be judged for their aptitude, like you are not capable of doing this, rather than effort.

EMMA: Yeah, that’s it. It’s a blow.

CHANG: I am gonna move on to this question. As the top of the class, are you aware that your performance could bring pressure to your classmates? And if you do, would you perform more conservatively just to balance their feelings, and maybe your relationship with them? Also, do you ever feel that sometimes people take your achievement in Chinese for granted, like they think it is more to your talent rather than your hard work? You know, when people comment on your level of Chinese, I imagine there will be people say ‘Oh, Emma is just naturally good at Chinese.’ But actually, you put into a lot of hard work in it to achieve the level you have. I am wondering whether this kind of comments would affect you?

EMMA: Yeah, the pressure thing, it is definitely something, I feel like...but actually it’s been there all my life. Just generally I had been the top of my class since I was younger, so actually that peer pressure come across way earlier. So it just transcends to the fact that it is Chinese. It is also to do in general, that it happened a lot, even when I was younger in class. Sometimes even like when we were preparing for class or stuff like that, they will say ‘Oh, you don’t need to study that hard.’ And I am like ‘That’s how I get good grades, because I study.’ But it was actually made like I actually didn’t need that much help, or I don’t need to study, or I am already at the level that I don’t require any more help. But actually, I found that like the help is obviously what got me to that level, so obviously I would want more help, because that’s how I improve. But sometimes I felt like I don’t want to ask much, because...especially when I was in front of them. So actually after a while, things like I would like to come to the teacher after class, I just don’t want to ask many questions because I am like a too...teacher pack kind of thing. So I was like, yeah maybe I will just ask after the class or something. So I do divert the teacher’s question or answer it simply.

CHANG: So you would feel a little bit like self-restrained, behave a little bit more conservatively during the class.
EMMA: Yeah. I would restrain myself. For example, a few of us are answering your questions, or even when we were having the debates or stuff, like I always thought like it’s because I wouldn’t want to admit it to people that obviously the differences in levels are large. But really like if they don’t want to put effort into it, actually I would think why should I put so much effort into it. It’s like I am just breaking my back. When we were actually in a debate, they might just say two sentences and I would say ten. It is not helping me, so I just maybe reduce it to five. Do you know what I mean? Or just give it 15% instead of 80%, like I just restrain myself because I don’t want to put into that much effort and still get the same result. Because obviously you would reward what I give, but as in a group, you know, I don’t know. So the peer pressure, like I felt it, but I didn’t think it was in need of like…in some way as well, I think it will help the way you relate to the other students in the class.

As in, if they understand that you are not intentionally trying to answer questions and stuff like that, you are not trying to be like forward, they are like ‘Oh, okay, you are just smart’, but not like you are just trying to be mean.

CHANG: But as you said, sometimes you do think it was unfair, that your work was being underestimated.

EMMA: I think it was more so to do with like…at the same time I wouldn’t work less hard, does that make any sense? ((laughter)) So it’s like I know if I work at my 100% capacity, the highest grade I could get is A++, alright? And someone they might give like…on my same level, they might give like 70% or 80%, but they might get A+ as well. So I am like, okay I will just give my 80%. Do you know what I mean?

CHANG: So, as long as your excellence won’t affect other’s, you go with your maximum effort. If it starts to impact on others’, then you play a little bit more conservative, like put into the amount of effort which would be enough to maintain your level of grades but minimise the impact on others’.

EMMA: Yeah, but in more so…I am not thinking more so like…let’s say if like I could get A+++, if I gave 100%, I will give it 100%. Do you know what I mean? But it’s the fact like the result I am getting, it’s just gonna be like…like someone who might give it their 80% and some people give it like 50%. I know about the curve kind of way. I will just make it simple. Like if me and another student were the top two students in the class, and like they work at 80% and I work like 100%, but actually we are both A students. But there could be someone who is much worse, like 50%, and they are B students. So I am kind of like, I am just gonna put 80%, because there is no point for me to put into that extra 20% which could be spent on doing something else, especially when you were like have a lot of courses, you know. So actually like in final year I just told myself like just give it a little bit, and then I actually found it beneficial because like I kind of give like 50% of my capacity and maybe get the same result that someone maybe put 80% of their capacity, because they so used to it throughout. So it helped me, because I don’t need to do so much work in the final year.

CHANG: Okay, yeah, that’s true. Because I do know students who didn’t care at all. ((laughter)) They kind of pissed off everybody to get like A+, the outstanding mark. You don’t want to be that one.

EMMA: Exactly, yeah.

CHANG: So would you say that in a weird way, the peer relationship, the bonding between the students…the friends…the classmates, like a long term relationship, you would value that over just a little bit more GPA?

EMMA: I still wouldn’t say that much. It’s just like genuinely I don’t know what I would get. But it would be a little bit more pressure, for example, if I did bad, me doing bad would be an A+ for me, right? But to someone else it might be really really good. So if they like to see me getting a grade like that, they would be like ‘Oh, it’s so amazing’. And I am like ‘Oh, okay, that’s cool.’ But actually, inside I know I need to do better. But maybe it would be a bit hard for me, because like who would I measure against to know what beyond A+ is? So that’s probably the most difficult thing for me, like I just do what I can, you know. But I wouldn’t say it’s for them, because at the end of the day, we are all graduates now. It’s kind of you for yourself in the final year.

CHANG: I am thinking of this from another angle. Like if every time you just restrain yourself, like give your 80% or 70%, and get the highest score, would that affect your sense of achievement? Like how would you know that you were improving? It is gonna be a little bit difficult to [make sure…

EMMA: [Yeah, I think…to be honest, I didn’t really measure it as I was going. So I just enjoyed it to be honest. And the fact like…I don’t know, maybe just the number I get. Like I get 80
one day and I get 90 the other day. I would be ‘Oh, I get better.’ But they might be different vocabulary sets, so that [actually not…

CHANG: [So you don’t feel you have a very strong goal of getting better, like ‘I am gonna be at this level in three weeks!’ No, not that strong.

EMMA: No, not that strong.

CHANG: And you will feel good for always being the head of the class. ((laughter))

EMMA: To be honest, I am just like used to this situation, so it’s not like Chinese is the first situation that I was the top students. ((laughter))

CHANG: But I am wondering would the peer pressure, you would feel a little bit more for the Chinese class? Just maybe because it is a difficult subject, and you know that comparatively people are more struggle than the other courses.

EMMA: I think the peer pressure is more because…uh…it is more open. Does that make any sense? As in, you know, you could ask the teacher, or the teacher could ask students directly, so it is easier to see maybe if that teacher prefer that student. Because if it was a big [lecture…

CHANG: [you won’t be exposed.

EMMA: Yeah. So I think that is why, not necessarily because it is a difficult language, but it is more so like people kind of see it more. Actually but still I feel like it comes down to that student particularly. Some teachers obviously would prefer to ask questions to the students who actually know the answers, right? So it was like, ‘Oh, you always answer my questions. I will ask you.’ Back to me, as a student, you always ask me will make other people think ‘Oh, I can’t. She’s always answering. I won’t bother because she likes it.’

CHANG: So you think that is not a privilege, that is a burden. Like you were the lifesaver, the guard on the beach. ((laughter)) ‘Questions? Nobody answer? Okay, then, Emma!’ And people were like ‘Oh, we hate that lady!’ And they won’t say ‘lady’, they would probably prefer another word. ((laughter))

EMMA: Yeah, I know, I know. Improvise. ((laughter)) Yeah, basically.

CHANG: Overall, would you think yourself that…you had less of these unpleasant incidents, or you do have but you just manage to overcome them?

EMMA: I think I just manage to overcome them, because I think there is always a curve. It depends on how the people would take it. I think generally it comes down to the attitude. I don’t know, like I like languages, number one. So that’s me. So when I was learning one, I know that for me, I want to watch the show so that I could improve my language. I know that kind of like this is what I want to do for myself. And yes of course you guys, the teachers, you would suggest us stuff, but not instead you are gonna taught us that or make us watch that during the class, right? But I feel like people like…they don’t wanna bother like ‘Why would I watch a Chinese show on my free time?’ But I am like I am okay to do it because I enjoy watching stuff from another language. I do it with French movies, I do it with Japanese ones, I do it with Korean ones. It’s just another one for me. And I watch it and it might be like ‘Okay, it’s cool.’ And I might pick up a vocab there or the syntax that the way people speak of it. And that’s good for me. But for other people, that’s an effort. So again, I think that kind of feeds into this kind of like I am doing that extra bit. So I don’t mind when it comes to the stuff like the cultural differences or things like that. Like I am thinking when other students ask me how I make Chinese friends, they were like all the Irish students they ask me that. And I was like ‘What do you mean by how to make Chinese friends? It’s just friends. It’s the same like how you make other friends. You say hello and you talk about yourself for a while. Then you bring up something like a topic or stuff.’ And they are all like ‘I don’t know what to talk to them about.’ I generally just like ask them if they have any film suggestions for me, or I ask them about their hometown, you know, ask them something about themselves. Because for the most of the time we were so used to be the one who is answering. You know, like when the first time you meet somebody, and people were like ‘Oh, you are from Ireland. Tell us something about Ireland, something about this and something about that.’ You spend a lot of time to explain yourself, and you forget to ask. And that’s where the relationship was formed, that back and forth. It’s the time you figure it out like you both like the food or both like this, you watch this, you know, stuff like that. I don’t think I saw it as another task to take.

