**Narratives of Complementarity and Transformation:**

**Chinese Young People Constructing Selves in a Transcultural Context (UK)**

**By:**

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**Abstract**

Adopting two Chinese Taoist philosophical principles - complementarity and transformation - this thesis aims to explore the process of individuals’ constructions and transformations of selves in a transcultural context, via looking at the second generation Chinese immigrant young people’s narratives regarding their life experiences in the UK.

The principle of complementarity is utilized within a pluralist theoretical framework – social constructionist approaches, object relations theory, and Chinese Taoist philosophy. Empirical data are represented within two narrative case studies.

The principle of transformation is operationalized within the theoretical and methodological framework, the setting of research questions, and in the interpreting the data, all of which have undergone a process of constant change.

Narrative from four participants (Jerry, Sara and their mothers) about their life experiences are collected via free-association interviews as research data. The data are analysed within social constructionist and object relations theories, while the research outcomes arising from data analysis are interpreted within Taoist philosophy.

The originality of this research is that it provides a possible approach to conduct a transcultural research via engaging with pluralist but complementary theories regarding both Western and Chinese cultures.

**Key Words:** Complementarity, Transformation, Constructing Selves, Process, Narrativity.

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**Chapter 1** **Introduction**

*Around 4th century BC, there was a Chinese philosopher called Zhuangzi. Once, he dreamed that he became a butterfly fluttering happily anywhere he wanted. He was so very happy in the dream that he nearly forgot he was Zhuangzi. After woke up, he was astonished to find a fact that he was actually Zhuangzi rather than a butterfly. He was confused and asked himself that “did I dream of the butterfly or did the butterfly dream of me?” In other words, Zhuangzi thought that he might not be Zhuangzi but a butterfly in reality so that there must be a distinction between Zhuangzi and the butterfly. That might be the transformation of things.*

(Selection from The Book of Zhuangzi: The Adjustment of Controversies. Original Chinese text see box 1.1)

|  |
| --- |
| Box 1.1  庄周梦蝶 -《庄子·齐物论》The Book of Zhuangzi: The Adjustment of Controversies  昔者庄周梦为蝴蝶，栩栩然蝴蝶也，自喻适志与，不知周也。[俄然](http://baike.baidu.com/view/893711.htm)觉，则蘧[蘧然](http://baike.baidu.com/view/3524233.htm)周也。不知周之梦为蝴蝶与，蝴蝶之梦为周与？周与蝴蝶，则必有分矣。此之谓物化。 |

The protagonist in this well-known story, Zhuangzi, was a famous Taoist philosopher in ancient China thousands of years ago. His ‘butterfly dream’ has been interpreted in different ways through various disciplinary approaches, such as philosophy and psychology. Chang (1981), for example, sees the story as a concrete reflection of the Taoist philosophical perspective that all the distinctions between things, such as between person and butterfly, and between life and death, could be removed. From a psychoanalytical perspective, for another example, Skogemann (1986) argues that the story was actually sending a message about the way in which Zhuangzi could become aware of his unconscious mind as a butterfly instead of a person via his dream. In other words, dreaming makes one’s unconsciousness conscious.

Personally, I am fascinated by the beauty of this story, because multiple meanings could be interpreted by different people and even interpreted differently by the same person at different times. In my own experience, for example, it was a beautiful but not a special story to me the first time I read it when I was a high school student in mainland China. The only resonance I had with the story at that time was that I was also willing to have an experience of how it feels to be a different creature rather than the human being that I already was. I wanted to feel how it was to fly with wings like a bird and swim in a deep sea like a shark. When I was looking at this story again through the lens of a person with a Master’s degree in education and psychology, however, one question that emerged was “what is the connection and distinction between Zhuangzi in the reality and butterfly in the dream, and how did these two transform each other since Zhuangzi himself calls this as ‘the transformation of things’?”. Applying these ideas to my own situation, what, if at all, is a ‘real me’ in a material reality? Is the sense of ‘real me’ continued or discontinued? Could there be another me in a dream and what is it? What is the connection and distinction between one material ‘me’ and another ‘me’ somewhere else, such as in a dream or consciousness/mind? How could I test how the person who is sitting in front of a desk and typing those words at the moment not in her dream or illusion? Those questions have been lingering in my mind for a long time and finally guided me towards the consideration of the sense of self. This is the point at which this study begins.

In the butterfly story, it seems significant that Zhuangzi described two self-positions of either being a material person or being a butterfly in a dream. Reflecting on my own sense of self, I could describe myself in different ways, such as “I am Chinese” and “I am an only child in my family”. The identities of ‘Chinese’ and ‘only child’ are not as simple as they seem to be, however; questions could be extended based on those two labels, for example - firstly, is ‘Chinese’ a national or a cultural identity or both in this particular case? This question relates to the impact of China’s ancient history and civilisation upon Chinese people. Secondly, why am I the ‘only child’ at home? The one-child policy in China provides a unique political and social context. Thirdly, why do I identify myself as a ‘child’ despite the fact that I have already moved into adulthood? It might be relevant to how mature I think I am, which could be seen as a psychological issue, or how I consider my position in my family relationships, which is more of a social constructed mind. Fourthly, how does it feel to be the only child at home? This question seems to point to an exploration of my individual emotional and psychological experiences. Whatever the specific responses are, the factors that contribute to my self-positions as ‘Chinese’ and ‘only child’ are multiple and contextual and include individual emotional experiences in relation to social variables such as culture, politics, and family relationships. In light of this, I think that how people see themselves is important, but deciphering the way in which they construct particular senses of self is much more valuable and complex. Understanding my own sense of self was therefore my first motivation for embarking upon a study on how people construct and transform the sense of self.

The second significant motivation for doing this study of the self as my PhD project was my experience working with second generation Chinese young people as a part-time Mandarin language teacher in a supplementary school in a city in Northern England for three years. Those young people attended both Chinese language school on weekends in order to learn Mandarin as a second language and local English schools during weekdays for compulsory education. They came to learn Mandarin for different reasons. Some of them were keen to know more about Chinese culture through their ancestors’ native language, while some of them were forced to learn it by their parents. Some of the young people saw Chinese language competency as an advantage for their university applications. As a teacher, I found that the young people reacted differently not only to learning the Chinese language, but also their sense of selves within this activity. Some of them seemed very good at coping with their bilingual lives, but some of them found it difficult to move between two languages and cultural identities (Chinese and British). Similar to those young people, I also experienced conflicts such as food, entertainment, and ways of thinking between two cultures in daily life.

I would argue that those young people live in a transcultural environment. The term of ‘transcultural’ is adopted from an idea of ‘transculturation’ which is originally used by Ortiz in 1947 to express the process of not only acquiring a new culture and losing a previous culture, but also creating a new cultural phenomenon (Ortiz, 1995, p.103). Additionally, transcultural contexts may allow individuals to create a cosmopolitan citizenship (Cuccioletta, 2002). The initial focus of research thus became to explore how those young people consider themselves in their interactions with a bilingual and transcultural environment.

In summary, inspired by Zhuangzi’s butterfly story and driven by my personal experiences, my PhD research aims to explore how individuals construct and transform their senses of self by looking at the views of second-generation Chinese young people regarding their life experiences in relation to a transcultural environment in the UK. However, the aim of this research is not to provide any fixed answers about the self, but to show a pluralized theoretical and practical approach of exploring the process of constructing selves through some empirical case study researches. Therefore, it is necessary to state that the word of ‘self’ in this thesis is to express individuals’ senses of themselves in a simple way, rather than indicate that ‘self’ is an essential object.

Fundamentally, I adopted Taoist law of complementarity and transformation. Based on the law of complementarity, three different theoretical paradigms - social constructionism, psychodynamics (mainly object relations theory), and Chinese philosophy (mainly Taoism) - are integrated in order to interpret a complementary understanding of self-transformation, since while each of the paradigms has its advantages, but on their own, none of them built a satisfactory picture. Taoist law of complementarity allows me to draw those different theoretical aspects together since those paradigms do share some similar standpoints regarding the concept of constructing selves. In addition, my personal situation of embedding into Western culture with Chinese civilization also demanded that my thesis is theoretically pluralism. Therefore, a mixed methodology of narrative case study is built as well.

Based on the law of transformation, the theoretical framework, methodological approaches, and research questions in this research have been through a process of transforming – not only were prepared for the research but also derived from outcomes of the research and the flow of my own thinking. For examples, the theoretical direction turns from conventional Western theory such as Cartesian to social constructionism and object relations theory, the research interest therefore turns from the notion of ‘self’ to ‘process’. The purpose of data analysis was to make sense of how those young people see themselves in a transcultural environment, but later I realised it was also about my own self-transformation. For another example, Taoist principles of complementarity and transformation were adopted as fundamental ideas after the research outcomes was revealed with consideration of social constructionist and object relations theories. In other words, I did not realise that my research thoughts coincided with Taoist philosophy until the data was interpreted.

In the next few sections, I will explain the law of complementarity and transformation, describe the transformation of the theoretical and methodological framework and research questions, introduce research participants, and provide a map for the whole thesis.

* 1. **Complementarity and Transformation: The Fundamental Principles**

Taoism is one of the mainstream Chinese philosophical schools founded by Laozi and famously represented by Zhuangzi. It holds a perspective of complementarity that highlights the coexistence of opposites in a union, such as harmony and conflict, creation and decay, union and separation (Sabelli, 1998). In other words, things that seem different from or contradict to each other may have connections and similarities with each other. For example, the followers of Taoism are interested in exploring and learning the meaning of life and improving human beings’ well-beings via studying the natural world (Hue, 2010, p.601) because Taoists believe that there are similarities between human beings and the natural world. As Laozi suggested, human beings are expected to act like water because water “benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble” (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.17).

For another example, some people might think that East and West are distinct worlds (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). In effect, Western and Chinese culture and viewpoints do share a lot in common in the areas of both science and social science. Taking physics as an example, according to Capra (1976, p.20), Chinese Taoism and Western modern physics, which seem irrelevant with each other, share a similar viewpoint that both of them believe in the unity and mutual interrelativity of all things and events, as well as the intrinsically dynamic nature of the universe. In other words, both of them hold opposing viewpoints to the traditional worldview of mechanistic physics, the product of Cartesian duality between mind and body. Eastern philosophy tends to conceive the world as fluid and ever-changing, rather like modern areas of physics such as the Quantum and Relativity theories, that see the world as a web of uncertain yet interrelated events (Capra, 1976). Eastern, particularly Chinese philosophy, is not diametrically opposed to Western theory, and might be hugely helpful to treat Chinese philosophy and Western theory as not completely opposing forces, but rather as complementary to one another.

In addition to the principle of complementarity, another essential principle in Taoism is transformation. The law of complementarity sees contradictions and opposites in unity, the law of transformation sees all the things including the opposites as always in a process of changing and transforming. Life forms have an innate ability or power to transform and adapt to their surroundings, which is called “the transformation of things” (Fang, 2004, p.53). In other words, change and transformation is happening all the time between things especially the opposites such as day and night. In order to harmonize the differences and opposites, Taoists suggest accepting transformation and create unity (Di Corpo & Vannini, 2013, p.85).

Therefore, Taoist principle of complementarity and transformation encourages people to hold a holistic rather than an either/or perspective (Yuan, 1997), and a dynamic instead of a static perspective. These two laws are adopted as a cornerstone based on which the theoretical and methodological framework and the research questions are set as complementary and changeable. In other words, I am intending to look at the self and self-construction/transformation from both Western and Chinese viewpoints, and maintaining the flexibility of the direction of the thesis. The whole process of exploring the self feels like a process that is full of uncertainty and might yet suggest as get unknown places.

In the content below, section 1.2 will introduce the process of building the theoretical framework, which has been through several stages, guided by the different theoretical and practical questions arising from my consideration of the empirical research and my own positionality. Consequently, the way in which a mixed methodology was constructed will be introduced in section 1.3. In effect, the methodology and methods are not only inspired by the theoretical paradigms but also emerged from the data. Section 1.4 will introduce the process in which the research questions are transformed during the stages of building theoretical framework, analysing the data, and even after the empirical findings were found. At the end, I will introduce the research participants to the readers in section 1.5, and illustrate the map of this thesis in section 1.6.

* 1. **Transformation of Theoretical Framework**

In order to understand the notion of self theoretically, aspects of social constructionism, psychodynamics (object relations theory) and Chinese cultural and philosophical thoughts are adopted as complementary theoretical paradigms. The process of building a theoretical framework has been through four stages, guided by three successive questions that I formulated based on my own interests, curiosity, and confusion; and the research outcomes from data analysis.

