An intergenerational inquiry into the perceptions and experiences of education and learning – an empirical study of a group of Chinese post-graduate students and their parents in Beijing, China

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ABSTRACT

In current literature, there is ample official discourse on educational development and reform, all consistently emphasising education and learning as the essential pillar of China's economic success and future development. However, little is known about the way in which these official discourses are articulated in people's everyday lives. Hence, this thesis seeks to narrow this knowledge gap by revealing the real effects of the discourses on the actual lives of people within different socio-economic and historical contexts. It contributes to existing knowledge by examining the power on how dominant discourses are articulated in people's perceptions about education and learning over generations. There are two distinctive features of this thesis leading to its originality. Firstly, not only did it aim to fill literature gap from a group of Chinese individuals, but it also focused on two groups of participants that represented both the family and cohort generations. Secondly, the similarities and differences in their education and learning experiences and perceptions are considered not only between the two generations of participants, but also in relation to the changing context of official discourses from one generation to the next.

This thesis sets out to explore the experiences and attitudes towards education and learning from Chinese individuals' angles within an intergenerational perspective. By researching the education and learning experiences and perceptions of two kinship/cohort generations, this thesis examines the influence of the prevailing and changing government discourses alongside the enduring impact of cultural values. As evidenced in the findings, education experiences over generations reflect both the prevailing government discourses of the time and the changes in discourses over time. Chinese cultural values also mediate the relationships between the official discourses and individuals' experiences and attitudes. Aspects such as social class, regionality and gender also affect the education experiences and perceptions from one generation to the next. This thesis argues that the education experiences and perceptions vary between the two generations mainly due to the different political and socio-economic situations at the time. Moreover, persistence of education perceptions from generation to generation is significantly impacted by the traditional Chinese cultural values. In essence, cultural values are interweaved into the predominant and changing government discourses within the contexts of political, social and economic circumstances that subsequently shape the individuals' education realities.

Furthermore, this thesis suggests that its findings, contributions and implications could be interesting to various readers. This would include Chinese policy makers, educators and practitioners working within the education and learning arena, such as training providers and careers specialists, both in China and overseas.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

"In a matter of decades, society altogether rearranges itself – its worldview, its basic values, its social and political structures, its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later a new world exists. And the people born into that world cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lives and into which their own parents were born."
(Drucker 1995, p.75)

According to Drucker (1995), the world is changing so fast that people from one family generation may not understand the world of the previous generations. These rapid changes can also be seen within the education and learning arenas. This is especially true today with the impact of globalisation, where work environments are changing at a speed faster than we have ever anticipated or experienced (Holmes 2002). For example, companies are downsizing, outsourcing, subcontracting, and merging. Jobs are being eliminated and job natures are changing significantly. Kumar (2004) expresses that competition in the global economy is now moving away from a rivalry of resources, land, labour and capital, towards a knowledge-driven competition in terms of education, technology and skills. The advent of computerisation and the emergence of a wide range of information technologies have also led to enormous technological change that has unleashed the current skills requirements for the workforce (Holmes

2002). As such, what we have learned years ago may not be entirely appropriate or applicable in today's world. Holmes (2003) suggests that these rapid changes require workers to update constantly their skills and increase their knowledge to remain in employment. Those without the required skills or adaptability may therefore find themselves out of work sooner than they expect. During the current era of globalisation and advanced technology, education and learning will be the best armour for us to navigate safely through the uncertain and turbulent future. Hence, Tuijnman (2002) and Holmes (2003) encourage people to engage in deliberate continuous learning, such as in the form of further education, or else they risk being left behind in this ever-changing world.

As a result, buzzwords like 'continuous education'; 'lifelong learning' and 'learning societies' are seen in contemporary government discourses on education and learning (Li 2005), highlighting the importance of education and learning from the society's perspectives to cope with the rapid changes in this world. As such, I posit that government discourses on education and learning are not constant but changing over time alongside the political and socio-economic situations at the time. In order to explore how individuals' education and learning experiences and perceptions are shaped by government discourses within an intergenerational context, this thesis looks at how official discourses on education and learning in China have changed over the past six decades and also the different ways in which these

are articulated in everyday lives of the Chinese individuals over generations. While external forces like government discourses may influence one's continuous education and learning, I believe that there are other factors behind one's education and learning, such as parental influence, gender, social class and geographic variations. To understand where this belief comes from, this has to start with my personal biographic account.

Personal Biographic Account

I am a middle-aged Chinese woman born and raised in Hong Kong. My grandfather was a well-off landowner in southern China who migrated to Hong Kong during the time of the Nationalist and Communist civil war. With the wealth that he brought with him, he started his own import and export company. My father was educated to the secondary school level. Since he belonged to a middle class family, it was not essential for him to have the high educational standards to inherit or manage the family business. My mother was an orphan and graduated from a Catholic convent-sponsored secondary school. Lacking the love and care of a family, my mother's dream was to have a good home and hence she married my father at a young age and became a full-time homemaker. Although she came from another class and did not have higher educational qualifications, she was able to move up the social ladder by marriage. As such, from my parents' upbringing, it was not necessary for them to value higher education, as

they did not see a need for it. During my childhood, my parents neither encouraged me to excel academically nor to seek out intellectual challenges, or provide suggestions for my future planning. I remember that whenever I struggled with my studies, my mother never pressured me but instead soothed me and said, "Don't worry, others march through the door and up the academic ladder, but you only have to slip through under the door". My parents' message was not loud but it was certainly clear. Basic schooling was sufficient and higher academic attainment was not necessary.

When I was a teenager during the 1970s, Hong Kong was in the stage of rapid industrialisation concentrated on its tertiary productions while education development was not in the key agenda of the Hong Kong government (Cheung 2000; Dimmock 2000). It was only from 1970 that Hong Kong devoted more resources to its education provisions by carrying out six years' free and compulsory primary education, and subsequently adding another three years of junior secondary education eight years later (Fung 1986). When I completed my secondary education in 1979, Hong Kong only had two universities so only the academic elites had the chance to obtain higher education locally. Hong Kong's first university was established under the British system in 1911 and only upon the institution of the People's Republic of China in 1949 that Hong Kong had its second university with Chinese as its medium of teaching (Fung 1986). Since I never ranked top academically, attending local university would be out of my reach. My

social class thus became the determining factor for my continuous education. At that time, going abroad to pursue formal further education was a privilege available for children of the middle and upper class families. For example, working as a secretary was the most popular job for girls when my elder sister graduated from secondary school. So, instead of going to a local commercial school, my father arranged for her to study at a well-known secretarial school in England. Then, when I graduated from secondary school, it deemed natural for me to go abroad and secure a foreign diploma too. Making my own decision, I applied to a state-owned Sixth-Form college in England and since Hong Kong was a British colony, I was admitted as a home student paying a minimal amount of fees. With a clear goal to pursing higher studies, I started to enjoy going to school, passing my GCSEs during the first term and progressing well into my A-level studies.

Unfortunately at that time, it was announced that Hong Kong students would no longer be counted as home students and had to pay overseas student fees. With the drastic cost impact, my father decided that he would only sponsor me for a one-year secretarial course. He believed that university was not for girls and that we were more suited to work as secretaries. Being a junior in the family, despite my own interests and dreams, I had no choice but to obey my father's decision. At that same time, a male cousin of mine also came to England to pursue his higher education. While his family belonged to the working class and his father worked as a clerk for my father, they sold their only

house in order to pay for his international school fees. They placed their financial investment in their only son's higher education abroad even when their daughter was working as a factory worker after her compulsory primary school education. As for me, without the chance of higher education, this was the first time I felt that education was very gendered, and that I experienced the reality that female did not have the same access to education as their male counterparts.

After I graduated from the secretarial school and returned to Hong Kong, I followed my mother's footsteps and married at a young age. With my prestigious British secretarial diploma, my first job was a steno-secretary at a renowned bank in Hong Kong. Although I had my own family and a good job with stable income, I always felt that something was missing. Being a secretary was never my wish and the job nature did not fit my personality. I started to develop an interest in self-studying as well as attending an array of part-time evening courses, and finally landed myself in the human resources path. With the financial and emotional support from my husband, I studied all the way from certificate level in personnel management, to diploma in training, to a master's degree in human resources.

After waiting twenty years for my mortarboard and gown, I did not stop here but decided to pursue my doctorate degree. At this point, I was already in my mid-forties and had a stable management job. Hence, whether I have a doctorate degree or not makes no difference to my

work life. As such, I do challenge myself why I feel the desire to pursue even higher academic credentials. I believe that on the one hand, it could be my thirst for knowledge, curiosity to learn new things and the enjoyment I derive from reading books that provided me with the energy to keep pursuing. On the other hand, I am convinced that my own education experiences were fundamentally impacted by the attitudes of my parents who did not value further education. Furthermore, there are other factors that affected my education, some in a positive way and others in a negative way. For example the insufficient emphasis placed on local higher education by the Hong Kong government, coupled with my social class rooting from the wealth of my grandfather, gave me the chance of studying abroad. Yet, the gender bias towards female had put me outside the door of higher education and totally changed my journey of education and learning thereafter. As a result, my constant regret of not having a first degree may have subconsciously prompted me towards my continuous educational pursuits.

Since Hong Kong was returned to the Mainland China in 1997 as a Special Administrative Zone, I am interested in researching within a broader Chinese perspective and not just in a Hong Kong context. In addition, I believed that my parents' values and attitudes towards education has a profound impact on my education and learning perceptions and experiences, therefore I focus my research within an intergenerational context. Hence, this thesis is set within the Chinese

educational discourses framework with an intergenerational inquiry into the experiences and attitudes on education and learning from a group of Chinese post-graduate students and their parents in Beijing, the capital of the People's Republic of China. As there are divergences between the historical and economic conditions of Hong Kong and China, I fully acknowledge that my biography could have an influence on my research agenda.

Additionally, as this thesis is staged within an intergenerational Chinese context analysing education and learning perceptions of Chinese individuals against changing official discourses, I posit that findings of this thesis could also be valuable to Chinese policy makers, educators and practitioners working within the education and learning arena, both in China and overseas.

Research Aims

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the experiences and attitudes towards education and learning from the Chinese individuals' perspectives, to examine this intergenerationally and to explore how Chinese government discourses on education and learning are reflected in those experiences and perceptions. It aims to explore:

1. **Perceptions and experiences on education and learning between the two generations and how these patterns have changed or persisted intergenerationally**

   To understand education and learning experiences and perceptions of the individuals, this thesis seeks to find out why the research informants embark on education and learning, why education and learning is important to them, as well as other factors that have important impacts on their education and learning experiences and perceptions. By comparing and contrasting the education and learning perceptions and experiences of two Chinese kinship/cohort generations, this thesis also seeks to identify whether and how education and learning experiences and attitudes have changed or persisted over generations.

2. **The ways in which government discourses on education and learning are manifested and articulated in the daily experiences and attitudes of individuals from one generation to the next**

   With the intention of examining how government discourses on education and learning are manifested in individual lives from one generation to the next, this thesis explores education in China from its cultural and historical contexts. It identifies key themes on education and learning from the official discourses, and their

changes over generations. This thesis also looks at the variety of ways in which the prevailing and changing government discourses are articulated in everyday lives of the two research groups.

Theoretical Framework

With the intention of exploring China's historical and contemporary discourses on education and learning by focusing on intergenerational changes and consistencies, this thesis draws on the notion of 'discourse', put forward by French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, as its theoretical framework.

Discourse analysis is a broad concept with a variety of understandings of social realities, methods, and applications. This includes, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory, Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse theory, Potter and Wetherell's (1987) interpretative approach, and Foucault's (1972) poststructuralist approach. Discourse analysis is an interpretative, critical process in which historical, contextual, and cultural aspects of socially shared constructions are studied. It examines how discourses are historically, socially, and culturally defined (Stead & Bakker 2010). Poststructuralists like Foucault (1972), think beyond social constructionism and posit that discourse is governed by structures of power, knowledge, and ideology.

Mills (2003) states that using Foucault's work on discourse as a theoretical framework can help researchers organise the information they already know, confirm where they obtain the knowledge, where the power lies and whose interests the discourses might serve, and also how it is possible to think about the ideas of the discourse differently. Hence, I believe that the Foucauldian framework fits well with the aims and objectives of this thesis since it is a process where the researcher begins with a possible outcome in mind and then assemble the pieces of the puzzle to identify the precursors that bring about the outcome (Kendall & Wickham 2004). Within this framework, less attention is paid to the actual utterances/texts that are produced (Mills 2004) but focuses more on the power, intention and ideas generated from the discourses. That said, this thesis is not going to explore the texts of the Chinese official discourses on education but instead, concentrates on the contexts in which the discourses are structured and manifested in people's perceptions and experiences on education and learning.

The word discourse varies in meaning (Cheek 2004), and Mills (2004) argues that it is impossible to narrow it down to one meaning because discourse has had a complex history where different theorists use it in different ways. Normally the term 'discourse' is used as a linguistic concept. Foucault, however, shifts the attention on discourse to both language and practice (Hall 1992). By 'discourse', Foucault meant

"a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall 1992, p. 291)

Foucault (1972) argues that the traditional division between what one says (language) and what one does (practice) should be removed. To him, discourse refers to ways of thinking and speaking about aspects of reality (Cheek 2004), and it directs the meaning about a topic. Foucault highlights that "there is … no universal understanding that is beyond history and society" (Rabinow 1984, p.4), and that discourses are fundamentally tied to their particular socio-historical context and cannot be studied or understood if divorced from this context (Rabinow 1984). Therein discourses further influence how ideas are put into practice and regulate the conduct of individuals in different socio-historical eras (Hall 2004).

According to Foucault (1980), power and knowledge are inseparable. Power is not something a person has, but instead, it is discerned from the effect that discourses have on people (Foucault 1980). This subtle feature of power is constructive in that discourses direct individuals to construe themselves and their worldviews in certain ways (Stead & Bakker 2010). Cooper (1997) suggests that through the process of discourse, ideology is translated as knowledge or truth. From a Chinese perspective, Li (2005) describes discourses that consist of principles and policies as an "imperial sword" （上方宝剑）(Li 2005,

p.87), a symbol of supreme authority that focuses people's minds and actions. As discourses have meanings, effects and could give people the 'truth' about knowledge (Hall 2004), Foucault affirms that dominant discourses could control perceptions of people (Mills 2003) and affect directly on personal identity (Foucault 1972). For example, Chinese students became Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution upon their firm belief on influential official discourses at the time as the 'truth'. In essence, from a Foucauldian perspective, a discourse provides people with a way of 'knowing' reality (Jones 1993) and directs their perceptions and actions. Furthermore, knowledge is linked to power (Hall 2004). Hence, in order to explore education and learning, it is essential to understand how the combination of discourse and power produces a real effect for both the state and individuals.

Nonetheless, Jones (2003) argues that not all discourses carry with them equal authority. At any time in history, as a consequence of power relations, certain discourses will be more powerful than the others (Cheek 2004). This power determines who can speak with what authority, and conversely who cannot (Ball 1990). Although Foucault is well aware of the importance of state control and power relations within discourses (Mills 2004), he adds:

> *"I don't want to say that the State isn't important; what I want to say is that relations of power … necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State" (Foucault 1979, p. 38).*

As such, Foucault suggests that although the State continues to be powerful through dominant official discourses, there are also other powers operating within the social network (Mills 2004). It is important to realise the existence of this societal power generated around the institutions of the State. Accordingly, this thesis aims to explore how Chinese government discourses on education and learning are articulated in the everyday life of its people over generations within a social context. That said, it could be argued that discourse is not a close system but is part of a broader societal context, yet dominant discourses continue to be influential.

In sum, discourse analysis is used to understand and interpret the culturally and socially produced meanings regarding Chinese education and learning. It also emphasises the power and knowledge embedded in these discourses that configure people's meanings of education and learning. Hence, using Foucauldian concept of discourse as a theoretical framework, this thesis explores the historical and contemporary discourses on education and learning within the Chinese context. Such an analysis helps examine the extent of power the State has over individual lives through their official discourses.

Research Design

The conceptual framework is an overall framework about how researchers look at reality (Silverman 2005). It determines "what should be studied, how research should be done, how results should be interpreted" (Bryman 1988, p.4). Having a clear conceptual framework will allow the researchers to engage in social researches with close connection of how one observes the social world (Fay 1987). Within the social science arenas, there are many competing ontological and epistemological positions, of which positivism and interpretivism are the two extremes (Potter 2000; Bryman 2001). These paradigms provide different views from which we understand social reality and the nature of knowledge, and shape how people study their world (Rubin & Rubin 2005). In selecting the research method for this thesis, my decision was based on my assumptions and beliefs regarding the nature of knowledge and the processes through which knowledge can be obtained.

The ontology of positivism is an orderly universe with observable events. In its epistemology, positivists posit that knowledge only comes from "sensory experience by means of experimental or comparative analysis" (Blaikie 1993, p.94) providing grounds for generalisation. In brief, positivists believe in facts and not values, as they assert that values are too subjective (Potter 2000; Bryman 2001). On the other hand, interpretivism brings about ontology in which "social reality is regarded as the product of processes by which social actors together negotiate the meanings for actions and situations" (Blaikie

1993, p.96). In its epistemology, interpretivists view knowledge as the everyday socially constructed concepts and meanings that the social researcher obtained from entering the world of social actors.

By adopting an interpretivist paradigm, this thesis admits that realities are socially constructed rather than objectively determined as per the positivist view. While it is believed that social reality can be constructed by exploring the subjective meanings through which individuals interpret the world, this thesis treasures the variety of interpretations on social phenomena from different social actors' standpoints. It aims to explore and understand the live experiences of education and learning from the research participants' own viewpoints and to understand how they interpret their education and learning experiences. Given this 'understanding and exploration' nature of the research aims, it is suggested that the interpretivist position is appropriate for this thesis. Most importantly, this thesis values the individuals' recollections and interpretations of their education and learning attitudes and experiences, especially on what they say and do, and therein matching the feature of qualitative studies that explore "why people think and act as they do" (Kalof *et al.* 2008, p.80).

A qualitative interview approach is adopted for this thesis because of its ontological position that values people's attitudes, experiences and knowledge as significant exploration. In-depth unstructured interviews were employed to collect data on personal experiences from the two

groups of participants. In terms of sampling method, purposive sampling was used to identify participants who are most likely to provide data that are applicable and relevant to the research question. As perceptions and experiences of education and learning are critical information to address this thesis' purpose and aims, a group of post-graduate students pursuing their part-time master's degree programme with a renowned university in Beijing was therefore selected. While they are already learners engaging in continuous education, they are regarded as appropriate candidates in helping to bring insights about perceptions on education and learning in China. In addition, parents of the student participants were also interviewed to share their education and learning experiences and perceptions to provide an intergenerational angle to the research. With the rapid economic changes and development in China coupled with the unique socio-economic contexts, available education and learning opportunities for these two kinship/cohort generations were very different (Tsang 2000). As such, when this thesis explores the changing experiences and perceptions of education and learning between these two unique Chinese generations, the prevailing government discourses and educational policies at their time might be manifested within their education and learning experiences and attitudes. Furthermore, changes in official discourses over time might also be articulated in the changing experiences and perceptions over generations.

Thirty-four interviews involving twenty-two students and twelve parents were conducted in Chinese, the mother tongue of the participants. Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. Interview conversations were subsequently transcribed into Chinese and confirmed by the participants before being translated into English. Qualitative thematic analysis method was employed using data coding, categorising and identifying recurring key themes during the process of data analysis. As promised to the participants to maintain their anonymity, only their preferred names were used when quoting their dialogues in the relevant chapters of this thesis.

Significance of this thesis

On reviewing current literature on Chinese government discourses on education and learning, it appears that a wide range of educational reforms is in place. China's educational policies and discourses are mainly government-led initiatives and efforts. Over the past six decades after the institution of the People's Republic of China, its educational policy changes were in line with power shifts over different generations of leadership (Rosen 1982; Tsang 2000). For example, there are considerable differences in the educational philosophy between China's influential leaders, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping (Chen 1975; Lewin *et al.* 1994; Pepper 1996). Although they had essential differences in their educational outlooks, education was still the nation's pillar for continuous development. I posit that these

governmental policies together with the influx of globalisation and technological advancements have created external influential factors on individuals' education and learning pursuits. Although Foucault suggests that the State has the power (Mills 2004) to produce contextual knowledge, meanings, and the 'truth' through dominant official discourses, there could be other powers operating within the social network. As such, this thesis seeks to contribute to existing knowledge by examining the social power on how dominant discourses are articulated in people's perceptions about education and learning over generations. It has the potential to generate qualitative insights into the influence of Chinese traditional culture on education and learning perceptions, and into the impact of government discourses on educational reforms and initiatives on individuals' conceptions and practices.

Furthermore, while education and learning motivated by these external forces, such as government discourses, is one thing, I consider that internal motivation can be another entirely. Yet, little attempt has been made in current literature to explore and analyse different views and perceptions on education and learning from the angles of the Chinese individuals. China is a country of 1.3 billion people with diversified background and different levels of intellectual abilities and people have their own personal goals motivating their education and learning engagements, as well as obstacles at different times throughout their lives. Moreover, I argue that people from different generations under

different political leadership have their own unique personal biographies that shape their experiences and attitudes towards education and learning. Therefore, it is worthwhile to contribute to existing knowledge by exploring how the official discourses on education and learning are manifested and articulated within individuals' experiences and perceptions. In addition, this thesis explores changing education and learning experiences and perceptions in relation to the changing discourses within an intergenerational perspective.

Overall, the exploration of how those official discourses are manifested in individuals' experiences, as well as the intergenerational nature by which the exploration of how changing experiences and perceptions are related to changing discourses, are original. As such, I put forward that the empirical findings of this thesis represent an additional perspective to the official discourses on education policies and reforms. It is therefore significant to Chinese policy makers, educators and practitioners working both in China and overseas. For example based on the findings, policy makers can modify their strategies on lifelong learning; training providers can target their training to different client groups; and careers specialists can focus on guidance interviews in helping students identify their own interests and strengths. Detailed discussion on the contributions of this thesis is included in the concluding chapter.

Background Definitions

What is generation?

The term 'generation' has different meanings and therefore has to be clarified. According to Miller (2000), family or kinship generations have the biological lineages whereas cohort generations are based on shared historical experiences.

When referring to family or kinship generation, the term generation is used as a 'genealogical' one with familial meaning describing the kinship relationships between parents and their children (Abercrombie *et al.* 2006). In this 'family' sense, Miller (2000) remarks that generation are concerned with the transmission of values within the family. A generation is made up of an individual and his or her siblings, with the next generation made up of children of the individual and his or her siblings. The time span of a familial generation is the gap in time between the births of an individual and when he or she settles in a family and has offspring, of which it is approximately thirty years (Miller 2000).

A second description of generation is a cohort generation that demonstrates a social cohort within periods of significant social experience (Miller 2000) "whose collective experience of history is shaped by a significant event and whose memory is constructed around recurrent rituals and significant places" (Abercrombie *et al.*

2006, p.164). The meaning of generation in this sense refers to an aggregate group of people born during a specific span of years who are considered different from those who precede or come after them, for example there are historical events that affect the individuals born during that time such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Universal to a cohort generation is 'collective memories' (Miller 2000, p.33) including similar interpretations of the generation's shared experiences. These 'collective memories' from the historical events experienced by a birth cohort provide them with distinct character and reactions to subsequent events that affect their views and behaviours as well as future life chances and choices (Miller 2000; Abercrombie *et al.* 2006).

For this thesis, both the captioned definitions fit well with the groups of research participants selected. The students and their parents being two kinship generations also represent two unique cohort generations under significantly different political and socio-economic environments of China in the past six decades. The parent participants were children themselves during the catastrophic Cultural Revolution so they belong to a cohort generation of internal political struggle with little education opportunities. Their children, the student group, born during the late 1970's to early 1980's belong to the cohort generation of the 'post 80s', the time of rapid economic development in China after Deng's economic reforms introduced in late 1970's.

What is education and learning?

According to Kennedy (2002), education is the planned, controlled and institutionalised form of learning. It relates to compulsory schooling within the four walls of any educational institute, be it primary and secondary school or higher education institutes (Tight 1998). Education is usually confined to childhood or adolescent stages, taught by a teacher in a highly structured manner mainly concentrated on the pre-defined outcomes of learning such as competencies and attainment targets for certain age groups in schools, and students are expected to accept the knowledge and concepts being presented to them (Edwards & Usher 1998; Tight 1998). People often talk about their education in terms of degrees like bachelors, masters and doctorates (Amos 2001). That said, the concept of education is more related to schooling, studying, qualifications and students being taught.

The completion of compulsory education should not be the terminus of learning. Back in the 1920's, Eduard Lindeman along with Basil Yeaxlee already mentioned the comprehensive understanding of education as a continuing aspect of everyday lives (Smith 2001). They suggested that education should not cease when one leaves school, because the purpose of school education is to ensure continuation of education by learning in the process of living. In addition, Chapman *et al*. (2005) argue that formal schooling is the preparation stage for the full development of the talents and capacities of all students; with

schooling aiming at delivering highly developed learning skills to prepare students to enter the workforce after they leave the compulsory education system. Moreover, Bentley (1998) suggests that for anything to be qualified as 'education', two questions have to be answered. Firstly, how well does it equip students to apply their knowledge beyond their formal educational experiences and secondly, how well does it motivate continuous learning. Although education provides the foundation for further learning and personal development (Edwards & Usher 1998), I agree with Holmes (2003) that only when students feel inspired by their learning experiences in their initial education will they carry their thirst of knowledge into adulthood and embark on continuous learning. On the contrary, negative educational experiences may be a barrier for their further education and future learning endeavours.

Learning, on the other hand, is a broader concept with a more complex system and several interdependent aspects, those internal to the individual as well as external influential factors within the social and natural environment (Tight 1998 & 2002; Li 2003 & 2004). Learning is more associated with words like discovering, enjoyment, exchanging information with others and personal growth (Tight 2002; Malcolm *et al.* 2003). Learning also involves a constant internal change process that transforms individual experiences into knowledge (Tight 1998 & 2002; Holmes 2002; Li 2003 & 2004; Crick & Wilson 2005), thereafter modifying their thinking and behaviour (Li 2003 & 2004).

Furthermore, Lewy (2000) states that learning is a prevalent activity that penetrates a person's whole life. Learning is an important part of living, a natural consequence of being alive and cannot be separated from the rest of our lives (Fischer 2000). It is a process that happens all the time irrespective whether one is deliberately engaging in learning or not (Tight 2002; Boud & Solomon 2003). Learning is happening everywhere, is something that occurs throughout one's life regardless of whether or not it is talked about, managed or placed in some kind of institutional practice (Boud & Solomon 2003). Similarly, Tight (2002) posits that people often learn new facts, skills and ideas in their daily encounters, without realising they are already engaged in the learning mode. For example, people may not realise that self-directed activities for leisure and interest are also a kind of learning. Lewy (2000) reminds that learning does not simply occur in formal contexts of schools and colleges, but is a chronic constituent of day-to-day practice, at home, at work as well as in leisure.

Besides learning within a sub-conscious domain, Holmes (2002) brings forward that conscious learning is principally demand-driven where people learn in response to perceived needs (Holmes 2002). For example, the scope of people's learning will depend on their level of needs and how to satisfy them (Tight 1998). After the satisfaction of physiological and safety needs, higher levels of needs such as self-esteem and self-actualisation will be pursued (Maslow 1958). To

achieve eventual self-fulfilment, Tight (1998) suggests that it is the role of individual learners to be in charge of their own learning. Field (2000) proposes that no one can stop oneself from being a learner. Learning is more than being taught and it can be in any form anywhere, in the hands of the individuals to grasp their learning opportunities (Tight 1998; Field 2000; Holmes 2002).

Nowadays, as the business world keeps changing due to globalisation and technological developments, skills can become obsolete and knowledge can become outdated (Kennedy 2004). Field (2001) highlights that the preparation for life in tomorrow's world cannot be satisfied by those knowledge that people learned from initial schooling. It is believed that those who are best educated from continuous learning will have the best options in this ever-changing and competitive economy (Lewis 1997). In order for individuals to survive the economic turbulence, lifelong learning is the buzzword used to encourage continuous learning at all stages of life throughout a person's lifetime, including both formal education at school, as well as non-formal and informal modes of learning (Tight 1998; Aspin & Chapman 2000; Field 2000; Butler 2003; Rausch 2003; Kumar 2004). Nevertheless, education will not be replaced by learning, but it is a sub-set of learning and is the foundation for continuous learning (Smith 2001). It embraces the essence of education, which teaches how to continuously learn, think and communicate, and at the same time to adapt to changing realities (Holmes 2003).

Concluding from the literature, there are distinctive differences between the conceptions of education and learning. However, I argue that different languages may not always carry with them similar connotations on the same concept. While the Chinese and English languages are two distinct languages, there is the possibility that there can be slightly different interpretation on the same notion. As such, the meanings of education and learning in the western sense may not have corresponding translations or meanings to the Chinese. Therefore, this thesis pays attention to the dialogues of what education and learning represent to the Chinese people and not to impose western ideologies on them.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured in six chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 explores the key Chinese cultural values concerning education and learning and it identifies how these Chinese cultural values have changed over time, and why some have become more powerful or less powerful.

Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework for this thesis based on current literature outlining Chinese education discourses. It explores the cultural and historical contexts of education in China. It also looks into the prevailing government discourses on education and learning

under different Chinese leadership and how these discourses have changed over generations. As such, a framework of official discourses, from ancient China and throughout different regimes of Chinese Communist Party leaderships, informs this thesis.

Chapter 4 details the research methodology used in this thesis. It outlines how the research was conducted, and how the data was gathered and analysed. Ethical issues and how they were addressed are also presented.

Chapter 5 explores the education and learning experiences and perceptions of the two respondent groups and therein examine whether and how these attitudes and experiences change or persist intergenerationally. It also addresses how prevailing and changing government discourses manifested within the respondents' education and learning experiences and perceptions in an intergenerational context. This chapter also sheds light on how Chinese cultural values mediate the relationship between government discourses and individual experiences and attitudes.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 6, presents the key findings and its contributions and implications to practices. Remarks on the limitations of this thesis and possible future research directions on related topics are also included.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the experiences and attitudes towards education and learning from the Chinese individuals' perspectives, to examine this intergenerationally and to explore how Chinese government discourses on education and learning are reflected in those experiences and perceptions. I argue that using 'discourse' as the theoretical model is a useful way to understand education and learning perceptions and experiences since discourses are social practices that organise ways of behaving and provide the frameworks individuals use to make sense of the world (Drewery & Winslade 1997).