CHANG: Speak of this, do you still remember the time that you decide to learn Chinese? Or it is a gradual thing?

EMMA: So the thing is, I actually just like…okay, I had a friend who studied it before, who did the course before. So we were friends before (an anonymous institution). So when I was entering (college), I heard that the course was good, but obviously I was planning to do
French. You know the first year we have to pick two languages? So I actually was going to pick French and Italian. But it was like, I was thinking if I was gonna drop it, I am gonna pick something that is different and cool to learn. And I hear the pieces that Chinese is really fun to learn. So I think if there are students who are doing it, why can’t I try, you know. So I just decided to go to a few classes, and they were like fun classes. So I was like, I could really take this. So I just took it. But actually what I found was a problem that in French I was feeling less confident, and in Chinese I was feeling more confident.

CHANG: How come you could feel less confident for French?
EMMA: The French in (an anonymous institution) is shit, like… excuse me ((laughter)) Maybe I lose my passion. I was really passionate about it. I studied it for seven years. But now actually my Chinese is better than my French. But that probably because I never been to France, number one. Number two is because I don’t speak to a lot of French people. And number three is just the way it was taught in (an anonymous institution). It was just like pull the way from…like, just study grammar in here, and you go to the tutorial, and you study vocabulary there, and like stuff like that. But actually, the way they examine you was like you have one grammar exam, and one comprehension exam as well. Whereas Chinese you have a lot of continuous assessments as well, so you kind of motivate yourself to learn as it goes. And actually, in French there was continuous assessment, but it wasn’t graded. I mean, it didn’t count. So, it actually demotivated you because at some point, I was putting a lot of effort in class, trying to get a good result out of it. But actually, it turns out it actually didn’t mean anything. Then I was like ‘What am I doing with all my time?’ So I just decided to keep Chinese. That was actually the first push, because I was doing worse in another language, so I will just keep this one. And then, to be honest, I was like ‘I probably could do better in this language if I put into more effort’. So I started putting into more effort, and I enjoyed learning about it. So it was actually kind of fun. So I think the first initial thing was like…losing confidence in something else push me towards doing it. And then as my confidence built, kind of like I actually enjoyed this.

CHANG: Then it is a gradual thing, you became more devoted to this. Did you notice when you were more devoted rather than just pick Chinese over French?
EMMA: Yeah, I think I noticed it when I started watching shows and stuff. You know, like the fact that I enjoy watching the shows. Like for the first time I was watching it, it was more out of curiosity. And I actually enjoyed the drama, and I was like ‘Oh my god, this is so fun.’ And I watched another one. And it started when I realised that I was enjoying it, I realised that I actually like it.

CHANG: When are we talking about? Was it before or after the summer camp?
EMMA: Uh…I think generally when I watch those Kungfu movies, that was like WAY before. But like I would watch stuff like that, but I didn’t understand what they were saying.

CHANG: But what about the drama that you described?
EMMA: That was probably during the summer. And I think there is probably another aspect that actually motivated a lot of people, it is the fact that people think people who could speak Chinese are cool. So it’s like, you know, you talk to people and tell them you learn Mandarin, and they were like ‘What? That’s so cool!’ And you were like ‘Yeah! I am learning Mandarin. I am shit, but I am learning it. I will just see where I go with it.’

CHANG: This benefit is more about the local context, in here, right?
EMMA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. In here it was more so like ‘Wow, so cool!’ But that was like maybe for the first six months, because that was when I could still do French as well. So I was telling people that I was learning French and Chinese. And people were like ‘Wow, that’s so cool!’ And I was like ‘Yeah, yeah.’ But inside, like in my head, you know that you were just picking it up just a little bit, like I might not keep it. So it is not like, because people think it is cool, so I will keep it.

CHANG: Yes, that’s probably the reason why it only happened at an early stage because you grew way more mature than that later on.
EMMA: Yeah, anyway I actually realised the effort that it takes. ((laughter))
CHANG: So that’s true I think, because nowadays like if you put Chinese on your CV, like lots of the companies they have nothing to do with China or Chinese, but when they see it, that shows your figure. Like, you have the courage to take Chinese, and your persistence and devotion in one thing like that. It shows some part of your personality.
EMMA: Yeah, being able to take challenges.
CHANG: And that actually could be beneficial.
EMMA: It IS beneficial.
CHANG: It is the mature way of being cool.

EMMA: Yeah, yeah, but it is still cool. (laughter)

CHANG: So this kind of benefit is actually a little bit detached from learning a language, this perspective. It won’t be the same as if you were fluent in French or German. It won’t be the same, or at least it won’t be this much.

EMMA: Yeah, yeah. Obviously it would still be an amazing thing to be fluent in a language. But it’s like when it is something that really different, so the first thing that people could think of, for example the characters, ‘Could you write it? Can you type it? Could you read it? Can you understand this?’ So it’s more so like this is so different from what we know, like how you were doing it. That’s more so the reason that, like it’s more challenging than the Roman alphabet or something. I think it is more so like that, in the level of how hard the language is, you went up here. And I guess it is almost the same like for Cantonese or Russian or Arabic. Because like can you imagine someone speaks fluent Arabic, I would be like ‘Why’, you know. So I think it associated more with the difficulty of the language, and it is different from what you’ve used to.
Transcript of Audio Interview 13 (Liam, T13)

Present: Liam  
Location: Coffee place on campus  
Date: 18th May 2018  
Interviewer: Chang Zhang  
Duration: c. 100 minutes

CHANG: They told me someone had already quit the programme?
LIAM: Yeah, that’s true, Cormack did. He quit when he was in Shanghai with me. When we were in (an anonymous institution), three weeks in and he said, ‘Can’t do this. I am going back.’ And I said ‘Okay...’ He struggled a lot, like he didn’t have a good time. He barely got into lectures, like he barely tried.

CHANG: Do you know what happened to him?
LIAM: Funny thing that he told me he had a family problem, like an emergency, like something happened. And I said like ‘Do you want to talk about it? What is it?’ And he just said like ‘No, no, I just really need to go home.’ And I was like ‘Okay...’ Because I didn’t want to be the only (an anonymous institution) student in (an anonymous institution), so I was like ‘Let’s talk about this. Are you sure? I really appreciate us doing this together.’ And he said like ‘No, no, I need to go home.’ And then he left, went back home, drop out the programme, and I think he started to go to Australia, to work and travel for the year. And that was it.

CHANG: So he dropped out of college, not only the programme?
LIAM: Yeah, he dropped out of college. And apparently, he didn’t have a family emergency. He just made up a reason to leave.

CHANG: Yeah, that I could believe, because I actually had students who dropped out in the second year, and they told me the similar reasons. Because if you admit it, that you can’t do Chinese, it could do a lot of damage to your self-esteem or self-confidence. But that was quite extreme, I was thinking he could still go for Global (Business), and if so he could still stay in the business programme. And I think at least after a while he went back to Ireland, he should give you an explanation. But if he dropped out of college, then I guess he did not intend to...

LIAM: Yeah, he told his friends, you know, (an anonymous peer) and those people, close to him. And he told them that he just didn’t want to do it. There was no emergency. So I think he did lie to me, but it’s okay. It’s not like...I had a good time in Shanghai, it is fine.

CHANG: I think it is nothing personal to you, it is more personal to him.
LIAM: Yeah, yeah, it was his decision, and it is okay.

CHANG: And of course, with your presence there, that you are a stronger learner, I imagine it could be difficult to admit it to you.
LIAM: I don’t know, I don’t know.

CHANG: Especially that you had the same experience, think about it. You had pretty much the same experience, but you didn’t have the feeling like ‘I couldn’t do it.’ So, it is gonna be hard to tell you so.

LIAM: Maybe, I don’t know.

CHANG: Don’t take it personally.
LIAM: No, I don’t. It’s fine, yeah. I hope he is happy. I think he is okay.

CHANG: Okay, so out of academic curiosity, do you know exactly what happened? Like was it the overall experience, like the courses were too difficult for him and the life there, that gradually he just thought he couldn’t manage? Or there were some particular incidents?

LIAM: I think definitely it was very overwhelming. It was really hot when we get there in September in Shanghai. It was 35 degrees and we were sweating. The city was full, and it was very polluted, the air was pretty bad for the first few weeks. And I think the one big thing was about the food, he couldn’t find food. He wasn’t ready to prepare enough to go outside his comfort zoon, just go out to the restaurant and say, ‘What is this, what is this, and what is this?’ He’s always been a very reserved person. He is not outgoing in that sense. So I think he really struggled with that. So for the first one or two weeks I met him on campus, he said ‘Oh I’m so hungry, I’m so hungry. I haven’t been able to eat properly in here. So I took him to one of the restaurants I always went to, where I had Suzhou Tangbao. They are really nice. They have meat in them. And I showed him this food, and
he was like ‘Oh yeah, I am gonna eat this every day because I can’t eat other foods.’ So I think the food was one of the major problems for him.

CHANG: Okay I think it is more to the language rather than the food itself. Because you mentioned you looked into this place, and he decided he could take that as a steady diet. So there’s nothing to do with the Chinese food. So the problem for him is that it is difficult for him to get the proper food.