The transformation of the theoretical framework starts from an exploration and critique of a traditional or conventional Western understandings of the self, guided by the question of “is the self an essential core that we start with at birth?”. Alternatively, social constructionist approach enables me to address the question of “is the self a social product that each individual is able to construct within the specific contact of their particular social environment?”. Particularly, in order to understand Chinese immigrant young people, Chinese Confucian philosophy is considered to interpret the heritage Chinese cultural environment with which those young people encounter. The third stage looks at the inner psychological processes and asks “what might be happening in one’s mind when the self is being constructed within those particular transcultural contexts?” and mainly engages with object relations theory. Social constructionist approach and object relations theory seemed only partially successful in answering my questions about the self in this study, however. In the final phase, I therefore returned to Eastern perspectives by engaging with Chinese Taoist philosophy, which shares many points in common with several Western theories, but also provides a radical and complementary perspective. It is necessary to adopt Taoist philosophy in a transculturally complex study, in order to provide a counterbalance to the Western theories for interpreting the research outcomes.

The content below will explain each stage in detail.

***Western Concepts of Self***

From an early Western philosophical perspective, Descartes represents one’s awareness of his or her exist as the awakening of the human being in 1637 (Descartes & Veitch, 2006). Via his famous statement “I think, therefore I am”, Descartes suggests that human beings are aware of the sense of their own existence, the power of their inner mind, and the ability to make judgements about and change the world. This position is taken within a particular historical and social context which we know as the Renaissance.

Cartesian assumption has its profound influence on Western psychology and philosophy. For example, one feature in dominant Western psychology might be that the concept of self is distinct from other concepts about human beings. According to Harris (1989) and Hwang (1999), for example, the individual is a biological concept in which human beings are defined as creatures like any other living animals in the world, while the person is a sociological concept in which human beings are seen as agents in society who take a particular position in the social order and develop a series of actions to achieve personal goals. The self, on the other hand, is a psychological concept in which human beings are perceived as the locus of experience, including the most important aspect of experiencing oneself in terms of espousing a particular identity (Harris, 1989). In light of this, I was confused that whether the self refers to the individual, the social person, or the psychological sense of self.

Additionally, as Stets and Burke (2003) suggest, the sense of self emerges when a person can respond to himself or herself as a set of symbols or as an object amongst many other objects. In doing so, two different aspects of the self thus emerge. One is the self as a subject who is thinking, and the other one is the self who is the object of his or her own thinking (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). This distinction and awareness allows people to have a sense of an ‘inner’ or ‘private self’ but also leads people to see themselves as isolated from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In dominant Western psychological theory, the notion of identity is sometimes used synonymously with self (Swann & Bosson, 2010), or to indicate at least a part of the idea of self (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). The notion of identity negotiates individual experiences in the past, present, and future within the context of relationships with others (Wenger, 1998). In simple words, identity refers to a mental cognizance of who you were, are, and will be (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). The study of identity has also been suggested as distinguishing between personal identity and social identity (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). Social identity study sees human beings as members of particular group(s) and only pays attention to their feelings within their group membership(s). Personal identity study, on the other hand, reflects human characteristics that are distinct from one’s social identity and role(s). This sense of separateness and fragmentation is seen by some researchers as a consequence of the Cartesian position which has tended to dominate Western social science and philosophy (Ree & Urmson, 2005).

Self and identity are not seen as simple concepts, in particular. Jones and McEwen (2000) approach the complexities of identity development by presenting a conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. They suggest that dimensions of identity are composed of a core-identity and multiple-identities. The core-identity they describe as personal identity including personal attributes and personal characteristics. The ‘multiple-identity’ is a social identity that involves family background, socio-cultural conditions, current experiences, and life planning. In other words, ‘self-identity’ is conventionally seen as an amalgamation of both personal identities, for example, an individual’s inner thoughts, and social identities on which the individual is in relationships with others.

The distinction between ‘core-identity’ and ‘multiple-identity’ considers the effects of social factors on people’s concept of self, however, it also can lead to conflicts between individualism and collectivism (Oyserman & Lee, 2008), and between immersive and distal perspectives (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). The collectivist viewpoint highlights the influence of social issues on one’s self-concept, whereas an individualistic perspective serves to minimise the influence of social functions. In an immersed perspective, people identify themselves in relation to others from their own viewpoint, whereas a distal view indicates that people evaluate themselves according to other people’s opinions. According to Turner, Oakes, Haslam and McGarty (1994), and Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012), the separation of the self between personal and social identity is explained in the many selves or multiple ‘faces’ one presents to the world, as oppose to a single ‘me’. It might, however, be difficult and/or problematic to articulate a psychological self that is separate from the sociological self in one person, since psychological and social issues are inextricably interwoven.

Exploring ‘constructing selves’ through a Cartesian and dominant Western psychological lens makes me feel fragmented, disconnected, and anxious. Interpreting the concept of self from this perspective, I would have to split myself into different pieces, while maintaining the core identity and having seen myself as entirely separate from the social environment. As Gergen (2009, p.xxi) suggests, Descartes’ theory is problematic because it “separate(s) mind and world, subject and object, self and other”. As a consequence, the self is “sharply distinguished from the outside world” (Burke, 1997). In other words, in a Cartesian-informed understanding of the individual, each individual is seen as bounded or isolated, being alone is seen as a natural state of affairs, wherein the effects of people on each other might be overlooked, the wellbeing of each individual may be negatively influenced, and people might become more selfish (Gergen, 2009).

In addition, this official doctrine of Cartesian dualism is seen by Ryle (1949, p.11) as “the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine” which claims that “there exist both bodies and minds; that there occur physical processes and mental processes; that there are mechanical causes of corporeal movements and mental causes of corporeal movements”. Ryle (1949) critiques that Descartes’s dualist doctrine is a category-mistake in principle. He argues that the terms of mind and body “do not indicate two different species of existence” but “two different senses of exist”, therefore “it makes no sense to conjoin or disjoin” the body and the mind (Ryle, 1949, p.12).

Philosophically, the Cartesian viewpoint of self is trapped in a realm of philosophical idealism, which asserts that the only thing that people can truly know is their own experience (Gergen, 1999). As I understand it, Cartesian thinking not only overestimates human beings’ power and even omnipotence while overlooking their limitations, but also underestimates the influence of outside world on human beings.

Moreover, Cartesian position seems unsustainable having lived in a culture which takes a very different approach to the connectivity between the social good and the person. In other words, one unique reason that I found myself cannot sustained in Cartesian position is that I come from a different culture. For example, Chinese Confucianism sees the concept of self as an extension of one’s social relationships, and Taoism even sees it as an extension of cosmos (Ho, 1995), which are both different from Cartesian perspective. Chinese philosophy and culture holds a holistic point of view to look at the connectivity between human beings and the world they are living in. I therefore question the usage of Cartesian wisdom for my research.

However, inevitably affected by this dominant Western point of view, I found myself in a difficulty in moving between two positions. One regarding self-contained, another one regarding that one’s concept of self is affected by culturality and external world. I therefore firstly turn to explore the self through the less disconnected perspective of social constructionism which helps me to make sense of the influence of the outside world upon the emergence of ‘self’, then turn to object relations theory in order to explore individuals’ inner worlds.

***From Bounded Self to Relational Self: Adopting Social Constructionist Approach & Chinese Confucianism***

It is necessary to state first that I am not intending to argue whether the dominant Western positivist or the social constructionist approach is right, because from a social constructionist perspective, it is problematic to identify whether a point is ever ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The mainstream way of looking at the self, such as Cartesian position, however, is not considered relevant for this research, since it fails to address the relationship between the self and the external environment, which is focused on the notion of cultural difference and the possibility of change. But it is a point where I started to explore the concept of self.

According to Smythe (2013), the difference between an essentialist and constructionist mode of studying the self might be reflected in the difference between the questions “did you find yourself?” and “did you make yourself?” That is, essentialist researchers intend to search for the essential human nature of the self; for example, one essentialist argument would be that people perceive themselves to be more essentially human than anyone else (Haslam, et al., 2005). The constructionist perspective sees no essential factors in the self, but rather claims “the self comes into existence only through interaction with others and the form it takes” (Zikin, 2008, p.394). In other words, one’s sense of being or having a self cannot be considered without the effects of the environment upon the ways in which the individual develops. As such, the home and the school environments are considered as important contextual factors in the research.

Social constructionism provides an approach in which ‘self’ does not necessarily have to be essential or fixed, but could be in a permanent process of construction or potential transformation. Social constructionism does not aim to search for the essence of ‘self’, but rather acknowledges that human beings are continuously constructing selves rather than ‘finding self’. According to Wetherell and Maybin (1996, p.265), social constructionist viewpoint on the individual “stresses joint action, dialogue, debate, conversation, conflict, and discussion, both between and within people as they try to reconcile the diverse voices or internal dialogues which make up their mental lives”. Therefore, the way in which social relationships and voices influence one’s self-construction is the focus in this research. In particular, relational being (Gergen, 2009) and dialogical self theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) are two main theoretical perspectives that are adopted to build one part of the theoretical framework and explore the participants’ self-construction within their significant outside relationships, both interpersonal and contextual.

In addition to social constructionist approach, considering the transcultural context in which the research conducts, I will adopt Chinese Confucian philosophy to explain the influence of family on individual Chinese. Confucianism suggests that the individual self or identity should be defined within one’s social relationships and social contexts, which suggests that social constructionism and Confucianism might share common ground. People are expected and encouraged to become the ‘big me’ which refers to the social self instead of ‘small me’ which refers to the individual self. In other words, Confucians suggest that ‘we’ is an identity that should be prioritised above ‘me’ (Lau, 1996). Radically, Chinese people are encouraged to be selfless which means “they have chosen to yield them up in the service of the society or state” (Hall & Ames, 1998, p.23) by Confucians. Social constructionist and Confucian positions will be illustrated in chapter 3.

***From Outside-Relational Self to Inner-Relational Self: Adopting Object Relations Theory***

Social constructionist perspective allows approaches which root the self in one’s various social relationships. One’s selves could thus be seen as relational (Gergen, 2009), always in the process of transformation. But how do the various outside relationships construct or interact with one’s inner mind? How do individuals react psychologically to their outside relationships? In what ways do individuals react to the same outside situation differently? The dilemma posed by a social constructionist perspective does not take into account that whether there is a ‘me’ or a young person who experiences the world in a way which is unknown to others. How could we contemplate that inner world? Object relations theory is considered as a useful resource for exploring these avenues.

Object relations theory may seem incompatible with social constructionism. I would argue, however, they do share some similar standpoints. For example, both of them are opposite to Freud’s drive theory and see human nature as fundamentally social (Epstein, 1991). Additionally, object relations theory addresses a gap in social constructionism by paying attention to human beings’ inner psychological development. For example, as Epstein (1991, p.860) suggests, object relations theory imposes certain limits on constructionism by suggesting that while human nature is not essential and fixed, there might be regular psychological patterns through which an individual’ sense of self has potential to develop in the direction of autonomy which is rooted in independency. Therefore, I would argue that it is valuable and necessary to take both social constructionism and object relations theory into consideration in study of human nature.

In particular, object relations theory focuses on interpersonal relationships, with the term ‘object’ referring to individuals’ inner representations of outside objects or relationships (Frosh, 2012). The self is neither seen as being constructed in the outside world nor the inner world, but in a third space in-between the outside and the inner world (Winnicott, 1971) from the perspective of object relations theory. That is, the self is not only outside-relational but also inside-relational. This position will be explained in chapter 4.

***Opposite Selves in Unity and Transformation: Adopting Chinese Taoist Philosophy***

According to the research outcomes which will be summarised at the end of chapter 3 and 4, one’s self-transformation is influenced by different and opposites issues. “How to understand and cope with those opposite experiences” became another crucial concern in the study. On the one hand, Western social and psychological theory do not seem to be able to solve this question. On the other hand, the uniqueness of the Western self in this study is challenged by an examination of elements of Eastern cultures (Burke, 1997), especially when this research is conducted a transcultural situation.

The unique wisdom and characteristic that Chinese culture possesses, I would argue, is its encouragement of people to accept and play with paradoxes rather than see them as problems. In terms of the way in which Chinese people cope with the conflict and paradox between traditional culture and contemporary culture, for example, according to Fang and Faure (2011), both old and new cultural values visibly coexist in today’s Chinese society as a consequence of China’s interactions with foreign cultures in the age of globalization.