In the Chinese language, 'studying' and 'learning' is the same two Chinese characters of 'xue xi' (学习). While there is no clear distinction between 'studying' and 'learning' in the Chinese language, people tend to see learning and studying as synonymous. During the interviews, both groups implicitly or explicitly equated studying to learning as they mainly talked about 'xue xi' as formal academic learning within educational institutes with strong emphasis on the importance of gaining the qualifications. None of the participants can recall their 'xue xi' experiences from unintentional or non-academic informal learning situations, such as workplace learning. This could thus be argued that while Confucian beliefs included a broad perception of learning, it could well be their espoused values of their traditional culture whereby their

acted value is on formal education as a vehicle to success. Furthermore, Foucault's (1972) poststructuralist approach stresses the interconnectedness of signs but also of a constantly changing and temporary structure depending on time and context (Stead & Bakker 2010). Therefore, a word such as 'learning' may have a very different meaning in discourse situated in the Chinese culture compared to a non-Chinese culture.

From the findings, there are similarities and differences of education experiences and perceptions between the two generations. The recurring themes revealed the similarities of perceptions behind the notion of education over generations. For instance, both groups expressed gaining 'face' from educational attainments and this is particularly important for those with farmer status from the rural area, reflecting the consistent influence of class and regionality from one generation to the next. Within these recurring themes, there are indeed differences in education experiences. For example, both groups value the importance of education even though the reasons behind are different. The students have this thought from their parents through continuous emotional and financial support in their educational pursuits. As for the parents, their regrets in missing educational opportunities and experiences that education is highly gendered led to their high regard on education. These regrets coupled with the one-child policy became the driving force behind their continuous support to their children's education, irrespective of gender. Moreover,

experiences on the notions of lifelong learning, importance of qualifications as well as the understanding of 'survival' are evidently different between the two cohorts due to different political and economic contexts. These similarities and differences of education and learning experiences and perceptions over generations reflect the prevailing government discourses of the time as well as changes in discourses over time. Moreover, Chinese cultural values that mediated the relationships between the official discourses and individuals' experiences and attitudes could not be undermined.

In sum, this thesis concludes that differences between the two generations' views on education and learning perceptions and experiences are mainly brought forward by the different political, socio-economic situations at their respective times. The two generations' similar regard on the notion of education, nevertheless, is elementally impacted by the traditional Chinese cultural values. Finally and of equal importance, it is the prevailing and changing government discourses which are interwoven within the contexts of political, social and economic circumstances that shape individuals' education and learning realities.

CHAPTER 2
CHINESE CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Introduction

Culture is a very broad, highly complex and intangible concept (McGuire *et al*. 2002). On a day-to-day basis when people talk about culture in general terms, usually they are referring to cultural artefacts, such as literature, drawings and calligraphy, music and instruments, and even drinks and cuisine. Venter (2002a) suggests that these artefacts are cultural products that reveal and support its culture rather than a definition of culture.

Culture is argued to be complex because of its multi-dimensional and abstract nature (Fan 2000). Liu & Mackinnon (2002) state that there are as many different ways to define the meaning of culture, as there are ways to explore and describe the concept itself. Culture can mean different things in different situations, and even within similar fields, different researchers can apply different meanings to it (Venter 2002a). Venter (2002a) states that due to the complexity of culture, there is no way that it can be defined in simple terms and that there is unlikely to be a consensus of what culture really means. For example, A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (1952) in their book 'Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions' identified over a hundred and sixty different definitions of culture. Since there is no one universal definition for culture, they only classified the definitions of culture under different emphasis for readers to decide what culture means to them. Therefore,

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I suggest that to make sense out of any study on culture, researchers have to first clearly define culture within the purpose of their research. To come up with my own definition of culture for the purpose of this thesis, literature on the topic of culture has been reviewed. I postulate that culture is a possible factor influencing human behaviour within an intergenerational context. For instance, culture might shape the education and learning attitudes and experiences from one generation to the other. Hence, materials on culture mainly emphasising human behaviour and social traditions are explored.

In reviewing the literature on culture, the definition by Tylor over a hundred years ago in 1871 serves as a useful start detailing the component of culture:

> *"(Culture is)… that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952, p.43)*

Tylor's definition of culture is very descriptive in nature explicitly illustrating a whole set of cultural values, such as knowledge and beliefs, that feature the "comprehensive totality" (Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952, p.44) nature of culture. Then, with emphasis on human behaviour, Clifford Geertz adds that within a culture, people of the group communicates and develops their knowledge, beliefs and also

attitudes; whereby their experiences are interpreted within the social norms and ultimately guide their further actions (Geertz 1973). Moreover, as this thesis seeks to look at possible changes of cultural values within an intergenerational perspective, besides defining the concept of culture by substance, the definition with emphasis on social heritage or tradition is also of significant value. Mead expresses that culture not only includes the complex whole, but those traditional behaviours developed by the individuals within a social group are "successively learned by each generation" (Mead 1937 in Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952, p.47). Hofstede (1980, 1997, 2001) in his studies also offers further insight into the definition and nature of culture:

> *"Every person carries within him or herself patterns of thinking, feeling, and potential acting which were learned throughout their lifetime. Much of it has been acquired in early childhood, because at that time a person is most susceptible to learning and assimilating." (Hofstede 1997, p.4)*

Hofstede describes culture as the "collective programming" (Hofstede 1997, p.4) of the mind that consists of diverse patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, that is "software of the mind" (Hofstede 1997, p.4), with different programming differentiating various groups of people. He remarks that individuals begin to learn their mentally programmed ways of behaviours first from the family from the day they are born (Hofstede 1997; Hall 1989). This process then continues

throughout their lives as they grow up, learning and collecting life experiences at school, in the work place and in the community (Hofstede & Bond 1988; Hofstede 1997). Hofstede & Bond (1988) add that from generation to generation, different types of cultural traits are transferred and carried on within the social group. Furthermore, since culture is a shared pattern of being, thinking, and behaving, with deeply rooted traditions permeating all aspects of any given society, Gilbert & Tsao (2000) declare that there is really no aspect of human life that is not touched or altered by culture via one's learning throughout their lifetime. Hence, on exploring various appropriate definitions of culture for this thesis, I have defined cultural values as 'A cluster of traditional behaviours, beliefs, and knowledge that are developed within a social group whereby there can be differences in cultural values and traits from one social group to another. These values are learned from a very young age and are passed on from generation to generation that shape members' future behaviours and interpretations of experiences'.

According to Hall (1989), education is deeply rooted in culture and even before formal schooling. More so, young children in their early years have internalised the values and beliefs pertinent to learning in their respective culture (Li & Wang 2004). So to understand the fundamental concepts of the traditional Chinese culture and its educational perspectives, this chapter aims to explore:

- The key Chinese cultural values in regard to education and learning

- How these Chinese cultural values have changed over time, and why some have become more powerful or less powerful

Chinese culture and Confucianism

China is a country with over five thousand years of history and a diverse population consisting of fifty-six ethnic groups (CERNET 2005) as well as having a huge population of 1.3 billion (Li 2005) contributing to the uniqueness of its traditional culture. It is practically impossible to describe Chinese culture in simple terms. Chinese culture has evolved for thousands of years under the influence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Fan 2000; Ang & Ofori 2001; From & Holmgren 2001) covering different features of the lives of the Chinese people including the aspects of education and learning. Turner & Acker (2002) argue that Confucianism has an overriding cultural influence in Chinese society, making it impossible to discuss Chinese education and learning without referring to Confucius and his teachings.

Confucianism is a philosophy about life, a behavioural or moral doctrine with a set of guidelines providing the basis for the norms of proper Chinese interpersonal behaviours (Hofstede & Bond 1988; Hofstede 1991; Fan 2000; Yan & Sorenson 2006). It has been widely believed that Chinese behaviours are deeply rooted in the legacies left by the Chinese philosopher Kong Fu Ze, or Confucius (Chen 1990; Oh 1991; Martinsons & Martinsons 1996; Ames & Rosemont 1998; Fan

2000; Pun *et al.* 2000; Guo 2006; Xu 2006; Yan & Sorenson 2006). Confucius, whose real name is Kong Zhongni, was born in 551 BC (Liu & Mao 2007). He is known for his wisdom, and his sayings are posited to be the fundamental pillars amongst the various Chinese philosophers and gurus (Chen 1990; Oh 1991; Martinsons & Martinsons 1996; Ames & Rosemont 1998; Fan 2000; Pun *et al.* 2000; Guo 2006; Xu 2006; Yan & Sorenson 2006). In the Chinese society, his position is very similar to that of the Greek philosopher Socrates, who lived about eighty years later (Hofstede & Bond 1988). Guo (2006) expresses that Confucius had his unique place in the Chinese history and had been the national ideal of the Chinese people for over two thousand years:

"The Encyclopaedia Britannica published in 1984 declares, 'the doctrine of Confucianism established by Confucius is a synonym of the doctrine of the Chinese nation; if one asks what can represent the traditional Chinese life and culture, the answer can only be Confucius'. A Manual of People's Almanac, published in the United States in 1984, lists the ten greatest thinkers in the world with Confucius at the top." (Guo 2006: p.79)

Confucius, who is named as the 'greatest teacher in China' (万世师表), has been presented as the most influential Chinese educator in the history of China (Xu 2006; Liu & Mao 2007). His teachings involve ethical philosophy, political and educational principles that contain a full

set of guiding principles and pragmatic rules for daily life (Henze 1984; Chen 1990; Hofstede 1991; Oh 1991; Martinsons & Martinsons 1996; O'Keefe & O'Keefe 1997; Ames & Rosemont 1998; Hofstede & Bond 1998; Morden 1999; Fan 2000; Pun *et al.* 2000; Guo 2006; Xu 2006; Yan & Sorenson 2006). Being one of the founders of private schools in ancient China, Confucius dedicated most of his life to teaching and writing (Zhang 2004; Xu 2006). His contributions to education and culture were significant, first by categorising and preserving ancient classics into 'Four Books' (四书) and 'Five Classics' (五经). Secondly, he started the practice of private and independent teaching, and established a complete and systematic theory of education that greatly emphasised the importance of students taking initiatives in their studies (Guo 2006). Furthermore, Confucian philosophies placed heavy emphasis on the development of a man of virtue 'junzi' (君子) (Ang & Ofori 2001). A 'junzi' is expected to maintain a moral standard in shaping human relations by embarking the five virtues, namely humanity/benevolence 'ren' (仁), righteousness 'yi' (义), propriety 'li' (礼), wisdom 'zhi' (智) and trustworthiness/faithfulness 'xin' (信) (Fan 2000; Yan & Sorenson 2006). Confucius believed that it is necessary for a person to establish the right moral values, and his aim of education was to cultivate the 'junzi' with perfect personality (Guo 2006). Therefore to Confucius, education was the fundamental tool to develop the moral qualities of righteousness, uprightness and conscientiousness in the individual; and the purpose of education was

to help the person in living up to what makes him a 'junzi' (Henze 1984; Lee 2000).   In addition to having education, another important feature of a 'junzi' is the ability to cultivate oneself by engaging in continuous learning and to apply that new knowledge to living and understanding that learning is a lifetime task, which is an enjoyable part of being alive (Berthrong 2005).   From this, there is a famous Chinese saying that says 'first cultivate oneself and regulate one's family, then the states will be rightly governed leading to making the whole world tranquil and happy' (修身齐家治国平天下).   Overall, education and learning are at the centre of Confucius' thinking on the creation of an ideal society (Guo 2006).

The tenets of Confucian ethics and philosophies, mainly stipulated in the book 'The Analects of Confucius' (论语) compiled by Confucius' disciples is believed to be most influential literature on the Chinese culture of education, teaching and learning (Cleverley 1991; Guo 2006). Confucius was a diligent student throughout his life (Chen 1990) and advocated that a good education could change people for the better. Turner & Acker (2002) state that education being highly prized within Chinese society was rooted in the doctrine of Confucianism with many quotations from the Analects overtly expressing the importance of education and learning. For example, the first quotation in the Analects "Is it not a pleasure to learn perseveringly?" (Cleverley 1991, p.6) already promotes education and learning as being delightful and

enjoyable (Lee 2000). Moreover, Confucius affirmed that education should be available to all those who were capable of learning and would benefit from it, irrespective of whether they were rich or poor (Cleverley 1991). He also imposed no restriction on age in accepting his students (Guo 2006), and made education available to all males who wish to study and learn. While Confucius' introduction of self-initiated learning embraced the broadness, inclusiveness and continuous essences of education and learning, I argue that it was still gendered excluding female participation in formal learning within the traditional social context. For example, Confucius' Analects led to the common notions of "uneducated women are to be desired as wives and daughters to ensure the safety and sanctity of household and society; that educated women should be spurned and not tolerated; and that men should desire to marry women who are their inferior in education and social status" (Turner & Acker 2002, p.32).

Furthermore, it is a common notion from literature that Chinese people adhere to the Confucian code of conduct (Henze 1984; Chen 1990; Hofstede 1991; Oh 1991; Martinsons & Martinsons 1996; O'Keefe & O'Keefe 1997; Ames & Rosemont 1998; Hofstede & Bond 1998; Morden 1999; Fan 2000; Pun *et al.* 2000; Guo 2006; Xu 2006; Yan & Sorenson 2006). Yet, with the rapid changes in the Chinese society for over two thousand years, it is questionable that Chinese people all live by the Confucian code of conduct on human relationships, social structures, virtuous behaviours and work ethics. Firstly, I argue that

although the tenets of Confucianism have been influential within the Chinese society for thousands of years, there are heterogeneity of beliefs, attitudes and values among its people alongside changes in political, social and economic contexts over generations. China has changed over the past sixty years and is still changing. Chinese culture is therefore not static but dynamic, and so are the Chinese cultural values (Fan 2000). I posit that different cultural values manifested in the lives of different people according to the diverse ways people interpret them during different historical, political and socio-economic environments. Fan (2000) endorses that China's economic reforms, market driven economy as well as its open door policy to the west not only changed the social situations of the contemporary China, but also reshaped some of its cultural values. Secondly, as Confucianism is not a religious philosophy but teachings of practical ethics without any spiritual substance (Hofstede & Bond 1988), Oh (1991) points out that Chinese people may be subconsciously Confucian in their thinking and behaviour without actually understanding its existence. I echo that many of its followers in practice may not be consciously following the Confucianism principles and probably never have any firsthand knowledge of any academic texts about Confucius. Since not only scholars are familiar with quotations from the Analects; everyday Chinese people often use these sayings and traditional stories to instil the importance of education and learning within the society (Yan & Sorenson 2006).

Hence, I argue that this could portray an illusion picturing Chinese people's adherence to the Confucian code of conduct.

As the purpose of this thesis is to explore the education and learning experiences and attitudes of the Chinese individuals, the rest of this chapter will look at those Chinese cultural values relevant to education and learning, including discussion on the changes in these Chinese cultural values over time.

Chinese cultural values concerning education and learning

Chinese culture and its cultural values are broad and complex covering different aspects of the lives of the Chinese people. As this thesis aims to examine the experiences and attitudes towards education and learning, this section narrows down from the broad spectrum of Chinese cultural values (Fan 2000) and thus only explores the following Chinese cultural values, mostly Confucian values, concerning their significance in education and learning.

- Five cardinal relations 'wulun' (五伦)

- Family/collectivism

- Filial piety

- Face

- Knowledge

Five Cardinal Relations 'wulun'

To ensure harmonious relationships in the Chinese society as highlighted by Confucianism (Yan & Sorenson 2006), social behaviour is governed by clearly spelled out rules regarding human interactions (Zhang 2004). The Confucian code of social conduct, namely the five cardinal relations or 'wulun' governs nearly the entire range of human interactions in the Chinese society. 'Wulun' stipulates that respect and obedience must be given to the higher rank by the lower rank in each of these pairs and there are no exceptions to this social order: (1) ruler and subject, (2) father and son, (3) husband and wife, (4) elder and younger brothers and (5) friends and friends (Fan 2000; Kennedy 2002).

> *"Parent and child should stick by each other; husband and wife shouldn't take advantage of each other; old and young should know their place with each other; and friends should stand by their word with each other." (Rosser, et al. 1999, p.7)*

Suggested by Rosser *et al.* (1999) as an essential element for the smooth and harmonious functioning of the Chinese society, it is important for people to accept consciously and fulfil their assigned rank and role within 'wulun' (Pun *et al.* 2000; Noronha 2002). Therefore, behaviours such as righteousness between ruler and subject, sincerity between father and son, distinct functions between husband and wife, order between older and younger brothers as well as faithfulness

among friends, are all expected by the Chinese (Morden 1999; Rosser *et al.* 1999). Hofstede & Bond (1988) also express that the stability of the Chinese society is based on these inequalities with juniors paying respect to seniors, and in return, seniors are obliged to provide guidance to juniors.

In terms of education and learning within this traditional framework, strong compliance and conformity to one's superiors, such as parents, husband and elder siblings are expected (Fan 2000; Noronha 2002). For important education directions, children who are in the lower rank of the hierarchy are expected to listen to those of higher ranks, such as their parents. Similarly, the parents also assume their high rank and status power of 'wulun' and provide guidance as well as directions in their children's education (Kennedy 2002; Borden 2003). After all, to sustain the parents' ranking and power in the family, children are expected to respect the wisdom, knowledge and expertise of their parents, and obey the decision on educational directions and choices provided, irrespective of their personal interests and goals (Sparrow & Wu 1998; Morden 1999; Yan & Sorenson 2006).

I argue that this traditional cultural value of social hierarchy continues to be influential and transcend time from the ancient time to the present China. It was evident from my personal experience in education choices and directions when I was young. Being a junior in the family at that time, I was powerless but to obey the decision of my father who

assumed a higher ranking within 'wulun' on my education directions. Yet, I acknowledge that there might be differences between my research participants and me, because different historical and economic environments influence our live experiences.

Family/Collectivism

In the Chinese society, family is the vital social entity. Reflecting the status of family at the apex, we can see that three out of the five cardinal relations refers to family members, namely father and son, husband and wife, and elder and younger brothers (Fan 2000; Kennedy 2002). In collective societies, individuals do not emphasise the importance of 'self' but stress strongly the 'we' (Humphreys 1996). An individual is not an individual but rather a member of a family collectively (Hofstede & Bond 1988; Hofstede 1991; Morden 1999). In this collective family setting, people consider the welfare and integrity of the family as crucial. From a very young age, children are taught by their parents and teachers to put other family members before themselves, to share their pride, shame, joy and sadness. They are also trained to regard their personal values and desires as being inferior to the benefits of the family as a whole (Hofstede & Bond 1988; Sparrow & Wu 1998; Morden 1999; Yan & Sorenson 2006). In essence, the individuals should have clear goals of furthering the family welfare and to maintain its reputation (Bond 1991; Yan & Sorenson 2006).

Furthermore, to ensure harmony in the family, individual family members avoid conflict and confrontation with one another (Chow & Ding 2002; Kennedy 2002). For instance, an individual may disagree with another member of the family but still explicitly act agreeable and in compliance (Noronha 2002). Venter (2002a) posits that in the Chinese society, the reason for individuals to place family interest on top of their own interest is that they are taught to believe that family is their natural shelter and the overall life support system. They depend on their families for financial and emotional support, so without a family, they will have nowhere to go and no one to trust (Hui 2008). In return, they embrace a strong sense of belonging within their families, and view the maintaining of relationships, interactions and obligations among family members as a lifelong process (Xu 2006).

In view of education, familial authoritarianism is a norm rather than an exception, and unconditional compliance to parental rule is expected from the children in major decisions such as education and religion (Hui 2008). Venter (2002a) mentions that Chinese children's educational choices are determined by and within the family collectively (Venter 2002a); with main focus being better job opportunities that can lead to benefits for the family as a whole. As Chinese individuals depend heavily on their families for financial and emotional support (Hui 2008), approval and endorsement on their educational pursuits from the family are hence essential. If there are diverse opinions on

one's education, in order to avoid conflict and disagreements among family members (Chow & Ding 2002; Kennedy 2002), children normally follow the decisions of their parents. Furthermore, family members collectively take immense and personal pride in the education successes, as well as shame in the failures, of those within their family (Bond 1991).

However, this notion of collectivism is argued to have changed over time and become less powerful within the Chinese society. When China opens its door to the west, components of the western cultures and values are steadily adding their colours to the traditional Chinese cultural values (Yau 1988; King 1996). Upon the success of China's economic reforms, the increasing economic prosperity and material improvement of people's lives have brought about a growing trend of individualism (Sun 2000). Young people tend to become more materialistic and have more thoughts on personal fronts regarding practical returns. The younger generation is now more focused on personal needs and there is generally a lack of community spirit, which could only be seen in the older generations (Jackson & Bak 1998; Sun 2000). I posit that it is understandable that collectivism is getting less powerful from a social perspective, as this young generation is the first generation since the inception of the Communist China to stand on its own feet (Farndon 2008). In their parents' time, people are taken care of by the central government with assigned work, housing and social benefits. Yet during China's move from a planned economy to a

market driven economy, the lifetime job security or 'iron rice bowl' support is ceased, leaving behind a situation where young people have to be competitive in the community, learn to protect themselves and have their own personal value (Farndon 2008).

Although there is a growing focus of individualism in China, I further argue that it is not at the expense of the traditional Chinese values of family, in particular the respect for parents. Chinese culture is more collective rather than individualistic (Trompenaars 1993; Hofstede 1997) within the family context over their identification with the society as a whole. I put forward that if collectivism is related to collectiveness with all people in the society, then China might not be collective in this sense, as Chinese people will fight for the benefits of their family and go against the interests of other groups. This coincides with a well-known Chinese saying 'every family cleans out the snow outside their own door' (各家自扫门前雪) meaning that family is of utmost importance and that people tend to take care of their own family first.

Even under the current social changes in China, family being a vital cultural value within the Chinese society is becoming more influential. For example in Beijing, farmlands are abolished due to urbanisation and people are compensated with good money and relocated to urban buildings. This has resulted in a change in family configurations. Instead of living collectively with extended family members, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, or other even unrelated housemates

(Hofstede 1991), people are residing in their individualised family unit with their nuclear family consisting not only of their children but also their parents. Hence this concept of family, with the powerful influences of parents, is so prevailing that it is not uncommon that children, even after their marriage, still seek the guidance and approval from their parents on important issues such as educational decisions. Accordingly, although Chinese people are driving towards individualism at the society level by expressing their personal opinions and personality characteristics in many aspects of social life, it is suggested that generation after generation, they are still collectivistic at the level of immediate family with own internal attributes taking a secondary role (Youn 2000).

Filial piety

Within the Chinese family, the relationship between parents and children is highly emphasised in Confucianism (Yan & Sorenson 2006). This relationship is based on filial piety, which is the children's devotion to parents, and their positive loving behaviour towards their parents and elder relatives (Xu 2006). Chinese children are bound by filial piety, with absolute obedience and complete devotion to their parents expected (Cleverley 1991). For instance, it is unimaginable that a son would take a different view or be opposed to that of his father, because this act violates the son's filial duty and disrupts the family hierarchy, harmony and integrity. Moreover, it is the moral obligation of the

children to repay earlier parental care and affection (Cleverley 1991). As a result, children are likely to demonstrate filial piety throughout the life of their parents, and be responsible to take care of their parents in old age (Yan & Sorenson 2006).

However, it is important to understand that filial piety is not a one-sided affair and parents have to gain the filial piety from their children. Parents have to perform their duty in taking care of their children and are expected to provide guidance and advice to them throughout their lives (Yan & Sorenson 2006). Zhang (2004) elaborates that if parents wish to see filial piety from their children, they should have a deep love and kindness for them. At the other end, if the children wish their parents to treat them with love and kindness, they should attend to their parents with filial piety too.

Relative to education, Chinese parents tend to make all major educational decisions for their children, because it is the parents' filial duty to take care of their children (Yan & Sorenson 2006). As a return of their support and care, the children listen to their parents on educational arrangements, and work very hard to achieve the expected academic results (Chow & Ding 2002). Furthermore, people also believe that high educational attainments could provide them with a golden gateway to success with favourable economic returns. Therefore, through financial benefits from education, the children are

able to fulfil their filial obligations and support their parents financially throughout their lives.

Yet, I argue that traditionally Chinese parents only expected their sons to provide them with filial duty therefore willing to support their education expenses aiming for financial and social upward mobility (Short 1999). Whereas in the old days, daughters who married away from home (Bailey 2007) would have no filial obligations for own maiden family after marriage. As there are many changes from the traditional to contemporary China, I posit that China's one-child social policy implemented in 1979 brought about changes in the notion of filial piety in terms of gender equality. It is because under this policy, family resources tend to focus on the one child (Tsui & Rich 2002), irrespective of gender, of which in return that one child will have all the resources as well as to solely shoulder the filial obligations both emotionally and financially to their old aged parents.

Face

Social harmony is continuously sought after in the Chinese society not only within a hierarchy or in the family, but also among friends, people at work and others in the society at large (Gilbert & Tsao 2000; Chow & Ding 2002; Noronha 2002). Chinese people believe that harmony is found in the maintenance of everyone's 'face' in terms of one's dignity, self-respect, prestige, respectability, reputation and pride (Hofstede &

Bond 1988; Hofstede 1991; Morden 1999; Ang & Ofori 2001). Gilbert & Tsao (2000) highlight that although 'face' could well be a universal behaviour, the Chinese have developed a high sensitivity to it and refer to it in a much more sophisticated manner than in other cultural groups. The amount of 'face' a person possesses is a representation of one's social status within the community, and when Chinese people interact with one another they will protect, give, add, exchange or even borrow 'face' (Gilbert & Tsao 2000; Chow & Ding 2002). According to Hofstede (1991), "the importance of face in the collectivist family and society is equivalent to losing one's eyes, nose and mouth" (Hofstede 1991, p.165). In this sense, losing one's 'face' is not socially or morally appropriate and also losing others' 'face' through open conflict and overt self-interest is viewed as unacceptable Chinese behaviour (Sun 2000; Chow & Ding 2002; Kennedy 2002). After all, it is the core interpersonal interactions of Chinese people to gain, give and maintain 'face' (Venter 2002a) that is crucial in preserving the interpersonal harmony within the Chinese society (Noronha 2002).

In relation to education, it is a Chinese common belief that others will not look down on them if they have high educational attainments, coinciding a Chinese saying 'everything is low class, except those with education can move up to the upper class' (万般皆下品, 唯有读书高). As such, Chinese parents are very proud of their children who have the high academic achievements. In particular, they like to show off the educational accomplishments and career successes of their children in

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front of their relatives and neighbours, thus gaining a lot of 'face' from others (Chow & Ding 2002). On the other hand, when their children score low academically, they will have a strong feeling of losing 'face' both for themselves and for their family (Li 2004). That said, I argue that this notion of 'face' in relation to social harmony is one thing, yet the social status in relation to 'face' is more important within the Chinese society.

Knowledge

It has been a traditional belief that Chinese people seek knowledge based on their 'haoxuexin' (好学心) that is the 'passion for learning', through their diligence and endurance of hardship (Li 2004). Li & Wang (2004) point out that Chinese cultural values placed heavy emphasis on individuals' intellectual development, skills acquisition and most crucially the love and passion for learning. It is in accordance with the Confucian doctrine of the perfect man, 'junzi', which proposes that Chinese people's traditional purposes of education and learning are to gain knowledge, to expand intellectual ability, to attain moral self-cultivation and to provide social contributions (Li & Wang 2004). Hence, it is argued that education is not purely an academic engagement in obtaining knowledge or satisfaction, but for the learners to become better and more socially and morally responsible people (Li 2004). Li (2004) further elaborates that the reasons Chinese parents send their children to school is not primarily to learn literacy and

numeric skills, but to gain knowledge about the world, to improve their social skills, and to become morally cultivated.

However, within the context of China's economic and educational reforms in the past three decades, I argue that this cultural value is becoming less significant among Chinese learners. As China shifted from a planned to a market-oriented economic system, there have been increased employment opportunities outside the government manpower plans (Li 2005). As those market-required skills are generally lacking in the workforce, employers have to use the level of academic attainment to identify potential candidates from the huge working population of China (Cruikshank 2008). Likewise, the Chinese educational system places high concentration in awarding 'degrees' (CERNET 2005) leading to the perception that this 'piece of paper rolled up and tied with a ribbon' is a guarantee of a good future and a licence to get a good job with good money. As a result, education or formal learning becomes more important than any other types of learning because of its tangible outcomes. Sun (2000) expresses that more people regard formal learning in an instrumental way and are not motivated by the intrinsic value of obtaining knowledge from education. Learning efforts are concentrated on education, and that people's ultimate aim of education is to gain qualifications and have the actual diploma and certificates on hand, to enjoy the practical economic benefits of better career opportunities and higher financial rewards leading to a wealthier future (Liu & Mao 2007; Lynch 2008).

I suggest that this change in the notion obtaining knowledge based on 'haoxuexin' could be interpreted according to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In the past three decades of China's economic and educational reforms, people are gradually moving away from poverty and becoming financial sufficient (走进小康) (Li 2005). As such, Maslow (1958) highlights that people have to satisfy their physiological needs of survival as well as lower level needs of shelter and security before they move on to higher level needs of self-esteem, which involve the desire for strength, achievement and competence and eventually self-actualisation of full capacities and potential. Therefore in current China, the extrinsic motivations of employment security and good future are more influential over the cultural value of gaining knowledge based on one's passion in learning. It appears that only when basic needs are satisfied, will people be able to engage in continuous education and learning for the sake of passion and enjoyment.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to explore the fundamental concepts of the traditional Chinese culture, its cultural values in relation to education and learning, as well as how these cultural values have changed over time.

It has been a long Chinese tradition to place high value on educational achievements (Turner & Acker 2002; Li 2004; Guo 2006; Xu 2006; Liu & Mao 2007). Confucius advocated that the man of virtue 'junzi' could cultivate moral qualities through education (Henze 1984; Lee 2000; Guo 2006). Confucian value of the five cardinal relations 'wulun' that guide human interactions in the Chinese society according to their rank within a hierarchy (Fan 2000; Pun *et al*. 2000; Kennedy 2002) brought about the notion of respect to seniors in terms of educational directions and choices. The second one is family and collectivism, where Confucius' ethical system places familial and group social well being within the society above all else (Bockover 2003), whereby individuals' intellectual development and skills acquisition are not only for their own benefits but also for their families (Li & Wang 2004). Also related to family is the duty of filial piety, where both children and their parents are bound by this duty throughout their lives (Yan & Sorenson 2006). Then, the notion of 'face' in terms of achieving high academic attainments and educational success (Noronha 2002; Huang 2007) is explored. Finally, the seeking of knowledge from education is another cultural value discussed.