LIAM: I think it is more of the underlying attitude. I think his Chinese is actually enough to manage these tasks. Like ‘You rou ma? La bu La?’ (Does it have meat? Is it spicy?) That’s all you have to say. He still didn’t do it. So I think it is just the general attitude of being outside of his comfort zone.

CHANG: So too frightened to try.

LIAM: Yeah. In my sense, all the language, the food, if you don't have the right attitude, you won't go anywhere. So I think it is the attitude that matters to the success of the year abroad. I think it could be anything that frustrates you. For some people it is just the bureaucracy of… I think everything is, when you go there is a younger person, you know, for a lot of people it is the first time away from home. It's just, anything, any one thing could be the tipping point, the deciding factor. But I think it is the overall accumulation of being outside of your comfort zone. Because, like for one person it is the pollution, or for me it is the food. For everyone it is a challenge, but there is usually one factor that sets it off.

CHANG: But for this case I think it is very pitiful. It is not like you couldn't stand the pollution or the food. To be honest, like this is not the right place for you. But for something like this, it could happen in any other countries, it could happen in any other scenarios. I'm thinking, do you have some kind of like international student officer at the university that you could turn to, that the person could help to improve your well-being or something like that? Like if he had the problem, if he wanted to seek help, was there any opportunity for him?

LIAM: I don't actually know. We did have a foreign student officer, it is the one who helped us with the application and picking up modules.

CHANG: I'm sorry I was talking about in here or in China?

LIAM: Oh, in (an anonymous institution). We didn't have much support from (an anonymous institution). But in terms of the culture shock, or other kinds of mental health issues or problems, I don't actually know. I don't think… I think most of the international students just stuck with their friends. They just stay together. I don't think there was actually a support structure for people, you know, to go there and say ‘I don't like the food in here, please help me.’ None in that sense.

CHANG: Well, here it is the same. It is only started to emphasise the well-being of the students. But I think well-being is a very important part of learning. So again, this case is really a pity.

LIAM: Funny enough, when you're talking about the well-being, I didn't notice that this would come up, but I also struggled…like I also had a hard time in Shanghai. I was lonely. And the one big mistake I made, I wrote this in my note for the business modules, you know, when you do the travelling journals and we have to talk about culture shock and stuff like this, what I was struggled with was that I think I made a strategic mistake. I went in as I was thinking I was not like the other international students, because I actually speak Chinese, right? I am here to make Chinese friends and really experience the culture of the Chinese students. So I didn't do all the international students events early on which was there, like going to the wall in Beijing, or in Shanghai it was going to the Bund altogether. I'm like ‘No, no, I didn't come to Shanghai to meet German people or Italian people’, right?

CHANG: You want the authentic experience.

LIAM: Exactly, yes. But I found it very hard to connect to Chinese people. Firstly because, if you walk into a classroom in (an anonymous institution), if there were six rows, all the international segments were in the last two rows. So the seating order was just following that way. obviously, that was just one detail, but it shows that [kind of…

CHANG: [isolation between Chinese students and international students.

LIAM: Yes, the cultural barrier for sure. And there was a lack of mixing. It is the same for the group project. Like we had an economic class, we had a homework group, obviously all the Germans stick together, all Sweden stick together, all the Italian stick together. So I am like ‘Okay, I am gonna go up and stay with the Chinese people.’ And I asked them ‘Can I do the homework with you?’

CHANG: And they said no?

LIAM: Yeah, they were very suspicious. They said ‘You have to ask the teacher. I don't know whether this will work.’ And then I ask another group, they completely ignored me, they
didn't even look at me. I ended up with is doing this with the Germans because I could join any other Chinese groups. This is the economic class, that is in English. So this kind of hurt me. I found it really difficult to interact with the Chinese students, to blend in, and the experience of…just make friends with them or work together. And obviously there was a good reason for it. It is not because they were racists or mean. It is that in general, international students go there and they were lazy, they did do that much work. And for them the grades are very important. So every homework counts a lot, so for the foreign students, they took it too casually. I think that was the bias. I think that's why it didn't happen. It was not that the Chinese students were not interested in it, it was just that they saw me as a risk, that I might be lazy and destroy their grade. And then they didn't want to interact with me.

CHANG: But you also said that when you went to the first group, they said something about getting the permission from the teacher. So it made me feel like the isolation was intended, that it was arranged that way on purpose. So they were prearranged.

LIAM: So do you think there was a rule in the university that I couldn't do it?

CHANG: Maybe, I don't know. I think that it was just to avoid the responsibility of saying no. I think the teacher was open to it. The teacher was actually very good. They all have a good degree from the big good American universities. There are all very well educated and have good English. So it wasn't like the teacher was saying ‘No, no, no, you are foreign students! No, no, no, you are Chinese students!’ I think it was just huge cultural barriers, the difference in perceptions of laziness and work together. So that was actually very frustrating for me, because my big plan is…it is the disillusionment of what your plan is. So there lies the problem, what is your expectation and how big gap there was between the expectation and the reality. For Cormack, it was unbearable, right? The gap was just too big. It was too much than what he expected. For me, I sort of felt…like it was all my disillusionment. As someone said, it was like it all lost in translation. I wasn't with the former students, and I wasn't with the Chinese students either. So who are my friends? Who are my group? But I ended up joining the Germans, and I made friends with the Germans. At the end of the term, that was okay. As I said, I was disillusioned. I thought I had it, because I studied Chinese, so I had better tools to interact with, to bridge the gap between the cultural barriers.

CHANG: Regarding the homework, I think we had the same issues in here as well. If you put students into groups, there are gonna worry about whether they teamed up with stronger players, so their scores won't be affected. Could it just be compulsory, to just mix the Chinese students and international students? Like the teacher just arrange them to work together and let them figure out the way. Or like, to do group project but mark individually. That could work, right?

LIAM: Yeah, I absolutely agree. Just like you said, I remember I was thinking of that. Wouldn't it be great for a big internationally university to have people specifically work together?

CHANG: Yes, especially when we are talking about (an anonymous institution). It is not a bad university. Actually, it was one of the top universities in China. So this sounds like they did not take any advantage of being an international university. That's a waste of resources.

LIAM: Yes, it is the opportunity wasted.

CHANG: And the other thing I'm picturing is, that when you first approached the Chinese students, it could be seen as the traitor of the German students. Like, ‘Oh, that guy he didn't want to stay with us. He wants to stay only with the Chinese students!’ So how did you mend that relationship?

LIAM: Yes, exactly. Obviously, they weren't like I am the traitor of the German nation. ((laughter)) It wasn't that bad. But, obviously they knew that I wasn't 100% engaging with them. I didn't show up for the social gathering. I did go out with all the international students to the city and get drunk. So they were like ‘What's the deal with this guy?’ But, as soon as you started speaking German to them, they were so thankful to just hear someone speak German. And they were like happy to have more people in their small group. Because before we left, people were left with the impression… I remember (an anonymous teacher) said that don't stick in the Irish bubble So that's what I thought, like I am not going to stay with Irish people or German people. But it's not that easy. It is really not that easy.

CHANG: That's something we don't know to be honest.
LIAM: It is the same for Chinese events, right? A lot of Chinese students in here, they just stick in their own bubble. They are keeping together, and they are surviving for the year, and they are going back home. It is very hard to bridge the gap, you know?

CHANG: And also, the official communication channel could be quite artificial. Like if you go to the international students gathering, for the people, the students who are willing to communicate with you, they could be selected due to their personality. They would be very outgoing, but kind of like they are there to do their jobs, and their job is to communicate with you, to make friends with you. But they are not the general public. They were selected. And it might be to when you were talking about the Chinese students in here, like the gap is there. It really relies on the social events for them to bridge the gap. It's really on external forces to break that, the internal forces seem not enough.

LIAM: Yes, that’s true.

CHANG: And also, you mentioned a lot about how you approached the Chinese students. What about the other nationalities, students from other countries? I think that would be nice experiences as well. Why didn't you approach them as well?

LIAM: I did eventually. I did make friends from Sweden and Germany and the UK and Australia, there were a lot of Australians. I did eventually, yeah. But for the first five weeks I did only want to make Chinese friends, or like as much as I could. Because obviously there were those incidents, and I was unlucky. But, there was only so many times that you could try. It was hard for me to just keep trying, like ‘Okay, this Chinese person might not want to be my friend.’ Like, it's just hard. But, in terms of international aspects, like making international friends, that was not a problem. It was easy. It's okay. Especially if you were speaking English, there were a lot of Australians and people from England, so that's super easy.

CHANG: So, I think culture shock is inevitable, it will happen to everybody. It's just, in different degrees and differing angles, how you handle them.

LIAM: Yes, a hundred percent. I wish I handled it a little bit better. Because there were a couple of months I was alone at home worrying about like ‘Okay, this is gonna be a tough semester.’ I wish I started like just being friends with the Germans at an early stage, you know? I waited too long. I said ‘No, no, I don't want to be friends with the Germans’ when I was trying to make friends with Chinese students. I shouldn't say something like this. I should just play the game like everyone else did.

CHANG: But, like you said, you did eventually make friends with the Germans and other international students, but not Chinese? You failed to connect to them eventually?

LIAM: Well, for the most part. There were buddy programmes with the English teaching major students, but in terms of socialising in the evenings and going out together, it was mostly international students together.