Herein, Taoist philosophy is adopted for two reasons. Firstly, it could be seen as a theoretical support to the Western theories, since they do share some common ground. For example, both social constructionism and Taoism see one’s knowledge of the world as inclusive rather than exclusive of the ‘knower’ (Stevenson, 1996). Secondly, it offers an alternative viewpoint, such as the concept of ‘no-self’ and Wuwei (action through inaction), the power of emptiness, detachment, and receptiveness, and the idea of yin–yang philosophy (Hue, 2010, p.601), which provides another radical approach to understand the self and explain the complexities of the social world and one’s inner world. I believe that adopting Chinese philosophy is beneficial to achieve a balanced perspective and enrich the theoretical framework, especially when considering the transcultural nature of the thesis, and its account of young people with a Chinese heritage written by a Chinese émigré.

Taking a Taoist concept of ‘selflessness’ as an example. Selflessness or ‘no-self’ is similar to ‘self-forgotten’ in Taoist point of view (Peng, Xu & Shen, 2011) which refers to a realm in which the individual self is a part of nature and the universe. In Taoist view, one’s self-construction does not necessarily need to follow any social rules, or be defined from a social perspective, because ‘self’ will and should come naturally. In other words, ‘self’ would not be true if it was ruled or constructed from outside. Taoists suggest that “if one tries to capture the meaning of self in the regular sense, the result is failure. But if one just let go of oneself, one will find one’s self” (Lau, 1996, p. 61).

In effect, although various philosophical or religious perspectives have had substantial influence on Chinese culture for thousands of years, Chinese culture neither sticks to any of them, nor believe in all of them without selecting a particular philosophy to believe in. Chinese culture allows people to selectively follow the principles which make sense to them and enrich their life, even though it might cause contradictions and paradoxes (Fang, 2014). Therefore, I chose Taoist philosophy to interpret my research since I am convinced by its thoughts. This position will be demonstrated in chapter 5.

In summary, the theoretical framework in this thesis is built on the juxtaposition of the social constructionist approach, which looks at self within its social circumstances; object relations theory, which pays more attention to individuals’ externally impacted inner psychological experiences; and Chinese Taoism, which provides a different and possibly radical version for interpreting the self. It is necessary to invoke accounts of social issues and individual experiences, as well as both Western theories and Chinese perspectives, in order to contemplate the complex social and cultural issues inherent in this transcultural study. I chose these three perspectives to underpin my research because they are complementary and interconnected, and because they allow me to account for the complex culturally-informed position that emerged in the empirical phase of the research, for example, the theoretical multi-perspectivism arose from attempts to analyse the complex data.

* 1. **Transformation of Methodological Framework**

The principal aim of the research is to explore the second-generation Chinese immigrant young people’s self-constructions/transformations in a transcultural environment (UK). Based on the chosen theoretical resources, the purpose is not to search for any ‘truth’ but to explore and interpret the issues concerning the concepts of self and self-constructions/transformations that are raised by the data in a transcultural context. The research is exploratory and adopts a qualitative interpretivist paradigm. In particular, narrative case study has been chosen as the methodology for empirical exploration and analysis.

Building a methodological framework has, however, been a difficult process as well, because it needed to synchronise with the development of the theoretical framework and the changes in the research questions. A mixed methodology was therefore constructed, depending upon the theoretical paradigms of social constructionism, object relations theory, and Chinese Taoist philosophy.

Similar to the way I built the theoretical framework, the methodological framework has gone through a process with several turning points as well. The following section introduces this process in brief, for instance, turning from ‘generality’ to ‘individuality’, from ‘reality’ to ‘process’.

***From ‘Generalist’ to ‘In-depth’: Looking for an Appropriate Methodological Paradigm***

When I started to consider a methodological framework, I investigated the quantitative approach, not only because that quantitative paradigm is dominant in many disciplines, including social science (Fielding & Schreier, 2001), but also because at the start of this study, I did not fully understand the complexity of issues concerning generalizability or making the research look more ‘scientific’ with numbers and figures. In other words, I was initially attracted by the quantitative approach which seems have access to the truth of the world as it is. However, as I explained above, my own thoughts and understandings about the self are constantly changing. I realised that looking for ‘general truth’ is not an appropriate aim in social sciences and in particular my research for some theoretical reasons.

From a social constructionist perspective, in particular, it is problematic to look for a generalised ‘truth’ about human beings. As Burr (1995, p.21) suggests, “there is no objective evidence that you can appeal to which would demonstrate the existence of your personality”. In other words, the person or the self is discursive, contextual, and socially constituted (Raskin, 2002). Therefore, I am questioning, but not denying, the possibility of the existence of objective facts. I would argue that searching for objective facts might not always be appropriate for social science research.

From a philosophical perspective, there is a distinction between natural and social science. Harre (1972, p.18) suggests that “people are perfectly capable of distinguishing between the world as it is and the world as it is manifested to them … between appearance and reality”. He further states that “natural scientists are going for the truth whereas in sociology it gradually became clear that the societies you were looking at were very different from one another. In the social sciences there is not a world out there” (Edmonds & Warburton, 2015, p.10). That is, in social sciences, the existence of an objective world is questioned.

In effect, looking for objectivity is not even an absolute purpose in the area of natural science, because according to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, objective fact does not equal science (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983), while quantitative approaches do not easily accept the importance of accessing and understanding each individual’s socially constructed experiences.

Quantitative paradigm has been criticised for a long time now in social sciences in particular (Guba, 1990). Quantitative research might, for example, cause context stripping, exclusion of meaning and purposes, and disjunction of grand theories with local contexts, whereas qualitative research could eliminate or alleviate those problems (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, quantitative paradigm did not fit the theoretical point of view I inclined towards or the research aims I wanted to achieve. The methodological framework is therefore located in the qualitative paradigm. The research purpose changed from seeking to generalise people’s experiences to looking in depth at each individual’s self-constructions respectively within the transcultural context.

***Narrative-Transformation: Introduction of Narrative Case Study and Interview Methods***

The purpose of the research is to understand the second generation Chinese immigrant young people’s self-transformation via understanding the way in which they give meanings to their life experiences, the participants’ narratives would be an appropriate approach to access to their life experiences. From a social constructionist perspective, it is not only that narratives are regarded as unique, and personalized stories, which are reflective of special life conditions; but also that one’s description and explanation of the world are within the relationships people construct the meaning or sense of what is observed (Gergen & Gergen, 2011, p.122 -123). In other words, in addition to the uniqueness of individual experiences, narratives also refer to individuals’ relationships with outside world.

In particular, narrative transformation which refers to story and re-story one’s life experiences has become the focus in social and psychological researches (Gergen & Gergen, 2011). I assume that, narrative transformation might be a way through which one’s self is transformed. In this research, therefore, in order to understand daily life in depth and the way in which human beings give meanings to their lives through storying and re-storying, narrative inquiry is adopted as the main methodological approach. In addition, considering the uniqueness of each individual’s stories, case study is adopted as another approach since it is “down-to-earth and attention-holding” (Stake, 1978, p.5).

Considering Winnicott’s (1960a, p.589) suggestion that “an infant cannot become an infant unless linked to maternal care”, and Confucian thought that family is the basic unit for the Chinese (Gao, 1996), I assume that, in order to understand children’s experiences, their parents’ experiences should be taken into consideration as well. Therefore, Interviews were conducted with both young people and their family members (mothers). In particular, since object relations theory is one of the theoretical resources, free-association interview technique is adopted. Thus, I aimed to relinquish some of the control within the interview process and let the participants talk about whatever came into their minds. The details of the methodological approach and methods will be illustrated in chapter 2.

* 1. **Transformation of Research Questions**

Based on the transformation of theoretical framework, the research questions setting has been through a transforming process as well. At the beginning of the research design, I asked myself plenty of ‘what’ questions, such as “what is the self?” “what kind of self-positions do the young people construct in their daily life?” “is there a way to measure their cultural identities?” and “what percentage of their cultural identity do they consider to be Chinese?”. However, after engaging with a social constructionist perspective in which the self is not stable and fixed, but rather multiple and dynamic and always in the process of change, I kept questioning whether I was being limited by conventional approaches to study the self, which remain rooted in answering ‘what’ questions? Therefore, I turned my attention from ‘what’ to ‘how’ questions.

Considering one’s social relationships which is emphasised by social constructionist theory, the first research questions is ***“How do the children construct their selves socially i.e. in a transcultural context of various external relationships?”*** However, social constructionist theory arguably may lack a nuanced attention to one’s inner world. Consequently, considering object relations theory, the second research question is ***“How do the children construct their selves psychologically i.e. through the interaction between various internal and external relationships?”.*** Additionally, after the issue of participants that only the children and their mothers take part into the research was confirmed, I set a specific research question of ***“How do the children’s mothers experience their own selves and how does this affect their children’s constructions of selves?”***. Moreover, after collecting and analysing the data through perspectives of social constructionism and object relations theory, some more questions emerged from the data interpretation. Therefore, I added one more research question that ***“How could the research outcomes be interpreted by Taoist philosophy?”.*** The sub-questions of each of these research questions, and the way in which they were set will be illustrated in detail in Chapter 2.3.

* 1. **Greeting from Research Participants**

As mentioned previously, I worked in a supplementary Chinese language school in a city in Northern England. All my students were second-generation Chinese immigrant young people around 8 years old. Working with them gave me an opportunity to observe how people live within multiple different cultures. I found that most of my students’ parents could not speak English very well, so the children had to speak Chinese at home. Their home culture could also have been said to be more Chinese than English. When they went to their English schools or played with non-Chinese young people, however, they spoke English and fitted themselves into British culture.

Since the research aim is to understand the self-constructions of some of second generation Chinese immigrant young people in a transcultural context, and narrative case study was chosen as the main methodological approach, the research sample is not large. Considering ethical issues, the sample was chosen randomly. I therefore invited all my students and their families to take part in the research. Four people - two children and their mothers - decided to take part. Fathers stated that they did not participate because they were busy with their work, but also, the cultural norm is that dealing with teachers is usually a mother’s job. This point might reflect an important aspect of the conventional Chinese parenting style, which is that the influence of mothers on children is often more explicit than that of fathers.

These two children were my students and we had been working together for almost 3 years. At this stage, I would like to introduce them to the readers, in their own words, in order to form an impression of them. In the following chapters, each one of them will become much more familiar.

***Jerry:*** *I am an 8 years old boy who was born in the UK. My father is from mainland China. My mother is from Malaysia but she is Chinese too. I am the only child in my family so far. I can speak English, Cantonese and Mandarin, but my Mandarin is not good enough. Sara is one of my best friends in Chinese school.*

***Emily:*** *I am Jerry’s mother, a Malaysian-Chinese. My parents sent me to the UK when I was a teenager to avoid some family conflict issues. I speak Mandarin, Cantonese, and Malaysian language. My English is not good. I worked in a Chinese restaurant for a few years, but did not have the opportunity to go to university. Then I met my husband and got married. Now I am a full-time housewife. My husband, Jerry’s father, works in a Chinese restaurant, which is the only source of income in the family.*

***Sara:*** *I am an 8 years old girl who was born in the UK as well. I have a little brother called Leo who is sometimes grumpy, but I love him. I can speak English and Mandarin. I like drawing very much and I think I am very good at it. I want to be an artist in the future.*

***Alice:*** *I am Sara’s mother. I came to the UK from mainland China with my husband, Sara and Leo’s father, after we got married. I only speak Mandarin. I was an accountant in China but have no job in the UK at the moment. My husband works in a Chinese restaurant.*

The research was conducted with these four people.

In summary, the research aims to explore the way in which Jerry and Sara, as second-generation Chinese immigrant young people, see themselves in their particular transcultural context. The culture within their homes could be said to be more absolutely Chinese, whereas outside the home, their cultural environment is British. The research concerns the works or the interphases between psychological, social and philosophical factors in constructing selves.

* 1. **Mapping the Thesis**

Because of the transformational research process, the methodology and structure have had to adapt to the process. As a consequence, the structure of the thesis may seem slightly different from a traditional style since there is no a particular chapter for the literature review. In fact, the literatures in this thesis is explored respectively in relation to social constructionist theory, object relations theory and Taoist philosophy in each single chapter. The data is exposed to analysis in line with those three perspectives.

***Chapter 2*** will illustrate the methodological issues in this research. It will describe my positionality in relation to the research questions. The way in which the questions are explored will be demonstrated, including a rationale for the qualitative paradigm, ontological and epistemological issues, narrative inquiry, case study, and methods of data collection and organisation. Ethical considerations, subjective reflection and reflexivity, and evaluation of the research will be described as well. In addition, in order to set out a clear and detailed structure, I will provide a table with a list of themes and corresponding theoretical ideas and their positions in the thesis at the end of this chapter.