As China is changing and so are its cultural values, this thesis adds that the cultural values of 'knowledge' and 'collectivism' are becoming less powerful whereas 'family' continues to be very powerful and influential within China's ever-changing socio-economic landscape.

CHAPTER 3
DISCOURSES ON EDUCATION IN CHINA

Introduction

Currently, China has a very comprehensive educational system, which is broadly divided into three categories (CERNET 2005). First, the basic education category consists of pre-school education, primary and secondary education. Children can enter pre-school as young as three years old and it lasts for three years, and the duration of primary education is six years (Liu & Mao 2007). Secondary education has two streams: the academic secondary education is delivered in lower and upper middle schools leading to the opportunity of higher education; and the vocational secondary education which mainly offers skills and technical programmes (CERNET 2005). The second category of education is higher education. It is only for students who have passed the final examinations for all the levels of basic education and who have also passed the nationwide college entrance examination after their graduation from upper middle school (Liu & Mao 2007). Higher education in China at the undergraduate level includes both academic and vocational subjects. Many higher education institutions also offer postgraduate programmes leading to masters and doctorate qualifications (CERNET 2005). Lastly, adult education includes basic and higher education designed for adult students, and it aims to provide formal learning opportunities for adults who have not had a chance or were not successful in their initial formal education (Liu &

Mao 2007). According to statistics from CERNET (2005), China had over one million educational institutions of various forms and at all levels in the year 2002. Among them, six hundred and seventy thousand were in regular schools of basic and higher education and the remaining five hundred thousand were in adult schools. The government is the major educational provider with increasing number of social partners as co-investors. Currently, local governments are playing a key role in compulsory education, with the central government shouldering the main responsibility of higher education, and social partners contributing in the area of adult education (CERNET 2005).

Nevertheless, education is not a stable configuration but is a complicated pattern of educational components that interact with social trends within a process of constant change (Lofstedt 1980). Government leaderships frequently modify their educational policies, directives and guidelines in accordance with the political and socio-economic development strategies as well as available resources for the educational work of the country. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, China has faced huge socio-economic and political changes. Significant events include the audacious movement of Great Leap Forward towards communism that led to the huge famine in 1958-1960, and the ten-years social turmoil of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, as well as massive economic changeover from state-oriented centrally

planned economy to a market-driven socialist economy from 1978 (Whitehead 1977; Hsu 1983; Cleverley 1985; Davin 1997; Roberts 1999; Short 1999; Tsang 2000; Liu & Mao 2007; Farndon 2008). These discourses are not simple groupings of utterances or statements, but they have meaning, force and effect within a social context (Mills 2004). As a result, China's educational focuses and reforms were in line with these major political and economic changes in the society, in which I postulate that lives of the individuals could be significantly impacted by these changes.

As this thesis aims to explore the ways in which government discourses on education are manifested and articulated in the daily experiences from one generation to the next, this chapter will:

- Look at how Chinese cultural values on education and learning are reflected in government discourses

- Explore the historical context of education in China

- Examine changes in official discourses on education from one generation to the next

Chinese cultural values on education and learning as reflected in government discourses

As the purpose of this thesis is to explore how Chinese government discourses on education are reflected in the perceptions and experiences of its people, this section contributes by considering the

historical government discourses on education and learning and to identify Chinese cultural values that are reflected therein.

According to Chinese historical records, schools were believed to exist back in the Xia Dynasty (c.21st century to c.17th century BC). Yet, with the lack of archaeological materials, it was not until the Shang Dynasty (c. early 17th century to 11th century BC) that the existence of schools was evidenced by archaeological findings, such as inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells (Zhang 2004). Then during the period of Western Zhou (c. 11th century to 771 BC), a systematic school system with the operation of national schools and local schools was established. Children of the officials with nine years of study at the national schools could be appointed as officials by the emperor on passing an examination (Zhang 2004). During the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and subsequently in Tang Dynasty (618-907), the imperial examination system became more significant in the Chinese education structure (Guo 2006). It was only after the breakdown of imperial rule from the nineteenth century after the Opium Wars in 1840s and the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 that the imperial examination system ended in 1905 (Liu & Mao 2007).

In addition to the five Chinese cultural values concerning education and learning as identified in Chapter 2, namely five cardinal relations 'wulun', family/collectivism, filial piety, face and knowledge, two key

values on education and learning are identified from the discourses during the imperial China:

- Education was highly prized

- Education was highly gendered

Education was highly prized

China has a long history of education and schooling with the imperial examination structure being the fundamental backbone of the Chinese educational system (Turner & Acker 2002; Zhang 2004; Liu & Mao 2007). It was during the imperial age that passing the annual imperial examination and being appointed as government officials was the exclusive route for common Chinese intellectuals to acquire wealth, personal power and social success (Short 1999; Turner & Acker 2002). This could be traced back to the Sui Dynasty when the emperor invited more intellectuals to join his government and help govern the country. Scholars and academics that were not from the families of officials were given the chance to participate in the annual imperial examination (Liu & Mao 2007). The government's intention was to identify elite intellectuals, with schools being the primary means of talent cultivation (Zhang 2004). The imperial examination system thus became the main selection vehicle for government officials with job assignments mainly based on academic attainments. Although competition for the imperial examination was keen, it provided the opportunity to change the fates of many Chinese intellectuals by providing them with a route to

success, to get rich and change their social statuses and identities within the society. As a result, education being a dominant agent of societal change was highly prized within the Chinese community (Turner & Acker 2002).

As Chinese families share the pride, shame, joy and sadness (Bond 1991) of other family members, this success in education and upward mobility does not only apply to the individual but is also the source of immense pride and status to their families at large (Li 2004). That said, the influence of family continues to be powerful as parents constantly provide all sorts of support to their children for pursuing higher education aiming for ultimate returns to the family. Yet, if students were perceived as refusing to study for the imperial examination, their family might regard them as socially irresponsible and even immoral since they were not striving to be good (Li 2004). While "the importance of face in the collectivist family and society is equivalent to losing one's eyes, nose and mouth" (Hofstede 1991, p.165), when students experience failure in examinations, they will have a strong feeling of 'losing face' disgracing themselves and their family, especially their parents (Li 2004).

Li (2004) also believes that in order to achieve high educational results leading to possible social success and family welfare (Bond 1991), Chinese learners tend to develop the virtues of diligence, endurance of hardship, perseverance and concentration on their academic studies

(Li 2004).   However, as I argue in Chapter 2, this notion of 'haoxuexin' is becoming less powerful with China's changing official discourses and the move from a planned economy to market economy, with China placing high emphasis on academic elitism and the extrinsic motivation of qualifications.   This could arguably enthuse by the precedent of the civil service examinations held in imperial China. This strong belief of 'making good scholar officials' has been around for over two thousand years (Guo 2006), producing far-reaching influence on the system of school education thereafter. As such, the Confucian model generates an atmosphere where education is highly valued in view of its massive potential benefits.

Education was highly gendered

While education has been greatly prized in Chinese society (Hallinger 2000; Zhang 2004; Guo 2006) with the imperial examination system being the fundamental backbone of the Chinese education system for thousands of years (Turner & Acker 2002; Zhang 2004) and progressively open to everyone irrespective of social origins, females were excluded from this long-established system (Lofstedt 1980). Traditionally, Chinese families mainly placed their hopes and dreams on having a brilliant son who could win a place of honour in the imperial examinations leading to the way of prestige for him and the family at large (Short 1999). I argue that this was related to the highly influential Confucian system, which held a core value that denied women's

access to education (Kristeva 1986). For instance, female inferiority was enshrined in the Confucian ethic 'male honourable, female inferior' (男尊女卑) which prescribed a subordinate role for women resulting in a Chinese saying, 'a woman's lack of ability is her virtue' (女子无才便是德) (Cleverley 1985; Hooper 1991). Hence, education is argued as highly gendered, stemming from the core Confucian values, as women were denied the same access to the same kind of education as men (Cleverley 1985). It was believed that girls only needed to learn how to fulfil their future roles as mothers in terms of household management (Bailey 2007). Therefore, girls from rich middle class families were educated at home by their mothers or governesses in the areas of basic literacy, handicrafts, classical musical and literature (Johnson 1983). As such, it could be argued that although females are denied from formal education, informal learning opportunities to females were indeed in place back in the old days focusing on females' prescribed roles.

Only when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in the bourgeois revolution, and the Nationalist Party formed a republican government in 1911/12, were formal education opportunities available to females. At that time, western missionaries established co-education primary schools as well as secondary schools for girls (Snow 1967). Female secondary school students, although a minority, also participated in the 'May Fourth Movement' (五四运动) on 4th May 1919 to express their

desire for equal opportunity in education (Johnson 1983; Liu & Wang 2009) as well as fighting to abandon the classical Chinese language and to replace it by a vernacular written language so as to enable mass literacy (Davin 1997). Then in October 1919, the central government decided that everyone should have equal educational rights and there should be no differentiation between educations for the two sexes. So, in 1920, higher-level education for women was finally allowed with the creation of Beijing Higher Women's Normal School and also permission granted for women to enrol at Beijing University (Snow 1967; Bailey 2007).

Upon the demise of the imperial China, women had the chance to enter formal education. Yet, female participation rate in higher education was relatively low among the huge population of China, particularly in the rural area (CERNET 2005). From the traditional view where men are superior to women, when faced with poverty, women are the ones who had to work for a living and shoulder family commitments such as childcare and housework responsibilities, and prohibited from education (Zhang 2004). However, I put forward that this traditional view of education being gendered is practically challenged by the implementation of China's one-child policy in 1979. As all family resources essentially focus on the one child irrespective of gender, it is posited that more education opportunities are available to females. However, this is not to argue that these changes in discourses wiped out the gender discrimination in education provisions in China, but it is

a good start to have the education equality in place firstly in the cities and gradually into China's rural areas.

Historical context of education in China

From a historical context, this thesis explores the official discourses on education in China during the era of Mao Zedong. In 1949, since the founding of the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party, China has faced huge socio-economic and political changes. Government discourses on education were in alignment with major political and economic changes in the society at the respective times.

From the imperial China to the new China under the leadership of Mao, the focus of education changed from the high emphasis on academic achievements and talent cultivation to Mao's philosophy of mass education for political and ideological development (Cleverley 1985; Tsang 2000). Mao set forth that education must serve the proletariat politics and be combined with productive labour (Chen 1975; Tsang 2000). Only after Mao's failure in the economic policies of 'Great Leap Forward' and the government's intention to recover from economic downturns were education refocused on quality over quantity. These reforms aimed to produce academically trained elites, while at the same time; vocational education was retained for the masses (Davin 1997; Tsang 2000). However, with Mao's political struggle against his oppositions in the central government, he started the Cultural

Revolution to resume his power (Davin 1997; Roberts 1999). With Mao anti-intellectual attitudes, intellectuals were criticised, humiliated and even tortured (Cleverley 1985; Lewin *et al.* 1994; Lynch 2008). Academic credentials and educational levels were undermined as job assignments were allocated by the central government according to people's political and social class rather than their academic level and achievements (Rosen 1982; Lynch 2008). This therefore brought about a widespread notion of 'studying is useless' (读书无用论) (Unger 1982), which was a stark contrast to the traditional Confucian philosophy of placing high value on education, and where high academic attainment was viewed as the golden path to career success, higher social status, enhanced financial returns and ultimately a better life.

From exploring the history of education reforms during Mao's era, the following key themes from the official discourses on education are identified:

- Anti-intellectualism

- Cultural Revolution

- 'Studying is useless' and informal learning

- Education for women

Anti-intellectualism

Under the leadership of Mao, education did not follow the traditional path of producing academic elites for government positions but proceeded to increase the general education level of the people, especially in the areas of basic education and political awareness. Mao was opposed to knowledge and education for their own sake but affirmed that education must be guided by politics and class struggles (Chen 1975). He declared that although intellectuals were not categorised in the same enemy rank as capitalists and landowners, they were still considered "to be living off the labour of others" (Whitehead 1977, p.56). He also deflated university credentials since he portrayed that the weight given to the academic diplomas helped the educated class to perpetuate their advantaged status over workers and peasants (Unger 1982). Mao further insisted that "all genuine knowledge originates in experience" (Davin 1997, p.45), therefore besides learning from books, one must learn from those engaged in production, like from workers and peasants, and in schools from the students (Lofstedt 1980). He wanted to integrate theory and practice into the educational process, to align education with production needs of the country (Wang 1975), and to reduce the class distinctions between urban and rural, industry and agriculture, mental and manual labour (Pepper 1980; Roberts 1999). Colleges selected students not according to their previous academic achievements but instead considered families of workers, peasants or soldiers who were deemed the most 'virtuous,' and also recommendations by their work units (Rosen 1982).

To comprehend Mao's anti-intellectual attitude, this has to start with a brief biographic account of him. Mao was born in a village where his father was a "middle peasant, neither rich nor very poor" (Fitzgerald 1976, p.2) and his mother was an illiterate peasant woman (Rice 1972; Short 1999). His father wanted the young Mao to be educated but for strictly practical ends, such as bookkeeping, and regarded other reading as a waste of time (Davin 1997; Short 1999). Yet, the rebellious young Mao was always in confrontation with his father and was fond of reading at a young age (Fitzgerald 1976). With Mao's broad spectrum of reading, he was keen on classical literature (Rice 1972) but had a mixed feeling towards it (Chen 1975). While he hated Confucius from an early age because of the severe disagreements with his traditional teachers, he always relied on the authority of classics to win over his father in debates (Cleverley 1985). In addition to his bad experiences from traditional learning at a young age (Rice 1972), Mao's anti-intellectual attitude might also be caused by the harshness and resentment he experienced from the university scholars during his time working as a librarian at the Peking University (Chen 1975; Davin 1997). This might have brought about his negative attitude towards their intellectual achievements. Furthermore, Mao only graduated from the Teachers' Training School when he was twenty-five and never had a chance of entering university (Fitzgerald 1976). This could also be a

factor behind his devaluation of learning within educational institutions (Chen 1975).

With Mao's strong distrust on intellectuals, apart from deflating the value of education and credentials, his first overt anti-intellectual movement was the 'Hundred Flowers Campaign' in 1957 where almost half a million intellectuals were labelled as 'rightist' and punished with different degrees of severity including open confessions and re-education (Hsu 1983; Davin 1997; Chang & Halliday 2005). Then with Mao's anti-intellectual attitude, he believed that literature and arts as controlled by intellectuals had defied his authority. With his severe distrust and zero tolerance for bourgeois intellectuals to be in charge of higher education, Mao encouraged radical students to criticise educators and leading scholars as capitalists by launching the disastrous Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966 (Wang 2003). At this point, an anti-intellectual climax was reached.

In terms of education for the individuals under these official discourses, I argue that educational opportunities to the individuals were largely undermined while workers and peasants were in a higher social rank than intellectuals (Unger 1982). Even though individuals still attended schools, production needs were more important than gaining knowledge from theories. As such, all students were expected to spend at least two years performing manual labour before becoming eligible for higher education (Whitehead 1977). To further assimilate

labour and production into the educational process, students in the rural areas worked in the fields to learn from the peasants like planting and harvesting as well as working on water conservation projects (Wang 1975). As for those in the urban areas, secondary and higher education institutes set up their own factories within the school to ensure students' engagement in production work (Pepper 1980). Also to facilitate the elevation of political consciousness of the students, the curriculum was packed with political education courses with major texts drawn from the works of Mao (Wang 1975), for example quotations from his 'Little Red Book' (毛语录). Consequently, the educational level of the students at this time was very low with no real academic substances. Viewing from another angle, it could be argued that although classroom aspect of formal learning was diminishing, the informal learning favoured by Mao was well in place providing an alternate learning path for the people.

Cultural Revolution

After stepping down from the leadership role following the economic failure of 'Great Leap Forward', educational discourses were refocused back to educational excellence. Mao then started to criticise that too much emphasis was being placed on educational standards, too much reliance was placed on examinations and too much deference was paid to teachers (Roberts 1999). He once again advocated that education should be for the masses by setting the scene for the

forthcoming Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution with his famous statement on education on 7th May 1966:

> *"While the students' main task is to study, they should also learn other things, that is to say, they should not only learn book knowledge, they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production and military affairs. They should also criticise and repudiate the bourgeoisie. The length of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionised, and the domination of our schools and colleges by bourgeois intellectuals should not be tolerated any longer"* *(Lofstedt 1980, p.124).*

As empowered by Mao's statement, radical students saw this as a clear sanction for their revolutionary efforts, leading to political struggles against intellectuals and the traditional Chinese culture (Whitehead 1977; Roberts 1999). Many students from all over the country became Red Guards (红卫兵), or little soldiers with a red armband, upholding their mission of 'destroying the four olds' (破四旧), namely old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits (Roberts 1999; Liu & Mao 2007; Farndon 2008; Lynch 2008). During which, all forms of ancient literature, music and arts were banned (Liu & Mao 2007). Almost everything related to the traditional past and intellectual endeavours in China, such as temples and monuments as well as old Chinese style ornamental gardens of the bourgeoisie (Farndon 2008; Lynch 2008) were destroyed. The importance of education was further

undermined by the closing of all schools and universities, getting rid of formal curriculum, burning of books and the rejecting of all forms of traditional learning (Whitehead 1977). Condemning capitalism became the key mission of education (Wang 2003) where academics were subjected to criticism with public humiliation and torture like "paraded through the campuses wearing dunce's caps … forced to bow continuously with heavy stones wired around their necks" (Cleverley, 1985 p.172).

With the Red Guard movements leading to increased power struggles in the cities and amplified campus violence, Mao decided to disband the Red Guards organisation in spring 1968 (Roberts 1999). Then in order to split their built-up power over the years, Mao sent the young people to the countryside to be re-educated by the poor and the lower-middle peasants (Liu & Mao 2007; Farndon 2008; Lynch 2008). Consequently, formal education was further weakened when high school students and teachers were sent "to go up to the mountains and down to the villages" (上山下乡) (Lynch 2008, p.95). During this time, many of the students went unwillingly because they felt that they were placed in a position that was politically inferior to the peasantry (Unger 1980).

The period of the Cultural Revolution was a very disruptive one for the Chinese society in general. In particular, the Chinese educational system was most radically affected (Wang 1975). Emphasis on

education faced huge changes from the imperial China to the Cultural Revolution. During the time of the imperial China, government placed high emphasis on talent cultivation through schooling and examination system. As such, education was the key route to success and the enhancement of social status and economic returns. Yet, during the apex of the Cultural Revolution, there was a virtual collapse of the Chinese educational system (McComb 1999; Liu & Mao 2007; Lynch 2008). In the early 1970s when colleges and universities resumed their intake of new students, selection of students was mainly based on their family background of political virtue rather than academic merit (Chen 1975). People did not have to go through entrance examinations to go to college or present credentials to validate their academic attainments (Meng & Gregory 2002). Although schools were supposed to be resumed, a large part of the students' time was still devoted to active participation in revolutionary and political movements (Chen 1975). All in all, there was a major decrease in the number of educated young people with one hundred and thirty million students losing their educational opportunities during their prime learning age leading to a unique cohort of 'lost generation' in the Chinese history (Liu & Mao 2007; Lynch 2008).

In terms of education for the individuals, the educational infrastructure was indeed decimated because of the political struggles, whereby the nationwide educational system was placed in the hands of the 'reds' and the 'proletariat' instead of the bourgeois intellectuals (Unger 1982).

With school and university campuses controlled in turn by teams of Red Guards, soldiers from the People's Liberation Army, and finally workers and peasants, China's competitive educational ladder was destroyed (Unger 1982; Liu & Mao 2007). Educational standards were lowered with the shortened years of schooling and the making way for peasants and workers to gain access to education. In addition, teaching quality in higher education dropped dramatically when qualified lecturers and professors were sent to the countryside for re-education (Meng & Gregory 2002). More so, I argue that the devastation brought about by 'destroying the four olds' was drastic and deeply affected Chinese people's understanding and appreciation of their traditional history. Young Chinese nowadays has limited knowledge on traditional Chinese literature such as ancient writings and poems, as the Red Guards destroyed most of the valuable Chinese literature during the revolution.

During the Cultural Revolution, the term ideology appears to be more relevant than discourse because individuals could be duped into Mao's conceptual systems, which arguably were not in their own interests. However, the term discourse is still being used in this thesis because there is no evidence that the parent group was necessarily passive victims of Mao's systems of thoughts, since they became Red Guards voluntarily. Very often, people accept a given idea to be 'true' mainly due to the power of the dominant discourse.

'Studying is useless' and informal learning

During the Cultural Revolution, with intellectuals being classified as the 'stinking ninth category' (Hsu 1983) facing continuous criticism and torture (Cleverley 1985; Lewin *et al.* 1994; Lynch 2008), Mao's anti-intellectualism had brought about a widespread notion of 'studying is useless' (Unger 1982). Mao firmly believed that removing the upward mobility brought about by education could wipe out the achievement-mindset implanted by the bourgeois intellectuals (Unger 1982).

As a consequence of Mao's anti-intellectual attitude, this notion of 'studying is useless' was prevalent among youngsters at the time as jobs for graduates were allocated within the central government manpower planning system (Unger 1982). Academic achievements were undermined as placements were based on class and political background and not on their educational level and attainments in terms of qualifications and credentials (Lynch 2008). In addition to job assignments, all manpower movements were also centrally controlled with limited self-initiated upward mobility (Cheng *et al.* 1999). Within this planned manpower system, the central government also provided a lifetime stable job and benefits or 'iron rice bowl' (铁饭碗), offering the same lifetime benefits and salary to workers in the same rank (Venter 2002b). A common saying that goes 'working hard you earn thirty-six, doing nothing you still earn thirty-six' (做事三十六，不做三十六) was a good illustration. Venter (2002b) expresses that these egalitarian

salaries and rewards during the time of planned economy in China neither encouraged any enhancement on worker performance nor provide any incentive for further education.

As the need for academic credentials were devalued within the restricted central manpower planning and benefits systems, the widespread notion of 'studying is useless' confirmed people's common belief that going to school for education did not necessarily lead to greater opportunities for good careers. For example, even workers and peasants could work as teachers and administrators of schools and universities (Chen 1975). This de-linking of academic achievements from occupational futures very much demoralised people's pursuit in education because they knew that their future prospects were beyond their own control, and success in academic attainment and endeavours could no longer allow them to reach a high-status job (Rosen 1982; Unger 1982). Followers of this notion chose to stay in their social class as peasants or workers and had minimal incentive to pursue any continuous education for upward social mobility (Lewin *et al.* 1994).

Rooted from Mao's anti-intellectual standpoint, he did not regard education as being confined within classroom walls nor did he see learning as only being for a restricted period of a person's life (Price 1979). Rather, he was in favour of informal learning that stemmed from his personal affection to reading. According to Cleverley (1985),

"Mao was often to be found in libraries. He read while eating in the canteen, frequently browsed in Changsha's new and second hand bookshops, carried his texts into the nearby hills, and read in bed where he rigged up a bamboo pole to draw the light cord over his head. A third of the money the family contributed to his upkeep went on reading materials, mostly newspaper and journals." (Cleverley 1985, p.77)

Before China's liberation in 1949, Mao already played a major role in shaping the informal education environment of the Chinese Communist Party (Lofstedt 1980). For example, in 1921 Mao set up 'Self-study University' in Hunan where there were "no formal classes, no fees, no examinations and no diplomas" (Cleverley 1985, p.89). Students took optional courses and played a more active part in their own studies. They were encouraged to read the text themselves and to comprehend accordingly. Then there were discussions in study groups as well as the occasional stimulus of a lecture from an invited speaker (Davin 1997). Teaching methods were groundbreaking with tutors limiting their role to facilitators. Tutors were made available to aid students in their self-study but the main emphasis was on independent reading and reflection by the students (Lofstedt 1980; Cleverley 1985).

Upon in power, Mao continued to advocate that education should be for the masses and that there should be a link between education and production. For example, in his development of adult education, spare-

time education system was in place offering tertiary spare-time college courses to worker and peasant adult learners throughout the country (Roberts 1999). Classes were organised around the hours that would not interfere with work schedules. Chen (1975) states that this type of non-formal channel of learning proved to be very beneficial to those otherwise deprived, and provided people with career advancement opportunities in factory and commune to leadership positions (Chen 1975; Lofstedt 1980).

All in all, Mao's educational philosophy based on his anti-intellectual attitude, was quite the opposite to the time of the imperial China where high emphasis was placed on education and schooling as well as focus on academic excellence by using examinations to identify talented individuals suitable for government positions (Liu & Mao 2007). It is argued that under the reign of Mao, education was of lower priority compared to politics and class struggles (Chen 1975). Yet, it could also be argued that Mao being a pioneer in informal learning had also written a new chapter in China's learning landscape.

Education for women

During the time of the imperial China, the traditional way to rule the country was to keep education to men (Snow 1967). Moreover, under the Confucian value system, women were completely denied of access to education (Kristeva 1986). Not until the entry of foreign missionaries

into China and their launching of missionary schools after 1911 did the educational opportunities for women start to improve (Tucker & Acker 2002). As further noted by Tsui & Rich (2002), it was only from the early 1950s that the communist government encouraged urban parents to provide education to all their children. As a result, the enrolment rate of primary school-age girls moved up from fifteen percent in 1949 to ninety-eight percent in 2002. This was not only seen in primary schools, as female student enrolment reached forty-seven percent for regular secondary schools reflecting gender equality because of the nine-year compulsory schooling system. By the 1960s, enrolment rate at urban high schools was almost equal between the sexes (CERNET 2005).

In the area of higher education, in the fall of 1952 the Chinese government decided to pay for the tuition, boarding and food for those in universities, technical colleges and teachers' training schools irrespective of their gender (Snow 1967). Snow (1967) highlights that this was a special stimulus for women to participate in higher education since the worry on expenses were no longer a concern for them and their parents. Such emphasis that the government placed on education proved successful with a remarkable increase in the number of women students attending day and night schools between 1949 and 1952 (Cleverley 1985; Roberts 1999).

Despite these positive statistics showing gradual educational equality for females, Lynch (2006) comments that women from the rural areas are still prejudiced from receiving education. The first major obstacle for their equal participation in education is the deeply rooted traditional social attitudes of the family, which undermines the importance of females (Hooper 1991). As quality private higher education is not free in China, Chinese families, particularly in the rural areas, are more inclined to pay for the boys' education hoping that when they grow up, they will provide for the family in return (Lynch 2006). When there are financial considerations, parents often choose to keep their daughters out of school, usually withdrawing them after the compulsory education and assigning them to help with family chores and farm work.   Hooper (1991) reminds that this is particularly apparent in rural areas where women provide no financial return to her own family after marriage. Secondly, it is the traditional norm in Chinese society that men are less inclined to marry women with higher educational attainment than themselves, and therefore, a woman's pursuit for higher education would reduce their chance of finding a husband (Broaded & Liu 1996). Traditionally, a woman's social position depends on the status of their father, husband and son and had little to do with their own profession (Liu & Wang 2009). As Chinese women tend to view marriage as their key route to upward social mobility (Hooper 1991), they would rather give up an advanced education and professional employment for the chance of marrying well.

Although the Cultural Revolution was devastating, equality for females was in fact achieved when women were given partnership in the bureaucracy of power (Snow 1967). Rai (1999) comments that this chaotic time actually allowed female Red Guards to join in political struggles. Same as their male counterparts, they had the opportunity to travel all over China and experienced the same informal learning experiences from the peasants (Fenby 2009). Treated in equal footing, they also enjoyed the same prospect to enter higher education basing on political rank and social class, and not academic achievements (Hooper 1991; Liu & Wang 2009) or gender. Furthermore, Mao's wife launched a campaign during the latter part of the Cultural Revolution criticising Confucius for his derogatory attitude towards women, fighting to rectify gender discrepancies and raise the social status of women (Rai 1999).

Overall, gender equity in education has been on the agenda under different leaderships over generations. However, female illiteracy was still the outcome from the conservative attitudes towards women's education and it is argued that two thousand years of traditional attitudes cannot be wiped out in a few decades and may take longer time to change (Hooper 1991; Lynch 2006).

Changes in educational discourses over generations

Upon the death of Mao and the downfall of the 'Gang of Four' (四人帮), comprising Mao's wife and three other comrades, Deng Xiaoping was restored to take charge of the government in 1976. In December 1978, the significant Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Communist Party Central Committee (十一届三中全会) marked the triumph of Deng's reform idea (Hsu 1983) approving the historical change of China from a centrally planned socialist economy to the new hybrid of capitalism within a market-based economy (Li & Vinten 1997). This Session also gave authority to Deng to pursue the idea of 'Four Modernisations' (四个现代化) in the reform of agriculture, industry, defence and education (Hsu 1983; Lynch 2006 & 2008). These paved the roadmap for a series of education reforms thereafter. For example, the education guidelines to cope with the transition to an emerging market economy was established (Mok *et al.* 2009), increased funding for education was in place as Deng envisioned that a lack of education in rural areas would exacerbate social inequalities and hinder national development (Li 2005). In addition, the Compulsory Education Law was passed allowing all school-age children, irrespective of gender, class and regionality, in China to receive nine years of compulsory education (Pepper 1996; Murphy & Johnson 2009). Jones (1993) argues that the emergence of new discourses, which in turn define and control in new ways, reflect different forms of power under different regimes. It is merely a shift in power relations where one way of defining reality is replaced by another.

Official discourses in the post-Mao period were signified by Deng's education reforms focusing on meeting the economic needs of the country as well as improving the material conditions of people's lives through academic achievements (Tsang 2000). The following changes in official discourses over time are identified:

- Economic growth/market economy

- Academic elitism

- Lifelong learning

- Harmonious society

Economic growth/market economy

Historically, Mao's educational philosophy was mainly for political and ideological development. His educational provisions were mainly targeted to achieve economic restructuring by increased educational opportunities for the masses, especially for the uneducated adult and peasant groups, in order to enhance their political awareness (Cleverley 1985; Tsang 2000). Yet, upon Deng's return to power in the central government following the death of Mao, socialism had given way to capitalism. The socialist path of putting emphasis on equality for all and group participation was changed to a capitalist way of thinking, placing high priority on individual material incentives (Liu & Mao 2007). China's priorities were thoroughly reorganised, with

Deng's 'economic in command' fully replacing Mao's 'politics in command' (Hsu 1983, p.viii).