CHANG: To be honest, for a while I didn't understand, because to me this is not the normal experience.

LIAM: Well, it is my personal experience.

CHANG: Yeah, well, most people when they go, to be honest, their experience with the Chinese students or even the general public were not that harsh. But, I think it is also something to do with this…you mentioned a lot about the perceptions of Chinese students. I think that was quite extreme. And I think that could happen in certain parts of China, just the culture of valuing the academic performance quite seriously. And the other thing is, I think this issue could be worse somehow for the better universities in China. If you go to a rather not top university, maybe the atmosphere of chasing the GPA will be less extreme.

LIAM: It's true. It is probably true.

CHANG: Like we sometimes joke about them, we say that top universities cultivated those little devils. They care more about their academic performance rather than the overall experience. So sadly, that's the truth.

LIAM: You are probably right.

CHANG: So, sorry for the experience.

LIAM: It’s okay.

CHANG: Just to warn you, that this process can be demotivating as well because it brings you unpleasant memories and experience back. ((laughter)) Because sometimes it made you realise something that is a bit dark and you didn't realise it in the past.

LIAM: To be honest, I did struggle, you know? And there were times when I think whether this is for me, should I go home, you know? I talked to my parents on how can I survive this year, because for most parts I think it is just loneliness. Being lonely is a really bad thing.
CHANG: So you talked to your parents about this?
LIAM: Yeah, I told them that I feel lonely, and I am not sure if I want to stay the whole year.
CHANG: Was that helpful, their encouragement? They did give you encouragement, right?
LIAM: Yeah, they did say like ‘You wanted this, give it a try, you know, make friends with the German people’. That's what I ended up doing, but that didn’t change the fact that I was disillusioned for a long time. As I said, most of my expectations didn't come true.
CHANG: I am more curious about what got you through this dark period. I think this family support really helped.
LIAM: Yeah, the family did help. And (an anonymous peer) was there, (an anonymous peer) was in (an anonymous institution). But she was across the city. We met up occasionally and she had a Chinese boyfriend, that helped me. And I went to the gym a lot.
CHANG: Did you talk to (an anonymous peer) about the problem?
LIAM: Uh…not openly. I didn’t want to say I’m sad and lonely.
CHANG: So even if it was just a general hanging out, you know, just seeing (an anonymous peer) and hanging out, it helped?
LIAM: Yes. And even the course, it was a bad influence. Like, I picked really difficult courses because I was interested in them, for example Financial Theories. So they said that most incidents in the course were MBA masters students. So it was a really high level to some extent. So the material was hard, and I was pretty lonely. So I met (an anonymous peer) and tell her I made German friends, and it was fine at the end. But there were those dark periods of disillusionment. Now I didn't even remember how exactly it felt. But the general feeling was like ‘Wow, this is way harder than I imagined.’ It’s like culture shock for sure. What I remembered was like every little thing is really hard, that is exhausting. You paid a lot of efforts, like even if just going to the police office and registering your residency. If you go there alone, Shanghai is such a massive city, it takes two hours to take a bus to get there. Then you have to find food in 35 degrees, that is something you’re not used to. And you have to speak Chinese to a police person. It was really stressful like you are operating outside of your comfort zone all day.
CHANG: I had the same feeling when I first came here, like literally you need to learn everything in your life…
LIAM: [AGAIN!]
CHANG: Yeah, exactly. The system is different, and the language is different. For me, even just for the little things like how to top up your mobile, simple things like that you get used to them.
LIAM: And after a whole day, you got so tired of it. It is so challenging.
CHANG: Yes, you feel more like a kindergarten kid that you need to learn everything. That is exhausting.
LIAM: Yeah, that is very true.
CHANG: But I am picturing, if you go to the international students in gathering at the beginning and get a Chinese buddy, that would have been a huge help for all of these.
LIAM: That’s the other thing. It would have been. But I missed the open day and the first day because the universities sent me the information with the wrong campus. It is the bigger campus of the university outside of Shanghai. You have to take two trains and it takes two hours. And I went there, and as I said it takes me all day. And they said the open day is on another campus in the city centre. And I missed it. So that already took me an…disadvantage. I didn't connect to the people on the first day. So I think it was the mix of unlucky an unfortunate circumstances and me having the wrong strategy, you know? I shouldn’t have gone in there and thought I am so better than the Germans. Like, no, no, you have to stay with your friends and your nationalities, then you could sort of try to make friends with Chinese students. Don't throw yourself into another culture without any connection to your own culture, you know? I think that was my mistake. I thought I was gonna be 100% full Chinese, you know, like only have Chinese friends.
CHANG: But still I'm thinking how to improve that, and one simple solution is…because I think you have… I think the name is Deirdre in here, the coordinator of (an anonymous institution). She is the kind of media for communication. Like, I don't know whether part of her responsibility is your well-being, I only know that you have you have problems with the courses, that's the person you could go to. So here's the Chinese university they have the same person who plays like the role, like you said the international student officer, and you were instructed…you were pointed to the direction that if you have such kind of problem,
the international student officer is the person you could seek help from. I think it would be much better.

LIAM: Probably, yeah, you're right.

CHANG: Speak of this, I'm gonna 1st to jump to the last question about the course. I had several previous students, they expressed dissatisfaction towards the final year courses. And I think one of the reasons behind this is that you don't have a person like Deirdre for the Chinese modules. The courses could be improved, but the communication was not there. There was a lack of communication to make that happen.

LIAM: Yeah, I think so, for sure.

CHANG: Because for Chinese the only way is you to confound the lecture directly. Of course, we don't want to do that.

LIAM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think the communication could definitely be improved.

CHANG: First, what’s your opinion about the final year courses? And this is very interesting, because you had the teacher in the past, do you still have her for the final year?

LIAM: Yeah, yeah. So for both semesters we had (an anonymous teacher) for the language modules. We had this book and we did six chapters of it over 24 weeks. So three chapters for each semester.

CHANG: So it’s not that fast.

LIAM: Yeah, it was okay. It was manageable. And then we also have another Chinese module. The other Chinese core module is English, it is the Chinese Economics and Doing Business in China. I think what I really liked about the Chinese language course is that it had a good standard of material in business Chinese cases. So this book has like Starbucks’ marketing strategy in China and IKEA's entry strategy in China, that kind of stuff. So I think that was very interesting. And also her continuous assessments were also very interesting. I did a video, or I have to write a Chinese CV, or I do a dialogue, that kind of stuff. It was quite creative, and it kept the course interesting. I think it was a good structure to keep it as interesting as possible. What I didn't like about is that it was too much. It was too much about the specific business cases, like we talked about the P&G and we talked about the different kinds of shampoo for two weeks. For me it is like, okay I get it, but it is too much detail. I think the major driver for people going in the final year is…so people are motivated by goals, right? If you tell the person the purpose of their doing, they are more likely to do it better or to a higher standard, just in general. So for the first two or three years it was to learn Chinese and have a good year in China. There was a very clear purpose. And in the fourth year, I think a lot of people…because they need to look for jobs, and they have to think about the future, they get demotivated in terms of saying ‘Well, I am not gonna use Chinese anyway. So why am I learning P&G and shampoo?’ I think that was the major issue. It was for me as well. Like, I did apply for Chinese speaking jobs, quite a few positions in Singapore and Hong Kong, stuff like that. So I tried to keep it as my motivation. But you could definitely tell that the other people are slowly fading away and saying that ‘What’s the point?’.

CHANG: So they are doubting the necessity of learning the Chinese language. Like you said, over the different stages of learning, the role of Chinese was not always the same. Apparently before you go to China, the huge part is to do with the experience in China. It was not necessarily directly connected to your future career. But in the final year, of course it’s gonna be more about the reality. You have already had a rather clear focus or orientation about the career goals.

LIAM: Yeah, and I think that was the major cause for people’s demotivation in the final year.

CHANG: Yeah, because I catch the word irrelevant from what you said. You don't mind about the structure, but it was the content. Of course, there is no point to learn about the hundred kinds of shampoo which are relevant to your life.

LIAM: And there is only so much you could do for one module, in one chapter. And also there are different levels of Chinese as well. There are people who barely passed the HSK 3 and 4, and there are also people who had already past HSK after they came back. So there is only so much you could expect from one course, like putting a conclusion on this four-year project of learning Chinese, you know, it is a lot to ask.

CHANG: Okay, if I ask you to rate the course from 1 to 5, with 5 being the best, wish number would you give me?

LIAM: (.) Probably 3 or 4.

CHANG: Then would you picture that what kind of number the other students would give it, like the majority would rate?
LIAM: (. I think a lot of people were tired of it. I think they will probably just give it 2 or 3. They showed up and they looked at their phones. And then the teacher said ‘You have to learn this vocab. This is the assignment for next week.’ And then they were like ‘Okay, we will do it.’ As I said there was a general sense of...maybe it’s just the general stress of being in the final year, you know, you have to think about your future and your final grades.

CHANG: But you were in other courses with these people, would they behave the same? For example, like the business modules, were they be [like...

LIAM: [No.

CHANG: Then it is not gonna be that.

LIAM: Exactly, yes you are right. That’s true.

CHANG: So what’s the difference between you and the ‘2 and 3’?

LIAM: I think I try to keep it relevant as much as possible. I intended to HSK 5 in October.