Since each of three theoretical paradigms makes different assumptions about the nature and extent of ‘self’, the kind of ‘self’ is being constructed varies from chapter to chapter depending on the paradigmatic principles in use. The literature and data interpretation will therefore be dispersed into three chapters. In particular, ***Chapter 3*** will look at the data from the perspective of social constructionism. The particular theoretical framework is built on two perspectives, which state that the self is socially relational and dialogical. In addition, Confucianism is adopted in particular that will enable readers to understand the influence of social rules upon Chinese people’s lives. Jerry and Sara’s stories will be interpreted here mainly according to this social constructionist paradigm.

***Chapter 4*** provides a theoretical framework mainly based on psychodynamics (mainly object relations theory), discussing the way in which ‘self’ is constructed in transitional space via adopting the concepts of transitional objects and phenomena, imagination and fantasy, digesting emotional experiences, defence mechanisms, and narrative means. Jerry and Sara’s stories will be reinterpreted utilising those concepts.

***Chapter 5*** will turn to Chinese Taoist philosophy which will provide a radical spiritual perspective on the self and self-transformation. In particular, Taoist principles of complementarity and transformation, terms of selflessness and Wuwei, and the principle of Yin Yang will be explained and employed in interpreting the research findings, which are outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, and reflecting on my own experiences about the research and emotional experiences.

***Chapter 6*** is the final chapter, which aims to make a conclusion for this research. I will conclude the juxtaposition of the theories in this research, answer the research questions, evaluate the research, and illustrate its implications and limitations.

In summary, this research aims to explore the way in which the second generation Chinese immigrant young people’s self-constructions/transformation in a transcultural context. I would remake a statement that a complementary theoretical paradigm which involves social constructionist perspective, psychodynamics (mainly object relations theory) and Chinese Confucian and Taoist philosophy is necessary, because the theoretical complexity reflects the cultural complexity and context for the individual young people. In order to conduct the research, a mixed qualitative methodological paradigm, narrative case study in particular, is adopted. Next chapter will explain the methodology and methods in this research.

**Chapter 2 Methodology and Methods**

**2.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes a mixed methodology and methods that I have chosen, not only based on the principles of social constructionism, object-relations theory, and Taoist philosophy, but also arising from the research data, that is the best means considering the data emerged from the phenomenon to be explored. As I introduced in chapter Introduction, the whole trajectory of this research is about change and transformation. Building the methodological framework went through a process of change, with the change of theoretical framework and the research questions, and was affected by the data I collected from the participants. In other words, this research starts from the phenomenon rather than the methodology. Methodology and methods, in my opinion, aims to serve rather than restrict the research and the people. Therefore, the methodological framework in this research adopts various ideas from different theoretical perspectives in order to analyse the data.

As stated in last chapter, this research looks at how second-generation Chinese young people see themselves in a transcultural context in the UK. I will begin this chapter with a section on my positionality, an introduction of my views on the participants, and a scenic description of the research environment. This is in order to put ‘people’ in the centre of this research and remind the readers that all the chosen theoretical ideas are employed so as to understand those people.

The second section will list the research questions based on the theoretical paradigms and research findings, and explain the reason why research questions are set in a particular way. The next few sections will describe the mixed methodology and methods in this study, including qualitative paradigms, ontological and epistemological considerations. Narrative case study was utilized as the chosen methodology for considering the empirical research. Interviews were conducted to collect data. Thematic analysis was adopted to organise and analyse data. In addition, some relevant methodological issues such as ethical considerations, subjective reflexivity, and reflection will be pointed out. I also adopted Yardley’s (2000) criteria for qualitative research as an evaluation for this research. At the end of this chapter, I will provide a table with a list of themes and corresponding theoretical ideas, and their positions in the thesis.

**2.2 People in the Research**

**2.2.1 Positionality**

As social constructionists argue, it is hard for researchers to be value-free. Our own biases that serve as checkpoints to shape the research process need to be recognised along the way (Bourke, 2014). As England (1994, p.88) argued, “fieldwork is intensely personal, in that the positionality and biography of the researcher plays a central role in the research process”. Therefore, the way I analyse the participants’ stories might be different from any other researchers and even the participants themselves, due to the difference between the ways in which each individual understands the world.

In particular, throughout the whole process of preparation and design of the research, formulation of research questions, data collection and analysis, my positionality as a Chinese female studying in a UK university remained at the forefront of my mind. Therefore, I think it is necessary to describe my positionality in the beginning of this chapter in order to give readers an impression of who the researcher is and what kinds of potential and implicit factors might affect the study:

*I am a Chinese female, and I will have lived in the United Kingdom for almost 6 years by the time of thesis submission, since I came here for full-time master study in 2011. Prior to conducting the research study, I worked in a supplementary Chinese language school as a part-time Mandarin language teacher and worked with many second-generation Chinese immigrant young people for several years. My experience of working with them led to my interest in conducting research regarding how those young people see themselves in a transcultural environment. Owing to conversations with, and observations on, my students, I found that the students who found it difficult to learn Mandarin usually found themselves in some sort of conflicts regarding their identity; especially cultural identities. For example, they might not be self-motivated to learn Mandarin since they identify themselves as British (because of the nationality on their passport). However, their parents, and the Chinese community, told them that their heritage is Chinese. So, there was pressure on them to treat Mandarin as their own language rather than the second language. Consequently, they struggle with their relationships with their parents and friends because it seems that they were expected to ‘perform’ different roles in front of different people. Therefore, I wanted to learn more about how they were dealing with these pressures. I was drawn to learning their stories because I was too struggling to understand myself, confused as I was by my place in this globalized world.*

In summary, my positionality has two aspects. Firstly, I am Chinese who studies in the UK. I am experiencing my own self-construction/transformation as I cope with both Western and Chinese cultures. Secondly, the relationship between the participants and me, as those young people’s Mandarin teacher, guided my interest in their self-constructions; for example, how they were seeing themselves in a transcultural context.

My positionality has explicit influence on this study. Theoretically, being Chinese and studying in the UK allows me to explore both Western and Chinese perspectives. In particular, I hold a holistic perspective of complementarity and transformation with an embedding of Taoist philosophy which sees differences in a union, and things are in transformation. As I illustrated in chapter Introduction, the process of building the theoretical framework was long and involved with several turning points. I started looking at the self from a Western Cartesian perspective, but found it inadequate as a way of thinking about my current situation. I tapped into social constructionism and object relations theory wherein some of my questions found convincing answers but some did not. Therefore, I turned to Chinese Taoist philosophy since it has plenty of meeting points with social constructionism and object relations theory but also provides different ideas.

However, it would not be appropriate to claim that I am a social constructionist, or a psychoanalyst or a philosopher. Rather, I would argue, I needed theoretical flexibility to make sense of different, even opposite ideas. Therefore, considering the Taoist principle of complementarity, these three theoretical approaches are juxtaposed in the research. Furthermore, as England (1994) argued that research is a process rather than a product; it is possible that the same topic will be studied from different perspectives in the future when more theoretical paradigms come into the picture. However, at the current stage, those three approaches make more sense to me within the context of this research.

In addition, the relationship between myself and the participants allows me to be confident in understanding them because of our shared heritage in Chinese culture. My positionality may have served as a space in which these young people and their families had a voice (Bourke, 2014). One point I must claim, however, is that I neither can nor attempt to speak for research participants or work on their behalf to give them any suggestions on their life. I will therefore illustrate more about reflection and reflexivity in chapter 5.

**2.2.2 Pen Portrait of Four Participants**

In the previous chapter, I gave some basic information about four participants. In this section, I would like to paint a picture of the four participants by which I hope that the reader will become more familiar with them through my eyes.

***Jerry:*** *In my class, Jerry seemed very cautious and less confident in his Mandarin language. He rarely asked for opportunities to answer questions or take part in any language game unless everyone was included. However, if he was encouraged, he could do language tasks very well. He is quite sensitive and even a little bit emotional. Sometimes he would cry when he felt hurt by his classmates or failed in a language task, for example. In the interviews, it was to my surprise that he was quite chatty. He shared stories about the toys he liked to play with, his feelings about his mom and dad, his dreams about guns and war, and his best friends in both schools.*

***Emily:*** *Emily always came with Jerry to Chinese school. I rarely saw Jerry’s dad. She was very friendly and extrovert. Sometimes she stayed in the school waiting for Jerry and talked with other parents for the whole morning. When I was interviewing with Jerry at their home, she even offered me tasty homemade sweet soup. The interviews I had with Emily were in a library near her home because she wanted to show me the place where she and Jerry usually spent weekends. Emily is a Buddhist.*

***Sara:*** *Sara was very shy at the beginning of her study in Chinese school. She did not want to engage with the class activities. After a few months, however, she became familiar with me and other children. I could tell that she became more relaxed and engaged in the class. Her Mandarin improved a lot in 3 years. In the interviews, however, she did not seem very open, especially the second interview in which her mind seemed distracted by her friends outside of the room.*

***Alice:*** *Alice seemed introverted and even wooden sometimes. She rarely talked with me or other people actively in Chinese school. Most of time she sat on the sofa outside the classroom while watching Sara and Leo play with other children. When I told her that Sara did a great job in language tasks, Alice did not show me significant positive reactions and did not praise Sara. In the interviews, Alice told me that she often felt lonely, empty, and even depressed in the UK.*

**2.2.3 Scenic Description of the Research Environment**

According to Hollway (2011, p.94), scenic writing of the research environment “involves latent meaning and ties subjective experience to social practice and cultural meaning” could help researchers and readers understand data “more holistic; closer to tacit, unconscious knowing; and capable of accessing societal-cultural unconscious knowledge”. In other words, by providing a concrete picture of the research environment, a scenic description of the research environment allows both researchers and readers, consciously or unconsciously, to construct a holistic sense of the research context and the people involved in the research, in doing which, the data make more sense. For example, having a sense of the decoration in Jerry’s house might be beneficial for readers to understand the particular way in which Jerry constructed the sense of ‘religion’ which will be interpreted in chapter 3. Applying this idea to my research, I would like to provide scenic description of the situations in which the interviews were conducted.

***Jerry and Emily:*** *Jerry and I had interviews twice at his home. When I went into Jerry’s house, the first time, he was already waiting for me while playing with an iPad in his living room because Emily told him that I need to do a report about him. After guiding me into the room, Emily went into the kitchen and left Jerry and I in the living room. Around the room, I saw Jerry’s Lego toys on the table and floor, a study desk and a Buddha statue in the corner. Jerry and I sat on the sofa. He chose to use English to do the interview because he thought that his Chinese language was not good enough. He was a little bit tense at the beginning of the first interview. In order to make him comfortable and relax, I asked him a question: “what game do you play with your iPad?” as the beginning of the interview. He showed me a game called ‘Minecraft’ and then talked about his Lego toys. The conversation has successfully started. At the beginning of the second interview, I also used “Minecraft” to open the conversation. I told him I started to play the game after the first interview and shared my experience. He seemed a bit surprised about it. After exchanging our Minecraft playing experiences, the second interview had a good start also. Emily and I had two interviews in Mandarin language in a public library near her house. She shared her views on her life, and how they affected the way in which she educates Jerry.*

***Sara and Alice:*** *The first interview with Sara took place in their old house. Sara and her brother Leo, who was only 4 years old at that time, were playing in their bedroom when I came in. I told Alice that it would be better if I can talk with Sara alone, so she asked Leo to go to another room to watch TV; Leo rejected this because he wanted to be with Sara. Therefore, Leo stayed with us, but Alice told him not to be naughty - if he disturbed us, he would have to go to another room. Then Alice was trying to make a friendly phenomenon:*

*Alice (to Sara): did you show your teacher the pictures you drew?*

*Sara: Not yet.*

*Alice: don’t be shy, just treat your teacher as your friend.*

*Sara: (no response)*

*Alice (to Leo): are you shy?*

*Leo (loudly): no!*

*Sara (to Leo): shh*

*Alice: let’s chat with your teacher, I can sit here with you.*

*Me (to Sara): do you want your mom with us? Is it ok for you to play with me without your mom?*

*Alice (to Sara): are you ok without me? I need to do some kitchen work, is that OK?*

*Sara: ok.*

*As I felt, everyone except Leo was a little bit nervous because no one had experienced this situation before. For example, Alice asked Sara to show me her pictures. It may not because Alice wanted Sara to impress me in a good way because she knows that Sara’s drawing teacher speaks highly of Sara’s pictures, but because she wanted to open a conversation easily. For another example, when Leo speaks loudly, Sara said “shh” to ask him to be quite immediately. Looking at myself as well, when Alice said she can stay with us, I asked Sara whether she is ok without her mom, because I did not know how to tell Alice that she is better not to be on the scene.*

*Then, Alice asked Leo to leave with her again, but Leo shook his head. So, Alice left Sara and Leo with me in the room. We sat on the floor and had our first interview in Mandarin. A few weeks later, Sara’s family moved into a new apartment so we conducted the second interview there. I went into their new home after Mandarin language school when she was playing with some of her friends at home. Sara chose to speak English to me because she felt comfortable with it. She seemed a little bit impatient and distracted because her friends were outside of the room. Leo interrupted our conversation several times but Sara asked him to go out. The interviews I held with Alice were at her house also. I remember that, when I went there the first time, Alice asked me “would you like coffee or tea?” then offered me a cup of coffee. It was a significant moment to me because it seemed non-Chinese.*

**2.3 Research Questions**

As I introduced in last chapter, with the change in theoretical framework building, the formulation of the research questions has been through a process from ‘what’ to ‘how’. This point may refer to an empirical distinction between “knowing what” and “knowing how”. As Ryle (1945, p.4) suggests, “the knowledge-how is a concept logically prior to the concept of knowledge-that”. However, Ryle (1949, p.17) also argued that there are both parallelism and divergence between ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’. That is, theory and practice cannot be separated from each other. “It requires intelligence not only to discover truths, but also to apply them” (Ryle, 1045, p.6). Therefore, only ‘knowing that” may have restrict usefulness in this transcultural study. This encapsulates a shift in my approach to knowledge – from fact to process. However, it does not mean that I will ignore ‘knowing that’. In the research questions, I pay attention to both ‘what selves did those young people construct’ and ‘how they construct those selves” but more on ‘process’ because ‘fact’ is changeable.