Deng's key focus was to restore China's social stability and to rejuvenate China's economic position in the international stage (Tsang 2000). During this period, education provision was mainly a by-product of economic reforms. Main educational reforms were in response to the need of economic and social development of the country within the context of a market-driven economy (Li & Vinten 1997). As such, Deng's primary objective about education had an economic orientation with a key aim of improving the material conditions of people's lives through academic achievements (Tsang 2000). To cope with China's economic growth as well as China's change from a centrally planned socialist economy to a market-based economy, it underlined that China's education system need to produce more capable and qualified talents through the expansion and improvement in quality for all levels of education (Lewin *et al.* 1994). Lewin *et al.* (1994) quoted Deng's speech of 1985:

> *"Our country, its power and the potential of economic development depend increasingly on the quality of labour and on the quantity and quality of the intellectuals." (Lewin et al. 1994, p.17)*

However, the biggest problem for China's modernisation was the shortage of qualified, educated and skilled personnel (Hsu 1983).

Therefore, Deng focused on the education of top-notch high quality young people with the intention that they would be the ones who could lead China into industrial modernity. To avoid the old debates on populist versus elitist education (Pepper 1996), Deng put forward his philosophy of a two-track education system or 'walking on two legs' (两条腿走路). On the one hand, he provided education opportunities to the highly qualified elites, and on the other hand offered vocational training and adult education opportunities to those less academically able (Bastid 1984; Tsang 2000; Fenby 2009). Moreover, the huge population of under-educated people could still hinder the nation's economic development and prosperity. Therefore, Deng committed a gradual implementation of a compulsory nine-year primary to junior high school education (Tsang 2000).

As the educational development of China was still inadequate to provide high calibre talents to support the rapid economic growth of the nation, the central government further raised people's attention to the primary role of knowledge, and notions of the knowledge economy and innovation became the topics of discussion in the society (CERNET 2005). In order to cope with the development and challenges of the knowledge economy, the system of vocational schools was quickly expanded providing an alternative educational track for those who did not meet the standards for higher education. Adult education was also vigorously restored and redeveloped. For example in April 2001, the

Chinese government removed the restrictions on age and marital status from the eligibility criteria for the nationwide college entrance examination (Liu & Mao 2007), opening the door of higher education to those that were caught up in the Cultural Revolution and missed education opportunities at their prime age. Yet, I argue that the ten-year break in education during the Cultural Revolution had in essence dampened the education system making it unable to revitalise rapidly. For instance, the Cultural Revolution cohorts were not able to take the university entrance examination until they were in their late twenties, or even early thirties. By this time many of them already had family responsibilities, thus forgoing earnings to enter the university was often a difficult decision for them. As such, adult education involving studying by correspondence or self-study provided them with a good second chance at gaining education while they can also carry out their full time jobs and family responsibilities.

Overall, through the discourse changes, education has mainly been promoted from the economic orientation, which focuses on the material improvement of people's lives. I posit that this has heavily influenced individuals' attitudes towards the purpose of education since the focus on economic improvement has steered people towards a capitalist attitude concentrating on material incentives. This was quite the opposite to the traditional thought of obtaining knowledge from education as well as the traditional belief that Chinese people seek knowledge based on their 'haoxuexin', that is the 'passion for learning'.

Academic elitism

During the time when Mao was in power, intellectuals were challenged and discredited. With Mao's anti-intellectual attitude, he was opposed to knowledge and education for their own sake. He also regarded the emphasis on academic credentials as a competitive advantage for the intellectuals over the masses (Unger 1982). His anti-intellectualism was at its peak during the Cultural Revolution, where intellectuals were classified as the 'stinking ninth category' (Hsu 1983) and were put to open criticism and torture (Cleverley 1985; Lewin *et al.* 1994; Lynch 2008). The importance of education was further undermined when all schools and universities were forced to close down and that students and teachers were sent to the countryside for re-education by the peasants (Liu & Mao 2007; Farndon 2008; Lynch 2008).

When political power shifted to Deng after Mao's death, educational emphasis once again changed from mass to elite, manual to mental as well as worker to intellectual (Lewin *et al.* 1994) representing a quality instead of quantity scenario in China's education provisions (Pepper 1996). Deng's approach to modernise education was practical and he wanted to train China's brightest young people to lead the nation's move into industrial modernity. Educational reforms were focused on producing elite intellectuals and skilled workers through education to meet the demand of a market-driven economy. As such, academic

ability was once again important to schools, intending to recruit the best students and help them cultivate their talents (Rosen 1982).

In support of intellectualism, Deng first rehabilitated teachers and students' social statuses and resumed the pre-Cultural Revolution educational model (Wang 2003). Instead of being the 'stinking ninth category' (Hsu 1983), intellectuals were officially re-ranked as the 'fragrant third' just after workers and peasants (Cleverley 1985). The nationwide college entrance examination was resumed in autumn 1978 (Liu & Mao 2007; Lynch 2008). Admissions criteria were reverted to academic merit and the two-year work requirement before college admission was abolished (Pepper 1980). Those who had completed senior high school in 1966 were entitled to take the examinations and compete with other senior high school graduates for university admissions (Meng & Gregory 2002). Furthermore, Deng adopted a substantial report on educational development from the World Bank, which stressed the imperative need to adapt the educational system to the demands of rapid economic development (World Bank 2009), and urged that full attention be given to the proper training of a limited pool of highly qualified personnel and to improve on basic schooling (Bastid 1984). From that, Deng focused on developing academic excellence with the intention of placing educational quality at all levels and developing key educational institutions at various levels (Tsang 2000). For example, higher education based on fiercely competitive standardised national examinations, qualified technical and scientific

personnel trained from selective colleges and universities, and the development of key schools at secondary and primary levels to provide sound fundamental general education were arranged (Bastid 1984).

With China's rapid speed of industrialisation after Deng's economic reforms since 1978, China has been moving steadily from a planned economy to a socialist market economy creating considerable impact at the individual level. In response to the change in official discourses towards academic elitism, the notion of 'iron rice bowl' providing for a secured lifetime career became a thing of the past. During which the central job allocation system was abolished and academic achievements become more important within the market-driven manpower market (Tsang 2000). China's open-door policy and market economy together with the establishment of private businesses as well as multi-national companies, led to the competition for more educated people (Cortazzi & Jin 1996). To get the best-qualified personnel to facilitate their business growth, more and more employers rely on the level of educational attainment to identify potential candidates from the talent market (Cruikshank 2008). That said qualifications and certifications become the measurement of talent in their hiring process and the quality assurance on one's skills (Raddon 2007; Cruikshank 2008).

As a result of this change in official discourse, it is argued that Chinese individuals tend to pursue higher qualifications and accumulated more

education credentials to convince potential employers that being academic elites they are more suitable for employment. Also, young people nowadays believe that with qualifications on hand, there will be career advancement opportunities and promotions, increased marketability for future success in job seeking within the labour market, and also economic benefits like potential increases in earnings (Tamkin 1997; Turner & Acker 2002).

Lifelong learning

From a historical perspective during Mao's era, stemmed from his biography, personal interest and anti-intellectual attitude, Mao favoured informal learning through self-study and advocated that learning should not be confined within classroom walls and restricted by age (Price 1979; Cleverley 1985). He believed that education should integrate theory and practice and that knowledge comes from experiences (Davin 1997). Therefore, besides learning from books, one must learn from those engaged in production (Wang 1975; Lofstedt 1980). Informal learning was at its peak during Cultural Revolution where schools and universities were closed, and students learned informally from travelling around the country and from the peasants (Farndon 2008; Lynch 2008).

Changing over to the post-Mao era, to avoid the old debates on populist versus elitist education (Pepper 1996), Deng further enhanced

educational equality, such as nine-years compulsory education with special emphasis on the implementation in the rural areas (Tsang 2000; Li 2005). Moving onto the twenty-first century, China, like any other industrialising countries in the Asia-Pacific region, proceeded with the speed of industrialisation. Its change from a planned economy to a market economy had brought about significant changes in skill demands and ever-increasing need for talents (Green *et al.* 1994). In 2002, Chinese President Jiang Zimen opened a new chapter for the socialist modernisation with Chinese characteristics (Li 2005). His idea of 'building a moderately prosperous society' (奔向小康) in an all-rounded way emphasised the importance on economic growth with continuous development through new prospects of education, such as building a learning society with all citizens involved in lifelong learning (Li 2005).

According to Kumar (2004), lifelong learning is an imperative policy consideration from the government perspective, and no country is able to dismiss the impact of lifelong learning for sustaining economic, socio-political and cultural growth within their society. While facing the prime forces of globalisation, the workplace is also undergoing constant change and readjustment with some traditional job positions vanishing and new ones emerging. Hence, in order to improve the overall educational quality in meeting the ever-changing needs in the labour market (Liu 2009), Jiang's widespread notion of 'knowledge can

change your destiny' (知识改变命运) encouraged people to learn within the formal, informal and non-formal settings throughout their lives (Li 2005). His notion of lifelong learning promoted that citizens having access to a good education is the foundation of a learning society, and the completion of school-based education is no longer regarded as the terminus of a person's educational journey. Jiang also encouraged the creation of learning families, learning organisations, learning communities and learning cities and to achieve the establishment of a learning society with lifelong learning for all (Li 2005). As a result, strong emphasis was placed on continuous education and training of the already-educated elite who would be leading China's modernisation programme in the coming decades (Liu 2009). Furthermore, the development in adult education in China also drives the transition from traditional school-based education toward lifelong learning. For example, with the aim to establish a learning society and encourage peoples' learning during adult lives, China's long-term educational development plan has recognised distance learning as a supportive mechanism to its citizens' continuous education and lifelong learning (Li 2005).

Furthermore, it is argued that Jiang's articulation of lifelong learning was not new to China. The notion of lifelong education was first introduced in China at the end of the 1970s after the Cultural Revolution. The report 'Learning To Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow' by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was translated to the Chinese language (Li 2005). Although the government started to pay attention to the importance of adult education in the regeneration of the country, such western-imported idea of lifelong education and learning had not gain much ground in the Chinese soil at that time (Cheng *et al.* 1999). Moreover, Field (2000) points out three indicators of a learning society. Firstly, most citizens of that nation continue to take part in organised learning activities throughout their adult lives, be it employment related or purely for leisure. The second indicator is that people enrol for post-secondary education because of different learning needs or demands rather than according to their chronological age. Lastly, the extent of opportunities for non-formal learning in people's daily lives is also a good indicator of a learning society.

There are several experimental learning communities around China, which are experimenting with the concept of continuous education and different modes of learning, such as the ones in Chaoyang District in Beijing. However, China is still a long way from being a learning society. In order to create a learning society, the main responsibility of learning has to be passed to individuals. Even though there are government policies and guidelines encouraging lifelong learning for all, they are mainly concentrated on what and how it should be done. In addition, many Chinese books are published on the topic, but again they are promoting the concept of lifelong learning from the angles of government and educational providers. Thus, I comment that the

pursuit of lifelong learning is still a long-term mission since most of the government's lifelong learning initiatives are focused on people's engagement in continuous formal education rather than embracing the broader concept of informal and non-formal learning.

Harmonious society

The ten-year Cultural Revolution orchestrated by Mao was one of the most catastrophic and disruptive periods in the history of China, with the traditional Chinese culture and educational system drastically affected (Wang 1975). During this time, the Chinese educational system virtually collapsed with all educational institutions closed and intellectuals tortured and sent to the countryside for re-education (McComb 1999; Liu & Mao 2007; Lynch 2008). While one generation of Chinese people's education was 'lost' during Mao's Cultural Revolution, Deng's economic reforms had brought about educational reforms for the new generations.

Into the twenty-first century, Chinese President Hu Jintao's 'Scientific Outlook on Development' (科学发展观), dedicated to promote social harmony, and was officially adopted by the central government, elevating the importance of education to a higher level. In line with the educational philosophy of Deng and Jiang, Hu continues to consider education as the cornerstone to rejuvenate the nation. Hu firstly opts to build a caring and humane society aiming to make education and

learning an enjoyable process (Boshier & Huang 2006). His wish is to make education and learning a pleasurable experience based on personal interests, needs and not confined by age (Fenby 2009). For instance, through the provision of adult education, older people can also develop learning habits and maintain healthy independent lives with self worth and fulfilment through different modes of learning, be it formal, informal or non-formal. Since learning opportunities are offered to older people based on their interests and needs rather than their age, I argue that this change in official discourse is particularly imperative giving the 'lost generation', who are now into their retirement age, further chances for education and learning within a relaxing and enjoyable learning mode of their choice.

Secondly, Hu intends to turn China into a harmonious society rich in human resources by providing equal access to education (Li 2005) irrespective of class and regionality. His vision to build a 'harmonious society' is to look after the poor and disadvantaged and to create wealth for them by redirecting more of the development investment away from the booming coastal regions towards the struggling interior in the western regions (Farndon 2008). For example, financial investment was increased for education in the countryside so that all fees for the nine years of compulsory education was abolished as from 2007 (Murphy & Johnson 2009). When looking at Hu's dogma of a 'harmonious society', which aims to reduce national inequalities, I put forward that Hu's concern for the poor in the disadvantaged areas was

rooted from his experiences during the Cultural Revolution. Hu was born in Jiangsu in 1942 and both of his parents were teachers. Educated at Tsinghua University, he was sent to the poor countryside to be re-educated by the peasants during the Cultural Revolution and spent fourteen years in the poor province of Gansu (Fenby 2009). As an intellectual with firsthand experience of the hardships faced by the poor, Hu's commitment to achieve equity and establish a harmonious society to move China forward is argued to be understandable.

However, Murphy & Johnson (2009) remind that it is not easy to combat educational disparities across regions and social classes in China's development process, due to obvious differences between the rural and urban areas. Because of early economic development, people from the eastern coastal major cities are in general better off than those in the inner parts of the mainland. As such, they are in a better position to pay for higher quality educational services strengthening their children's educational advantages (Murphy & Johnson 2009). From this reality, I do not agree with Foucault's (1972) assumption of fair access to discourses, because those less privileged lack access to education and knowledge, and hence, prevent them from easy access to and understanding of the government education discourses.

Additionally, parents in the poor rural areas opted to withdraw their children after only a few years of schooling because sending a child to

school meant a loss of manpower in the fields. Countryside entrants to university almost never return to the countryside upon graduation as they regarded higher education as the best means to escape from a life of impoverishment and hard manual labour jobs (Unger 1982). Hence, when a student from a peasant family did well in schooling, he or she would probably leave the village for good and leave no financial return to the household (Cheng 1986). Yet, with the 'face' factor heavily rooted in the traditional Chinese cultural value, academic success leading to entrance to university was regarded as prestigious to the household and to the village at large. After all, despite the compulsory nine-year education initiative, Mok *et al.* (2009) state that the main challenge is the continuous educational deprivation for the children with limited educational choices and access to quality education. This is particularly obvious in the rural areas where parents' attitudes were stemmed from economic and cultural constraints (Lewin *et al.* 1994).

Conclusion

This chapter aims to explore the cultural and historical contexts of education in China. From a cultural perspective, China has a long history of placing high emphasis on education and schooling (Hallinger 2000; Zhang 2004; Guo 2006) with the strong belief of 'making good scholar officials' being the fundamental backbone of its educational system (Guo 2006). Yet, as influenced by core Confucian values,

education was also highly gendered as women were denied access to the same kind of education as men (Cleverley 1985).

A socio-political and historical analysis of the discourses has revealed different interests of the different parties the dominant discourses served. While all Chinese leaders share the same view that education is fundamental to the development of the society (Chen 1975), changes in official discourses arose with the power shifts between different leaderships of the central government (Rosen 1982; Tsang 2000). During Mao's reign, education was for political and ideological development. He disagreed with the idea of concentration in academic excellence but viewed education as the vehicle for promoting social equality and therefore it should be for the masses. Then under the leadership of Deng and his successors, there are four significant changes in official discourses on education and learning.

- Changing from political and class struggles to economic growth and market economy, with education being promoted mainly from the economic orientation focusing on the material improvement of people's lives.

- Changing from anti-intellectualism to academic elitism, whereby stratification within education is supported to meet the diverse demands for intellectuals and skilled labourers within a market-driven economy.

- Changing from informal learning to lifelong learning, aiming to embrace the inclusiveness of learning being formal, informal and non-formal.

- Changing from Cultural Revolution to harmonious society, with rural education provision identified as the 'priority among priorities' (CERNET 2005), plus regarding education and learning as an enjoyable process (Boshier & Huang 2006).

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Researchers' choices of research topics reflect a variety of criteria. Social researchers who conduct small-scale research projects usually opt for topics that are of interest and relevance to themselves (Acosta-Alzuru 2005; Denscombe 2010). Social researchers, just like any other human beings, carry with them the importance of their personal history and experiences (May 2001). Even though positivists previously undervalued personal experiences as being too subjective (May 2001), it is nowadays considered by qualitative researchers to be quite the opposite. For example, Denzin (1994) suggests that qualitative researchers can "work outwards from their own biographies" (Denzin 1994, p.512). As such, a researcher's biography is able to shape the theoretical foundations, methodological consideration and the final analysis of the research (Collins 1986; Broom *et al.* 2009). Roberts (2002) highlights that the value of embracing the researcher in the process is to recognise that we all have stories, and that the researcher's 'self' provides "privileged insight into social issues" (Denscombe 2010, p.301). Therefore, the 'self' has become a fundamental part of social interaction and the inclusion of the researcher's own biographic account provides an important resource, rather than being a limitation to the social research (Roberts 2002; Denscombe 2010). My own biographic account presents my life

history that reflects the way I perceive and interpret the social world, which in turn influences the reality of my life and actions (Sarantakos 2005). Hence, this thesis begins from my own biographic account featuring the influential factors on my education experiences and perceptions, such as parental influence, gender, class and regionality. For example, my regret of not having the opportunity for higher education due to my gender has substantially influenced my continuous pursuit for education.

When embarking on this research, I found myself looking back at my past experiences in education, whilst at the same time looking forward to new encounters and experiences of others' learning journeys. It is through the process of 'researching the other' that we "peer into the eyes of the other ... embark on a journey of self: exploring our fears, celebrating our voices, challenging our assumptions, reconstructing our pasts" (Sears 1992, p.155). Yet, with the self-other relationship, people see themselves as 'insiders' and others as 'outsiders' (Billington *et al.* 1998). If the researcher is an insider of the social group and shares the same upbringing of the informants, it is argued that he or she will have the capability to precisely comprehend their experiences, closer to the reality of people's lives and thereby lead to a more reliable account (Parameswaran 2001; Grenier 2007; Tinker & Armstrong 2008). However, even as an outsider, Adamson & Donovan (2002) suggest that the researcher's reflexivity could still facilitate interpretive research. As no research is value and bias free, reflexivity is argued

to be a crucial element to good researches (Bryman 2001; Acosta-Alzuru 2005). In view of this insider/outsider debate, my research was conducted in Beijing where I have a dual status of being an insider/outsider. According to Fawcett & Hearn (2004),

"One can clearly be a member of a dominant group in one situation and be an 'other' in a different situation." (Fawcett & Hearn 2004, p.202)

I am a Chinese descendent born outside of Mainland China, and while I look and talk like a native, I am really from Hong Kong. On the one hand, my informants and I are all from a Chinese origin, and we therefore share many aspects of our cultural heritage. This commonality between us facilitates rapport and brings in the collection of rich data (Hawkins 2010). On the other hand, Hong Kong was a former British colony for a hundred years until 1997 when the People's Republic of China reclaimed Hong Kong as its Special Administrative Zone. The strong influence of British colonisation made Hong Kong's social, historical and education systems relatively different from those of the Mainland China. As such, I carried with me the traditional Chinese cultural values while absorbing education in a western environment under the British influences.

In order to make sense of lives different from my own, I acknowledge my background and experiences to be different from my informants

and hence I have intentionally adopted the position of an outsider and tried to see things with a pair of fresh eyes from their angles. It is through exploring and interpreting the stories of my informants that I can reflect on my own education and learning path and beliefs (Sears 1992; King 2008; Leskela-Karki 2008). Within the process of reflexivity, I recognise my differences with my informants in terms of gender, social class, regionality and age. In particular, I am reflexive in the age boundary with my parent group informants who are older than me, and that I have not experienced any of their economic hardship or political struggle. According to Grenier (2007), this boundary can be dissolved "when the researcher and participant are able to communicate their understandings of events and experiences" (Grenier 2007, p.722). Thus in order to appreciate and better comprehend the key changes in my older participants' lives, I embarked on an "identity construction" (Hoskins 2000, p.50) where I immersed myself in Chinese history so to redefine myself from having no political or socio-economic knowledge about China, to having a grasp of it. Moreover, I am also reflexive in the age difference with the student group. Fortunately, Hong Kong has already experienced the stage of industrialisation that they are currently facing, so it is easier for me to understand the students' situation in facing the rapid economic changes within contemporary China.

The following section presents the methodological decision of this thesis describing the selection of qualitative in-depth interviews as the

research method with justifications, as well as the sampling considerations. The section on data collection details the interview process, followed by the data analysis that describes the process of analysing the collected data by coding, categorising and identifying recurring themes. A section examining the ethical issues in the research and how they are addressed is also included in this chapter.

Methodological decision

Interpretivist approach

This thesis is derived out of a genuine interest in exploring different perspectives on education and learning as interpreted by research participants. Jones (1993) argues that people's perceptions and experiences, such as what we think, know and talk about, are linked to the various discourses in which they encounter. Hence, all the individuals' experiences are shaped by their perceptions and understanding of their world, and are all valuable data and findings. It primarily involves people, their real-life experiences, comments, feelings and beliefs with focus on understanding the individuals' feelings and thoughts on their education and learning experiences. Therefore, the interpretivist approach, honed in on the understanding of human perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, feelings and emotions (Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Bryman 2001; Denscombe 2007), is argued to be most appropriate for this research. Conversely, the positivist's view of treating research respondents as non-reflective subjects, ignoring

their ability to act on experiences and not considering their interpretation of the world, is an inappropriate approach for this thesis.

Qualitative research

As this thesis is conceptualised within an interpretive framework, it does not concur with the absolute need to gather objective statistical and quantitative data. Bryman (2001) suggests that the highly interpretive nature of qualitative research can allow the researcher to explore events of the social world through the eyes of the informants, and to interpret the social world from the perspectives of the people being studied. The intention of this thesis is to explore the attitudes, emotions and feelings on education and learning experiences of the research participants and how these perceptions and experiences are shaped by the prevailing and changing Chinese government discourses on education. It is, therefore, appropriate to adopt a qualitative methodology in gathering, examining and interpreting data for the purpose of discovering meanings and patterns with emphasis on the individual participant's views and personal experiences (Mason 2002).

Research method

Denzin (1989) emphasises that everyone has different attitudes, values and beliefs, and the best way to deduce meaning is through the social face-to-face interactions of the individuals. This can be collected using various field research methods such as interviews, observations and

case studies, yet they have their own strengths and weaknesses. As one of the most popular methods in social science research (Hermanowicz 2002), Rubin & Rubin (2005) propose that qualitative interview is powerful since it is able to "operate for us like night-vision goggles, permitting us to see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is often looked at but seldom seen" (Rubin & Rubin 2005, p.vii). Roberts (2002) adds that interviews not only form a collection of stories but they also help researchers reflect on the informants' lives and draw on their own experiences. Furthermore, Silverman (2006) affirms that on a practical level, interview method suits small-scale social research with time and financial constraints because interviews are relatively economical in terms of time and resources required. Therefore based on academic and practical considerations, this thesis employs qualitative interview as its research method. So through interviewing people I can access directly what happens in their society (Silverman 2006) as well as tap into their inner worlds to find out what happens in their minds, and seek to understand their attitudes and values that cannot be directly observed (Hannabuss 1996).

Interview format

Interviews can be conducted in a structured, semi-structured or unstructured format (Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Bryman 2001; Silverman 2006; Denscombe 2007). On one end of the spectrum is the structured interview design that aims to capture precise data within pre-designed

categories in which an interviewer asks each interviewee a set of pre-determined questions, coupled with a series of pre-established answers for them to choose from. This type of interview design does not allow for flexibility in the way questions are asked and answered, hence does not serve the purpose of this thesis in aiming to tap into the participants' inner worlds or to encourage them to express their feelings, emotions and experiences freely. The semi-structured interview format has several fixed open-ended questions and allows participants the freedom to answer them. This interview format was initially considered for this research. However, after completion of the pilot interviews, although participants were very responsive to my questions, they lacked the liberty of free reflection on their education and learning attitudes, particularly in relation to influential people and events.

In order to allow the understanding of complex human behaviours without imposing any a priori categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Bryman 2001; Hermanowicz 2002), unstructured interviews that place authority on the interviewees and can encourage them to express their views freely, bringing forth more detailed accounts (Tinker & Armstrong 2008) deems fit for this thesis. Also, as pointed out by Rubin & Rubin (2005), in-depth interviews are particularly useful in filling in historical blanks when older people are given the chance to reflect on historical events and then express their understandings on revolutions and cultural expectations that shaped

generations over generations, which in particular match the context of my research. Therefore my data collection direction was subsequently detoured from a semi-structured format to embark an open-ended unstructured interview format allowing free recollection of education and learning incidents, events and feelings prompted by a couple of broad questions that served as guideline to the interviewees.

Sampling

Of equal importance to the decision of research method is sampling. Sampling techniques can be divided into probability and non-probability sampling (Bryman 2001; Denscombe 2007). Probability sampling is where the chosen sample is a "representative cross-section of people or events in the whole population being studied" (Denscombe 2007, p.13). Positivists are more inclined to employ probability sampling to facilitate future generalisation of their research outcomes. On the other hand, non-probability sampling allows the researcher to concentrate on the collection of valuable data applicable to the research question on hand, making this technique not only economical but also more informative compared to conventional probability sampling (Denscombe 2007). Purposive sampling, convenience sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling are classified under non-probability sampling techniques (Bryman 2001). As this thesis adopts an interpretivist position and is more interested in looking into participants' worlds to understand their subjective aspects of perceptions, meanings, attitudes and beliefs, feelings and emotions, it

is argued that non-probability sampling is appropriate here. More so, purposive sampling has been adopted because it allows the sample group to be selected with a precise purpose in mind, whereby the selected group is believed to possess the particular qualities relevant to the topic of research.

Purposive sampling allows me to target research participants who I believe can contribute to my research and is likely to produce valuable data for the research analysis (Bryman 2001; Denscombe 2007). I selected a group of post-graduate students in a two-year part-time master's programme from a renowned local university in Beijing, one that ranks top ten nationwide. Students undertaking the post-graduate degree programme are required to have a minimum of an undergraduate degree in any discipline plus at least three years of full-time work experiences. Besides studying the compulsory core modules, students can choose their stream of specialisation, for example, human resources management, business administration and so on, according to their interests and related work practices. With this thesis aiming to understand the education and learning experiences and perceptions of Chinese individuals, this group of students representing the cohort generation of the 'post 80s' will be able to provide useful data and shed light on the factors that influenced their education and learning perceptions.

As this thesis seeks to explore the ways in which government discourses on education are manifested and articulated in the daily experiences from one generation to the next, hence understanding the education and learning experiences and perceptions from two kinship generations is fundamental to this research. As suggested by Giele & Elder Jr. (1998), comparing family generations as well as cohort generations can link history and lives and provide a yardstick to measure historical changes and access its effects. Therefore, the second group of research participants is the parents of the selected student group contributing to the family generation of this research. More so, the parent group also falls into a unique cohort generation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in which they were teenagers then at a point of transition. Being members of this cohort exposed them to the same concrete historical experiences, while their distinctive experiences may also shape their identities and attitudes. In comparison, their children are the cohort generation of 'post 80s' and who benefit from the rapid economic changes and development in China (Tsang 2000). The differences in education opportunities available to these two generations as they grow up, together with the different social and economic contexts in which they live, makes the comparison between these two generations worth exploring. Moreover, when both groups share similar perceptions and meanings on education and learning, I argue that there is an extension of cultural attitudes from one generation to the next with cultural values of the parents being reflected in their children.

On the number of participants for research studies, there is no consensus in the literature as to an appropriate sample size for qualitative research. Silverman (2005) affirms that qualitative research can also be fruitful and meaningful even with small bodies of data that have not been randomly assembled. As authenticity is more important than sample size, gathering genuine understanding of people's experience via open-ended questions with small samples are argued to be common in social researches (Silverman 2006). Hence, my sample size is based on the principle of saturation where I continued to interview both groups of participants, with an understanding that each new conversation will add less and less to what I already know. Upon "hearing the same matters over and over again" (Rubin & Rubin 2005, p.67), I know I have reached the point of data saturation and is time to stop the interview process.

Data collection

The data collection process started in December 2007 with over eighty email requests sent to the target sample group, inviting them to share their education and learning experiences and perceptions. In my email (Appendix One), I briefly explained the nature of my research and confirmed to maintain the confidentiality of their identities and the privacy of our meeting contents. In January 2008, I conducted two pilot interviews using the semi-structured interview approach. With the

consent of both participants, the meetings were audio-recorded, and were subsequently transcribed and translated. These meetings proved to be informative and useful in guiding my further interviews. To ensure that the participants have enough freedom to reflect on their past and future lived stories and to express their views and perceptions on education and learning, my research method was subsequently shifted to using the unstructured interview format.

In addition to sending the emails for me, the master's degree programme administrator also assisted and made follow-up telephone calls to the student group to further invite them and their parents to attend the interviews. Twenty-two students and twelve parents responded positively to the requests and interviews were conducted throughout January to July 2008. This number included the pilot interviews, as these participants are an integral part of the overall sample being a "vital component in the part of discovery" (Denscombe 2007, p.96). Demographics of all the participants are featured in Appendix Two.

When 'researching the other', I recognised the importance of constructing an atmosphere of power equity (Sears 1992), where I created an inviting and non-threatening environment so that the participants could freely articulate their personal education and learning experiences and perceptions. The interviews were held at various venues according to participants' choices and convenience, some

during the daytime and others in the evenings. The venues varied from a quiet corner in a renowned coffee shop, a formal conference room in an office environment, a private room in a Sichuan restaurant, an elegant Chinese teahouse to the study room in my house. Each venue had its pros and cons, but most importantly, my participants were the ones who chose the venue, and where they felt relaxed and comfortable to talk about themselves. Due to the busy schedules and personal commitments of the participants, only nineteen face-to-face interviews were arranged and conducted.