CHANG: So you have external goals rather than these modules, and it is associated with the learning itself, that they are all connected.

LIAM: Yeah, as long as we have a long-term goal, it is very easy to put into the work. It is very easy to work hard. If there was a purpose, and there was a goal to it. And as I said, I was also applying for two jobs. So that was my purpose, I was still motivated. But I definitely felt a decreased motivation when I get no for these jobs. More like I didn't get any job offers in Singapore or Hong Kong, and there will be definitely denies, right? I would think ‘What the Chinese is gonna be for me? Is it only gonna be a party trick at the dinner table?’

Like when people ask me to say something in Chinese? Is this all it is gonna be for the next five to ten years? Or I am gonna actually build a career out of it?’ And those are the ideas that other people had, you know? I just managed to keep the motivation a little bit longer, you know, set myself goals to allow me to work further.

CHANG: Could you give me some example like before and after you get the ‘No’s’?

LIAM: So before the ‘No’s, it is like ‘I still have a career that is something to do with China or Chinese.’ So after it was like that door is shut for me, you know. I won’t be taking that path, which means I am not going to use Chinese regularly for the next two or three years, maybe. So yeah, it was definitely disillusionment in terms of like ‘What’s the point? Is this gonna be something you put at the bottom of your CV? Or is it something you could actually build on, build a career out of it?’ So I think some people did it, like Declan, he got Enterprise Ireland in Shanghai, so he is gonna make use of it. But other than that, I think the majority is not going to use it.

CHANG: So in terms of career purposes, you kind of like used to have differences with...but not anymore with the general public? So for the short term, your career path will not have a connection with China or Chinese. But still you rate the course like 4 or 5, but they rate like 2 or 3.

LIAM: But that’s just my opinion because they were less motivated than I was.

CHANG: But see, you are aware of the difference. See in here, you mentioned goals, and you also mentioned long term goals. So I think maybe deep inside, Chinese is still there. You still believe that in a long run, that is always gonna come back to you and be beneficial.

LIAM: Yes, one of the major reasons I choose to accept the offer of EY is because of their three years programme. They said they are going to send people abroad. They send people to other EY offices all around the world. And they said some people get to send to Singapore. And I said they speak Chinese in Singapore, so please send me to Singapore. So I am definitely planning for it. Like this is a competitive advantage, I need to make use of it, you know. Otherwise, it would be a waste of time, and it would just end up being a party trick, like something I just did in my 20s, you know. So yeah, I am definitely still looking forward to it. I am gonna apply for Huawei’s job in here, in Ireland. So I am definitely still looking for it, while the majority of the people might not.

CHANG: And do you also think that your rating has something to do with the overall impression of the teacher? Like you had her in the past, so you developed a rather better relationship with the teacher, in comparison with the people who rated 2 or 3?

LIAM: I don’t know. I think our relationship was fairly neutral. She’s fairly direct. She’s very…she’s not very emotional. She’s not particularly engaging like you are, and she rarely holds a conversation with people after the course, you know. But it doesn’t mean she’s mean or she’s too strict. That’s my relationship with her. Whenever I ask her for things, like maybe a change for tutorial or something, and she says ‘Yeah, we could do this and this.’ And she actually ended up ask me things. I could show you the PowerPoint slides. She asked me to talk to the second years, to introduce the year in China to them. And I did
410 that, and she said that I will get 5% more for the participation grades. And I was like
‘That’s fine, thank you.’ So, it was just neutral. But I wouldn’t say we had a relationship
like this. We never talk like this.

CHANG: Would you say it is more like a professional attitude?
LIAM: Yeah.

415 CHANG: Or would you think that people are expecting something closer, so they were a little bit
unhappy about this?
LIAM: No, I didn’t think people are expecting anything. I think they were indifferent. They just sat
down and say ‘Okay, this is my Chinese teacher now. It’s fine.’

CHANG: But someone told me that, in the second year, (an anonymous t
420 while in the final year they feel that she cares much less. Sometimes the indifference is
mu
LIAM: Yeah, I do agree with that.

425 CHANG: Okay, I am gonna move on to the question about the reduced self-confidence. Actually, I
think this is what killed Cormack. ((laughter)) So, do you ever feel a reduced self-
confidence, but might be at a le
LIAM: So I think I’m in a lucky position in terms of that, like I always did well in the Chinese
module, because it was quite straight forward. This is a broad culture point, I think. I think
the Chinese approach of learning is quite similar to the German approach. So a lot of it is
based on a set schedule, a set plan. And you just have to learn it, and then you will be
tested, right? It’s A, B, C. It’s really easy. And I think in Ireland, it’s a bit different. It’s
more like ‘Oh, you have to do this and maybe it would come back in the exam.’ So they are
not used to just sitting down and hammering it into their brain. Will it make sense, that kind
of learning style? Like learning vocab every day, practise pronunciation every day? It’s just
long-term planning and everyday practice, that will get you there in the long term. I think
that kind of approach, that Irish learning culture isn’t really there. Maybe it’s a little bit too
vague, but I think it is there.

CHANG: To me it sounds more like the Irish students, they had a little bit lack of learning strategy.
LIAM: Exactly, yeah. ((laughter))

435 CHANG: So you do feel that as well?
LIAM: Yeah, I do agree with that.

CHANG: To me it sounds more like the Irish students, they had a little bit lack of learning strategy.
LIAM: They don’t know how to learn.

440 CHANG: To me it sounds more like the Irish students, they had a little bit lack of learning strategy.
LIAM: Exactly, yeah, that’s what I mean, yeah. And I think Chinese and German are very
practical. They have a plan, they know how to structure things. Whereas the Irish approach
was a little bit all over the places. They still work hard, and they are still interested in it.
But it is not structured enough.

445 CHANG: Their approach might not be the most effective. So where did you get the information about
the approach? Did you get it from the course or the teacher? Or when you came here, you
were equipped with this information already? But the Irish learners, they still haven’t got it.
Like you said, if it is not enough contained in their culture, and if they did not get this from
the course as well, then…

LIAM: Like I said, it’s a general approach of learning a language. I think…so in my first year, I
also pick French, and I did French for eight years in secondary school in German. And they
put a lot of emphasis on learning another language and culture and stuff like that. So I
thought my level was decent. I felt like I didn’t do anything but my grades in French was
still like A class. It was a surprise, because the Irish level of French was so much lower,
even though we did like a similar amount of time. So I think just in general, the Irish
approach of learning a language is not a very good approach. I don’t know exactly what it
is, so I could not quantify it for you. But definitely it is not structured as it should be.

CHANG: So when you say you were lucky, I think indeed you were lucky, because you were
equipped with those skills beforehand. So if I am having an Irish student in here, I am
450 gonna try to trace the responsibility. I want to know who should be responsible for that. To
be honest, I don’t think the learner should be responsible because you were never taught
about it. So I think it will come down to the modern foreign language courses and the
teachers. And if they started Chinese fresh from scratch, and you know that Chinese is
different from the European languages, like it is gonna be very different from the French.

455 Then you should have different methods to learn it, then the course and the teacher are
responsible to pass on the knowledge.

LIAM: I agree with this, a hundred percent, yes.
LIAM: Are they? Then why so many people complaining about the course? I can’t give you the Irish perspective. I have never been to the Irish secondary school.

CHANG: It doesn’t really matter. Because most of you, you didn’t study Chinese in secondary school. You started from scratch in college, and we were your first batch of teachers. So from a teacher perspective, we should give out methods. Otherwise, they are gonna struggle, and they ARE struggling.

LIAM: No, I agree. For example, talking about having a more structured approach, I think to have long term Chinese success, it is very important to do it every day and practise every day. I am not saying I am perfect at it, but I could tell that as soon as I have a routine, like doing it every day, my Chinese would improve drastically. So for example, when you introduced us Memrise, I would do Memrise every day in China and learn the vocab so much quicker. And obviously I did your courses as well, for the final year, I also built my own Memrise vocab list. I think anything that provides us with a structure for daily practice is particularly important for Chinese. It would help Irish students for sure, anything with a set routine. Without it, like overbearing, because there is a risk like you say ‘I will do 100 Chinese words every day. And our Chinese teacher is so strict. And we have Chinese homework.’ They gonna drop it immediately. So I think it definitely needs some approach that Chinese learning could have a structure in it, a more structured approach.

CHANG: It’s actually a set of learning mechanic behind the Memrise. So it makes up the flaw of lacking the method. You just put in all the content you need to learn, and the software will tell you how you should learn it and when you should revise it. That fills the gap. But for the rest of the perspectives, like oral communication and pronunciation practice, how could you do it like that if the methods were not provided? And I think, to be honest, a lot of Chinese teachers including me, we lack the knowledge about that, because we didn’t learn Chinese that way. We don’t know how to provide that kind of methods.

LIAM: And I think there is a huge potential in terms of...as you said...the well-being, like keeping students engaged in general. Like my girlfriend would watch me do Memrise, right? And she would say ‘I am so jealous!’ because it looks fun. Like ‘It looks like a game! Are you actually studying?’ And I am like ‘Yeah, I am actually studying. It’s just like it looks like a game, right?’ So there are so many tools to keep it interesting, keep it engaging for long term success. And I think the best way to study is that you don’t even realise you are working. That’s the best way to study, like you are driven actually by your own interest and your curiosity for the subject matters, rather than doing it on purpose. And it doesn’t really feel like work to me. It is interesting. It is a game to me.