The way in which I set the research questions in the study is congruent with the way in which I built the theoretical framework. When I was trying to explore the self from a conventional, essentialist, point of view, the research questions seemed always to begin with ‘what’. For example, borrowed a term of ‘self-position’ which indicates the multiplicity of the self from Dialogical Self Theory which will be introduced in chapter 3, I would ask ‘what self-positions did the children construct?’ In terms of cultural self-positions, starting from a positivist or quantitative approach, I was wondering ‘what percentage of ‘Chinese’ is in their self-identities’. In fact, these research questions made me anxious because I could not find a sufficient tool to test their identities. I therefore turned to other approaches to explore the self.

Social constructionism was the second stop on my journey. It helped me to understand that the ‘self’ should not necessarily be seen by looking at the self only; but, rather, by exploring the social context and social relationships the subject is in. This may sound roundabout, but may be more valuable. The first research question thus asks how children cope with the social relationships they encounter and in doing so how they construct their self-positions. However, the self is not something we can see or touch, but something we can only think and feel about. The third paradigm is psychodynamics (mainly object relations theory), which guides me to look at individuals’ inner worlds. Consequently, the second research question asks how the participant’s self-positions are constructed within both outside and inner worlds. In addition, since both social constructionism and object relations theory emphasise the importance of significant people in the subject’s life, the third question asks how the children’s family, especially their mothers, affect their self-constructions. Moreover, the research outcomes which are came out from data analysis will be interpreted by Taoist philosophy.

I will provide a list of four research questions with an explanation of the reason why they have been set in a particular way below. The premise of each of those questions is that they are located in each participant’s narrative rather than in a general context. In other words, all the questions should have a suffix of ‘depending on their narratives’.

**1. How do the children construct their selves socially i.e. in the transcultural context of various external relationships?**

According to a social constructionist perspective, the self should be considered as multiple, dynamic, relational, and never fixed (Gergen, 2009; Burr, 2003). This question will enable an exploration of the multiplicity and relationality of the young people’s self-constructions. Its sub-questions are: **1.1, how do the children construct their self-positions in the interaction with their significant relationships?** In order to explore this question, two other questions that start with ‘what’ also need to be asked: **1.2, what kind of significant relationships do they think they are in? 1.3, what kind of self-positions were constructed within those relationships?** This question aims to explore the subject’s self-construction within external relationships.

**2. How do the children construct their selves psychologically i.e. through the interaction between various internal and external relationships?**

According to object relations theory, one’s self is constructed in the third space between the inner and outer world (Winnicott, 1971). This question will enable exploration of the way in which the inner and outer worlds interact and in doing so, how each child constructs their self-positions. Accordingly, the sub-questions are: **2.1, how do they emotionally experience the relationships with other people?** And, **2.2, how do they emotionally experience the relationships with themselves?** These questions aim to explore how the children cope with various relationships in both conscious and unconscious ways, and in doing so how they construct their particular self-positions consciously or unconsciously within emotional experiences.

**3. How do the children’s mothers experience their own selves and how does this affect their children’s constructions of selves?**

According to Winnicott (1971), children cannot be studied in isolation from their caregivers; especially mothers, for example, due to the amount of time spent together. In addition to the young people, their mothers were also research subjects. This questions aims to understand the self-constructions of the children in relation to their mothers’ experiences of their own self-constructions and understandings of their children’s identities. In doing so, the children’s self-constructions might be located more effectively in the family relationships.

**4, How could the research outcomes be interpreted by Taoist philosophy?**

This question is added after the data was collected and analysed within social constructionism and psychodynamics (mainly object relations theory) because some more questions such as ‘how to look at the research from a Chinese philosophical perspective’ emerged to me. In particular, I think the research outcomes coincidently reflected some Taoist thoughts. Therefore, I set this research question for guiding attention to Taoist philosophy.

In summary, the main concern of this research is the way in which the second generation Chinese immigrant young people construct their selves in a transcultural environment. Based on the theoretical paradigms of social constructionism, psychodynamics (object relations theory), and Taoist philosophy, my research is exploratory, without setting assumptions of those children’s self-identities before the research. It aims to explore the participants’ daily experiences including their interactions with the outside world and their emotional experiences, and the way in which the children’s selves are constructed in a transcultural context.

Next section will illustrate the ontological and epistemological considerations from both Western and Chinese Taoist perspectives, and the qualitative methodological paradigm.

**2.4 Ontology, Epistemology and Qualitative Methodological Paradigms**

The epistemology and ontology that underpin the methodology are the basic overviews on the way in which the ‘knowledge’ and ‘reality’ can be understood. According to Cruz (2006, p.23), epistemology aims to “illuminate the difference between knowledge and opinion, or the difference between good reasoning and poor reasoning” and “understand general and ubiquitous elements of human inquiry, such as perceptual knowledge or inductive inference”. In simple words, epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the question of knowledge (DeRose, 2005) whereas ontology refers to the view of reality.

In particular, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.108), the ontological question is “what is the form and nature of reality, and what is there that can be known about it?” The epistemological question is ‘what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?’. In general, ontology is concerned with the question “what is reality?” while epistemology is concerned with the question “how can we know reality?”

According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), theoretical frameworks or paradigm influence the way in which the knowledge is studied and interpreted. Different theoretical paradigms are independent with different epistemological, ontological and methodological perspectives. According to Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000), for example, realism claims that knowledge is something ‘out there’ to be discovered. Contextual constructionism argues that the knowledge is constructed inter-subjectively; radical constructionism even challenges the foundations of knowledge itself. Language, for example, might not be able to adequately present the reality in question.

However, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), constructivism believes that reality is locally and specifically constructed. Consequently, in terms of methodology and methods, realists and positivists who believe the knowledge exists independently of and can be proved by the researchers intend to conduct quantitative research, whereas constructivists are more likely to employ hermeneutical or dialectical research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). That is, theoretical paradigm is a basic belief system that is built based on “ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107).

In this research, I choose to reject traditional Cartesian epistemology and ontology because, in particular, the Cartesian approach, which has dominated Western social science, suggests that true knowledge, which is certain and immutable, could be achieved by discovering how the mind mirrors the external world objectively (Markova, 2000). Whereas according to the theoretical framework I have built, however, I doubt the existence of ‘true’ knowledge about human beings, and do not think that a human being’s mind could mirror the world as it is. I have thus discounted the Cartesian approach in this research. In the content below, I will explain the ontological and epistemological considerations based on the paradigmatic principles consist of social constructionism, object relations theory and Chinese Taoist philosophy.

In social constructionist sphere, the term ‘constructionism’ is often interchangeable with constructivism. They do share some points in common, for example, as McNamee (2004) suggests, both constructivism and constructionism are concerned with how human beings are able to co-exist and co-create a world together, along with the emergence of social and personal changes. The distinctions between the two cannot be overlooked, however. Constructivists focus on the internal cognitive processes of individuals, whereas constructionists focus on the discourse of joint social activities (McNamee, 2004). In psychology in particular, constructivism is simply concerned with mental processes within the individual that construct things such as one’s view of the world, whereas constructionism also looks at how the individual itself is constructed (Parker, 2005). Gergen (1985) also recommends the use of constructionism in social psychology since constructivism often refers to Piagetian theory. In this thesis, only the term ‘social constructionism’ is used, although it might share some common meanings with social constructivism.

In particular, constructionist ontology is similar to the constructivist paradigm, which assumes a relativist ontology, i.e. “that there are multiple realities, a subjectivist epistemology that knower and respondent co-create understandings, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.13). In addition, according to Andrews (2012), social constructionism makes epistemological claims only. Its concern is the way in which knowledge is constructed in the social context rather than the ontological issue of whether an objective reality is existing or the metaphysical issue of causation, for the reason of its ontological belief that there is no one objective reality but multiple realities. However, Nightingale and Cromby (2002, p.705) argued that social constructionism itself is ontological because “it has the potential to function as an explanatory framework within which we might examine the actual ‘nature’ of our world rather than just our knowledge of such a world”.

Additionally, since object relations theory is one branch in psychodynamic and psychoanalytic theory, I would like to look at ontological and epistemological issues from a psychoanalytic and psycho-social perspective as well. According to Gargiulo (2006), psychoanalysis is “not about empirical discoveries of ontological realities, nor should it be” (p.475), but a metaphor for making sense of experience because “there cannot be one definitive centre of meaning” (p.478). Psycho-social epistemology concerned with theorising about how researchers and the readers/audience of naturalistic empirical research know what was encountered (Hollway, 2011). Therefore, this paradigmatic principle determines that psychodynamic research is interpretive and that the meanings are created by the researcher’s interpretation. In sum, considering epistemology and ontology from the perspective of Western theoretical framework in this research, I argue that the basic principles in this research are: ontologically, there is no objective reality or truth; epistemologically, individual knowledge is psycho-socially constructed.

Moreover, from a Taoist holistic ontological perspective, the world we experience is a unity structured by oppositions and contradiction and always in a process of changing (Freiberg, 1975). As Cheng (1989, p.168) suggests that Taoism is a work with a cosmological outlook which is not confined to cosmology but covers both ethics and philosophical anthropology. In particular, Laozi, also called Lao Tzu, who is seen as a founding father of Taoism, contemplated the ontology of the universe and posed there existed a fundamental force which he called Tao or Dao (‘way’ or ‘path’) since it is nurturing and moving everything in the world, but cannot be adequately defined (Hwang, 1999).

Tao is a metaphysical concept. Laozi explained Tao in his book that “Tao is bottomless, the very progenitor of all the things in the world” (Waley, Chen and Fu, 1999, p. 10, for original Mandarin see Box 2.1), and:

Tao gave birth to the one, the one gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand. These ten thousand creatures cannot turn their backs to the shade without having the sun on their belies, and it is on this blending of the breaths that their harmony depends… Truly, things are often increased by seeking to diminish them and diminished by seeking to increase them (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p. 87; for original Mandarin see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1

道，渊兮，似万物之宗。出自《老子. 第四章》

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。万物负阴而抱阳，冲气以为和。故物而损之有益，或益之而损。出自《老子.第四十二章》

(Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999)

Since myriad things and phenomena originate from Tao, it seems that all the things are in a network of relationships. Human beings, as concrete things, also exist in this relational network. In the Taoist viewpoint, human beings are relational – they are not only related to other people and things in the world and to nature, including heaven and earth, but also to the world as a whole, which includes things that human beings do not yet understand and to things in the past as well as to things in the future (Cheng, 1989, p.169).

Epistemologically, in Taoism, ‘not to understand the limitations of knowledge is a disease’ (Masami, 1999, p. 177). Therefore, Taoists suggest that “the more you know, the less you really know” (Shien, 1953, p. 260) because human beings can only know the world from their own standpoints. For example, the meaning of ‘water’ to people must be different from its meaning to fish, i.e. one’s knowledge, which is received from sense impressions, is not a necessary direct or true reflection of reality (Shien, 1953, p.260). According to Masami (1999, p.176), Tao is “something that we must realize for ourselves through a profound exercise of personal understanding…through practice”. That is, Tao is individual and personal knowledge rather than objective or absolute existence. It is not a general rule. In fact, everyone is encouraged to create his or her own Tao. In light of this, I would argue that Taoism shares similar ontological and epistemological thoughts with social constructionist perspective and object relations theory.