For those who could not meet me in person, we agreed on an alternative communication method of using 'Microsoft Messenger (MSN)', exchanging dialogue by logging onto our own computers. This online method allowed us to communicate in written Chinese as we took turns in typing our exchanges. A major shortcoming of online communication versus face-to-face communication is the absence of important non-verbal cues like gestures, tones and pauses. This could have been overcome if the participants have the Internet conversation applications, such as 'SKYPE', in which both visual and verbal communication could be transmitted. Nevertheless, an advantage of this online written exchange was that the communication remained in written form and there was no need to transcribe the recorded conversations. In all, two out of twenty-two student interviews were conducted via MSN online. One final student only emailed me her views on her education experiences and viewpoints. With this one-way

communication, I did not have the chance to probe and offer follow-up questions. Still, her willingness to share her experiences and ideas is surely better than not providing any assistance at all.

For the parent group, I contacted the student participants to check the availability of their parents. However, some of them felt completely uncomfortable talking to a stranger, some did not reside in Beijing, and one of them was fully occupied with the preparation and volunteer work for the Beijing Olympics. In addition, some of them expressed that they were nervous and lacked confidence to answer my questions because of their low educational level. I assured them that there were no right or wrong answers and that their experiences and thoughts were of great interest to me. In the end, I met with eleven parents for our face-to-face interviews and communicated online using MSN with one parent participant.

People produce meanings in "unique and multiple ways, and the medium for sharing such interpretation is language" (Hoskins & Stoltz 2005, p.100). As language is a central component for research interviews, especially where it is the key vehicle in understanding the concept of culture, all my interviews were conducted in Putonghua, the official language of China and the mother tongue of all the participants. In addition, as suggested by Hoskins (2000), in order to understand and be understood, the use of a shared language with shared meanings is vital. More significantly, when the participants are using

their own language, they are at their best in being able to express what they want to say and are more able to reflect on their stories in deeper descriptions (Raddon 2007; Karnieli-Miller *et al.* 2009). As I have lived in Beijing for over twelve years, even though my mother tongue is Cantonese, a dialect of China, I can communicate well in Putonghua with the participants and have no problem in understanding the transcripts in written Chinese.

I began every interview by thanking participants for his or her kind participation. I also reiterated that the reason for sending them the guiding parameter in advance (Appendix Three) was to help keep the discussion focused and to ensure good use of the interview time. Importantly, there were no right or wrong answers in our discussions. Providing minimum directives within this parameter, I encouraged the participants to provide their own definition of learning and recall related incidents and perceptions. According to Karnieli-Miller *et al.* (2009), success in 'researching the other' could be measured by the researcher's ability to retrieve the participants' stories. Being an ethnic Chinese and able to converse in Putonghua, I was granted an insider status by my interviewees and quick rapport was established. Throughout the lively and inspiring conversations, they told me about themselves, their work, educational experiences, and thoughts and feelings related to their education and learning endeavours. Deeper levels of reflection on their formal learning experiences in the context of their own life circumstances within the historical and political era of

China were also expressed. Thus from their conversations, external realities such as facts and events, as well as internal experiences of feelings and meanings, were shared and identified. Moreover, what the individuals recalled were not just simple descriptions of events, rather, they were reflecting and re-telling events that were important and meaningful to them.

This interview process involved my focused attention and active listening to the dialogues of the informants, because each situation has its own meaning and interpretation within unique subjective human experiences. To make sense of lives other than my own, I am aware of my own education and learning experiences, gender, class and regionality and entered openly into the world of my informants. I only used probing, clarifying and paraphrasing to seek elaborations on significant topics. More so, non-verbal responses such as the nodding of my head, offering of sincere smiles or simply saying an "uh-huh", were used to encourage the participants during the interviews. According to Denscombe (2007), no research is ever free from the identity, values and beliefs of the researcher; therefore, I exercised control over my personal attitudes, acted in a detached manner and refrained from interrupting the flow of the participant's thoughts and viewpoints by withholding my own feelings and thoughts. Overall, even though the unstructured interview fit well with my research framework and I was able to obtain relevant and rich data by actively listening and allowing the interviewees freedom of talking (Silverman 2006), there

were still disadvantages. For example, a few participants detoured from my research focus and shared a great deal of other thoughts that might not be useful for my research.

I timed to conduct my interviews within an hour; however the participants were the ones taking the leading role in deciding the length of each interview based on his or her openness and willingness to share experiences, views and opinions. As such, control and ownership of the data was in the hands of the participants and they had the power to decide the quantity and quality of the data to be shared. In the end, duration of the face-to-face interviews ranged from thirty minutes to over one and half hours. Since it is not realistic to depend on our memory to recall every single detail on what the participants said, recording provided detailed recorded conversations that field notes could not supply and the richness and emotions of the interview could also be captured (Silverman 2005). With the permission of each participant, responses were audio-recorded to ensure preservation of the dialogues. Initially, some of the participants, especially the parent group, felt rather uneasy with the recording, but they quickly overcame their anxiety once they were fully engaged in our conversations. To demonstrate my interest in the details and to concentrate on the conversation, I did not take any notes during our meetings but instead listened attentively and asked probing questions and clarified viewpoints only when needed.

Silverman (2006) argues that transcripts of recordings provide an important record of the interactions between the interviewer and interviewees with high reliability. Thus, all my face-to-face interviews were transcribed in Chinese by a native Chinese. Transcription time for the recordings ranged from four to six hours depending on the recordings' duration. When a transcript of the interview was received from the transcriber, I listened to each recording while concurrently reading the transcription to ensure accuracy. A copy of the transcription was then sent back to the participants for their review and comments. Upon finalisation with the participants, I translated the transcriptions into English. Each translation from Chinese to English took a minimum of three hours. However, it is important to recognise that when researching others, especially from the lenses of language, we might not have the same meanings as our informants and the understandings can sometimes be contradictory (Wacquant 1997). To ensure precision of the translation, two bi-lingual volunteers read all the transcriptions and translations, which were in Microsoft Word format. When in doubt, they would go back to the audio recordings to ensure accuracy between the Chinese and English versions.

This research stage of transcribing and translating was very time consuming and exhausting, however, it was indeed worthwhile because preparing transcripts and translations was in itself a research activity (Silverman 2005). The process of listening to recorded interviews, reading over transcripts and translations, as well as noting

the words or phrases that participants used to explain their perceptions and describe their formal learning experiences, allowed me to start reflecting on the recurring themes for data analysis.

Data analysis

To set the scene for constructive interpretation of the collected qualitative data, participants were encouraged during the interview to recall their memories on learning decisions, choices and perceptions according to their understanding on the meaning of learning. This approach of self-reflection allowed them to reconstruct their relevant learning experiences from memory, and this facilitated my exploration and understanding of the 'what' and 'why' behind their education and learning behaviours. As affirmed by Raddon (2007), it is not the intention to validate these memories of events from the participants but to acquire an understanding of the 'lived realities' of the individuals that is valuable to them. In the process of 'researching the other', I acknowledge that the informants and I are distinct selves with subjectivities, and as Hoskins (2000) expresses, "understandings are always filtered through the self of the researcher" (Hoskins 2000, p.56). Therefore, when I entered the space between us working towards an understanding of their experiences, I recognised my possible subjectivity in data analysis.

Once data is collected, good summarising skills and insight capabilities are needed to extract meaningful content from the data (Rubin & Rubin 2005). In fact, recurring themes started to emerge during the translation process. In order to become thoroughly familiar with the data and get ready for interpretation, I re-read the text data repeatedly. Key phrases and statements relating to participants' education and learning experiences and perceptions were identified. I also read between the lines to see whether there was any implied meaning contained in the data (Denscombe 2007). I searched for patterns of meaning within the statements, including the assumptions and interpretations made by the participants about themselves and others. I sought to draw my analysis from how each individual perceived his or her education and learning experiences. Nevertheless, employing the open-ended question approach has its limitations. First, it is difficult to compare responses amongst participants since they may have different emphasis due to own experiences. In addition, the width and depth of responses can vary significantly. Some dialogues are very rich in details with peripheral elements, yet in other cases, only a skeletal account of their recollection on education and learning events, opinions and feelings were shared.

The first step of my analysis process is to code the data by attaching a 'label' to the raw data, be it in the form of names, initials or numbers (Denscombe 2007). I printed out every translation with wide margins leaving enough space to assign codes to statements on specific topics.

I then decided on the type of data to be coded, such as an event, an action, an opinion, or an implied meaning that has relationships with the participants' education and learning experiences and perceptions. I then re-read the translated transcripts carefully again reviewing the raw data aiming to draw meanings out of them, and at the same time look for emerging constructs stemming from the text data that could be significant for analysis. At this stage, the aim of coding is to break down the data into components that can be analysed. For example, the code 'C1' was assigned to statements that were related to participants' experiences, emotions, ideas, comments and perceptions relating to 'parents'; code 'C2' are those in connection to 'filial piety'; and code 'C3' for 'family members, such as spouse, siblings and relatives', and so on. From the text data, recurrent themes that reflected shared ideas rather than just an issue raised by one individual was identified. In addition, there were cases when one statement related to a number of topics and was assigned with more than one code. After this initial coding, sixty-two common codes were identified, plus an additional thirteen codes from the parent group.

The second task was to identify ways to group the codes into categories (Denscombe 2007). At this stage, I searched for relationships among the initial codes and merged some of the codes under broader category headings by continuously comparing and contrasting the text data. This aims to rebuild the data back into theories so to understand the education and learning experiences and

perceptions of the research participants and the factors that played important roles in their education and learning paths. As a result, codes with common themes were organised into clusters based on similarities of meanings forming categories, such as 'cultural', 'economic' and 'social'. Microsoft Word files were created to capture the text data for every code with their relevant wording copied and pasted from the translated transcripts. After this process, seventeen codes under seven categories were identified (Appendix Four).

The final stage for my analysis is to identify core codes. From here, the most frequent recurring themes appeared as core codes within the categories. For example, formal learning decisions influenced mainly by parents as well as extrinsic motivation of having a better future in terms of earning more money after getting a good job with high qualifications. These identified core codes are vital to identify the ways in which Chinese government education discourses are perceived and articulated within everyday lives from an inter-generational perspective of two family/cohort generations.

Ethical issues

Ethical concerns are an important element for any research and especially during the process of data collection.

First, it is my responsibility as a researcher to ensure that the interests of my research participants are not adversely affected by my research, and that they have the right to refuse participation in any kind of research. Thus, invitation emails were sent to them well in advance. The emails also provided participants with an explanation of the purpose and parameters of my research, for their understanding and consideration.

Moreover, one of the most important issues about face-to-face interviews is on the protection of the individual's key information. Rubin & Rubin (2005) point out that when promises are made to interviewees in safeguarding their identity, it is crucial to keep that promise. I have assured all the participants that their personal identities, particulars and their respective work units are strictly kept anonymous in this academic research. As a result, only their preferred names are used and their confidentiality protected.

Furthermore, permissions were obtained before all audio recordings and assurances were given that the tapes would only be used for my research reference. In addition, I respected and responded to a request to turn the recorder off when a parent participant talked about her previous job with the Chinese government.

Finally, a researcher has the obligation to report the interviews accurately and fairly (Rubin & Rubin 2005), and therefore all the

transcriptions were given to my participants for their comments, information and confirmation.

Conclusion

Stemming from my personal biography and employing 'discourse' as the theoretical framework, this thesis is set within an interpretive paradigm and adopts a qualitative framework. This chapter has justified and described the research methodology of unstructured interview as the research method, as well as selecting purposive sampling to identify the two groups of participants representing both family and cohort generations. Qualitative thematic analysis method has been employed using data coding, categorising and identifying recurring key themes during the process of data analysis. Ethical behaviours were exercised throughout the research. Detailed findings and discussions of the empirical research are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

External driving forces such as globalisation, economic development, technological advancement and the pursuit of a knowledge society, have led nations, organisations and individuals to a level of severe competition and drastic changes that they have not faced before (Holmes 2002). Holmes (2003) expresses that during the present age of post-modernity, there is no magic bullet for long-term success apart from having the ability to adapt, learn and change. These external forces therefore brought along the necessities of upgrading the skills and knowledge of the workforce and consequently formed a driving force behind the notion of continuous education and learning (Holmes 2002 & 2003). China is not an exception to this notion, as is evident from its governmental education policies parallel to its economic development policies. Facing the political struggles during different reigns of Chinese Communists leaders, along with increasing challenges from greater global competition, China has undergone a series of educational reforms aimed at enhancing the educational level of its citizens as well as increasing its competitiveness on the international stage.

Whilst all Chinese leaders share the same view that education is fundamental to the development of the society (Chen 1975),

educational policy changes were aligned with the power shifts between different factions of the central government (Rosen 1982; Tsang 2000). Within the Chinese Communist Party, there are two main divisions, namely the radicals and the moderates, which carry with them essential differences and competing dialogues in their educational outlooks (Hsu 1983). To the radicals, led by Mao Zedong, education was for political and ideological development. Mao disagreed with the idea of concentration in academic excellence but viewed education as the vehicle for promoting social equality and therefore it should be for the masses. On the other hand the moderates, supported by Deng Xiaoping, promoted education mainly from the economic orientation focusing on the material improvement of people's lives. Deng supported stratification within education to meet the diverse demand of intellectuals and skill labourers within a market-driven economy (Rosen 1982; Tsang 2000).

Into the twenty-first century, current Chinese leaders elevated the importance of education and learning to a higher level within their government discourses. The concepts of the learning society and lifelong learning are highly regarded (Li 2005) and citizens are encouraged to learn within the formal, informal and non-formal settings throughout their life. More so, the government's vision of a harmonious society provided educational opportunities that are not only for the intellectual elites in the cities but also take care of the less academically able and those in the rural areas (Farndon 2008). As

there are ample official discourses on educational development and reforms, consistently emphasising education and learning as the essential pillar of China's economic success and future development, I argue that this is just one side of the coin. Little is known about whether and how these discourses are articulated in public's everyday lives. For example, the notion of lifelong learning has been highly regarded within government discourses (Li 2005) and it is vital to explore how this is manifested in people's daily lives.

Furthermore, while prevailing and changing government discourses on educational reforms may influence individuals' continuous education and learning at different stage of their lives, I believe that there are other factors behind one's education and learning endeavours. This to me is exemplified by my own personal experiences. From my own biographic account, my social class and my brought up in Hong Kong favourably provided the chances for my general education. Yet on the other hand, my continuous pursuits in education are fundamentally impacted by the unenthusiastic attitudes of my parents towards higher education for girls. My motivation of working on this thesis is from the idea of 'researching the other' whereby I can explore and interpret the stories of my informants and to reflect upon the factors influencing my own education experiences. Although my upbringing in Hong Kong was different from those in China in terms of the economic, historical and political situations, I am interested in exploring education and learning as relevant to China because of its rich history and its current

rapid economic development and industrialisation. As such, the purpose of this thesis is to examine the perceptions and attitudes towards education and learning from the Chinese individuals' perspectives, to examine this intergenerationally and to explore how prevailing and changing Chinese government discourses on education and learning are reflected in those experiences. In doing so, the aims of this chapter are:

- To explore the education and learning experiences and perceptions of the two respondent groups and to examine whether and how these attitudes and experiences change or persist intergenerationally

- To explore how prevailing government discourses manifested within the respondents' education and learning experiences and perceptions in an intergenerational context

- To explore how changes in government discourses over generations impacted the respondents' education and learning experiences and attitudes over time

As mentioned in Chapter 4, this research employed a qualitative methodology using unstructured interview format to collect dialogues from the participants as empirical data. Interviews were conducted with twenty-two post-graduate students from a renowned university in

Beijing, along with twelve of their parents who were currently residing in Beijing. The interviews with both groups were based on the same set of topic guidelines with open-ended questions asking participants about their learning experiences and perceptions, plus their future learning plans, if any, within their own definition of learning. They were encouraged to express themselves in their own language. Upon comparing and contrasting the text data, recurring themes were identified as the base of the thematic analysis of the findings. While I believe that only through the participants' own voice can their beliefs, feelings and emotions be heard, it is noticeable that in the following sections, I have made a deliberate choice to quote participants' own words so that their voices and expressions are well represented. Last but not least, as I promised to protect the research participants' anonymity, only their preferred names would be used in this thesis.

Perceptions and attitudes on education and learning between the two generations

The parent and student group of informants are representing the family generations of this research. At the same time, the parent group belongs to a unique cohort generation of the Cultural Revolution, whereas the students represent the cohort generation of the 'post 80s' growing up alongside the rapid economic changes and development in China. Upon analysing the interview transcripts and translations, six recurring themes behind the education and learning experiences and attitudes of these two kinship/cohort generations are identified.

- Education is vital

- Lifelong learning

- Qualifications

- Future

- Family/parental support

- Face

I recognise that these recurring themes are the similarities from one generation to the next. Yet, there are differences between generations in their thinking and reasoning behind the same perception. I argue that each of these key themes also carries with them different weights about the prevailing or changing official discourses on education over generations. In addition, impact of the participants' deeply rooted Chinese cultural values upon their education experiences and perceptions cannot be undermined. Likewise, discourse is of central importance to the understanding of people's perceptions and experiences in education and learning. As the multi-dimensional discourses change over time influencing different areas of the respondents' lives experiences at different time of their lives, the following diagram (Figure 1) presents the interrelationships among historical and changes discourses on the parents' past and present experiences and attitudes, as well as the students' experiences influenced by both prevailing discourses and the experiences of their parents. Chinese cultural values that mediate the relationship between

government discourses and individuals' education experiences and perceptions are included.

manifested/influenced

My Biographic Account
- Gender
- Class
- Regionality

Chinese Cultural Values
- Five cardinal relations 'wulun'
- Family/collectivism
- Filial piety
- Knowledge
- Face
- Education was highly prized
- Education was highly gendered

Historical Discourses (Mao)
- Anti-intellectualism
- Cultural Revolution
- 'Studying is useless'/informal learning
- Education for women

Changes in Discourses over time (from Mao to Deng and his successors)
- Economic growth/market economy
- Academic elitism
- Lifelong learning
- Harmonious society

Parent Group (the past)
- Red Guard during Cultural Revolution
- Re-educated by peasants
- Gender – female missed out second chance for education

Parent Group (the present)
- Education learning is vital for their children/own regret
- Lifelong learning/enjoyment
- Qualification is crucial for a good future
- Financial and mental support for their children's education
- Face/particularly those from lower social class
- Gender/One Child Policy/equal opportunities for education

Student Group
- Education is vital
- Lifelong learning acknowledged/still engage informal learning
- Qualification is crucial for a good future
- Parents' emotional and financial support most important
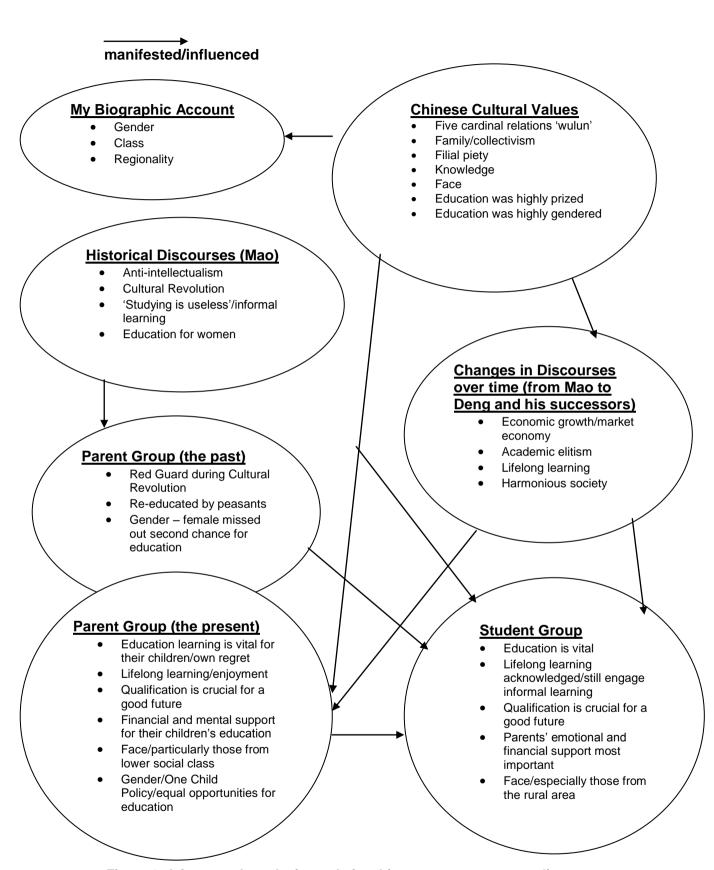- Face/especially those from the rural area

Figure 1: A framework on the interrelationships among government discourses, Chinese cultural values and the findings

Figure 1 illustrated the complex influences of government discourses on both groups of participants. For example, the parent group belongs to the cohort of the 'lost generation' losing out in their educational opportunities during the historical discourses of the Cultural Revolution. Their negative experiences thus created a domino effect on their present educational views and experiences, which also indirectly affected their children. The shift from the historical political struggles to economic growth brought about economic and material improvements in people's lives. As a result, the parent group transformed their regrets to financially support their children's education. In addition, Chinese cultural values that were undermined during the Cultural Revolution have resurfaced and are positively affecting the present educational realities of the parent group. As such upon retirement, they enjoy their leisure learning within a formal setting. Evidently, the dominant discourses at different time of their lives, the changes in discourses over time, and the traditional cultural values are all manifested in the education and learning realities of the parent group.

As for the student group, the persistent impacts of the deeply rooted Chinese cultural values, such as 'education is highly prized' are evident in their continuous education endeavours. Moreover as mentioned above, their education and learning experiences and perceptions are not only influenced by the current official discourses, but also indirectly impacted by the past and changing discourses manifested in their parents' education and learning situations. I posit that this is the

outcome of a subtle crossover of the powerful Chinese cultural value of family/parent and the changes in discourses over time that allow for different possibilities and opportunities. As such, the multi-faceted forces of cultural values, historical and changing discourses as well as the past experiences of their parents indeed merged to shape the students' educational experiences and perceptions.

I included my biographic account in Figure 1, showing the process of 'researching the other' where I continue to be reflexive on my own learning journey while exploring the learning realities of my informants. Firstly, I acknowledge that, to a different magnitude, the parent group and I both experienced that education is gendered. Nevertheless, for the student participants being the cohort of the 'post 80s' enjoy the benefits of the one-child policy whereby gender gap in education has been narrowed, at least in big cities like Beijing where my research was conducted. Secondly, both groups of participants apprehended the relationship of class and regionality, such as from the rural area, to the importance of education, of which I was reflexive that they were different from my own experiences. Lastly, it was very touching to learn that the parents were so helpful and understanding in offering both financial and emotional support to their children's education and learning. This was quite different from my own personal experiences in which my parents were indifferent to on my education pursuits. This process of 'researching on others' allows me to reconstruct and make

sense of my past (Sears 1992) through reflecting on my own education and learning journeys while embarking on this research.

Figure 1 also includes the recurring themes identified by the research informants. Firstly, both groups of participants expressed that formal learning in terms of education was of paramount importance to them. Secondly, the participants' acknowledgment of their understanding of lifelong learning as a broader concept than education is discussed. Thirdly, 'qualifications' is widely recognised as the key motivator for their pursuit in education. With the idea of high-level qualifications bringing about bright future of having good job, more money and improved quality of life, the key theme of 'future' followed. Then, the role of parents in their children's educational attitudes and decisions is another key theme repeatedly mentioned by both groups of participants. Lastly, the notion of 'face' that takes into account the importance of status within the Chinese society and the intense comparative attitude of the Chinese people is also highlighted.

In the following sections, the above key themes will be discussed around the ways in which prevailing and changing government discourses are manifested in people's actual and changing attitudes and experiences in education. The explorations on how Chinese cultural values mediate the relationships between government discourses and individuals' attitudes and experiences are included in the discussion.

Education is vital

Education being important is the first and foremost recurring theme derived from the finding. This section argues that education continues to be highly prized over generations as evidenced in many Chinese sayings presented by both groups of participants, as well as embedded in the Chinese language. As changes in official discourses enabled new opportunities, the parent participants who were the 'lost generation' during the Cultural Revolution inevitably translated their regrets to high emphasis on their children's education endeavours, directions and decisions.

From the findings, both groups of participants expressed their feelings and standpoints on the importance of education. Eson and Guo both use common Chinese sayings to illustrate their views:

> *"From a very young age, it has always been in our minds that education is the most important thing to us … There is an old saying that goes 'everything is low class, except those with education can move up to the upper class' (万般皆下品，唯有读书高)." (Eson - student)*

> *"I always tell everyone that education is so important to us. There is an old saying 'you can find a golden house in the books and you can also find beautiful girls in the books' (书中自有黄金屋，书中自有颜如*

玉). You are nobody if you have no education and no knowledge."

(Guo - parent)

According to Turner & Acker (2002), this consistency of placing high emphasis on education from generation to generation revealed a deeply rooted traditional Chinese cultural value, which was articulated in the historical discourses, of education being highly prized.

In addition to seeing education as vital from a cultural perspective, participants tend to use the words 'studying' and 'learning' synonymously with an inclination to regard formal learning leading to qualifications as 'real learning'. For example, Hua expressed overtly that learning naturally is about going to school for education. However, from current literature, there is a clear distinction between the definition of education and learning (Tight 2002; Holmes 2002; Boud & Solomon 2003). Tight (2002) states that while education are more associated with school, studying and qualifications; learning on the other hand, is happening everywhere throughout one's life (Boud & Solomon 2003). Holmes (2002) adds that learning is a much broader concept than just studying at school for qualifications, but includes formal, informal and non-formal learning.

"My first reaction when hear the word learning is that I immediately think of going to school to have education, to obtain knowledge of some kind. Yes, to me learning is going to school, studying hard,

doing well in classes, scoring high in nationwide examinations and get

into a renowned elite university, and getting a well-paid job." (Hua -

student)

Hua has a spontaneous inclination to link 'learning' with 'study' as if it is

a natural concept. In addition to expressing it explicitly, it is through the

essence of their dialogue that the meaning of studying comes through

when the word 'learning' is used. For instance, it could be argued that

Ying continuously used the word 'learning' but was in fact referring to

her studying for formal qualifications:

"Only if I continue my learning can I have better life for my family and

I, and could I have more face and status within my group of friends.

Learning is the only route for me to live with my head up." (Ying -

student)

From the language perspective, when looking at the Chinese language,

there is indeed no differentiation between the Chinese words for

studying and learning. They both use the same Chinese characters of

'xue xi', where 'xue' (学) means learn and 'xi' (习) is practice. Since

there is minimal distinction between studying and learning within the

Chinese language, people are used to equating studying to learning as

embedded in their daily use of the Chinese language. As reflected in

the findings, participants essentially refer learning to formal study within

educational institutions, which is the case throughout this thesis

irrespective of the changes over time in official education discourses over generations.

In addition to the language perspective, this attitude of placing high emphasis on education indeed reflects historical government discourses as articulated in the education experiences of the parent group. During the interviews, parent informants talked about the importance of education while they recalled their experiences of losing education opportunities when they were young. During the Cultural Revolution, they were teenagers at their prime education age but education opportunities were at a halt then. Yi and Suying shared their experiences and feelings:

> *"When I was in the second year of junior high, there came the Cultural Revolution. All schools were closed during the Cultural Revolution, and nothing could be done. At that time, I was not involved in any rebels. I was in Beijing and did not go anywhere, but stayed at home and did some paintings or knitting. I felt so uneasy not going to school and stayed at home learning nothing for two to three years." (Yi - parent)*

> *"Our generation was caught up with the Cultural Revolution. It was the time that we were at our learning age. However, we did not have the chance to go to school. (After the revolution) school resumed … we could go back to school, but since we were out of school for too*

long and thus did not have the urge to learn again, therefore we did

not have a lot of education." (Suying - parent)

Deprived of formal learning opportunities during the Cultural Revolution, the parent participants also expressed their inner thirst for knowledge from education, as in Tang and Yulan's situations:

"During the Cultural Revolution, I was only in junior high … a time to earn knowledge by going to school. However, while caught up with the Revolution, all students were sent back home … no more school, no more learning. Therefore, the education level of our generation was generally very low. This was the fate of this generation. It wasn't that people in our generation had no desire to learn, it was because of family poverty and social unrest, that even if we really… really want to learn, we did not have the conditions for learning and thus, we have not learned. Frankly speaking, we also wanted to have knowledge from education, and through our own efforts, to make our life better off, and have better living conditions for our parents. But we missed our learning opportunities and therefore we could not achieve our expectations and did not do so well." (Tang - parent)

"My academic qualification was very low due to the Cultural Revolution when I just entered junior high school. During the Cultural Revolution, I went to the Inner Mongolia and joined the Inner Mongolia Youth Military. I spent 8 years there with no opportunity to study or to learn. I was only doing farming work. Of course, I was deeply aware

of the importance of learning. However, you have to understand the actual conditions at that time. With the hardships ... no matter how big your desire was you could never achieve it." (Yulan - parent)

In Tang and Yulan's situations, it could be argued that their deeply rooted Chinese cultural value of 'education being highly prized' actively mediated the relationship between the government discourse under the Cultural Revolution and their own experiences on lacking educational opportunities. As a result, with their unfulfilled desire, the parents carried with them deep regrets like in the situations of Dang and Tang:

"I would say people nowadays should treasure learning during the best time of their life when they have the chance to learn. Like us, missing the learning opportunities would face difficulties in life. Like myself, I was never a student and never enjoyed university life. I would never have the chance to do so. This regret will be with me forever." (Dang - parent)

"It is my regret that I did not have any qualifications… I have faced situations that I need different knowledge but lacking them, and therefore not being able to develop with society. Therefore, I have to tell my daughter my problems and experiences and the importance of education to cope with the society. If she does not have education, she will be the same as me." (Tang - parent)

Evidently, on the one hand, the parents' desire for education is rooted from China's long history of placing high value on education where upward social mobility came from intellectual capability and high academic attainments (Turner & Acker 2002). On the other hand, their immense desire and longing for education was indeed suppressed by the official discourses of the time when they were growing up where Mao's anti-intellectual attitude and the notion of 'studying is useless' were profound. It can therefore be seen that the power from dominant discourses can be dispersed throughout social relations, and can both produce possible forms of behaviour as well as restricting behaviour (Mills 2004).