CHANG: Okay, another thing that was brought up in the past interviews is that, probably influenced by the cultural background, the native Chinese teachers appear to have a lack of concern for individual students. For example, like (an anonymous teacher), if you don’t talk to her, she won’t talk to you. She does care about the class, like how you were doing, whether you could pass the exams. But there was a little bit lack of focus on individual students. Do you share this kind of feeling?

LIAM: I think it’s just that she seizes her position, like she is indifferent to the final year students. She didn’t care. She just showed up and got the attendance. I think she thinks ‘Okay, that’s their choice. I am not gonna force them. That’s not my problem. I am not gonna change them in the last semester for a four-year programme.’ So just like you said, in the second year, we were still in a preparation phase, right? It matters to her, whereas in the fourth year, people go to accounting, and they work in an accounting company and never speaks Chinese again. And I think she is aware of that. So I think she knows that people get demotivated, and she’s not gonna change them. She’s not gonna...like six more weeks after a four-year study, she is not gonna go ‘You need to improve your spoken Chinese now!’

CHANG: This doesn’t make total sense to me, because if the indifferent is neutral, it’s gonna be both parties are happy. The teacher may go very easy on students, and the students are happy even if they did not learn much. That’s gonna be the situation you described. But apparently, it’s not.

LIAM: Not, it’s not. It’s a manageable course. It’s an okay course. It’s an easy A comparing with other courses.

CHANG: Then why so many people complaining about the course?

LIAM: Are they?
LIAM: Okay, just because they will give it a 2 or 3 doesn’t mean they would complain about it. They would be like ‘Okay, I don’t care. Just an average. Give me a B, and I am okay with it.’

CHANG: No, actually people are complaining. Most of the people that I interviewed from your batch, they expressed dissatisfaction about the course, some are pretty angry about it. So, could it be something to do with the GPA? Like if you don’t care but you are getting good marks, then it is fine. But if it is not, then I guess… ((laughter))

LIAM: I got an A last semester, but I don’t know for this semester. No, so if I was quite struggling to get a B or C, then probably I would be angry about it as well. I don’t know.

CHANG: Oh crap, it’s been an hour already. Okay, normally I could manage to keep this in an hour.

LIAM: But I guess we talked a little bit more on Cormack. Okay, let’s return to the issues about the reduced self-confidence. Do you have any more to add to it?

LIAM: The one thing I got confidence, or I will notice about whenever I found myself in a low motivational mood, like ‘Wow, I am not where I am where it was supposed to be’, again the whole disillusionment thing, like ‘What’s the point of this’, you know, the low motivation. I don’t know whether this is effective, but when I watch a Chinese movie or a Chinese video or something, and I don’t understand it, even though it was just chitchat or small talk, I get really frustrated. Because I just think that after four years, I should be able to be enough to at least understand those small talks and like to be able to watch an average movie. It just frustrates me because it shows me that it is still so hard to immerse yourself in a culture. And it just seems so hard to understand sometimes. I think it is a bit abstract, but that’s the problem. As I said, I am very good at…if the teacher tells me doing an A and B and C, and I will get a good grade, I will do A and B and C, and get a good grade. But that’s the academic part of it. But in terms of going out of my comfort zone and like talking to the waiter and practising my small talk Chinese, I think I am a little bit lacking in that sense. So when it comes to a free flowing natural conversation situation in a video or a movie, when a natural dialogue happens, it really frustrates me if I can’t understand them. Even worse, when I go back to school and I learn P&G and all the stuff about the shampoo, that’s even more frustrating. There is a lack of emphasis on…I think…practising small talk and keeping up a daily conversation. Obviously the reality is that the (an anonymous institution) or (an anonymous teacher) would say ‘That is your problem. You have to go outside and make Chinese friends on your own.’ I think that’s their approach.

LIAM: Yeah, I agree one hundred percent. This is one of the slides I did for the second year of how I draw my learning progress. And obviously there are two major roads. There is the profession part of it, and there is the personal part of it, but it feeds into your professional development as well. So the range of people’s proficiency before they went to China would be all just around HSK3, but when they came back from China, the range would be much wider. The academic profession part of it is mostly driven to university courses and HSK preparation that kind of stuff. And the personal part of it is actually underlining the motivation of the learners to the cultural access you get from learning the language, like the music and karaoke, chatting with a waiter or taxi drivers, drinking rice wine, that kind of thing. And I think there is a lack of connection in the programme in general. For example, when I consider myself in a situation of a business meeting, I sell myself to my employer and I am gonna speak Chinese, right? And if I do that, obviously I am gonna end up with the situation of meeting Chinese people, right? And I think the most important thing in that situation is being able to chitchat and have small talk. That’s the first major impression, right? That’s how you build trust, and say like ‘Oh, you speak Chinese!’ They don’t want to know about Head & Shoulders and P&G. They just want to see that you could hold up a small talk, [a natural conversation…
CHANG: [Just Chinese for social purposes.
LIAM: Yeah, I think that’s one major criticism for this course, that it didn’t bridge the gap between
the professional development and personal development.

590
CHANG: So something about the course design, if you could implement that, it would help students
to get real life sense of achievement. And I also heard the other side of the story, like some
students they could do this in real life but could not manage to get a good GPA in class. So
now I think the story is complete.

LIAM: I think it is just personal preference. Some people are naturally better at small talk and
going outside of their comfort zone.

595
CHANG: Even if they only have a quite low proficiency, this could still happen. It’s something to do
with your personality as well, I guess.

LIAM: And I think that’s probably the more important part of learning a language, is to be
prepared and go outside of your comfort zone. It’s not doing A, B and C, and doing the
Memrise courses. It’s being able to talk to waiters and taxi drivers. I think that’s the major
part of it. I am saying it because right now the most advanced level of Chinese in our
course are (an anonymous peer) and (an anonymous peer), right? And they weren’t A+
students in first year and second year. They were good. They were like B or sometimes B+, that
they were up there, the top 30%. But because they spend a year in China, going outside
of their comfort zone, and they did make Chinese friends and they talked together. They
didn’t care about the cultural embarrassment, and they were prepared to make mistakes. I
think that’s what I am lacking. I think that was my deficiency. I wasn’t prepared enough to
get outside of my comfort zone and make mistakes. I was trying to be too perfect all the
time. I always say the secret to learning any languages is you have to be prepared to be an
idiot for any room you walk in. You have to be prepared to be laughed at every single day.

600
CHANG: But I am curious, were you the same when you were learning French?
LIAM: No, I think I was more courageous. Because I did an exchange when I was 14 in Paris, and
I spoke more and more French, and I became more and more courageous. I think it is
because you know the French people, their German was so bad, that I didn’t feel bad. It’s
like ‘Oh, I am already doing well.’ Whereas, if I speak to a Chinese person, their English
was very good. And if I say something like ‘Nihao!’ They were like ‘Oh, look, there is a
westerner who speaks Chinese.’ And they were not really saying that, they were like
‘Could you really speak Chinese?’ And as soon as you made mistakes, they were like ‘Oh,
thank you for trying. I know Chinese is hard. But it’s okay.’ And that makes you feel
stupid.

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CHANG: Do you feel it more like racism with a nice cover? It’s like they treat you very nicely but
still…
LIAM: I think it is called racism with lower expectations. Like it is good for you because you are
white, so good try, good try. So it’s not good.

610
CHANG: Yes, and I think they do have this in the Chinese culture, or more like Asian culture, that if
you can’t speak perfectly, don’t even bother speaking. So I think you could also be
influenced by this culture. Because you didn’t have this kind of traits when you were
learning French, but now you do. Like, when you were learning French, you were not so
afraid of making mistakes. And you attributed that to the reason that French people are not
so good at German, like it is more equal. But for Chinese, people are very good at English.
Could that be part of the reason why you are not so comfortable going outside of your
comfort zone, that you are influenced by the Asian culture of being able to speak perfectly?

LIAM: I don’t know. I think the English, the English of Chinese students are very good. You can’t
get there even if you are willing to make mistakes. So no, I don’t think it is the culture. But
I do agree with the point that if you can speak perfectly, don’t speak it.

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CHANG: So you agree with this point?
LIAM: Yeah. So I think the cover is racism with lower expectations. Like ‘Well done, you white
man. You speak Chinese, well done!’ And they go to their friends and say ‘No, their
Chinese is really bad.’ And they actually think like fair play for trying. But this is not really
that good. I think one of the interesting examples is that, do you remember the speech that
Mark Zuckerberg gave in Qinghua University? He did a Chinese speech, and all the
Chinese people made fun of it in the comments. They are very critical over there. And I
think that’s the same thing.

CHANG: So they show their true colour on the internet.

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LIAM: Exactly. So when face-to-face, they say ‘Oh, your Chinese is very good!’ But between their
friends, they would say it is not so good.
CHANG: Like we always have the impression that French people would be a little harsh when you were speaking French. Like if you were lousy, there were told you in your face. But if you speak of it in this way, that actually they are being honest. ((laughter)) But for Chinese sometimes it is like, they will give you compliments that they don't really mean it. You feel that it is too obvious that they tried to encourage you, but in the way that is that obvious, like it is fake, it is not from the bottom of the heart…

LIAM: It’s patronising, yeah, it is patronising.