Methodologically, as a consequence, the explanatory or exploratory approach might thus be a proper way underpinned by epistemological and ontological consideration from social constructionist approach, object relations theory and Chinese Taoism.

The methodological question, in particular, is “how can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.108). Methodology is the tool we use to explore what we want to know. Qualitative approach is the methodology in this research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.3), qualitative research is:

[…]a situated activity that locate[s] the observer in the world; consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible; transforms and turns the world into a series of representations; involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world; and studies things in their natural settings, attempts to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Unlike quantitative (experimental) sciences which look for a ‘value-free objective truth’ and focus on measuring the causal relationships among variables, and transcending opinion and personal bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; 2011), qualitative research encourages the researchers to be immersed in the phenomenon rather detach themselves from research as quantitative researchers do (Firestone,1987). Quantitative and qualitative approaches adopt different approaches when addressing the same issue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research provides rich descriptions of the issues concerned (Ploeg, 1999), which is not the concern of quantitative research because details of the issue might interrupt the generalisations of the result.

In brief, qualitative research aims to make sense of reality in its natural context with the consideration of its situational limitations. Qualitative research is value-laden that does not avoid showing the researcher's subjectivity. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994, pp.105-106) qualitative research can redress the imbalance in quantitative research by providing contextual information, rich insight into human behaviour, and attention to individual cases rather than generalised statistical results. Qualitative researchers are often seen as bricoleurs who adopt multi-methods and disciplines, and struggle with locating their subjectivities in a reflexive text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In particular, a bricoleur needs knowledge of the various theoretical paradigms, research strategies and methods that one may adopt to solve any particular problem.

In summary, qualitative paradigm is chosen as the methodology in this research. However, there are various qualitative approaches such as ethnography or grounded theory to do the research. According to Creswell (2013), the different categories of qualitative approaches for inquiry and research are narratives, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies. In particular, phenomenology attempts to describe the common meaning of shared living experience and particular phenomena of experienced. Grounded theory research aims to develop a theory which arises from the data. In doing so, the information is dissected then rebuilt in the form of codes before re-assembling (Riessman, 2008). Grounded theory focuses initially on fragments of the data rather than seeing the data as a whole. The intent of ethnographical study is to interpret shared patterns of human behaviour, beliefs, and languages in a culture-shared group and describe how a culture-shared group works. Case studies tend to deeply analyse a case or multiple cases. The narrative approach provides a way to think about, analyse, and understand stories lived and told by people (Creswell, 2013). With my paradigm and concrete empirical research questions decided, narrative inquiry and case study seems the most appropriate approach.

**2.5 Narrative Case Study**

In this section, I will discuss the understanding of ‘narrative’ and the role of language in the research, and explain the methods of narrative inquiry and case study.

***Narrative***

Hiles and Cermak (2008, p.149) describe the function of a narrative, claiming it “plays a crucial role in almost every human activity, dominate human discourse, and are foundational to the cultural processes that organise and structure human action and experience.” In my understanding, narrative helps people make sense of not only their life experiences but also their surroundings, because “narratives offer a sense-making process that is fundamental to understanding human reality. Narratives enable human experiences to be seen as socially positioned and culturally grounded” (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p.149). A narrative is the process of “meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experience” (Chase, 2011, p.430).

In addition, “narratives are not merely accounts of experience; they are performative, offering frames for human action and pragmatic and persuasive responses to deal with life’s events” (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p.149). In particular, narrative is ‘the performance of the self as a story of identity’ (Parker, 2005, p.71). Which is to say that, human beings use narratives to not only present, but also perform and construct their views of life experience. This takes the argument further to explore the performativity of narrative.

In terms of the theoretical paradigm in the research, social constructionists see narratives as forms of action and social performances (McNamee, 2004). “Identity and experience are a symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded” (Langellier, 1999, p.129). However, since the social relationships are multiple and complex, the person in his or her performative narrative is not fixed or stable. In my understanding, through my research, I think narrative is a way for the participants to show who they are not only to me but also to themselves, as Langellier (1999) suggests that through storying and restorying, one has his or her potential for self-transformation.

In terms of the form of a narrative, to borrow from Riessman (2008, p.23), narratives “[come] in many forms and sizes, ranging from brief, tightly bounded stories told in answer to a single question, to long narratives that build over the course of several interviews and traverse temporal and geographical space - biographical accounts that refer to entire lives or careers”. More specifically, personal narratives are conceptualised in three different ways (Riessman, 2001). The first way sees a narrative as an entire life story or autobiography; the second is more restrictive and sees narratives as brief and topical stories; the third way sees narratives as extended accounts of lives that develop over the course of interviews. My work basically draws on the second and the third concepts of narratives that study discrete stories and how the stories are structured during the interviews. However, since the story must be told and interpreted by language, the transparency of language is one concern in a narrative inquiry.

***Transparency of Language***

Language plays an essential role not only in the narrative research but also in everyone’s daily life. It is critical in social constructionist paradigm (Raskin, 2002). However, how can we make sure we understand each other correctly and how can we make sure we express ourselves accurately? In other words, what is the relationship between words and ‘reality’? The issue of transparency of language will be discussed through a perspective which is in part borrowed from Lacanian perspective.

According to Hollway and Jefferson (2008), it is problematic to assume that what a researcher asks is completely understood by the subject, or indeed to assume the researcher can understand what the participant is saying. For example, in the research, Jerry mentioned that he has dreamt that he shoots people “in the other country which is an enemy to our army”. The meaning-frame of his words “our army” seemed vague to me, so I asked him whether it is China or the UK he referred to by “our”. Although the intention of my question was to avoid the misunderstanding, it might cause another misunderstanding because my question was based on my own cultural self-positions. I gave him two choices between China and the UK but ignored another possibility that his meaning-frame of ‘our’ might be Malaysia since what I noticed later is that his mother, Emily, is Malaysian-Chinese, and Jerry likes listening to Malaysian songs. It would therefore have been inappropriate to take Jerry’s meaning-frame of “our” for granted. It seems to me that this example highlights how easily misunderstandings can happen between the interviewer and interviewee.

Even though Jerry’s meaning-frame of ‘our’ is only about being Chinese or British, it might still be a misunderstanding considering Lacan’s argument that the signifier may indicate a number of the signified (Buckwalter, 2007). This argument was affected by Saussurian semiotics, which claims that the relationship between the signifier as language with a series of symbols and the signified as the corresponding concepts each signifier is linked to is random and arbitrary. It means that it is impossible for one subject to understand exactly what another subject’s signified through the subject’s words, because what is transferred in communication is the signifying chain of signifiers and their own corresponding signified concepts (Buckwalter, 2007). In other words, language is a mediator that connects individuals but also makes a gap between individuals (Hook & Neill, 2008). Relating to my example, even though Jerry and I both agree with that ‘our’ means Chinese, it cannot be taken for granted that the meaning of Chinese to me is as same as to him because words do not necessarily mean what they say.

Clinically, in addition, Lacanian therapists hold a perspective that it is impossible to know anything about ‘reality’ through the patient’s words (Frosh, 2012). In other words, the purpose of some psychoanalytic therapy is not to search for ‘reality’ because there is none. Moreover, Lacanian perspective sees language as performative (Frosh, 2012); i.e. there will always be a discrepancy between language presentation and thoughts such that the translation between these two is always uncertain and approximate (Frosh, 2012). Therefore, language is not a tool to deliver meanings, but rather to create meanings. In my research, I am not looking for the ‘reality’ underneath the language, but the ‘story’ created by the language.

Methodologically, in addition to Lacanian perspective on language, according to Hollway and Jefferson (2008), the transparency of language between interviewers and interviewees cannot be guaranteed; neither can be absolute transparency. When the researcher is listening to the recordings and reads the transcripts, she is faced various ‘texts’, by doing so there is a reconstruction of the narrative by the researcher. One is the participant’s conscious narrative message at the time and another is the participants’ unconscious message. For the former, the researcher is not able to assure that the message she received from the participants is exactly what they were intending to share; for the latter, neither the participants nor the researcher could assure what we transferred to each other is exactly what we were willing to say. In the example above, for instance, there is no guarantee that what Jerry said is exactly what he meant to communicate, not only to me, but also for himself.

Simply, according to Lacanian perspective, there is no meta-language (Parker, 2005). Lacanian theorists are suspicious of any claims that there is a neutral view of things. The ways in which the human mind works should be described from within the speaker’s speaking position. A researcher’s subjective involvement should be examined as far as it shapes the manner in which the data is interpreted. This is because it might be dangerous to rely on the transparency of language. Furthermore, analysis is a changeable and nonstop manner of thinking rather than the practice of looking for a fixed interpretation of each case (Parker, 2005). I would therefore argue that the interpretation of my data in this thesis is based on my current theoretical knowledge and life experiences involving my own emotional experience. It might be reinterpreted in a different way in the future. There is no right interpretation, and even if there is, it cannot be achieved but only could be got close to.

In light of this, I argue that all the stories that the narrator presented to me and I presented to readers are not the ‘whole story’, because no story can be complete. As Billig (2014, p.161) suggests, the participants’ narratives in the research interview, that are not problematic, direct reflections of an earlier ‘experience’, should be understood in their discursive context. Therefore, “[qualitative] research is not a process of uncovering (even relative) ‘truths’ about people, but rather exposes the ways in which people are positioned by the theoretical structures used (by them as well as by researchers) to understand them” (Frosh & Young, 2008, p.112).

***Narrative Inquiry***

As a consequence, narrative inquiry is a multidisciplinary enterprise in which narratives can be defined commonly as a story of events through which individuals are able to make sense of themselves and the world (Wells, 2011). Story-telling is the main focus in narrative inquiry (Reissman, 2005). According to Wells (2011), in general, narrative inquiry focuses on people's oral narratives of events or experiences in past, present, the future or in imaginary. The terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are interchangeable in her definition.

One of the features of narrative inquiry which distinguish it is that narrative inquiry accepts as legitimate a concern with the narrator’s life experience (Chase, 2011). Narrative inquiry adapts an ontology which is concerned with how people live their storied lives - our world is a storied world (Etherington, 2004). In particular, according to Hiles and Cermak (2008, p.151), “narrative inquiry does have its roots in a social constructionist perspective, but it does also entail a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive view that incorporates both a rich description of the socio-cultural (discursive) environment and the participatory and creative inner world of lived experience”.

More importantly, according to Billington (2012), narrative not only refers to the oral or written discourse of an event or a series of events; but also refers to the act of narrating itself; for example, someone recounting something. Therefore, narrative researchers not only focus on the content of story itself, but also pay attention to the way he or she is constructing the narrative (Daly, 2007). In addition, narrative research not only focuses on presenting a storyteller’s conscious cognitions and feelings, but also intends to present their emotions that are unknown to them (Squire et al., 2008). The aim of narrative inquiry is to understand the conditions, phases in life, or turning points in an individual’s experiences (Wells, 2011). Therefore, narrative inquiry can be seen as a both social and psychological approach to explore the participants’ experiences that are both known and unknown to themselves.

The self is socially constructed and “is able to weave for itself an illusion of coherence through its memory of relationships with others, and actual relationship which confirm its enduring existence for itself” (Parker, 2005, p. 30). That is, the self is constructed in one’s daily experiences within both social and inner relationships. Understanding one’s experience is a key way to explore one’s self-construction. Narrative inquiry is the “first and foremost way of understanding experience” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p.542).

Narrative inquiry begins with telling stories (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) about people’s experience over time, and exploring the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Since my research is intending to explore each participant’s individual experiences and the way in which the outside cultural environment affects them, narrative inquiry seems an appropriate way for me to ‘know’. According to Bruner (1991, p.3), “the world or knowledge is not something immutable, not always ‘there’ to be observed, and never a point-of-viewless”. Reality is constructed by narratives to some degree. Narrative constructions can only achieve “verisimilitude” (Bruner, 1991). Therefore, since the philosophical root of narrative inquiry in my research is social constructionism which dispenses with objective truth but focuses on social construction of knowledge, I am not arguing that it is not important to know whether the story the narrators told in the interview is exactly what happened or not; but rather, it is much more important to look at the way in which they shaped and made sense of their story. In other words, the most significant aspect of one’s self-construction is not reality but one’s interpretation of the reality. As Riessman (1993, p.1) argues, as a narrative researcher, storytelling is “what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us”. In particular, according to Chase (2005), a narrative study is expected to express why the story is worth telling, what the story is about, what kind of emotions, thoughts and interpretations are relevant, in which way the narrator acts as a protagonist, and the uniqueness of each human being.