As time moved on from Mao to Deng, there are changing government discourses from anti-intellectualism to academic elitism where Deng's educational approach is to develop China's brightest young people through higher and further education (Rosen 1982). These are articulated in Huaguang's education experiences and perceptions:

"I continue to study hard and continue to learn because education is very important to everyone. I feel great taking this postgraduate course for its academic qualifications … Well, just that I feel good and useful being knowledgeable, capable, smart and on the top … it is about my future." (Huaguang - student)

As changes in official discourses enabled new opportunities, the parent participants who were the 'lost generation' during the Cultural Revolution inevitably translated their regrets to high emphasis on their children's education endeavours, directions and decisions. The importance of education re-surfaces and crosses over with the traditional Chinese culture which together help to shape the parents' current perception on the importance of their children's education. From their hardships, the parents look ahead to ensure that their children would have a better life than theirs and 'that piece of paper rolled and tied with a ribbon' is the tangible object that can give them the peace of mind. For example, Shuli and Aiyee both see hopes through their children's education opportunities:

"After I married and had my own child, I wanted my child to also love learning. I'm not saying that I placed all my hopes on my child but at least I hoped that she could live a much better life than me … The more she learns, the wider and broader her knowledge and horizons will be. I really want her to learn more and more instead of like her parents. I want her to have a life with knowledge and a high standard of living … Although people in my generation have regrets about our learning opportunities, all in all we can see hopes in our families from our children." (Shuli - parent)

"Our family conditions are now much better than before … therefore everyone starts to place importance to education again. Now I finally understand that those with a better education actually have a much

better life than me. With my low literate level, I do not have a good job. Being a mother, I am very concerned with the education of my son. Now we all try to provide a good environment for our children to study for a higher qualification so to change their life. I hope that he can have good education, good qualification, good job, good life and so on. We do not want our children to have the kind of regret and hard time that we had experienced … he is my hope for the future." (Aiyee - parent)

From the above findings, I put forward that behind the same perception of 'education is vital', the parents' thinking and reasoning are quite different from the students. To the students, the current government discourse of academic elitism is manifested in their views and actions that high educational attainments are good for their future developments, as evidenced in their current continuous education pursuing for their post-graduate degree. As for the parent group, with their deeply rooted traditional cultural thought of placing high value on education suppressed by Mao's anti-intellectualism and the notion of 'studying is useless', their regrets are not only with them forever but have transformed into hopes and expectations on their children's educational successes. It appears that the parents' attitude to their children's education is a result of the reaction against the official discourses of the time when they were growing up, and only with the changing discourses that other possibilities were enabled. As a result, changes in discourses at policy level are articulated in the increased

educational support and opportunities for the younger generation. Hence, I argue that the student generation not only experienced the impact of the prevailing discourses on education at the time but their education experiences are also shaped by their parents' past.

In addition, the parents talk about the importance of education not for themselves but focus on their provision of educational opportunities for their children, irrespective of gender. Changes in official discourses allowed the traditional cultural value of the significance of education to resurface. However, the cultural value of education being highly gendered was also challenged. With the implementation of a one-child social policy in 1979, it unintentionally helped generate education opportunities for females that indirectly narrowed the gender gap (Liu & Wang 2009). As a result, parental expectations were high for their only children, irrespective of their gender, and they were therefore willing to spend a larger percentage of their total income on their children's education (Tsui & Rich 2002). For example Shuli, who is not a rich parent, was very willing to financially support her daughter academically:

> "Our family is not rich, but for education of our only child, I will give her
> the best that I can. For example she loves reading, and even though
> books are very expensive, I still buy a lot for her." (Shuli - parent)

This one-child policy has led to an emergence of a child-centred environment where Chinese families reduced the traditional gender biases against females. Consequently, none of the student participants actually mentioned about their education in relation to the aspect of gender because they have never experienced education as being gendered. Girls who are the only child in the family today do not have to compete with siblings for family resources (Tsui & Rich 2002). As the only hope for the parents in terms of old-age security, girls nowadays have an increased prospect of receiving formal education than those in the earlier generation. According to Larsen & Istance (2001), even though the strength of the link varies, there is a clear general pattern that the higher the education levels among parents the better literacy for their offspring. However, I argue that this link seems to be very weak within my research groups. The older generation may not have the same education opportunities, but their children are post-graduate students with continuous formal learning plans. In order to facilitate their children's formal learning and strive for more successful lives, there are obvious financial sacrifices from the parent group, irrespective of their own educational level and financial situation. Just like Shuli's case, with China's one-child policy, more and more parents, whether well-off or destitute, are willing to financially support their only child for higher education to obtain better qualifications, irrespective of gender.

However, I am not arguing that gender discrimination has completely disappeared. Since my research was carried out in the capital city of Beijing, findings cannot be directly translated to the situations in the rural areas. Even though the current official discourses of harmonious society aim to combat educational disparities across regions, for example all fees for the nine years of compulsory education was abolished for those in the countryside as from 2007 (Murphy & Johnson 2009), equal opportunities for education might still not be the case. As points out by Lewin *et al.* (1994), despite the compulsory education initiatives, there is still the tendency of a high dropout rate in rural areas, especially for girls. For example, when faced with financial constraints, parents still tend to keep their daughters from going to school and assign them to do farm work and family chores. Therefore, in reality, because of cultural and financial constraints, there is still educational deprivation for the girls, especially in the poor rural areas (Mok *et al.* 2009) despite their understanding that education is crucial.

Lifelong Learning

This section reminds that lifelong learning is theoretically not a new concept in China where the traditional Confucian value of education and learning acknowledged the comprehensiveness of learning being an enjoyable lifetime task (Berthrong 2005). With current Chinese leaders advocating the discourses on lifelong learning and continuous education in order to combat the rapid changes brought about by

globalisation (Liu 2009), the widespread notion of 'knowledge can change your destiny' encourages people to learn within the formal, informal and non-formal settings throughout their lives (Li 2005).

While my participants' first reaction to the question about their understanding of 'learning' is to equate learning to schooling both implicitly and explicitly, after deeper reflection they can also comprehend a broader view on learning. For instance, surfing the Internet, watching television, reading extracurricular books and leisure magazines are also forms of learning. Lina is a good example:

"You know, normally I do not have the chance to reflect and organise my thoughts … I think …when dealing with people, or talking to foreigners, or meeting people from different levels and background … yes, all these are part of learning, right? I think … also reading, including extracurricular books, leisure magazines, not necessarily academic books … are kind of learning." (Lina - student)

In addition, a number of the participants had prepared for the interview so to demonstrate their intelligence about my research topic of learning. They recalled what they have learned from books and what they were taught by their teachers and parents. Some of them quoted an old Chinese saying from 'The Analects of the Confucius' to show their knowledge on the wider meaning of learning that one can learn from anyone anywhere. As Chinese society is a place where many old

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sayings and slogans are commonly used to describe different circumstances, both Wawa and Jeff cited the same common quotation that is often heard in China:

"There is an old saying that goes 'when three people are walking together, there must be one who can be my teacher' (三人行必有我师). That is we can learn from anyone anywhere." (Wawa - student)

"An old saying goes 'when three people are walking together, there must be one who can be my teacher' (三人行必有我师). That is, everyone that you meet everyday, including your subordinates, colleagues, bosses, friends and even your children, as long as you really want to learn, you will definitely learn something from them." (Jeff - student)

As it is believed that Confucian values of practical ethics have been embedded in many traditional sayings, Yan & Sorenson (2006) highlight that many Chinese people quote phrases from 'The Analects of the Confucius' without even coming across any academic texts of Confucius. It appears that Chinese children pick up these phrases from family members or at school at a very young age and continue to use them to describe different situations where they think is appropriate, while not necessarily having the knowledge on the origins of such phrases.

On the broadness of learning, there is another common Chinese saying passed on from generation to generation stating that 'learning has no boundaries' (学海无涯). This saying exemplifies the concept that there are no boundaries to learning and affirms that learning can happen at any time, in any form and in any mode. Following this line, Jeff also has his knowledge to share:

"Every individual at a different age has their own learning goals and learning directions. When people are young, learning is to obtain knowledge from school. At a working age, it is to learn how to interact with people. For the middle-aged group, learning is an attitude. As for the elderly, learning should be an enjoyment.   Now you see? Learning is really extensive." (Jeff - student)

As such, this Confucian belief that learning is broader than education, is something not limited within particular parameters and timeline, but occurs throughout one's entire life in many forms, was manifested in Jeff's attitude.

Furthermore, most of the parent participants, who are already in their sixties, expressed that due to their unique life experiences and hardships for most part of their lives, it is now time for them to enjoy life after retirement, and that continuous learning is their main choice of activities. Wang and Aiyee shared their views:

"I'm retired … I have plans to continue my learning … for example, to learn how to dance, sing and exercise. I also want to learn how to use the computer and to surf the net. When reaching old age, I think we have to learn how to enjoy life and also learn to be healthier." (Wang - parent)

"I want to learn something related to technology, like how to use a computer. I just need to know a little bit so I can play with it. I think … older people's learning is for happiness and also to improve the quality of our life." (Aiyee - parent)

I posit that this attitude of enjoyment appears to be a reflection of their deeply rooted cultural value of filial piety. Although it is the common understanding that filial piety refers to children's respect to elderly and taking care of their parents, Yan & Sorenson (2006) remind that it is not a one-sided affair. Parents have to take good care of their children to gain the filial piety from them. As expressed by the parent participants, it is now the time for them to enjoy life because they have already fulfilled their filial duty of taking care of their children when they were young. Hence the parents are now worry-free and can enjoy themselves as their children are financially independent and are expected to demonstrate filial piety at their retirement to repay earlier support and care (Yan & Sorenson 2006).

In addition to cultural perspective, current official discourse on lifelong learning and learning society are shown in the students' attitude towards the broadness of learning. Their understanding on this topic from books and teachers is evidently shaped by the widespread notion of 'knowledge can change your destiny'. This notion of encouraging people to learn within the formal, informal and non-formal settings throughout their lives (Li 2005) has been widely publicised on billboards around the country as well as incorporated within school curriculum. For instance, the discourse on academic elitism is manifested in the attitudes and experiences of the student group, as in the situations of Qiong and Linda:

"Oh yes … continuous learning … lifelong learning ….I learnt about them … I think it is about more knowledgeable from our education achievements … and yes, also my curiosity of the unknown world." *(Qiong - student)*

"Lifelong learning is popular nowadays. I am happy and pleased to see that I am stronger today than yesterday and that I will be better tomorrow than today. I feel that upon learning new things, my life is enriched and becomes meaningful. Also, I will become stronger and more capable and better than others." (Linda - student)

As for the parent group, they also expressed their views on lifelong learning as Shuli shared her joy of travelling with her daughter from which she informally learned different traditions and cultures:

"I feel that knowledge is everywhere in our daily life. Like when I travel with my daughter, I obtain knowledge too. There is an old saying 'reading a million books cannot compare with walking a million miles' (读万卷书不如行万里路). That is when you are travelling, you can understand the local tradition and culture, and by talking to the locals, you can also understand their lives. This is a good learning method and I feel good about it." (Shuli - parent)

Shuli belongs to the generation of the 'Red Guard' during the Cultural Revolution and gained experiences by travelling around the country as well as learning from peasants in an informal way. Hence, her current perceptions of 'reading a million books cannot compare with walking a million miles' is argued to be much influenced by Mao's education discourses on informal learning and that learning should not be confined within classroom walls (Price 1979; Cleverley 1985). When China moves on to the twenty-first century that the new leadership encouraged the concepts of lifelong learning and continuous education to cater for the talent needs in supporting China's economic growth and increased productivity (Liu 2009), Jiang echoes with his recognition of lifelong learning in a philosophical way:

"People's entire lives, from birth to death, are engaged in learning. Learning can be from eating or anything related to daily life. We have to learn whatever we need to know. This makes learning endless." (Jiang - parent)

While the parent participants acknowledge their understanding of the learning concept as broader than schooling and fully embraced the concept of lifelong learning, their current leisure learning is still under a formal setting. For example, on one hand, Jiang expresses his view on the comprehensiveness of lifelong learning, yet on the other, he is engaged in formal learning. Yi was also excited when sharing her extensive studying opportunities offered by the Elderly University:

"Upon retirement, we took courses at the Elderly University. With the opportunity to learn at the Elderly University, we have something to do and have a balanced life." (Jiang - parent)

"Elderly University is mainly for those old retired people. There are all sorts of subjects, such as calligraphy classes, dance classes, computer classes and photography classes. We can attend whatever subject we are interested in. You will get into the learning mode once you get started there. It is that environment that transforms learning into a hobby." (Yi - parent)

Lifelong learning is now a theme highly emphasised by the parent group as evidenced by their continuous education opportunities after

retirement that was made possible through the changes of official discourse over time. Yet, even when the parents are fully aware of the broadness of learning and have a choice among leisure-learning providers, they still opt for classes at the Elderly University showing their preference on educational institutes over other forms of learning. As the 'lost generation' during the Cultural Revolution losing education opportunities, they are now enjoying their chances of learning within the four walls of educational institutes. That said, I suggest that this might be a reaction to their past feeling of missing out the classroom aspect of learning when they were growing up. Therefore, when formal learning facilities are now available as part of the current discourses of harmonious society focusing on enjoyment for its aged population, the parent group grasp this chance of formal learning coinciding with their cultural value of placing high emphasis on education.

Furthermore, the student participants are also happy about changes in discourses that place emphasis on lifelong learning, which are beneficial to their parents. For example, Ying and Hua have full support to their parents' engagements in lifelong learning within formal settings.

> *"In fact when I look at our older generation like my parents, their lives nowadays are pretty fulfilled. Like my mother, she is retired but still very busy everyday going to classes. I ask her why you are so busy. She said I have to learn dancing, and attend workshops on outdoor*

rescues … well … she is now very much into mountain hiking. She also enrolled in a painting class, with a professional as their tutor. I think that old people's lives without the kind of competitions at school can still be very rewarding." (Ying - student)

"Now, my parents are retired and have moved here to Beijing and stay with me. They are learners too and are very active participating in the classes and activities organised by our district community centre. My mother is learning how to dance and my father is learning how to use the Internet … he is particularly fond of MSN." (Hua - student)

After all, I argue that the notion of lifelong learning, including different modes of learning, is still far away from reality since the notion of formal education is so deeply rooted in the Chinese society. Student participants' pursuits in postgraduate qualifications and the parents attending Elderly University are good reflections. Although China is still a long way towards being a learning society providing lifelong learning for all, indeed the popularity of elderly universities and community-learning centres operated by the local governments is an encouraging start towards the adoption of official discourse in people's everyday lives. For the success of learning society and lifelong learning, I put forward that the younger generation in particular, has to embrace not only the concept but also practise learning within non-formal and informal settings.

In sum, with the Chinese tradition of placing high emphasis on the teachings from Confucius on the broadness of learning, these collective beliefs and values have profound impacts over generations from a cultural level. Hence, after deep reflections, participants were able to acknowledge the comprehensiveness of learning to include other learning modes other than just education. However, knowing something and taking action are different matters entirely. As evidenced in the findings that will be discussed later in this chapter, the participants expressed that qualifications from formal learning is of utmost important for employment related reasons, whereby education can provide them with qualifications, good job, high pay and bright future. Hence, I argue that Chinese individuals are embracing two different angles on the concept of learning where their espoused value being 'learning is in all modes and all aspects of life' while their acted value is indeed 'learning is studying for formal qualifications with educational settings'.

Qualifications

This section argues that with discourse changes over time towards academic elitism, individuals are keener to obtain qualifications and to navigate through the turbulence of the manpower market. It is the current awareness that having a skill certification or professional qualification would lessen people's sense of work insecurity (Raddon

2007) and increase their marketability within the labour market (Tamkin 1997).

From current literature, there is a good deal of discussion on education and learning being motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic forces (Huitt 2001; Weller 2005). Intrinsic motivations include curiosity and interest in a subject area, seeking self-esteem, self-direction, self-development as well as personal fulfilment upon one's acquisition of knowledge from different forms of learning (Bye *et al.* 2007; Khamis *et al.* 2008). On the other hand, extrinsic motivations are more related to tangible outcomes like qualifications, which can lead to possible economic benefits (Kennedy 2002). When both groups of participants recalled on the factors that influence their education perceptions and experiences, studying for a qualification stands out as a recurring theme. Although this perception persists over generations, the reasoning and thinking behind this attitude is evidently different. It appears that while the parent participants now place the same value on qualifications as their children, they did not do so when they were younger. It was only following the change in discourse from Mao to Deng, which brought new possibilities for educational advancement, that the parents generated similar values as their children. Furthermore, the parents' current attitude on education also reflect the resurfacing of their deeply rooted traditional Chinese cultural value of education being highly prized; where education is the key route to

success and to get rich and change their social statuses and identities within the society.

Being the 'lost generation' losing out educational opportunities during the Cultural Revolution, not all of the parent participants have qualifications from education. The concept of getting qualifications from education was indeed far reaching during the historical discourses where the parents lived through. It was Mao's belief to remove the upward mobility brought about by education and to wipe out the bourgeois achievement-mindset. Shaped by Mao's notion of 'studying is useless' and the central job allocation system, the parent participants who were young people at that time were not motivated to study given that academic attainment had no relationship with their job assignments. Nina felt for her parents:

> *"Talking about my parents … that time was the Cultural Revolution… they had been classified as worker class. It did not matter whether they were interested in continuous learning or not, their lifetime jobs were already assigned by the state, and so there were no motives for them to learn." (Nina - student)*

Cheng (1986) points out that it was only during the post-cultural revolution phase that people embarked on non-formal adult higher education and were given equal employment opportunities to those graduated from universities and college. Only a few parent participants

were able to take advantage of the limited adult continuous education opportunity during the economic reform that led to their career success. Dang and Suying were the lucky ones:

"Because of work related needs, I started to learn about accounting by self-study. After a few years of studying hard, I obtained the State Accounting Certification and was eventually promoted to be the accountant of our factory." (Dang - parent)

"As a cadre, of course I have to have qualifications. Under such a system, I was able to promote from deputy chief to chief-in-charge and then to commissioner and finally to head a central government department. It is all because I have qualifications that I get promoted to today's position." (Suying - parent)

With the changing educational discourses from Mao's political struggles to Deng's economic growth, there were more education opportunities under the two-track education system (Bastid 1984; Tsang 2000; Fenby 2009). In addition to elite education, the vocational training and non-formal adult higher education also provided good second chances for the 'lost generation' to obtain qualifications (Cheng 1986). I argue that this discourse changes was noticeable in the parent group, such as Deng and Suying, as they literally went through and experienced the changes over time. As such, after they survived the Cultural Revolution and now into the economic development era of

China, their perception on qualifications changed accordingly. Tang is a good example:

> "In this society, if you do not have a diploma or certificate, you are going nowhere. Why? It is because qualification is a proof of your real ability. No matter where you are in this world, with the diploma and certificates on hand, you are like being accredited already. For example, you go to work for a company with diploma and certificate, people will think you are competent. Without the papers, how can you prove that you have achieved bachelors, masters or doctoral level? Therefore, I emphasise heavily on the importance of qualifications. You know, like my daughter, she always gets her diploma or certificate no matter whether it is a typing course, a bachelor's even a master's degree. I always remind my daughter to ensure that she has the diploma or certificate on hand which is important for her future development." (Tang - parent)

Tang's current perception on the importance of qualifications is argued to be different from the official discourses of the time when he was growing up. It is because under Mao's notion of 'studying is useless' and the central manpower system, educational attainments, qualifications and certifications were irrelevant to one's future. Yet as the changing discourses enabled other possibilities, especially for the children, Tang's perception changed accordingly.

As for the students, after reflecting on the importance of education, they put forward that qualifications was the number one key factor behind their pursuit of education. Yun and Nina reiterate that indeed getting the actual diploma is the ultimate reason behind their continuous pursuit towards higher qualifications. Nina even explicitly stated that she would not regard those courses that do not offer certificates or diplomas as learning:

"Learning is a tool, and at the end there will be a diploma. Yes, the outcome is the actual certificate … diploma. In my view, it is not for the amount of knowledge you learn but for the diploma." (Yun - student)

"I think that the key importance of getting a qualification is the diploma. Others will view you differently in terms of academic achievement; say you're a university graduate, master's degree graduate and so on. When looking for jobs, companies will not look for your qualities but your qualifications on paper. I personally believe that only those specific learning towards a qualification with certificates and diplomas are counted as learning." (Nina - student)

It appears that the student participants viewed education in a very instrumental way focusing on extrinsic values like qualifications and certificates rather than intrinsic values such as knowledge gained. It has been a traditional belief that Chinese people are seeking knowledge based on their 'haoxuexin' that is the 'passion for learning',

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through their diligence and endurance of hardship (Li 2004). Li & Wang (2004) indicate that Chinese cultural values placed heavy emphasis on individuals' intellectual development, skills acquisition and most importantly the love and passion for learning. Yet, this notion of 'haoxuexin' has not been mentioned or implied by the participants. Quite the opposite of this traditional cultural thought, Ying confessed that she indeed does not have much 'haoxuexin', since her only reason to work hard for academic attainments is to gain qualifications. Lina also expressed that in her view; Chinese people are not eager to learn but forced to learn in order to get the qualifications:

"I cannot say that I am eager to learn or love learning, because I also thought about playing and going out. So why be studious? I need the qualification. I could not lose my dignity; I have to be the glory of the farmers' children." (Ying - student)

"Most of the people I think are not necessarily eager to learn, only for getting the qualification … yes, like it or not, we are sort of forced to learn." (Lina - student)

It is argued that people generally study for qualifications, yet I suggest that the overwhelming focus in gaining a diploma or certificate has created a 'diploma syndrome' in China. While the Chinese learners are so focused on accumulating certificates, they could lose sight of other intangible benefits like knowledge, satisfaction and fulfilment. With

Chinese people's 'diploma syndrome', even though they recognise the different learning modes and processes which occurred during the human lifespan, they may not regard all these activities as learning due to the lack of certification, as in Nina's case. As such, the Chinese cultural belief of Chinese people seeking knowledge due to their 'haoxuexin' is evidenced to be less powerful as the student generation place high emphasis on qualifications reflecting the changing discourse to academic elitism whereby successes are based on one's academic achievements.

Furthermore, under the changing discourse from political struggles to economic growth, China moved from a planned economy to a market economy with its door opened to more multi-national companies and private businesses competing over best-qualified workforce (Cortazzi & Jin 1996). Qualifications thus become their measurement of talent in their recruitment and selection processes (Cruikshank 2008) adding to the intensity of the 'diploma syndrome' in China. For instance, Linda expressed that the reason she placed high importance on qualification and diploma is mainly due to her employers:

> *"The ultimate key purpose of studying is to find a job. The importance of the diploma is indeed from the views of employers. He feels it is important … therefore I feel the same way too." (Linda - student)*

Therefore as influenced by this change in official discourse, the students' pursuit for qualifications is seemingly employment related, as employers frequently make use of the level of educational attainment to identify potential candidates from the talent market (Cruikshank 2008). The situation is getting more severe after the demolition of the 'iron rice bowl' policy and the central manpower assignment system, where more people are forced into the competitive labour market fighting for job opportunities. Since the competition is keen within China's huge population, qualifications thus become the primary yardstick to measure one's abilities and predict one's performance. This is reflected in the views of Yiming and Hua:

"Qualifications are very important … In China; we have too many people all fighting for job opportunities. Everyone will first look at your qualifications prior to considering your application." (Yiming - student)

"We have 1.3 billion people in China and the competition is so keen that education is the only yardstick for measurement … Formal qualifications are very important to us as they sort of identify us. Without an elite education, we will have no future, especially with a population of 1.3 billion." (Hua - student)

As such, for the younger generation facing the forthcoming economic and social developments of China brought about by different changing discourses, it is argued that engagement in continuous education and

the getting of qualifications is believed to be a good way to 'sharpen the saw' for personal survival in this rapidly changing economy. Within this context, the students acknowledged that abilities and skills are crucial for good job performance, yet having the qualification on hand is even more vital. A number of them shared their views regarding qualifications as the prime proof of their abilities in trying to get a good job:

"Nowadays, although there is increasing attention on abilities and skills, qualification is more important. It will not be acceptable if you do not meet the academic requirements stated on the job advertisements, because no matter how high your ability is, no one will know. Actually, you will not have the chance to be interviewed, not to mention the chance to show your ability." (Yuan - student)

"Work ability is important after you got the job, but you still need a diploma to get you in so as to confirm your ability, right? If I do not have high academic qualifications, they simply do not give me a chance to show my ability. Therefore, qualification is an important entry criterion, and after that, I can show my ability. Yes I think … qualification is like a passport and it allows me to get in." (Linda - student)

"Even if you are smart but without the paper proof of your qualifications, do you think that companies will take the risk of hiring you? At least if you are smart on paper, the company will already be

50% sure that you are good and the remaining 50% will depend on
your performance at work." (Eson - student)

These students firmly believed that qualification is the 'knocking door stone' to 'ask the employer to open the door for them' so that they can show them their abilities. Some participants also described formal qualifications as the 'passport' for them 'to go to wherever they want', or as the 'ruler' to measure and predict people's possible abilities. For example, Cicai recognised that continuous education can elevate his ability, yet it is the qualifications with the diploma on hand that could help him to move up the career ladder:

"Why study? To elevate my personal ability is one thing, but more
importantly, without appropriate qualifications, even though I'm very
capable, my chance of moving up the career ladder will be very slim."
(Cicai - student)

Likewise, some of them viewed gaining the 'extra piece of paper rolled up and tied in a ribbon' just as an add-on to their pursuit of continuous education. For example, both Jeff and Eson expressed that although having the diploma is not their main desire, there is certainly no harm in gaining knowledge and a diploma at the same time:

"Since we have to learn anyway, why not choose a course with
qualifications and a diploma? Although the cost might be higher, at

least the diploma itself is the proof of the knowledge that everyone in the society is looking for." (Jeff - student)

"*I think that since I want to learn something, I might as well learn it and get a qualification or diploma at the same time. Sometimes you never know when that qualification or certificate will be useful in the future, so having one more certificate on hand will never do you any harm." (Eson - student)*

It is thus during the changing discourse to academic elitism that individuals believe that qualifications is inevitable. The general perception is that they have to accumulate more education credentials to convince potential employers that they are better qualified than other candidates that are applying for the same job or that they are more suitable for further promotion. And although this perception on qualification persists over generations with both groups of participants acknowledging the importance of qualifications behind one's education, the reasoning and thinking behind this attitude is evidently different due to the changing political and economic contexts. It could be further argued that the parent participants' high value placed on qualifications is generated by the same set of circumstances that their children are facing now since during the parents' teenage days, such circumstances did not exist.

Future

After reviewing 'qualifications' as one of the key motivating factors for formal learning, achieving a good future is another extrinsic motivator repeatedly recognised by both groups of participants. This section argues that the Chinese cultural value of believing education can bring about a good future continues to be strong. However, with the changing discourses to economic growth and market economy, the concept of future and the definition of survival actually changed over generations as evidenced in the findings. Furthermore, the perception that education with a qualification can lead to a brighter future is argued to be even stronger from participants that come from the rural areas.

Confucian values have played a vital role in the persistence of this perception over generations, where Chinese people strongly believe that a high educational level could bring about upward social mobility, wealth and status (Turner & Acker 2002; Liu & Mao 2007). For example, during the imperial age, education was the best path for the acquisition of personal power and social success as stipulated by an old Chinese saying 'everything is low class, except those with education can move up to the upper class'. It is believed that high educational credentials can bring about good employment opportunities leading to a higher salary and a better future, and this coincides with a famous old saying that goes 'you can find golden houses and beautiful girls inside your books' (书中自有黄金屋, 书中自

有颜如玉), meaning economic benefits come with knowledge and qualifications. Tamkin (1997) states that in many incidents, an individual's investment in education and development is well rewarded with tangible returns, such as better progression opportunities, increased earnings as well as decreased likelihood of being unemployed. Although the return on investment in continuous and higher education is not guaranteed, both groups of participants still firmly believed that qualifications could lead to brighter future and a better life with economic benefits. Wang and Guo supported this idea:

> *"I grasp the chance and study hard because I know that learning will be useful for my future and that study is a kind of preparation. As simple as that: you have knowledge, you have a future. I think it is because I continued to learn and equip myself with qualification that I was promoted from a factory worker to my present position of Office Administration Assistant. I would say only through learning for a qualification that I move to a higher level." (Wang - parent)*

> *"Only with education can people find their future. No education, no knowledge, no good job, no good pay, no future. Like my son, he is now so successful because of his high education … you know I believe knowledge is power." (Guo - parent)*

The student group also shared the same view:

"Nowadays, people are more practical, they will further their education for the benefits of their career growth … which I think is equivalent to a better future." (Qiong - student)

"More learning equals more education, more knowledge, more status and more money and a brighter future … Motives of my learning … for better qualifications to enhance future promotion, find a better job, and to provide better living conditions for my family. Everyone who studies hard for his or her future will think similarly. Well, this is very normal, and I think this is pretty much the same for everyone." (Hua - student)

To both groups, a good future broadly encompassed the opportunities of having a good job, earning more money as well as having a better quality of life. However, because the two groups of participants actually belonged to two unique cohort generations; it is argued that there are underlying differences on experiences and thinking behind this same perception of 'future'. For example, the concept of 'survival' is very different between the two generations. At the time of the older generation, China was still under poverty due to natural disasters and political unrest, and their wish for better survival was simply to satisfy basic needs like having enough food and a good shelter. Jiang and Guo both experienced the hard times:

"At that time, I was caught up with the 1958's Great Leap Forward, and later the natural disasters in the 1960's. Everyone was assigned half a kilo of food per day and our stomachs were never full. If we

worked in the farm, we could have another half a kilo as a subsidy. In order to survive … only if we worked on the farm did we had food, and if we went to school, we would have no food to eat. Later I joined the army at the age of 18 for survival … soldiers did not have wages but at least we were supplied with basic personal necessities." (Jiang - parent)

"It was the time of the Cultural Revolution when I was young, around fourteen years old. I spent 10 years working in the field growing vegetables, building brick houses and participating in all sorts of manual labour work, all of which exceeded the physical abilities of a child. They only gave us less than half a kilo of rice per day. As a youngster, I never felt full after every meal. Frankly, I never think about my tomorrow when I have a empty stomach today." (Guo - parent)

In comparison to the parents, their children are the generation of the 'post 80s', who grew up hand-in-hand with China's thirty years of economic reforms and development. As an outcome of the changing discourses focusing on economic growth, they are brought up in a relatively resource-sufficient and materialistic environment. The students were facing a different, often more affluent and secure adulthood than their parents. Hardship was something of the past and 'survival' to them is improvement in living standards and enrichment in lifestyles. Their pursuit for continuous education is to bring a better future with an enhanced quality of life:

"Education is the foundation of our bright future. It is not just for basic daily needs … survival for a better quality life … to get a more comfortable luxurious life … everyone wants LV, Gucci, you know those designer bags." (Wawa - student)

"Young people nowadays do not need to work hard for basic survival. I think they want better life, for example, a more luxurious life with their own house and car. For this kind of lifestyle, we are not able to help them; they have to work hard and achieve it by themselves." (Wang - parent)

From one angle, the students' attitude of education is more of a materialistic one focusing on the improvement of living standards and lifestyles reflecting a change in the Chinese cultural value of knowledge. This cultural value is argued to be less powerful because instead of seeking knowledge due to people's 'haoxuexin' or passion for learning (Li 2004), nowadays more people regard formal learning in an instrumental way. They put emphasis on qualifications that can help to bring a better future with financial improvement, but not motivated by the intrinsic value of obtaining knowledge from education (Sun 2000).