CHANG: And I am also thinking about the teachers, I don't know whether you realised it or not, like at an early stage of learning, you may make mistakes in pronunciation, and somehow they probably were trained to encourage you all the time, they don't correct you. But in turn there were say ‘Good job!’ And when people start to get used to it, it is actually quite demotivating. Because when they receive the compliments, they know that the teacher is just trying to encourage them rather than giving them an objective review of their work.

LIAM: It's patronising, yeah, it is patronising.

CHANG: I just think the Chinese teachers have a lack of matters of carrying out constructive criticisms. People don't like the criticisms because they don't want to link them to their aptitude, I don't want to hear anything that will make me feel stupid.

LIAM: Yes, that’s true. So for the criticism you have to be very balanced. So for example, about the tones, I think the teachers should understand them and correct them, but just turn away and speak it like that, instead of repeating it in front of everyone. And say like ‘He made a mistake’ in front of everyone. I think you have to be careful.

CHANG: And I think students in here they don't really mind if you put it somewhere else, for example if you didn't do enough work. So for example, I will try to give comments like ‘This is not good enough for you. I know you’re being lazy. I hope you get a better result next time and I know you could if you work a little bit harder.’ But I guess I never told you that. It is because you were like a crazy person, you know? You were too engaging in the class, that you were always asking questions and challenging me. ((laughter))

LIAM: Yeah? I was like that? ((laughter))

CHANG: Yeah, you did! I remembered very clearly, that at the beginning of the class you always ask questions. And during the class if you spot anything, sometimes it could be a little bit outside of the class, that's something that is too professional like we should discuss among the teachers, like whether you should use this word over another word in this context, you would just ask directly during the class. And I tried to give you honest answers. Because some of them I could answer, some of them I actually couldn't, that I need to do some research about it. And then we get along. I think you respected me in that way, and I respected you in that way as well.

LIAM: Yeah, a hundred percent.

CHANG: And actually, later on you kind of reduced to that kind of confrontation. You started to approach me after the class, an overall that kind of amount of challenging were reduced. I felt there was mutual recognition that was built.

LIAM: But honestly, it was never challenging! It was just generally curious. You thought that was challenging, REALLY?

CHANG: So this is cultural differences, see? For my feeling, even though I know that like the educational culture here it is perfectly fine for students to directly ask questions during the class, as sometimes challenge the teacher, still sometimes you couldn't help it. It is your mindset, it is very difficult to change.

LIAM: WOW! I was NEVER aware of that!

CHANG: It’s actually not only me who have this impression.

LIAM: Of me criticising the teachers? REALLY?

CHANG: To be honest, yes. So if we don't have this conversation, I will never know as well. I thought we just built up some mutual respect.

LIAM: Did they not like me then or…?

CHANG: No, not like that. It’s just like you were labelled. And it will be attributed to like stereotyped, that you were from German, so you were more challenging and like criticising and more logic in that way.

LIAM: That’s not a problem, that is true. I am more German. But I was never aware of that. Because I remember in the first year or the second year, all my questions were about the
underlying logic of the language. Like there was the whole conversation about the characters, learning characters or the language in general by only remembering like this means this, this means this because the teacher said so, is a very inefficient way of learning. If you tell me the structure and the underlying logic of it, I would understand it in a deeper degree.

CHANG: Yeah, you always trying to find the rules behind it, the logic.
LIAM: Yeah, and it’s never about like ‘Chang, I don’t think you know this!’ It was never challenging or criticism. So, it is amazing. Were my questions so bad?

CHANG: No, it’s just...to be honest...sometimes it is challenging for us as well. First thing first, again, we didn't learn Chinese like you did. We get that information when we were like babies. So we never had those questions. I always say that like though it looks like I'm teaching you, but in fact I learned so much from you. So I think...I view it more like the space of improvement. It's just a little bit more requiring you to be a little more prepared.

CHANG: So I think to be honest, the Chinese teachers are a little bit of lack of being equipped with that kind of knowledge. So hopefully when I finish my research project and gave feedback to those training units, they would consider putting more of these into their training.

LIAM: Yeah, I think I really liked it when you went through all the radicals, the basic characters and the logic of their combination into more complex ones. I think that really helped even in the third year when I was in China.

CHANG: I think I was very important that the teachers should have that kind of knowledge. But many don't even recognise it. And they don't want to admit that. And they just throw them to the students. Like ‘Okay, these are the vocabulary, learn them by yourself, remember them by yourself!’ But actually, the students don't need you to point out the vocabulary, they need explanations. They need the rules, they need the logic, like you said. It's very obvious, if all those questions that you raised...if the content was already involved in the course, you don't need to ask for it, and we don't need to feel being challenged.

LIAM: Yeah, I think really liked it when you went through all the radicals, the basic characters and the logic of their combination into more complex ones. I think that really helped even in the third year when I was in China.

CHANG: But do you feel a resistance among the Chinese teachers, like they don't really want you to ask those questions, both in here and in China?
LIAM: Oh yeah, there was definitely...like I didn't ask so many questions while I was in China.

CHANG: Oh! What happened to you Liam? What changed you? (laughter)
LIAM: I think it was just because the course was so demanding, like 100 words a week or actually 200 words a week, five different subjects. Like I kind of have to do Memrise all day. I was occupied so much, so it's not like ‘Oh, what’s the logic behind this?’ It’s just more likely to learn it and at the end of the day you will have a test. I think that was it. Whereas I think your approach of teaching left a little bit room for us to actually understand the logic. But the Chinese schedule was too overloaded, like learn these words and the next week is the test. There was no time for like ‘How does this sentence work?’ There was no time for that, you know? But, yes of course the culture thing is for sure, like doubting their authority and openly criticising or asking someone something for sure. I remembered in an econometrics class, like an economic class with a lot of calculations, like we had a whiteboard and eventually the teacher would make some mistakes because it is two hours of math. No one would point it out until one foreign student says ‘I am sorry, I think you missed a zero there.’ And the whole Chinese class would be like ‘Wow! What is he doing?!’ I definitely felt that. I was definitely aware of it. I mean, I didn't mean to offend the whole (an anonymous institution) in here when they were in Dublin. But, yeah, it was fascinating. I never realised that. I think in German culture in general, there were no forbidden or taboos in pointing out mistakes, and just stating that there is a problem, and then you fix it.

CHANG: But you think Chinese do?
LIAM: Chinese people or Chinese culture in general are very good at pragmatism. They are very good at finding a solution for something, but they will avoid openly discuss…or confronting that something is wrong. I don't know, maybe because it is about losing face, being openly criticised and lost your authority.

CHANG: They prefers to silently give you the solution but avoid describing the problems. They don't discuss the problem that much.

LIAM: Yeah, I don't know. This is probably too touchy. There won't openly discuss it. They will just say, okay something is wrong, but just let us move on.

CHANG: Okay, maybe something about the indirect culture.
LIAM: Yes, so I think that was one of the examples. So in German, there is no harm in pointing out problems. And it is the same in the Irish culture as well. Whereas in the Chinese culture, they avoid confrontation. They are not direct. They are very subtle. They are very indirect. Like when I was in the book club in China, I would say ‘Okay, this is a problem. Let’s fix it.’ And people would say, ‘Liam, why are you angry?’ I say ‘I am not angry. It’s just that there is a problem. Let’s fix it.’ Like we are all trying to get a better result. So I think there are differences in culture. Anyway, that was a very long description of a point. ((laughter))

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CHANG: Okay, some final words about the reduced self-confidence. You mentioned the frustration would happen throughout the different stages of learning?

LIAM: Yeah, like every now and then, like I'm listening to a news report, if I felt like I was not at where I was supposed to be, I would feel a little bit frustrated.

CHANG: But it never occurs to you that you might set up the goal a little bit too high?

LIAM: No. What’s high? High is relative, right?

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CHANG: So that is very interesting, what is your reference? Could it be French?

LIAM: I don’t know. That’s a big issue for me. Like where is my reference point? It goes back to a deeper point about my personality. I came here when I was 19. I looked Irish and I sounded like Irish. But I was very German. Like I was a product of the German culture. I was really really German. So I constantly choose to…like who am I comparing myself against, right?

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CHANG: Where did this image come from, like ‘Oh, in the fourth year I am gonna be able to watch Chinese movies’, where did you think it comes from?

LIAM: I don’t know, it’s just a piece that I picked up. Do you remember Cillian, who passed the HSK 5, who did the Spring Festival Gala?

CHANG: Was he the last batch of the fourth year, a very thin guy?

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LIAM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And he has very good Chinese. So I tried to pass him, this is my goal. So I aimed high in all directions. But it is true, if you constantly compare yourself with the best everywhere, you are never gonna be happy.

CHANG: So your frustration comes from, first, you got a recognition from the GPA, but you didn’t get recognition from the real-life. And the second this, you are comparing yourself with the models, sometimes it is a realisation that you are not as good as that guy from a certain perspective. That would frustrate you because that will make you feel like your aptitudes could not match that guy in that perspective. That’s a very damaging feeling.

LIAM: Yeah, like ‘Why not? I did the same course! Am I not as good as him?’ Yeah, for sure. Maybe that’s just me because…

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CHANG: No, no, no, I don’t think this is just you.