Narrative research is diverse in its various theoretical divisions. According to Squire, et al. (2008), event-centred narratives see individual’s representations as constant; experience-centred narratives see representations as varying drastically over time and in different situations even from the same person; co-constructed narratives see representations as social. In addition, psychoanalysis is “concern[ed] with the psyche as a form of language, even a ‘narrative’, in itself” (Squire et al., 2008, p.9). In particular, according to Patterson (2008, p.23), event-centred narrative methods analyse data based on Labov’s six-part model that look at the “abstract, orientation, complicating action, result, evaluation and coda” in one’s life story. Event-centred narrative looks at the syntax of the narrative. However, this method assumes that an objective reality could be constructed without taking into account the context (Patterson, 2008). It is not compatible with the social constructionism paradigm in my research so, therefore, an event-centred narrative method is not employed.

Experience-centred and culturally-oriented narrative methods, according to Squire (2008), focus on the semantics of the narrative with an assumption that humanity’s experiences could become part of the collective consciousness through story telling. This method sees personal narratives as sequential and meaningful, as means of human sense-making, as representation and reconstruction, and as transformational (Squire, 2008). In particular, this method organises narratives into themes rather than structures them. It considers the uncertainty and transparency of language, and the interaction between the narrator and the listener. The narrative is now seen as not only a characteristic of humans, but also a factor that make us human (Squire, 2008, p.43). The interpersonal context and the broader social and cultural contexts in narratives are also the focus of this method. In addition, psychodynamic researchers think the narrative can represent the narrator’s psychic realities and unconscious elements. Since the theoretical paradigm for my methodology in this research is interdisciplinary, and the purpose of the research is to explore the participant’s personal experiences in a transcultural context, and “narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p.55), narrative research is the best for my purposes. Having considered content-centred, experience-centred and culturally-oriented methods, I think that the narrative method used in my research is most compatible with the latter.

It seems to me that there are at least two factors involved in studying narratives - especially how narrative is constructed. One factor is time, not only succession in time, but change through time (Squire et al., 2008, p.10). Another factor is the relationship between the narrator and the listener. In particular, in terms of time. For narrators, their narrative might be reconstructed in different situations and times since they might change their minds. Through narrative retelling, a particular self is constituted (Riessman, 1990). For researchers, their interpretations of the data may change when they revisit data because researchers also became different people as time goes on. Therefore, the way in which the narrator constructs and reconstructs their narratives and the way in which my interpretation of data might change must be taken into consideration in the data analysis. In terms of the relationship between the narrator and the listener, as Riessman (1990, p.1195) suggests, “a teller convinces a listener who was not there that certain events ‘happened’, that the teller was affected by them … occasioned by the presence of a listener, her questions and comments”. In other words, the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee is more as the listener and the narrator who work collaboratively to invite narrators’ specific stories. (Chase, 2011). The interpreter’s reflection and reflexivity is therefore necessary in the data analysis.

In summary, according to Creswell (2007), a procedure of conducting narrative research is not a lock-step approach but rather a representation of an informal collection of topics. In general, borrowed from Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Creswell (2007, pp.55-57) suggests a procedural guide for narrative research: Determine that the research questions best fit narrative research which aims to capture stories of a small number of individuals, collect both individual stories and information of context through different sources, analyse and re-story the participants’ stories, and collaborate with participants. Frosh and Young (2008) also suggest a psychodynamic methodological procedure. In the next section, the way in which the research was conducted and the steps that were taken will be illustrated with consideration of those suggestions. In addition, the methodological issues in narrative inquiry, including the research relationships, ethics, data interpretation, and evaluation (Chase, 2011) will be explained.

***Case Study***

In addition to narrative inquiry, case study is an important qualitative inquiry in this research as well. According to Flyvbjerg (2011, p.301), the definition of case study includes four layers of meanings: it “focuses on individual unit”, “is intensive”, “stresses developmental factors” and “focuses on relation to environment”. Applying to my research, firstly, Jerry and Sara’s cases are studied as two individual systems. As I stated above, the participant should not be seen as sample but as people in social research. Jerry and Sara and their mothers, to me, are not only the research participants but rather each independent person. Each of them have their own life experiences – some part might be similar, for example, both Jerry and Sara went to Mandarin language school, but not the same, for example, they may have different experiences about the school. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to do cross-case analysis on Jerry and Sara’s cases.

Secondly, I intend to explore detailed information of each case. In order to understand Jerry and Sara, I intend to explore each of their personal stories rather than ask them some general interview questions. In other words, it would be the participants rather than me to decide what stories to talk about in each interview. Thirdly, I bear the transiency of the events in mind and look at how the events interrelated and make a whole picture of each case; and fourthly, I focus on the particular context of transcultural environment the cases in. In other words, I focus on time and space of each case, since from a social constructionist perspective, people’s narratives and identities are transient and contextual.

In summary, narrative case study is chosen as the main method in this research, through which the participants’ experiences about their life in a transcultural context are explored in-depth. However, instead of omnisciently summing up the case, I would rather keep it open. As Flyvbjerg (2006; 2011) suggests, telling the story in its diversity, not linking to any one specific theory, allowing the story has different meanings to different people, might be the good strategies to do narrative case study.

**2.6 Methodological Issues and Methods**

**2.6.1 Data Collection & Production**

To obtain detailed information from a small number of informants, the interview is a reasonable method (Denscombe, 2014). According to Riessman (2008) and Wells (2011), the interview is most widely used for constructing narratives for inquiry. In this section, the steps of data collection or data production of the way in which semi-structured narrative interviews are conducted with psychoanalytic free-association interview techniques will be described.

***Semi-Structured Narrative Interview***

According to Bold (2012), comparing with structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews not only have a set of questions to guide the process, but also leave space for participants to tell their whole stories instead of pieces of information. In addition, according to Squire (2008), most experience-centred narrative interviewing is semi-structured, intervening as little as possible. In this research, a brief list of questions for children and their mothers was prepared for the interviews. In order to guide the interviews but also not to intervene the participants too much, most of the questions were therefore designed as ‘truly open-ended’ which means the interviewees were allowed to answer them with their own words (Wells, 2011). As Riessman (2008) suggests, it is preferable to ask open-ended questions because it allows the participants to tell the story in a way they think meaningful.

The interview questions were set according to the research questions. For children, the research aims to explore in what way the children construct their self-positions within various relationships, especially cultural-self-positions. The interview questions were therefore intended to explore children’s experiences in their daily life. The question, for example: “What do you usually do at home and in schools and with whom?” “What do you enjoy or not enjoy doing at home and in school?” “Could you talk about your best friends?” “Was there anything making you happy or sad?” For mothers, the research aimed to explore their own self-constructions and how these affect children’s self-constructions. In addition, as I explained above, interviewing mothers helped me to know more about the children and their context. The questions for the mothers therefore asked them about their own life experiences and their understanding of their children, for example: “Do you know who your child’s best friend is, and how did you know it?” “Do you know what your child likes and dislikes to do at home?” “How did you feel when you came to UK for the first time, and how about now?” “In order to ask the question “what makes you feel you are Chinese or British?”, however, I also posed one, and only one, structured question. The question “Could you please rate how much you think you are Chinese or British on a scale from 1 to 10?” was asked of both the children and mothers, in order, not to measure the degree, but to provide an intuitive impression of their cultural identities.

Although the interview questions were prepared in this research, the narrative interview schedule does not necessarily follow the prepared questions, but rather, the questions are seen only as a guide which might be useful but also might not be useful when follows narrator’s story (Chase, 2011). The agenda in the narrative is open to change depending on the narrator’s stories (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). In Jerry’s case, for example, when I asked him to talk about his friends in English school, he mentioned someone “who is not in the same religion” with him. Consequently, the conversation turns from ‘friends’ to Jerry’s understanding of ‘religion’. This example might reflect on an interview technique of free-association through a perspective of psychoanalytic or psycho-social research.

Moreover, from psychological and social constructionist perspectives, interviewee’s narratives are co-constructed by both interviewer and interviewee. As Wells (2011, p.27) suggests, the interviewer helps to shape the interviewee’s talk not only through the way in which the questions are asked but also the way in which the verbal and nonverbal responses, such as volume of voice and body movements, are given to the interviewee. For example, in Sara’s case, when she said she does not like maths, I found myself giving her a response of expressing my personal feeling that “I do not like math either”. Then she seemed feel more comfortable to talk about her negative experience of doing math. In my opinion, her narrative about math seems to be a co-construction by both of us. In the simple example, both her self-image and my own self-image are reflected and even resonate with each other.

***Free-Association Interview***

According to Parker (2005), the principle of psychoanalysis is not to prescribe how things should be, but to help interpret how things became the way they are and why we experience some particular feelings in the ways we do. Psychoanalytic practice deals with case studies. In my PhD research, therefore, psychoanalytic theory is employed in both data collection and data analysis. A free-association interview technique was adopted in the data collection, especially to understand the way in which particular external relationships have affected the participants’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviours by allowing unconscious ideas to come to the fore (Clark, 2002). In other words, through free-association interviews, both participants and the researcher’s unconscious dynamics could be symptomatically inferred (Hollway & Jefferson, 2005).

Free association is an interview technique originally used in psychoanalytic treatment. Unlike traditional interview methods where the respondent’s intention is suppressed in favour of the interviewer’s interests (Hollway & Jefferson, 2004), guided by this principle of free-association the interviewees are encouraged to “say whatever comes to mind […] not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p.309). The researchers are able to “pick up on incoherences (for example, contradictions, elisions, avoidances) and accord them due significance” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p.310). By adopting this technique, I therefore left a space for flexibility in the conversation with my interviewees, for example, allowing silent moments to take place, using “could you give me an example” to encourage participants to associate more information, and following the participants’ narrative rather than only counting on the pre-prepared interview questions. It is necessary for us to give up control of the research process and follow the interests of the participants (Riessman, 2008). This strategy is helpful to keep a balance between the power of researchers and participants in the conversation because it leaves a space for participants to tell their stories in their own way.

Using participant’s own phrases as the follow-up question is also a technique in a free-association interview because it might be helpful to “elicit further narratives” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). In the interview with Jerry, for example, he told me that he told his father to go out because he bothered him. I wanted to know what happened to him next but was not sure how to ask a specific question at that moment, so I simply stated “you told your father to go out but he didn’t?” To my surprise, Jerry did not tell me what happened to him but reflected on what he just said further by narrating “it was not reasonable to make my dad get out because he did make money for me”. Jerry’s further narrative was not what I intended to ask, but it seems more valuable because it seems to me that Jerry was reconstructing his own understanding of the past issue during our conversation. In other words, Jerry was not ‘telling’ me the story, he was ‘reconstructing’ the story by himself. In doing so, the turning point of his emotional experience emerged significantly in a free-association narrative interview which concerns with narrators’ emotional sequencing of their stories.

In summary, the principles and techniques I used in the interviews can be listed in general: Firstly, I started every conversation with a question that either interested participants or reflected some connections between them and me. With Sara, for example, I started the conversation on the topic of drawing because she is very proud of her pictures; with Jerry, I started the conversation discussing his favourite iPad game. With Alice and Emily, I started a conversation on Chinese language learning because I was Jerry and Sara’s language teacher and that connected us. Secondly, the list of prepared questions was treated as a guide. During the interviews, I was trying to follow participants’ narratives and respond to them with their own phrases such as Jerry’s ‘religion’. Thirdly, I paid attention to my own feelings during interviews as well as the participants’ narratives, for example, remaining vigilant about my own arrogance and reminding myself to give up control of the conversation. After data collection came the organising and analysing of the data.

**2.6.2 Data Organisation and Analysis**

Adopting an idea of methodological procedure from “psychoanalytic approaches to qualitative psychology” (Frosh & Young, 2008, p.119) and a NOI (narrative oriented inquiry) model from “narrative psychology” (Hiles & Cermak, 2008, p.154), and considering the practical experiences from the research, I devised a five steps model to organise and analyse my research data.

***Step 1. Transcribing and Translating***

The first step in organising and analysing the data is to transcribe it from audio recording to text, in which process judgements about what level of detail to choose, data interpretation, and data representation are involved in order to make the written text readable and meaningful (Bailey, 2008). Through transcribing and reading transcripts, it is helpful to build up a picture of the context and the story as a whole (Hiles & Cermak, 2008). Transcribing was the first step to familiarising myself with the data.