From the second angle, according to Maslow's (1958) hierarchy of needs, when physiological and safety needs, such as food and shelter, are satisfied, higher level needs of love and belonging will be pursued.

Hence, this move from basic survival to elevated desires is natural as China rapidly moves through different stages of economic development. This is manifested in Qiong's view:

"People wish to pursue a better life … because when your material life reaches a certain degree, you will naturally want more things. (Qiong - student)

As such, it is normal for people to have altered attitudes on their 'future' in view of the changing socio-economic environments. These changes are apparent in the parent group, from having no 'future' to getting qualifications leading to a good future with enhanced quality of life. This can be explained from the changing government discourses over generations. When the parent participants were young, the notion of attaining a good future from education and qualifications did not exist. During the time of planned economy, people were placed into jobs within state-owned enterprises by the government according to their political status and class and not academic attainments. As all manpower assignments and movements were centrally controlled with limited self-initiated upward mobility, individuals generally had less incentive to pursue any continuous education (Cheng *et al.* 1999). When China moved from a centrally planned to a market economy, the notion of a secured lifetime career became history. Adhering to the changing discourses as well as the re-surfacing of their cultural value of 'education being highly prized', the parent group is able to truly

regard education as a means to provide for a better future. Zhang illustrated this changing phenomenon through his son's situation:

"During my time, we are taken care of by our work unit with assigned housing and other benefits. I worked all these years until now that I am retired. However, when my son graduated from university, the central job allocation system was abolished and they had to look for jobs in the market. Well, good jobs in the market are lesser and lesser because the numbers of graduates are increasingly. Competitions are very keen … so I think only education with high qualification can provide us with the competitiveness and a good future … yes this is what I think now." (Zhang - parent)

As for the student group, upon China's transformation into a market economy, they have to continuously improve themselves in terms of educational achievements in order to survive the economic turbulence brought about by globalisation, industrialisation and technological advancement. For example, Jing seeks to gain a qualification within a profession in order to cope with the increased demand for talents under the changing discourse of market economy:

"I remember there was a saying back then: 'being well verse in mathematics, physics and chemistry, no matter where in this world, there's no way that you should be afraid' (学遍数理化, 走遍天下都不怕). Since most of my family members have a background in science, they said that if a person can perform well in a profession, then surely

that person would be successful and have a great future. Yes ... I have had this concept ever since when I was young. In order to find a good and high-paid job in the competitive market, I think my family is correct and I need to be a professional in order to have a good future too." (Jing - student)

Also evidenced from the findings, the perception that education with a qualification can lead to a brighter future is even stronger from participants that come from the rural areas. According to Cruikshank (2008), human capital theory suggests that education will lift people out of poverty and that those who invest in continuous education can increase their lifetime earnings. This thinking is reflected in the common belief of the participants that in order to move away from poverty and low status in the society and have a better future, the key is to have qualifications from education. Shuli and Suying endorsed this belief:

"Like us, a family from the rural area, the only chance to change our own destiny is through studying hard for the diploma." (Shuli - parent)

"Some people from the rural area wanted to work in the city, and in order to do so, good education level was needed and their only chance of coming to work in the city was by studying hard. If they stayed in the rural area, they would have no future ... you know why they study hard ... it is because they know having qualification is their only way out, otherwise, they will be farmers forever." (Suying - parent)

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Children from the rural areas are also more aware that the level of education is important for their future. To them, the only way out of poverty is to strive for superb academic results that qualify scholarships and to further their higher education in the city, with the belief that they will find a good job after graduation leading to a brighter future with better quality of life. Both Nina and Xiaohui are from the rural area and shared the same sentiment:

"Since we are from the rural area, we have no choice but to work hard on our studies … Low education means a low salary and no future … high academic qualifications will end up with high salaries meaning a good future." (Nina - student)

"We are from the rural areas. Either we stay at home and do farming job, or obtain higher qualification and find a good job in the city. If I do not have the qualification and really have to go home, I will have to marry a farmer and be a farmer for the rest of my life. The only way out for me is to attend university and obtain formal qualifications, and then look for a stable and well-paid job in the city. I will then have a future." (Xiaohui - student)

In addition to region where they belong to, this also reflects the changing attitudes towards gender. Females, in particular those from the rural areas, have started to gain equal educational opportunities within current China, as in Ying's success:

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"Learning is the only way out for this girl from the farm to become a woman working in a large multi-national company." (Ying - student)

With changes in official discourses over time, such as the concentration on academic elitism and the one-child policy, it is argued that the effects of gender hindering education on the student group have been reduced. For example, the current discourse on lifelong learning with the widespread Chinese slogan that says, 'knowledge can change your destiny' is noticeable in people's daily lives, especially those young people from the rural areas where they now can enjoy gradual equality of education as promoted by the discourses of harmonious society. Yet, it is not suggested that gender discrimination has been eliminated within a broader perspective. Especially in the rural area where women provide no financial return to her own family after marriage (Hooper 1991), when there are any financial considerations, girls will be withdrawn from school after compulsory education whereas boys will have educational opportunities hoping that when they grow up, they will provide for the family in return (Lynch 2006).

Family/parental support

This section presents the importance of family/parental support in all aspects of education from the individuals' perspectives. Essentially, the parents' high regards on the importance of education, their financial

support and helping to take care of daily routines, are all key contributors to their children's formal learning attitudes and actions. It is argued that the consistency of perception among the two generations irrespective of all the changes in official discourses over time is rooted from the traditional cultural values that passed down from generation to generation.

From the findings, both groups of participants mentioned about the key importance of parental support in children's educational directions and decisions. When describing their dominant role in their children's education, the parent participants sounded very natural. They stressed that the role of parents is to provide the best education opportunities for their children and to pave their path for a good future. Shuli is one of the many parents who placed a high emphasis on their children's education:

> *"Knowledge is wealth, and therefore I place high emphasis on my daughter's education … you know, all parents want their children to be able to fly up high, like dragons and phoenixes. Therefore I hope that my daughter can be in love with learning, and we as parents gave her all our support and encouragement." (Shuli - parent)*

Upon changes in discourses emphasising economic growth and market-driven economy, in order to ensure that their children understand the importance of education for staying competitive in the

labour market, some of the parents force their children to study hard. Jia, for example, placed heavy emphasis on the severe competitions in the real world to encourage the educational pursuits of his daughter:

> *"As parents of course we have to provide the best education opportunities to our children so that they can have a good future. I always talked about the severe competition out there, telling her that working hard in her studies and going to university is the only way to a good future. Yes, we as parents … believe that education is very important to our children." (Jia - parent)*

As changing discourse from political struggles to economic growth enabled materialistic improvements in people's lives, there are other parents who encourage their children to do well in their studying by providing financial and emotional support. Financially sufficient parents are particularly proud of their affordability to pay for the extra classes, adding the competitive edge to their children. Jia and Suying shared their stories:

> *"I always encourage my daughter to go as high as possible … go for a doctorate degree. I will pay for it as I believe that giving her education is better than giving her money to spend. What she learned stays with her forever." (Jia - parent)*

> *"When my daughter was young, I brought her to English classes, calligraphy classes, drawing classes. Oh, well, she indeed did not*

want to learn all of these, but she had no choice. I had done my best

to give her the chances already. Ever since primary school, I hired

tutors to give her one-to-one guidance, up until when she was in junior

high. Then she got into a very good high school." (Suying - parent)

Not undermining those parents who are neither wealthy nor well educated, but parents' continuation to take care of their children, irrespective of the child's age, is a common phenomenon in China. As the educational level of some parent participants was not high and did not have the ability to assist their children academically, they shared their alternate ways of supporting their children's education to show their continuous support, love and care. Without commenting on which is the best way, Guo and Aiyee demonstrated different actions of support to their children's education.

"His (my son) main responsibility was to study hard and to obtain good

scores in his school works, so my wife and I were the ones doing all

the household chores." (Guo - parent)

"When he (my son) was young, we had a superstition … if we would

like their children to study well, we would have to give him pen and

paper as toys. That is to cultivate his interest in writing … so when we

played games, we would play with the pen and paper." (Aiyee - parent)

While evidently the parents are providing their best for the education of their children irrespective of gender, indeed women from the parental

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generation experienced denied access to education when they were young and thereafter further losing out second chance of education due to family and childcare responsibilities. Their regrets were directly translated into countless support for their children's continuous education. For example, Aiyee and Jiang both recalled the time when they were young and that elders in their family who held traditional Confucian thoughts placed low value on education for females:

"When I was young, I did not hear any positive comments on learning from the elderly … did not think that learning was important, especially not important for females. They did not send their girls to school; boys could go to school though. " (Aiyee – parent)

"I started school very late, at the age of nine … whereas women simply did not attend school. I had many siblings at home, and at that time, we have to pay school fees. At that time, people did not think that going to school was so important. However, my parents still thought that being a boy I should have more education." (Jiang – parent)

While education has been greatly prized in Chinese society (Hallinger 2000; Zhang 2004; Guo 2006), it is argued that female still do not have a fair chance of educational pursuits (Lofstedt 1980; Mok *et al.* 2009). Rooted from the highly influential Confucian core values, women's access to education was not encouraged (Kristeva 1986), as

evidenced by the female parent participants who were not given chances to pursue education when they were young. Yet, during the Cultural Revolution, females were given the same right as their male counterparts in terms of participation in political struggles, criticising intellectuals, as well as all types of movements of the Red Guards, so arguably gender discrepancies were very much removed. Although schools and universities were resumed after the end of the Cultural Revolution, family and childcare responsibilities further hindered females in pursuing their second chance for education. Thus, evidently the parent group, especially the mothers, carried with them many regrets. Yi and Deng both faced similar challenges:

"In 1978, University Entrance Examinations were resumed, but because I had my son and my work unit was very far away from home, I did not take it. I had to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and brought my son with me to work, and only arrived home at 7 o'clock at night. Those not married had the time to revise for their examination. I again missed the chance. Afterwards, I completed my high school courses via self-study after work. It was really difficult taking care of a child and at the same time doing part time self studies. (Yi - parent)

"After doing nothing for ten years, I was assigned to work in the factory after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Actually some people went back to study but I did not, because I was pregnant and missed this chance of going back to school again ... no way that I could return

to school for my study because I have a family to take care and also I
have to work to get the monthly wages for survival." (Dang - parent)

It was not that the parents do not have any desire to learn, they simply lack the environment and conditions to support their continuous education endeavours. With their regrets, it was translated into placing heavy emphasis on education of their children, irrespective of gender. As such, it could be argued that the student group is not only impacted by the prevailing official discourses of their time, their educational experiences and perceptions are also shaped by their parents' past under the influences of the historical discourses.

In addition to the impacts of government discourses on individuals' education experiences and perceptions, traditional cultural values also mediate the relationship between the government discourses and the educational experiences and perceptions of the two groups. For example, as shaped by the cultural values of family, the student participants expressed that a good future brought about by educational attainments is not only for themselves but also for the welfare of the family. Yun and Eson shared their wishes of providing a good future for their family upon gaining higher qualifications leading to a good job and high salary:

"In this society, you must have high quality qualifications and
certificates to find a good job. With a good job, you will have enough

money to support your family and upgrade their living standards." (Yun - student)

"With a good education, we can find a good job, earn good money and can then enjoy life … Now, I have a stable job and am working on my master's degree and I will earn more money as soon as I complete it. I'm sure this will bring a brighter future both for my family and me. I would like to improve the living standards of my parents and hopefully I can buy a big house for all of us." (Eson - student)

Furthermore, the cultural values of 'wulun', filial piety and collectivism also explain the persistence of this key theme from one generation to the next. Firstly, the five cardinal relations, 'wulun', is the Confucian code of social conduct that brings about respect and obedience according to social order (Fan 2000; Kennedy 2002; Noronha 2002). Within this traditional framework, strong compliance and conformity to one's superiors, such as parents, husband and elder siblings are expected in Chinese cultural practices (Fan 2000; Kennedy 2002). For example, in terms of educational importance and decisions, children in the family who are in the lower rank of the hierarchy, are expected to listen to those of higher ranks, such as their parents, in order to maintain harmony within the family. Similarly, the parents also take up their high rank and status power of 'wulun' and provide directions and decisions in their children's educational choices. When the student participants recalled memories of education experiences, the first thing

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that came to their minds was that their parents were the key driving force in influencing all aspects of their education. This is especially so when they were young and had thought neither too much about why they had to learn nor about their future. This is similar to other Chinese children who never questioned their parents' decisions but listened and obeyed. Jing and Wawa are two examples out of the many student participants sharing a similar view:

"When I was young … I actually didn't have any concept of why I had to learn, it was just a thought instilled by my family that I have to complete high school, then go to university, then go to graduate school or go and join the workforce. This is very traditional, my mom and dad gave me this thought." (Jing - student)

"My parents … told me to work hard on my study so as to have a good future. At that time, I had not thought much about my future; I just listened to my parents. They love me and therefore whatever they said was for my own good." (Wawa - student)

As presented by Li (2004) in her research, Chinese parents not only hold high expectations for educational achievements, they are also very involved in their children's educational directions and decisions. In this regard, parents' attitudes on education in influencing their children's values, beliefs and decisions cannot be undermined. Yan

mentioned that her parents played a significant role in her educational choices:

> *"When I was at high school getting ready for the university entrance exams, I thought about my future profession, but have no idea at all on what to do and what should be my major at the university. My parents made all decisions for me, and yes, of course, we have to listen to our parents … They decided that it is not a bad idea for a girl to study finance or law … actually I have no idea as to whether this will be popular or unpopular or whether it has a good future or not. Well without any question I just obeyed the decision of my parents, so I chose law as my undergraduate major." (Yan - student)*

Evidently, people's thoughts and emotions, their sense of self, and their ways of understanding are influenced by dominant discourses. For example, when the students describe their educational explorations and decisions, I argue that their circumstances are situated in the larger social, cultural, and historical discourses in which family members, especially parents, play an enormous role in their decision-making.

While Yan expressed that 'of course' she has listened to, complied with and obeyed the guidance and decisions of her parents concerning her formal learning, others added that listening to their parents was simply

a way to please them and to maintain harmony within the family or to avoid punishments. Here are the experiences of Carlos and Sam:

"I was a good kid and never thought of not listening to my parents. Going to university is a big decision and therefore I have to discuss and listen to my parents … my only goal is to have a better life for my family and make them happy. If I do not continue my studies, they will be unhappy … Therefore, they want me to learn, and then I'll learn … no way that I'll upset them." (Carlos - student)

"At that time, studying was for the sake of my parents. When I scored high marks, they were happy. If I did not score high or perform well in my study, they were unhappy and might beat me. Therefore in order to avoid the beatings, I have to study hard." (Sam - student)

According to Venter (2002a), the family is the natural shelter and overall life support system for the Chinese individuals. They depend on their families for financial and emotional support (Hui 2008). As such, when considering educational directions and choices, the endorsement and encouragement from family members are essential. Cicai stated that his family's support was his motivation to pursue continuous education:

"With my family's support, I feel that I have more energy to study, but if my family oppose to the idea, I am afraid I will not continue to learn." (Cicai - student)

Since family supports are so important to the students' education endeavours, there are many other ways that Chinese parents influence and support their children's education, as recalled by the student participants:

"My mother sent me to the best primary school in the district we lived. She had to pay a donation to the school for my admission." (Eson - student)

"Whenever I faced any difficulties in my schoolwork, no matter how late in the evening, my parents would bring me to their professor friend, and this act undeniably benefited me a lot." (Ying - student)

"As a teenager, I realise that my mom, who doesn't like to talk much, would say 'son, let me do it (all family chores), you have homework to do, do well in your study is most important'." (Jeff - student)

The family also includes spouses who are important social actors within the Chinese society. As only a small number of the student participants were married, the spouse's support was not mentioned much. Wawa, who is married, said that her husband has played an equally influential role in her educational decision:

> *"It is not my decision … my husband told me to study this master's degree hoping that I might be able to help him more in his company." (Wawa - student)*

Furthermore, in everyday life these recognitions of ranks and hierarchies also extend to other superiors such as teachers and supervisors at work. For example, Jiangyi and Ying also shared their comments about the impacts from their work leaders on their education attitudes:

> *"He (my boss) wants us to have room for development. That is important to me to do this course. He hopes that the more we learn and gain knowledge, the longer we will stay with the company." (Jiangyi - student)*

> *"My boss is also very studious, she is now doing her second master's degree and this definitely has an impact on me." (Ying - student)*

In addition to inspirations from work counterparts, teachers also have a high status in the Chinese social hierarchy. Chinese students are usually very obedient to their teachers and follow what they are told to do. Huaguang is a good example:

> *"I'm the obedient type and always listen to my teachers. They told me to study hard and I listen to them on what subjects are important to the university entrance examination etc." (Huaguang - student)*

As Chinese students are the obedient type, I argue that this is also an adverse outcome to the adherence of 'wulun'. For example, some Chinese students actually follow the academic route decided by their family even if they have interests in other directions. With the heavy control by Chinese parents on educational decisions, they are taking away their children's opportunities and freedom in pursing formal learning within their own interest areas. As affected by the deeply rooted cultural value of 'wulun' to maintain harmony according to rank and hierarchy and avoid conflict among family members, children usually avoid disagreements and follow the decisions of their parents. Hui shared his regrets in this aspect:

"When I was young, I had dreams about what I want to do, but my parents did not agree with me. They just want me to complete secondary school and then go to university. Normal education to them is the only correct way out. Frankly speaking, I have to obey my parents. I remembered that when I was young, my biggest interest was in painting. I think I was quite talented in that area. As far as I can remember, I started painting from preschool or kindergarten times until primary five. However, one time when I did not score well in a test, my parents took away all my painting stuffs and locked them away. They told me that painting would affect my normal study. Well, since painting was not very popular in China at that time, they refused to pay for my painting tutor fee anymore, so I was forced to stop. Right now, I am not able to paint anymore." (Hui - student)

Secondly, Confucian families are judged based on filial piety, which is people's positive loving behaviour towards their parents and elders within the family (Xu 2006). Within filial piety, parents also have the filial duty to take care of their children when they are young and are expected to provide guidance and advice to them throughout their lives (Yan & Sorenson 2006). Hence, parents tend to make all major educational decisions for their children as evident in the findings. Bound by filial piety, the children were obedient and acted in compliance, such as following their parents' educational arrangements, and working hard to achieve high academic results in order to please their parents in return of their support and care. This way of thinking is illustrated by both groups of participants:

"I know that it was also not easy for them, since when I was young, they had very difficult times trying to earn a living. My mother had to perform physical jobs that not a lot of men had to do, and she had to take care of the family. As their only child, I told myself that if I did not study hard, they would be heartbroken. I thought that my educational success was a good repayment to my parents." (Ying - student)

"It is our tradition to respect and take good care of our parents. Parents always come first and we always give the best to our parents too. Our children, who grew up in this traditional environment, also have this traditional virtue of family coming first. With this in mind, our children also study hard in order to repay their parents and to fulfil the

hopes of their parents. Like my daughter, she will do her best to listen

to us and do what we want her to do. Now with her good job, she

pays us back by taking care of us so that we will be more relaxed and

happy and will have a more comfortable life." (Tang - parent)

Also under the concept of filial piety, Chinese children are expected to demonstrate their filial piety responsibilities throughout the life of their parents and to take care of them in their old age (Yan & Sorenson 2006). Therefore, in order for the student participants to fulfil their filial obligations and to care for their parents financially throughout their lives, they pursue continuous education with a confidence that qualification is the golden route for success, one which helps to bring favourable economic returns.

Lastly, this recurring theme of parental support can also be related to collectivism. In collective societies, individuals do not emphasise the importance of 'self' but stress strongly on the 'we' (Humphreys 1996). While the children continue to place heavy reliance on their family as support mechanism both mentally and financially, it deems natural that educational choices are determined by and within the family collectively (Venter 2002a), with main focus being better job opportunities that can lead to benefits for the family as a whole. For example, Lina shared her situation:

"During the selection of my major, definitely it was the decision of my parents. At that time, I just listened to my parents. In fact, I actually liked to study liberal arts, but my parents considered that the employment opportunities for arts graduates was fairly narrow, whereas graduates from science discipline had a much wider future and easier to get a good job … good for me and for my family." (Lina - student)

Nevertheless, it is argued that with the growing individualism in China brought about by the rapid economic development of the nation, the Chinese cultural value of collectivism is getting less influential in the day to day lives of the Chinese individuals. I argue that this trend might be more applicable on the community level where there are more competitions among people. Yet, as evidenced in my findings, Chinese individuals are still collectivistic at the level of immediate family and consider the welfare of their parents as crucial.

After all, this attitude of family and parents being most important towards one's education has evidently persisted from one generation to the next. Same as the parent group, when the student participants talked about their parents' influence on their formal learning, the responses came so naturally. For instance obeying their parents' decision and directions on education, sustaining their parents' ranking and power in the family and ensuring the happiness of everyone in the family. However, under this sameness in views, the parent group

indeed has different experiences behind their perception. During the reign of Mao, people were very patriotic to Mao and to the Communist Party at large, and therefore it was not surprising that the parent participants did not mention their family as being influential on their education during their childhood. As such, attitudes of the parent participants who grew up during Mao's era were shaped by the political direction of the government at their times. During the Cultural Revolution, the cultural value of placing their family in the apex position within the Chinese society was greatly undermined. At that time the main revolutionary effort was against the bourgeois intellectuals (Cleverley 1985) where even parents and family members were publicly criticised, humiliated and tortured by their own family members (Chen 1975; Hsu 1983). For example, a number of the parent participants was a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution, left the family and went to the countryside to learn from the peasants during their prime learning age. It was only after the end of the Cultural Revolution that changing government discourses from political struggles to economic growth and harmonious society allow the deeply rooted cultural values to resurface. Hence, the parent participants experienced a changing mindset and are now enthusiastic about the education pursuits of their children.

Also, with changes in cultural values over time, for example growing focus of individualism in China, I still argue that the influence on family, particularly parents, is getting more powerful within the Chinese society.

Even under the new social phenomenon of nuclear family, many married women still choose to live with their own parents, and seeking guidance and approval from their parents on educational decisions are not uncommon. In return, their parents continuously regard their married daughter as part of their family and provide financial support, as in Jia's situation:

"Even though she is married, I will still financially support her to go higher, as high as she can achieve." (Jia - parent)

Hence, I argue that the Chinese cultural norm of placing high value and respect on family, in particular the high social ranking of parents, continue to be powerful and influential over generations. Even under the influences of changing official discourses on education as well as the current social changes, such as urbanisation and increased individualism in China, this traditional cultural value has not weaken.

Face

Within Chinese societies, the term 'face' describes one's pride, dignity, prestige and respect (Hofstede & Bond 1988; Hofstede 1991; Morden 1999; Ang & Ofori 2001). Chinese individuals are particularly sensitive to this notion and that the amount of 'face' a person possesses signifies one's social status within the community (Gilbert & Tsao 2000) hence those with a lot of 'face' have reputation and respectability. This section argues that the Chinese cultural value of 'face' evidently

persisted from one generation to the next, of which the importance of 'face' is not only to oneself but also collectively to the family at large. Even when official discourse changes over time from one generation to the next, this notion of 'face' continues its impact and is especially obvious among those from the rural area. Educational inequality due to regionality evidently leads to heavy emphasis on the gaining of 'face' with academic achievements and attainments.

During the participants' sharing of their education experiences, the aspect of 'face' has also been highly emphasised by both groups of participants. Cicai shared his view on how this traditional cultural value of 'face' has deeply affected him in his continuous education:

> *"We Chinese people are very sensitive about face issue … without the appropriate qualification, it is face-losing being lower than others … I feel that with my continuous learning, everyone in my family will be happy, have a great sense of honour and be very proud of me. This concept deeply affected me." (Cicai - student)*

The parents being the 'lost generation' did not mention much about their own education experiences in terms of 'face'. Yi was the only exception. She was born and raised in a rich family, however, due to Cultural Revolution, she was forced to stop schooling and subsequently worked as a factory worker:

"At that time, I did not feel content being a worker and had to work on shifts as well as doing physical work. I knew that my only way out was to study and obtain my certifications. I want to move away from being a worker, from this low rank … and to move higher up the career ladder and have high status and 'face' for myself and family." (Yi - parent)

Yi's discontent to be in the lower class, a class that could not provide her with 'face' that motivated her to pursue continuous education after the Cultural Revolution. It appears that this perception existed even during the Cultural Revolution where some of the students were reluctant to go to the countryside to be re-educated by the peasants, because it was argued that being placed in a position politically inferior to the peasantry (Unger 1980) could be 'face' losing.

Instead of talking about themselves, the parents are particularly proud of their children who have high academic levels. They like to show off the educational accomplishments and career successes of their children in front of their relatives and neighbours, gaining 'face' from others. This sense of pride is reflected in Shuli's dialogue and Hua's feeling for his parents:

"My daughter graduated from university … now working in the city … we have a lot of 'face' within our village and we just love talking about our children in front of others." (Shuli - parent)

"My family and I were so glad that, with my impressive academic results, I was successfully admitted to the university directly with a full scholarship and without the need to attend the nationwide university entrance examination. Everyone in my family was so proud of me, and they had a lot of 'face' in front of all our relatives." (Hua - student)

This shows that the Confucian values, with high importance on harmony within the society (Hofstede 1997; Fan 2000; Kennedy 2002; Noronha 2002; Bockover 2003; Zhang 2004; Yan & Sorenson 2006; Hui 2008) also contributed to people's concern about 'face'. While the family collectively is very important to individuals, they take immense and personal pride in the success, as well as shame in the failures, of those within their family (Bond 1991).

Furthermore, as people's social status within the Chinese community is represented by the amount of 'face' they have (Gilbert & Tsao 2000), people will have a strong feeling of disgrace, or losing 'face' (Li 2004), if they are unable to maintain their own 'face' or to give enough 'face' to others. Thus, when students score low academically, they will have a strong feeling of losing 'face' both for themselves and for their family, especially their parents (Li 2004). A number of the student participants expressed that their parents will criticise them if they do not do well in their examinations, because parents will be embarrassed by their children's poor academic results and will have a strong feeling of losing 'face'. For example, Sam and Yun voiced their concern on disgrace if

they were unable to reach the academic standard or if they fail an examination. This is especially the case during family gatherings where family members brag about the academic success of their own children in order to gain 'face':

"In particular that examination before the Chinese Lunar New Year, because during the family gathering over the winter break, relatives all gathered together and their main topic was to compare the examination scores of their children. If my examination results were bad, my parents would lose face in front of everyone." (Sam - student)

"At that time, we lived in a courtyard together with my father's colleagues. They had kids of my same age and we went to the same grade and class. Everyone scored full marks except me. Parents liked to compare the results of their children and my parents lost face in front of others. Of course, children among themselves compared with each other too. Parents would buy us presents as encouragement when we got good test scores otherwise we would be scolded. So from a very young age the phrase that I heard the most from my parents was 'See, other children scored much … much better than you'." (Yun - student)

In addition, apart from the importance of having and gaining 'face', protecting 'face' is another key reason for my student participants to embark on their formal learning. They believed that their 'face' is protected when they engage in continuous education, especially

outside the family setting and in front of work colleagues and friends. It is a Chinese common belief that others will not look down on them if they have qualifications from formal education, coinciding with a Chinese saying 'everything is low class, except those with education can move up to the upper class'. Jiangyi shared his concern about 'face' at the workplace, whereas Xiaohui expressed that she wanted to protect her 'face' in front of friends:

"It all started when I realised that all my colleagues knew much more than I did and I felt awkward. There were times when the boss assigned us a task and everyone knew how to do it except me. Due to 'face' issue and that colleagues with the same job as me probably wouldn't tell me how to do it, therefore, I felt that there was an urgent need for me to learn." (Jiangyi - student)

"Sometimes when friends are talking about a topic of which I don't understand … Oh yes, it may be true that if everyone knows something except me, then it can be pretty face-losing for me. Then, this will force me to learn about it to protect my own face." (Xiaohui - student)

Stemmed from the sensitivity to 'face', some participants developed a very strong sense of continuous comparison with others, which is argued to be in line with the competitive norm under the market-driven economy. For example, Linda and Eson both have an intense concern

about 'face' as they were brought up in a very competitive environment among their relatives:

"You know, my uncle's child was admitted to university and everyone viewed highly of him. My parent said I had to take him as a model and to learn from him. Therefore I have to copy him, work hard like him and pass the university entrance examination with very good score … now, I opted for going to graduate school, mainly because my cousin went to graduate school too." (Linda - student)

"I think I will go for my doctorate degree, again because of my cousin. After she graduated from university, she went to America to study a combined master's doctorate course. Although she is still working on it, eventually she will have her doctorate diploma. Therefore, my plan is to also go into a doctorate program after finishing this master's degree and I hope I will be Dr. Lai around the same time as her. It has always been like that ever since we were very young, whatever she has, I want too, and vice versa." (Eson - student)

This elevated sensitivity on 'face' leading to constant comparison with others may sound negative. However, I argue that this, to a certain extent, generates a driving force for Chinese individuals to improve through continuous education in order to cope with the severe competition in the labour market brought about by China's rapid economic growth and the discourse on academic elitism. This fits well with a common saying that goes 'improve with competition' (有竞争才

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有进步).   That said, competition is extremely keen for those without high status in the society, such as the people with farmer status but lives in the city. For example, Ying, born and raised in the rural area, is now working as an executive at a multi-national firm in Beijing:

"I will not be me if I do not learn. I am from the rural area. If I do not work hard on my studies, I will be the same as those who grew up with me. Was it because I was from a poor family that you (her teachers) look at me from the far end of your eyes? I cannot let myself down, one day you will have to be proud of me … but how to be successful? It was so important for me to have my status changed upon admission into the university. Yes … a non-farmer status is necessary for my success. Well, those children with a non-farmer status will not have this kind of pressure, because they can still get a job even without university education. However, for us, if we cannot get into university, we have to go back to work in the farm and that is face losing for my parents. When compared with other colleagues, I realised that I would be better off if I obtain another qualification. Most importantly I will have face with higher qualifications and my colleagues will no longer look down at me … and also my previous teachers and schoolmates … I think I should continue to learn more to gain more face." (Ying - student)

Ying was indeed very emotional when telling her story, which included her struggles throughout all these years. As a peasant from the rural area, she is under immense pressure to gain 'face' from continuous

educational attainments. She firmly believed that people from the rural area have to study more diligently than those from the city in order to obtain good academic results, so as to gain 'face', upgrade the social status for themselves and their families. Her experience and attitude on the importance of 'face' is arguably shaped by the prevailing discourses of harmonious society providing equality of education to the rural area as well as the widespread Chinese slogan that says, 'knowledge can change your destiny'. Lastly, along the same line of social class, a simple act of meeting people can also have the notion of 'face' built in. Yan has this to say:

"People are very focused on what qualifications you have and where you graduated from. Especially when introducing to each other … ah … he is from Beijing University and she is from Tsinghua. You see, they really had a lot of 'face' in front of the group." (Yan - student)

Overall, Chinese individuals are particularly sensitive to this traditional cultural value of 'face' especially those from the rural areas and of lower social class. Yet, current government discourses on harmonious society aiming to provide priority educational opportunities in the rural area arguably provide greater opportunities to gain 'face' via educational attainments. Furthermore, I argue that with China's increased labour mobility across regions brought about by the rapid economic growth and market economy, Chinese individuals seeking employment opportunities in big cities will continue to pursue higher

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qualifications for a good future to gain and protect 'face' for themselves as well as for their family back home.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to explore the education experiences and perceptions of the two respondent groups in relation to prevailing and changing official discourses as well as the Chinese cultural values. Six recurring themes identified by both groups of participants were discussed. First, both groups of participants expressed that education is of paramount importance to them. This led to a broader notion of lifelong learning recognised by the parent group as an enjoyable process. Qualifications are also widely recognised as the key motivator for their pursuit in formal learning, with the idea of high-level qualifications bringing about good future. Family/parental support in children's educational directions and decisions is another key theme repeatedly mentioned by both groups of participants. Lastly, the category of 'face' takes into account the importance of status within the Chinese society and peoples' intense comparative attitude towards education.