LIAM: But I think it is particularly drastic for my situation because I am always a foreigner, you know? When I was in German, I was Irish. But when I was in Ireland, I was German. And I never really know where to compare myself.

CHANG: Something to do with the identity crisis.

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LIAM: Yeah, for sure. Anyway, that’s just what I think. I think it is demotivating as well. But then again, everyone has different circumstances, everyone has different abilities. But in general, I think that goes to the bigger point, I think that the demotivation…the source is the lack of small talk, conversation materials in the content of the course, which then leads to the incapability of carrying out small talk in real life. I think that’s where it came from.

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CHANG: So do you ever doubt the benefit and necessity of learning Chinese?

LIAM: So I think these two are quite connected. The purpose, like the point of it, I think in a general sense my motivation is still the same, that Chinese is a great language to learn out of the top 10 languages that you can learn. Right now, Chinese is definitely one of the best, you know, all the potential, a huge group of people speaking it. It’s a new emerging market, all these kind of stuff, you know. It checks out the boxes for a good language to have. So I kind of like never doubt that. But in an Irish context, I also think it is very very useful because Ireland relies on foreign directed investments. It is only a small country. So it has to play politics with the big players. So it was used to heavily influenced by the US culture. And I think in an Irish context, the relationship between Ireland and China will become more and more important in future just as China’s influence will grow in Europe, just like their investments in Huawei, the research development and environment in Dublin. So I think for an Irish context, it is also very good. But the one particular thing I experienced this year, we had a guest speaker for the Doing Business in China module, and he is running a consulting business called Emerald Ireland. When he pointed out that the language is rarely the problem because business is business, if you want the deal to be
done, it didn't really matter whether you speak Chinese or not. So I was like ‘What's the point?’ But I think the overall lesson for that is still that learning a language at least allows you to learn the culture better than the person who doesn't speak any Chinese. And when I think about when I was 18 or 17, that I didn't speak any Chinese, it was SO distanced, it was SO far away. I couldn't believe that a country like that even exists. And there are billions of people who live like that and speak like that, and they live in a country that looks like that. You can't really put them together until you go over there and speak the language. I think that's the advantage I get from speaking Chinese. It's just being able to go over there and see it.

LIAM: Yeah, you just need to keep trying. Obviously, I'm not going to get the DREAM job in Hong Kong right away, but it's a talking point on my CV. Like the interviews I had this year, one of the first lines they said would be ‘Oh, you speak Chinese?’ And that was the first icebreaker.

CHANG: So both a long-term goal, which could be a little bit vague, and also the short-term benefit are there as well. If you put it on the CV, it's gonna look nice.

LIAM: Exactly, yeah.

CHANG: So probably you need both.

LIAM: Yeah, and people had an interest in it, and they respect it, because they know it is a difficult language.

CHANG: So they recognise your language ability as well as your persistence, as a responsible person, maybe even like that.

LIAM: Yes, of course. And there are way worse languages that you could have wasted your time on. In Germany, you have to learn Latin in high school. So I was like ‘Why would I want to learn this? It’s a dead language!’ It's stupid. Like why? The language is just a tool, so use it. So I think in general the truth that I had Chinese four years ago is a good thing.

CHANG: Okay, then about GPA? I think a lot of people would have issues of this for the fourth year.

LIAM: Yeah, a lot of people had a dip in the fourth year. A lot of people just showed up for the attendance.

CHANG: But this is also to do with the career path they chose, whether they can see the short-term and long-term goal as well as the benefit.

LIAM: That's the only two streams, right? You are either gonna do it for GPA, or you have a real purpose to do that. There is a little balance, and sometimes it swings. Before you go to China, it's like ‘Wow, this has a good purpose. I’m gonna use Chinese for the rest of my life.’ But after you went to China, like I said in the fourth year, people were like ‘Okay, I'm doing it because I have to do it, instead of I think it would be beneficial in a long term.’

CHANG: What is it for you? Is it more like a strategy thing, like I want to maximise the potential of my degree and find the best job that I could, or still it has something to do with a genuine interest in the language or the culture? It is because you are interested in the language and the culture, so gradually you developed the goal that you want to have a job that is related to China or Chinese?

LIAM: I think it is different from person to person. For me I think I have a balance for both. I want to do it well and get a good degree, just in general, you know, like what's the harm in getting a good degree? But as I said, there were different stages of different disillusionments. There were stages like ‘What's the point?’

CHANG: I remember that you picked both French and Chinese at the beginning of the first year. At that time have you already decided which one you would pick after the first year?

LIAM: Not too much, no. I put it down because I thought it was interesting. I was interested in the Chinese culture for a long time. My grandfather was a patrol engineer. He builds the oil drilling machines, so he travelled a lot. He had a business in China as well.

CHANG: So the family influence.

LIAM: Yes, but also in general I was interested in the language and the culture. It wasn't just the family influence. I think it is very attractive in terms of how old it is, and just like how massive and rich the Chinese culture is. If you look at the old civilisations of the world, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Chinese, right? These are the four ones. And Chinese is the only one that survived. That's a massive thing. That was very attractive to me I think.
CHANG: If you have three job options right now, all three at the same level, same pay. One in Ireland, one in Germany and one in China, which one would you pick?

LIAM: (a pause for about 10 seconds) If I could get a job that is mainly in Europe but has a lot of travelling to China, that would be perfect.

CHANG: Yes, I think I was very tricky. I get this a lot from the people who get the ‘A’s. You want something to do with [China or Chinese…]

LIAM: [but not full-time.]

CHANG: Is it something to do with the living condition?

LIAM: Yeah, I agree.

CHANG: So the best job would be a job in Europe where you can enjoy the living condition in here, but also has something to do with Chinese.

LIAM: Yeah, where I could go home and eat my food, and I can watch my TV, and OCCASIONALLY Chinese movies. ((Laughter)) And OCCASIONALLY I could go to Shanghai and enjoy the Suzhou Tangbao.

CHANG: So you want the life, but not as a steady diet. Okay, then what about the teachers? You mentioned that there was a different approach of teaching Chinese?

LIAM: Yes, like imagine we are sitting in a Chinese classroom, so everyone just sits tight and quietly. And the teacher says ‘A, B and C’, and everyone could only practise ‘A, B and C’. Isn’t that a typical Chinese classroom in China? Well, you could definitely feel that in the approach of Chinese teaching in here.

CHANG: So a little bit more teacher-centred, one-way teaching style. It is more like a lecture, that it has a lack of interaction.

LIAM: Yes, but there is an interactive activity. Funny enough, I think a lot of people don't really like it in the final year. Because it is something forced, that we have to talk about the shampoos. And we were like, okay, if the tutor told us to do a dialogue on shampoos, then we'll do it. But that didn't mean we are interested in it.

CHANG: Then the interesting part is about the obedience. What would happen if this is a business module? If the professor presented a task which is inappropriate, and nobody wants to do it, will you just go ahead and do it? Or you will complain?

LIAM: I don't know. I don't think it is about authoritarian. I didn't think the teacher was that strict. Like I said, there are people just sitting there with their phones, she wouldn't even ask those people to put their phones away. She would just say ‘Okay, if they don’t care, that’s fine.’ No, I actually don't think there will be any difference in the business module and Chinese module, the strictness and the authority of the teachers. I don't think so. But just as I think of it, there is a little detail, I didn't think we speak enough in the final year. I think it is about the teaching style. It is not necessarily demotivating, but definitely it is a lack of engagement. You got bored after a while. As I said, after three chapters about the business strategy in China, you just start to feel bored. But there is only so much you can do in one module, you know. There are also some people who did take the Advanced Chinese. I didn't. So, I don't know, maybe they learned more in that module. But for me, that's the only language module. It is not perfect, but there is only so much you can do. So in terms of the huge drop off in the final year, I think it is just the material. It is boring and not useful.

CHANG: Is there anything you want to add to about the teachers?

LIAM: So in the second year, the teacher says… she wanted us to meet other Chinese people. She said, ‘Do you think the Irish people are the most interesting in the world?’ And I think the problem is that they underestimated how difficult it is to bridge the gap between different people.

CHANG: So you still think that it’s a good tip? So maybe next time when they warn you like this, it would be better if they could give some information on the strategies, like how exactly could you make Chinese friends, instead of just telling you that do not stick in the Irish bubble?

LIAM: Yeah. And again, I think some people are just naturally good at it, like (an anonymous peer), he is very outgoing. And he made a lot of friends.

CHANG: So it's more like social skills.

LIAM: Exactly. But I think the overall impression is that there was not so much interaction between the international students and the local Chinese students when I was in there. I think it is definitely underestimated by the course design itself. We were never trained on how to break the ice, how to start a conversation in Chinese or just small talk.
CHANG: And if the teacher or the course leave this to the students themselves, it is probably more difficult in this context, because there are fewer people you could practice Chinese with, not to mention the proper ones that you could try those social skills with. So I think it would be a good idea to just go ahead and arrange some language partners for you guys.

LIAM: Yeah, for sure. So the difficulty is underestimated, and the amount of individual work outside of the class, like to watch a movie or to practice with a language partner is overestimated. Irish students won't do anything unless you told them to do so. So unless you made them mandatory, especially in the final year when the motivation drops, if you tell them that they should practice the pronunciation of these syllables on their own, I guarantee that 90% of the class won't do it.