With the recurring themes commonly shared by the parent and student participants, it actually represented the similarities in their perceptions on education. In addition, the two groups of participants being two different cohort generations carried with them differences in education

experiences even under the same theme. Key differences in education experiences between the two groups are:

- Both the parents and students acknowledge the importance of education. Yet, the parents being the 'lost generation' missing out educational opportunities during their prime learning age translated their regrets to high emphasis on their children's education achievements. As for the students, their views and actions in educational attainments reflect current discourses on academic elitism as well as the influence of their parents.

- Parents, especially female, experienced the reality of education being gendered. Hence, with China's one-child policy, they fully support their only child for higher education to obtain better qualifications, irrespective of gender.

- Both groups acknowledge the notion of lifelong learning, however, only the parent group view it as leisure and enjoy the continuous education opportunities after retirement that was made possible through the changes of official discourse over time.

- Although both groups of participants acknowledge the importance of qualifications behind one's education, the reasoning and thinking behind this attitude is evidently different due to different political and economic contexts. The notion of qualifications was insignificant to

the parents under the state central manpower system during Mao's time. Yet, during the current market driven economy faced by the students, qualifications become a prime importance within the labour market.

- Under the notion of 'future', the concept of 'survival' is very different between the two generations. At the time of the older generation, China was still under poverty due to natural disasters and political unrest, and their wish for better survival was simply to satisfy basic needs like having enough food and a good shelter. In comparison, the students are the generation of the 'post 80s', who grew up hand-in-hand with China's economic reforms, whereby 'survival' to them is enhanced quality of life.

In sum, I argue that Chinese cultural values on education are consistently linked with the education experiences intergenerationally. The effects of the power embedded in the dominant discourses are evidenced through the overt thoughts and behaviours of the research respondents within their particular socio-historical context. The parent participants' education and learning experiences and perceptions are situated within various discourses over generations, hence not only impacted by the government discourses at the time but also by the changes in discourses over time. As for the student group, their education realities are not only influenced by the prevailing official discourses but also indirectly affected by the historical discourses via

their parents' experiences in the past. Overall, differences in education experiences and perceptions reflect the changing discourses and the changing socio-economic circumstances in which the generations grow up and live, as well as affected by gender, class and regionality.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This thesis takes my personal experiences in education and learning as its starting point. As I seek to understand my own experiences I have come to see how complex education and learning is, particularly from an intergenerational perspective. In order to "embark on a journey of self" (Sears 1992, p.155) I engaged in the process of 'researching the other' and carried out an empirical study of a group of Chinese post-graduate students and their parents in Beijing, China. My research examined how official educational discourses in China are articulated in everyday lives of the Chinese individuals within this intergenerational context. Therein, this thesis explored the education experiences and perceptions of two kinship/cohort generations, and how patterns have changed or persisted intergenerationally. It also looked at the ways in which prevailing and changing government discourses on education are manifested and articulated in the daily experiences from one generation to the next. Lastly, this thesis illuminated on how Chinese cultural values mediate the relationship between government discourses and the individuals' education and learning experiences.

This concluding chapter first presents the key findings of this thesis and their contributions and implications to practices. Limitations of this

thesis and other possible future research directions on related topics are also included in this chapter.

Key findings

In exploring the education and learning experiences and perceptions of the two respondent groups, the key recurring themes of 'education is vital', 'lifelong learning', 'qualifications', 'future', 'family/parental support' and 'face' were identified.

To begin with, both the student and parent participants expressed that education is of paramount importance. In the Chinese language, there is no clear distinction between the concepts of 'studying' and 'learning' as they are indeed the same two Chinese characters. As such, Chinese individuals perceive learning and studying as being synonymous. On the one hand, they are more inclined to regard formal learning as 'real learning'. On the other hand, they recognised that learning can be lifelong and in all modes as reflected in their traditional cultural values. The parent group even enjoy their lifelong learning endeavours after retirement within a formal learning setting.

Moreover, formal learning is seen in a very instrumental way within the Chinese society, focusing on qualifications and more importantly, the getting of the diploma, rather than intrinsic values like obtaining knowledge from education itself. With changes in official discourses

concentrating on academic elitism, China's economic reforms and rapid industrialisation coupled with globalisation, employers tend to use the level of educational attainment as the prime measurement and proof of abilities in identifying potential candidates from the talent market. The participants believed that investment in continuous education would be rewarded with tangible returns, such as bright futures with opportunities for a good job, earning more money, and a better quality of life.

In addition, student participants expressed that it is natural for them to follow educational decisions and choices made by their parents. Likewise, Chinese parents influence and support their children's education irrespective of their wealth and educational standard. In addition, according to the parent participants, even though they had a chance for education after the Cultural Revolution and possessed a strong desire to learn, they simply faced barriers such as poverty, family and childcare responsibilities that prohibited many of them, especially women, from pursuing continuous education and higher qualification opportunities. As a result, this cohort generation carried a weight of regret, sadness and expectation for their own children. Unfortunately, this weight of expectation is focused on a single child, which is a product of China's one-child policy as implemented in 1979. Hence, the parents placed all their hopes and dreams as well as resources on a single child irrespective of their gender. Lastly, 'face' is gained and protected from educational attainments. With the same

token, there is a strong sense of losing 'face' when individuals fail an examination or score low academically.

Since government discourses are multi-dimensional, they actually affect different aspects of the individuals' experiences and attitudes. For example, both the historical and changing official discourses shaped the lives of the parent participants as they indeed experienced those changes over the past three decades. Moreover, the education experiences and perceptions of the student group are not only influenced by the current official discourses, but also indirectly impacted by the past and changing discourses manifested in their parents' education and learning situations. In addition, traditional cultural values, such as 'education highly prized' also transcend time and manifested in the attitudes of both the parent and student groups.

When exploring the education and learning perceptions and experiences of the two research groups, two scenarios are revealed from the participants' accounts. One is the intergenerational persistence of educational perceptions, and the other is the differing education and learning experiences and perceptions from one generation to the next.

First, this thesis argues that Chinese culture plays an important role in the consistency of the education perceptions over generations. Xu (2006) affirms that for thousands of years, Chinese culture has a

deeply rooted influence on the daily lives of Chinese people. They are thoroughly imbued with Confucian beliefs from a very early age, and the useful advice from the doctrines of Confucian morality and ethics transcend time and run deep in the veins of generations. Yet as evidenced in the findings, although many cultural values persist across the generations, it takes place in different economic contexts and changing political approaches. Hence, it is important to recognise that the experiences and perceptions persisted among the participants in two different forms. First, cultural values suppressed and re-surfaced in accordance with changing discourses, and secondly those cultural values that remain strong throughout changes in discourses over time.

- Traditional Chinese cultural values that were suppressed when the parents were young have now resurfaced under the current political and economic environments. For example, the historical official discourse on Mao's notion of 'studying is useless' was influential during the time when the parents were young and during the Cultural Revolution. Every form of traditional culture was undermined then. Yet, in the post-Mao period, the changing discourses enabled the return of traditional Chinese cultural values, such as viewing education as highly prized within the society. Therefore, I argue that the cultural values are consistent over time in a subtle way from the 'past' to the 'present' of the parent group as enabled by the changing official discourses.

- Aspects of children's perception that are the same as their parents are shaped by the Chinese cultural values of family and filial piety and the strong emphasis on 'face'. These are evidenced to be consistent among the attitudes of the student and parent informants. Hence, I put forward that the endurance of these cultural value remain strong over time from generation to generation, irrespective of the changes in official discourses along with globalisation and economic development of the nation.

The second scenario is the divergence of education experiences and perceptions between the two generations. China's historical and political environments and rapid economic development shaped by changing official discourses, all contributed to the differing education experiences from one generation to the next. From the historical and political context, the two groups of research participants in effect represent two unique cohort generations in China. Parent participants belonged to the generation of internal political struggle with little educational opportunities, and life to them was a struggle and education an ideal. The student participants are part of the 'post 80s' cohort, when their upbringing coincided with the rapid economic development in China after reforms were introduced in late 1970's. With China's economic reforms going hand-in-hand with globalisation, China has encountered rapid socio-economic development and has fast-forwarded through the stages of industrialisation. Thus from their significant differences, two types of changes in their education

experiences and perceptions have been identified from the two groups of research participants. First, differences of experiences within the parents themselves and secondly, differences between the parent and the student groups.

- Changing official discourses under different historical, political and economic environments shaped parents' changing experiences and perceptions. These changing environments shaped the differences in the participants' educational opportunities and life choices. For example, the parent group being the 'lost generation' suffered the loss of educational opportunities when they were young. Now in their retirement age, they view continuous education and lifelong learning as an enjoyment. From an economic perspective, with China going through its economic development into a market-driven economy, people are more financially sufficient and are thus able to support their parents in their old age. As such, the parent group is now under less pressure about their future and can therefore embrace education and learning activities for the sake of enjoyment.

- Changing and prevailing official discourses shaped the differences of education experiences and perceptions between the two-kinship generations. That said the parent and student groups carry with them different attitudes towards education and learning. For example, under the context of current economic and financial boost in China, when the participants talked about education bringing

about a good future, their concept of 'survival' is indeed very different between the two generations. For the parent group, who had lived in poverty due to natural disasters and political unrest, survival to them equated with the fulfilment of basic needs. Whereas for the student group, who were brought up with sufficient resources, survival meant the improvement of their current living standards and lifestyles.

According to Foucault (1972) it is only within a specific historical context that discourses produce particular meaning and knowledge that are considered as the truth. Discourses from different historical periods produce different forms and practices of knowledge, which diverged drastically from period to period (Hall 2004) as evidenced in the differences of education experiences and perceptions between the parent and student groups. Yet, I question Foucault's postulation of definite differences between historical periods because as apparent in the findings, the traditional cultural value of placing high regards on education transcend times and consistent from one generation to another.

Overall, this thesis reveals that the education experiences and perceptions over generations are shaped by the changing and predominant government discourses on education, interwoven with traditional Chinese cultural values within different economic contexts with changing political approaches. In essence, discourses do not

exist in a vacuum but continuously interact with other discourses and social practices (Mills 2004), such as socio-economic development and globalization, which inform the questions of power and truth of the discourses.

Contributions and implications to practices

In current literature, there is ample discussion regarding Chinese government discourses on educational development and reforms. These discussions are mainly established from the governmental and educationalists' perspectives, stating what has been done as well as what should be done. However, little is known about the way in which these official discourses are actually articulated in people's everyday lives, leading to a gap in current knowledge. Therefore, more than my personal journey, this research contributes to knowledge in an under-researched area of education and learning within a Chinese intergenerational context. That is, how government official discourses exert influence over individuals' experiences on education and learning, as well as individuals' actual perceptions on education and learning under different political, historical and socio-economic conditions.

In order to add to existing knowledge, there are two distinctive features of this thesis leading to its originality. Firstly, not only did it aim to fill current literature gap from a group of Chinese individuals, but it also focused on two groups of participants that represented both the family

and cohort generations. Secondly, similarities and differences in education and learning experiences and perceptions were considered not only between the two generations of participants, but also explored within the changing context of official discourses over time from one generation to the next. Moreover, by researching the education experiences and perceptions of two kinship/cohort generations, this thesis also examined the enduring impact of cultural values alongside prevailing and changing government discourses.

According to the research findings, the following key contributions are established:

- This thesis brings forward that prevailing and changing government discourses and educational policies are influential to the education experiences of the Chinese individuals and are manifested and articulated within their everyday lives.

- This thesis reveals that education and learning experiences and perception of one kinship generation not only affected that group of people but also translate into their attitudes and actions that subsequently influenced the next generation.

- This thesis confirms that education and learning attitudes and experiences over generations are firmly embedded in their

traditional cultural values, even though cultural values change over time with some becoming more influential and others less powerful.

- This thesis adds that cultural values also interweave with the political, social and economic situations at different times and subsequently shaped different education and learning realities of the individuals.

Moreover, I submit that Chinese policy makers, educators and practitioners working within the education and learning arena, both in China and overseas, could find this thesis useful. This thesis has implications to practices in the following aspects:

- To Chinese policy makers –

While there is no clear distinction between 'studying' and 'learning' in the Chinese language, it is argued that Chinese people tend to see learning and studying as synonymous. Although the espoused value from traditional culture acknowledge a more comprehensive mode of learning, from the findings people are more inclined to regard formal learning as 'real learning', divulging their acted value on formal education as a vehicle to success.

It is worthwhile for policy makers to recognise that while people may be well disposed to the notion of lifelong learning as stipulated in official discourses, their interests in it may not extend to what

informal and non-formal learning have to offer. Consequently, the aspiration for lifelong learning is just an illusion when people pay lip service to the concept without putting it into practice. Hence, instead of using the slogan of lifelong learning, it is recommended that policy makers consider re-branding their educational strategies to 'continuous education' in order to align with individuals' learning conception and practices. Moreover, if the buzzword of lifelong learning has already been ingrained in the educational agenda to create a vision of the future, I still suggest that expressions like knowledge economy and learning society be clearly spelled out in the policy statements, and there needs to be clarification as to how these aspirations are to be realised.

- To educators –

This thesis contributes to foreign educators' understanding of Chinese education from an intergenerational perspective. It provides a snapshot of the cultural, historical and socio-economic landscape of Chinese education and learning through discourse analysis and how dominant discourses manifest in people's everyday lives. Since the concept that only formal education is viewed as learning has been deeply rooted in the discursive practices of the Chinese community, it is suggested that educators, in China and overseas, could plan the delivery mode of their education programmes accordingly.

With the increasing need for continuing education, it appears that distance learning has become a common mode of study all over the world (Hodgson 1993). Distance learning programmes are usually supplemented by part-time face-to-face tutorials, as well as incorporating media, such as video and audio programmes, computer software and online discussion forum. However, it is evidenced in the findings that Chinese students are heavily influenced by the traditional Chinese cultural value of 'wulun' and tend to respect the knowledge of the teacher, and used to having the teacher as an authority figure within a traditional classroom environment. While within China's adult education provision, there are also open and distance-learning routes; it is generally regarded as second-class education for adult students who confront less-privileged conditions and poverty, in order for them to catch up their education attainments. Furthermore, when personal wealth, mobility and migration are generally increasing, coupled with the traditional value of 'education is vital', students irrespective of their academic abilities, tend to go abroad for higher education and secure their overseas qualifications.

Consequently, I posit that overseas universities thinking of offering their programmes through distance learning is perceived to face difficulty in 'selling' this idea to the Chinese community, as it is not a mode of delivery that suits the characteristics of Chinese students. As such, if overseas universities are considering educational

engagements on Chinese soil, it is recommended that they consider collaboration with local higher education institute to solely or jointly offer their overseas programmes or establish their own overseas campus in China. Although China already has graduate programmes in cooperation with foreign universities (Li 2005), there are still plenty of opportunities for foreign universities to run pre-university and undergraduate programmes jointly with local higher education institutions to satisfy the growing demand of higher education in China.

- To training providers –

Even though from the official discourses, it is within the government education reforms to provide a two-track education system containing a vocational training route, it is evidenced from the findings that people tend to opt for higher education opportunities rather than vocational education and training. Faith in formal education, with qualifications and its positive impact on fame and gain, is still at the core of the Chinese students and their parents. This is due to the deeply rooted traditional Chinese cultural value of education being highly prized; where qualification from formal education is the key route to success in terms of wealth and social status within the society.

Additionally, there is a general opinion that post-secondary vocational education is mainly for those who failed university

entrance examinations (Li 2005). Thus, it is advised that this strong correlation between formal education and qualifications that exist in the population should be recognised by vocational training providers. Therein, I urge vocational training providers to start planning for curriculum and teaching quality improvements to prepare themselves for future possible upgrade from vocational training college to vocational higher education status. Perhaps they should also consider diversifying their training provisions to deliver work-related training to corporate clients and their employees.

- To careers specialists –

A growing education sector is likely to stimulate other related areas of expertise. With mass university education, it is important for Chinese students to engage early in careers exploration and to develop confidence and readiness for their careers. The findings of this thesis can be used to inform and develop culturally sensitive career guidance services for Chinese students and their parents, as well as to understand the power of dominant discourses on individuals. Evidenced in the findings, Chinese parents' high regard on the importance of education plus their financial and emotional support, are all influential factors to their children's educational attitudes and pursuits. Arguably the cultural value of collectivism and 'wulun' largely contribute to this scenario. Nevertheless, with the impact of globalisation and technological advancements, China is gradually influenced by the western world, bringing about an

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increased tendency of individualism in the younger generation. Careers specialists are therefore required to respect the collectivistic orientation by maintaining a balance between clients' personal interests and goals on one hand, and their respects for family and authority on the other. With this in mind, the findings of this thesis would be valuable to careers specialists looking to further understand the decision making process of Chinese students in their educational pursuits. Likewise, it is important to note that cross-cultural difference is a barrier that requires the careers specialists to develop their knowledge, expertise and patience to overcome. I believe that this thesis will provide them with a promising start in enhancing their knowledge about the Chinese education systems as well as the factors behind the decisions and directions of Chinese students' educational choices through discourse analysis and how dominant discourses have manifested in people's daily lives.

Limitations of this thesis and recommendations for further study

This thesis is a small-scale qualitative empirical research, which focuses on the education and learning experiences and perceptions of a two kinship/cohort generations comprising of a group of students and their parents. This thesis does not intend to seek generalisations or representation from its findings; rather, it seeks to add to the current knowledge on how official discourses can be seen manifested in

experiences within an intergenerational nature, as well as how other changing experiences are related to changing discourses.

Admittedly, this thesis focused on a group of students who might be more likely to value formal education since they are currently engaged in it, and therefore it would be worthwhile for future studies to broaden this and explore learning in other contexts, such as in the workplace. For example, a possibility is research on work-related learning experiences and perceptions from people working in state-owned enterprises as compared with others working in multi-national companies in Beijing or other cities in China. Their learning experiences, be it formal, informal or non-formal, can contribute to the understanding of the acceptance of different learning modes in a Chinese context, and possibly add the cultural colour of 'east meets west', leading to a deeper understanding of different cultural impact on education and learning of individuals.

Also, while one group of my research participants are post-graduate students who already has a high level of academic attainments, it is recommended that further study can include a comparison group to mine, of either students who have not engaged in such high level of education or those with lesser educational opportunities. People with different academic backgrounds can share their unique education perceptions and experiences, contributing from different angles and adding flavours to my findings, as well as exploring possible

differences and similarities between these groups and to identify the rationales behind their education choices and decisions.

Furthermore, China comprises 9.6 million square kilometres with regional differences between north and south, between coastal and inland regions, between urban and rural areas, between special economic zones and areas not so designated, and even between major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Guangzhou. Although education can 'lead to better things', it is necessary to recognise that in China, there is still an underprivileged class who cannot afford basic education, those who dare not dream about continuous education after the compulsory provision. In a country with 1.3 billion people, there will also be an imbalance of educational opportunities between fast growing cities and small towns in the rural areas. Furthermore, according to Jackson & Bak (1998) what pertains in one area may not be the case in another. More so, Beijing, as the capital of China, is considered to be an advantaged city, hence my findings may not apply to the disadvantaged groups, such as those underprivileged ones who do not have any or with only limited formal learning opportunities. To enrich the findings of this thesis, I recommend including students from other universities in Beijing or even from other cities in China. On the other end, instead of looking at the major and developed cities in China, I suggest future research on related topics to include students and parents from rural or remote areas of China, so as to build a more

comprehensive picture of whether or not government education discourses are articulated in their daily lives too.

Conclusion

Historical, communism and post-communism educational discourses are well documented. Nonetheless, the issue of their articulation within its people intergenerationally remains relatively unexplored within current literature. Hence, within the theoretical framework of 'discourse', the purpose of this thesis is to examine the perceptions and attitudes towards education and learning from the Chinese individuals' perspectives, to examine this intergenerationally and to explore how Chinese government discourses on education and learning are reflected in those experiences.

From this empirical study, it affirms that the education experiences and perceptions from one generation to the next are shaped by the prevailing government discourses of the time as well as changing official discourses over time. In addition, the education experiences and perceptions of a kinship generation can subsequently affect the next generation. For example, the student participants of this research not only experienced the influence of the current official discourses, their experiences and perceptions on education were also shaped by the historical discourses during their parents' times. This thesis also concludes that the education experiences and perceptions over

generations are firmly embedded in the traditional Chinese cultural values and interwoven with the different social and economic contexts, as well as changing political approaches of the government. Finally, yet importantly, as rooted from my personal biographic account I inquired about the impact of gender, class and regionality behind one's learning. This thesis also substantiates their influences on the education and learning experiences and perceptions over generations. There are various readers, both in China and overseas, who might find this thesis interesting and useful, including but not limited to, Chinese policy makers, educators, training providers and careers specialists.

In conclusion, I argue that education opens many doors in life. We are living in a rapidly changing environment where changes are continuous and inevitable. Referring to Drucker (1995) and as I mentioned in Chapter 1, with the fast and ever-changing environment, a generation may not understand the world of previous generations in the family. Holmes (2002) echoes that what people learned years ago could become outdated before they even realise. There is an old Chinese saying that goes 'when sailing against the waves, if you are not moving forward, you will drop behind' (逆水行舟不进则退). This reminds us that we should not be too satisfied with our current achievements, and have to continuously improve ourselves. With this, let us embrace my favourite Chinese saying that says 'learning never ends and it keeps you young and lively' (学无止境岁月长青).

Dear Friends,

Doctorate Research Paper - Invitation for an Interview

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt thank you to Laura, our mutual friend, for her kind assistance in forwarding this email to you on my behalf.

I am a Doctorate candidate at the University of Leicester, United Kingdom, and am now conducting a research for my final dissertation. I am from Hong Kong and have been living in Beijing for nearly 12 years. With my keen interest in exploring learning perceptions between two generations, it is my pleasure to invite your kind participation in a face-to-face meeting session.

Our meeting will be conducted in Chinese and it should be around an hour. I will not be using any structured questions but instead I look forward to hearing your stories on learning histories as well as your future learning plans, if any. Of course, your views and thoughts on 'learning' particularly within the Chinese context would be very much welcomed.

With your permission, our meeting contents will be audio taped, and the transcription will be sent to you for confirmation prior to our translation into English. Please be assured that only your preferred name will be used on my research report and that our meeting contents will be handled in strictest confidence.

Your kind acceptance and generous assistance is very much appreciated. Please kindly email me at helensokwan@gmail.com or call me at 13718799149 to schedule our meeting at your convenience.

Thank you very much in advance and I look forward to meeting you soon.

Yours truly,
Helen Kwan
Candidate for the degree of
Doctor of Social Science (HRD)
Centre for Labour Market Studies
University of Leicester
United Kingdom

亲爱的朋友们，

博士学位论文访谈邀请函

首先，对于我们大家的朋友罗拉，帮我转发这封邮件给你们，我表示衷心的感谢。

我是英国莱斯特大学的博士生，现正为我的博士论文做一项研究。我来自香港，在北京生活了将近 12 年。我最感兴趣的是研究两代之间对学习的意见，特别是北京大学生与他们的父母的观点。我非常荣幸地邀请你参加一个面对面的访谈。

我们的访谈将用中文进行，最长不超过一小时。我选择不用结构性的问题而希望能听到你们在学习过程中的故事以及你未来的学习计划。当然，你能与我分享你对于学习的观点与看法，我将不胜感激。

在你同意的情况下，我会对访谈内容进行录音，在将访谈内容翻译成英文之前，我会将其转换成文字形式发送给你确认。请放心，只有你选择的名字而不是你的姓名会出现在我的研究报告中，且我们的访谈内容将被严格保密。

在此，我对于你的热情参与和友好帮助表示深深的谢意。请发送电子邮件到 helensokwan@gmail.com 或打电话 13718799149 与我联系，以便安排面谈。

再次感谢并期待着尽快与你会面。

此致，
关凯玲
英国莱斯特大学
劳动力市场研究中心
社会科学（人力资源开发）博士生

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Student Participants

	STUDENTS	MALE	FEMALE	25 -	25 +	PARENT	REMARKS
1	Jing		Yes		Yes	Wang	
2	Huaguang	Yes			Yes	Zhang	
3	Cicai	Yes			Yes		
4	Hui	Yes		Yes		Aiyee	
5	Xiaohui		Yes		Yes	Tang	
6	Jiangyi	Yes			Yes	Jiang	
7	Qiong		Yes		Yes	Suying	
8	Linda		Yes		Yes		
9	Carlos	Yes			Yes	Yi	
10	Lina		Yes		Yes		
11	Yin		Yes		Yes		
12	Yiming		Yes		Yes		
13	Yun		Yes	Yes		Yulan	
14	Sam	Yes			Yes	Dang	
15	Bing		Yes		Yes		
16	Jeff	Yes			Yes		
17	Nina		Yes		Yes	Jia	
18	Yuan		Yes		Yes		
19	Ying		Yes		Yes	Shuli	
20	Hua	Yes		Yes		Guo	MSN
21	Wawa		Yes		Yes		MSN
22	Eson		Yes	Yes			Email
	TOTAL	**8**	**14**	**4**	**18**		

Parent Participants

	PARENTS	MALE	FEMALE	WORK	RETIRED	STUDENT	REMARKS
1	Aiyee		Yes	Yes		Hui	
2	Tang	Yes			Yes	Xiaohui	
3	Jiang	Yes			Yes	Jiangyi	
4	Suying		Yes		Yes	Qiong	
5	Yi		Yes		Yes	Carlos	
6	Yulan		Yes		Yes	Yun	
7	Shuli		Yes		Yes	Ying	
8	Guo	Yes			Yes	Hua	MSN
9	Dang		Yes	Yes		Sam	
10	Jia	Yes			Yes	Nina	
11	Wang		Yes		Yes	Jing	
12	Zhang	Yes		Yes		Huaguang	
	TOTAL	**5**	**7**	**3**	**9**		

I would like to express my sincere thank you to you in participating in my doctorate research.

This will not be a purely question and answer section, but instead, it will require your active engagement in self-recollection about your learning experiences, and your willingness to share any of your ideas and thoughts about "learning".

1/   What is "learning" to you? What are the motives behind it?

2/   Please describe, in as much detail as possible, your learning decisions and experiences in each and every stage of your learning, giving particular attention to the critical events, such as challenges and encouragements as well as influential people that/who positively or negatively impacted you.

3/   Please share with me your current and future learning plans, if any.

Thank you very much!

我衷心感谢你能参与我博士论文的研究工作。

我们的访谈不是一个问与答的过程，反之，我需要你的积极参与，希望你能对既往学习经验的一个回顾以及与我分享你对于学习的观点与看法。

    1/ 请谈一谈你对学习的认识与看法，以及学习背后的推动力。

    2/ 请尽可能详细地描述在你每一个学习阶段中，与你的学习决定和经验相关的故事，请特别注意关键事件，如挑战和激励，以及对你有正面或负面影响的人物。

    3/ 请谈一谈你未来的学习计划

谢谢！

List of codes and categories

1	**Cultural**	
	C-I	Family (parents, spouse, siblings, relatives)
	C-II	People (teachers, schoolmates, boss, colleagues, neighbours)
	C-III	Face (face, status and comparisons)
	C-IV	Beliefs (filial piety, value convergence, Chinese sayings)
2	**Social**	
	S-I	Knowledge (curiosity, interest, recharge, enrichment)
	S-II	Work related (skills needed, competition at work)
	S-III	Qualifications (diploma syndrome)
	S-IV	Own regret (thus, hopes on children to have a better life)
3	**Economic**	
	E-I	Future (good job, more money, survival, satisfy wishes)
4	**Political**	
	P-I	Government initiatives on education and learning
	P-II	Elders (learning opportunities, retirement)
5	**China Development**	
	CD-I	Globalisation and technological advancement
6	**Learning Barriers**	
	LB-I	Cultural Revolution (lost generation)
	LB-II	Poverty
	LB-III	Female (lacking opportunities, family responsibilities)
	LB-IV	Other learning barriers
7	**Additional Perceptions**	
	AP-I	Perceptions (past, present and the future)

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