Since this is a transcultural research and the participants used both English and Mandarin in the interviews, parts of the transcripts are in Chinese. Translating them into English is therefore a special task in the process of transcription. I did not translate the Chinese transcripts immediately after the interviews, because I was concerned that the meaning of words might be misinterpreted. Rather, the text is considered in its original language in data analysis. In the interpretation process, the texts were translated into English in order to help readers understand it.

Considering the influence of translation on the validity and reliability of the data, I would argue that the dilemma of power dynamics between the researcher and the translator (Larkin et al., 2007) is not a problem in this study because I took the dual roles of both researcher and translator. I do not claim, however, that I could translate the ‘correct’ meaning of their narratives, nor can I understand them better simply because I share part of culture with the participants. I would rather argue that translation is also a process of interpretation because, from a social constructionist perspective, translators form part of the process of knowledge production (Temple & Young, 2004). The way in which I translated and interpreted the data connects closely with my own positionality.

Furthermore, as Bailey (2008) suggests, transcriptions are expected to capture features of both visual data such as gesture and talk such as tone of voice and pauses. In addition to this point, I also paid attention to the notes I had taken and tried to recall my feelings during interviews in order to not only ‘see’ the transcripts but also ‘feel’ the transcripts. As Riessman (2008) suggests, transcription is an interpretation rather than a presentation of what was said; a transcript is a co-construction to which both the researcher and the interviewees contribute. “By our interviewing and transcription practices, we play a major part in constituting the narrative data that we then analyse” (Riessman, 2008, p.50).

***Step 2. Working Transcripts and Choosing Analysis Methods***

The ‘working transcript’ is a concept borrowed from NOI (narrative oriented inquiry) by which method the text can be broken down into “a numbered sequence of segments” and “arranged down the left-hand of each page with a very wide margin to the right where notes and annotations can be made” (Hiles & Cermark, 2008, p.153). When I was transcribing and reading transcripts, attention was not only paid to what the participants said and how said it, but also to how I felt about the data. Therefore, the notes I took while interviewing and transcribing are important sources for the data analysis. As I immersed myself into the data as a whole for a long time, different blocks of stories or themes emerged to me. Choosing an appropriate method to analyse the blocks of stories is the next step.

Riessman (2008) delineates four main approaches in narrative analysis viz. thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogical/performance analysis, and visual analysis. In particular, thematic analysis exclusively focuses on the content and the information provided by the participants, rather than the structure of participants’ speech (Riessman, 2008). This method is intending to preserve the story and theories on their whole information without splitting it. Structural analysis intends to separate sentences into different clauses then assign these clauses into different categories. According to Bold (2012), for example, the clauses can be assigned as abstract (what the story is), orientation (who, when and where), complicating action (what happened), evaluation (so what), and result (what finally happened). It seems that structural analysis emphasises the narrative form more than the narrative content. Dialogical or performance analysis sees narratives as social artefacts and pays attention to the context of the narrative; for example, when the narrative emerges, why it emerges, and to whom is needed (Riessman, 2008).

In my research, thematic analysis was chosen as the main point of access to the interview data, because it is flexible and does not require detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, it can be either a realist or a constructionist method. In this research, thematic analysis is used to help with data organisation, within a mixed epistemological paradigm of social constructionism, object relations theory, and Chinese Taoism.

Some points of dialogical analysis have been borrowed in order to look at the research relationship because the relationship between the researcher and her participants has an influence on the conversation. For example, the participants might decide whether to share some particular stories’ details based on their consideration of the researchers’ positionality. In the process of dialogical analysis, the dialogue also emerges between the researchers and the participants’ narrative because researchers speculate on the meaning of participants’ narrative in their own way. As Daly (2007) suggests, interpretive narrative analysis interprets the story within a variety of theoretical frameworks and pays attention to the researchers’ own assumptions and beliefs. Researchers’ reflection and reflexivity is thus critical in the dialogical analysis. Riessman (2008, p.136) emphasises that:

[…]attention [of dialogic or performance analysis] expands from detailed attention to a narrator’s speech- what is said and /or how it is said- to the dialogic environment in all its complexity […] Cultural context, audiences for the narrative , and shifts in the interpreter’s positioning over time are brought into interpretation […]The general principle of dialogic analysis is that] investigators carry their identities with them like tortoise shells into the research setting, reflexivity interrogating their influence on the production and interpretation of narrative data.

***Step 3. Familiarising and Working Themes***

According to Squire (2008), analysing experience-centred narratives is a controversial project. It can start with thematic descriptions which are used to develop and test a particular theory based on which a particular predictive explanation of a story was given. One single interpretation of a story is not expected because one story could be, and maybe should be, explained in multiple, valid, ways. I have read the whole transcript at least 5 times in order to familiarise myself with the material and obtain significant themes with theoretical intentions.

Both inductive and theoretical thematic analysis are particularly taken into account in order to identify the themes. In other words, the analysis is both data-driven and theory-driven concerning the specific research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, theoretically, in order to explore how children construct selves through outside relationships, the data set concerning how they narrate their relationships with parents and friends is coded into themes and analysed using a social constructionist paradigm. The analysis on the way in which they construct specific meaning-frames of particular terms such as ‘religion’ within a social context is considered data-driven. On the other hand, in order to explore how they construct self-positions through inner relationships, their imagination and fantasy would be the data set structured in the paradigm of object relations theory. This is the reason for the data being separated into different chapters with corresponding theories in the following chapters.

The themes have not just emerged from me, but rather, they have been coded and recoded through the interaction between the data and me. The process could be described as ‘familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A table of detailed themes, forms of analysis, and their location in the thesis will be provided at the end of this section (see table 2.1). Western perspectives are mainly used to analyse the themes, but Chinese philosophical thoughts are adopted to discuss the research outcomes with the help of Western theories.

***Step 4. Identifying Core Narratives and Storying “Stories”***

As Crossley (2007) proposes, after identifying themes, the next step is to weave all of these together into a coherent story. The interview transcripts under each theme were therefore ‘storied’ into several stories in order to display the whole situation of Jerry and Sara. Based on emerged themes, core narratives are identified and selected from the data corpus. As Riessman (2008, p.53) suggests, “narrative scholars keep a story ‘intact’ by theorising from the case rather than from component themes across cases”; narratives must be preserved, not fractured (Reissman, 1993, p.4). In the data interpretation section, I intend to interpret each story as ‘intact’ rather than showing pieces of interview transcripts or discussing similar themes across Jerry and Sara’s cases. The narratives or stories the participants told me were ‘storied’ by me again to show the readers. In the process of ‘storying’, researchers critically shape the stories that narrators told through listening and interpreting in particular ways (Riessman, 2008). In this step, I therefore restructured the stories of the participants, albeit in their original words. (For tracing stories in selected interview transcripts, see *Appendix A1-A4: Selected Interview Transcripts* in which a map for guiding the location of each story in the transcripts is provided;forall the interview transcripts, see electronic version of *Interview Transcripts* on the CD with the printed thesis)*.*

***Step 5. Analysing “Stories” and Interpreting “New Stories”***

After ‘re-storying’ the stories, the next step was to analyse them. In fact, the activity of analysis occurs throughout the whole process of the research, through observing, interviewing, transcribing and storying. By the terms ‘analysing’ and ‘interpreting’ I mean the practice of applying social constructionist and object relations theory and interpretive strategies to ‘thicken’ the narratives. As Frosh and Young (2008, p.119) suggests, the last step of the methodological procedure is to apply theoretical concepts to narrative material and analyse the research relationships drawing on the field notes which include the researcher’s observations of the research environment. The meaning of the ‘new story’ might not be exactly as ‘the story before’, however. In other words, I think the story became mine rather than theirs.

As Riessman (1993, p.15) suggests, meaning is ambiguous, fluid, contextual, not fixed, and universal, because it arises out of a process of interaction between people in a specific and transient context. The shifting of meanings is unavoidable in the process of the whole research; from the participant’s representation of their own experiences, to the way in which they tell the experience, to the way the researcher transcribes the story, to the way in which the researcher analyses the story, and to the way in which the story is read by different readers (Riessman, 1993). In representation, one cannot mirror the outside and inner world. For example, when attending to the experience, one is only able to make some but not all things meaningful. When telling the story, one needs to translate the experience into a language but the transparency of language is no longer assumed. When the story is transcribed by the researcher, there is much data, for example, non-verbal, which might not be captured, while other data might be added, for example, the researchers’ subjective interpretation. When the story is ready for readers, however, the meaning of story could be reconstructed by different readers within their own backgrounds.

As Hollway (2011) suggested, researchers are encouraged to use their imagination to get in touch with the reality of participants. Researches become part of the research, for example, the process of Jerry’s emotions changes in the transitional space to which both his inner world and the outside reality contribute. At the beginning, Jerry thought I was going to do a “report” about him and ask him difficult questions as his teacher. The questions about games relaxed him, however, possibly because he realised he could handle the questions. The positive change on his emotions might be enabling him to be more open to the interview. As another example, in the second interview with Sara, it seemed to me she was slightly preoccupied by her friends who were playing outside the room. The situation in which interviews are conducted needs to be taken into consideration in the data analysis also.

**2.7 Ethical Considerations**

No matter whether the research scale is large or small, the researcher must pay attention to the ethical issues in the research (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). The choice of methodology and all the methods of collecting and analysing data are dependent on the ethical consideration. I was aware of the ethical issue during the entire research project design and conduction. Before conducting the research, I provided an explicit and detailed research ethics application to my supervisor and the department for acquiring the ethical approval letter. Since the research includes children, it is considered high-risk research. I also provided my CRB disclosure where necessary to prove that I have no criminal record. The approved ethical approval letter is attached as *Appendix B*.

In terms of sampling, according to Squire (2008, p.48-49), experience-centred narrative researchers are more likely to use “small numbers of interviewees, sampled theoretically, often on an opportunistic and network basis, with little randomization within this sampling frame”. Two families, both of which I met in the Chinese language supplementary school where I worked as a Mandarin teacher, agreed to take part in the research.

However, considering my position as a teacher in the relationship with participants, parents and children may fear that refusing to take part in the research could damage their relationship with me and affect their children’s study in Chinese language school. Therefore, I took Flewitt’s (2005) suggestion that both formal and informal opportunities should be built for participants to say no. I explained to both parents and children for many times that the research is irrelevant to Chinese school, and promised that they could withdraw anytime they want. In addition, the purpose of the research, steps of data collection and analysis were explained to the mothers and children in detail.

Since the central point in my ethical considerations is that every participant must be protected (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012), they were promised that there would be no physical cost involved in the research. In addition to the protection, the wellbeing of each participant is also an essential check in every research (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). In my research, the interview took place in the participants’ preferred manner. Most interviews were conducted at their homes. With the participants’ permission and a completed consent form, two interviews were conducted with two children and two mothers, respectively. In addition, anonymity is also an important way to protect research participants. All the interview data was analysed in an anonymous way for my PhD study only.

Ethical issues were an ongoing checking process during the research. According to Squire (2008, p. 57), “ethical approval for experience-centred focused narrative research should, but rarely does, involve considering the ethics of interpretation, within the frame of researchers’ and research participants’ different powers over the data”. In the data interpretation, I did not return to participants and check the data interpretation with them for two reasons. Firstly, data analysis and interpretation took a long time because the theories engaged are very complex. It seems difficult to go back to the participants to talk about the research again after a long time. Secondly, according to Hollway (2009), from a psychodynamic perspective, the participants may not consciously know what they are saying in their narratives. I would therefore argue that my interpretation of the participants’ stories might not be the same as they see them. In light of this, the researcher’s reflection and reflexivity on the research should be considered as a constant issue. Reflection and reflexivity will be introduced in brief in next section and fully addressed in chapter 5.

**2.8 Reflection and Reflexivity**

According to Gehart et al. (2007), narrative analysis is the activity of meaning making which is not only conducted after collecting the data but throughout the whole process of researching. This includes the research topic chosen, research design and conduction, and subjectivity reflection. Data analysis was not actually conducted after the collection, but throughout the whole process as well, from consideration of the relationship between me and the participants, to preparation for the interview, to the way in which I analysed and interpreted those people’s stories.

It is important to bear in mind the perspective adopted in the thesis that there is no “truth” nor “real things”, only the speaker’s experiences and actions (Riessman, 2008). Research is thus a co-constituted joint product of the participants, the researcher, and the relationship between them (Finlay, 2002). If there is no accurate representation of the ‘real’, however what do we mean by “understanding” or “knowing”? From a Lacanian perspective, understanding is imaginary (Parker, 2005). As Bion (1962) suggests, to ‘know’ indicates a relationship between the subject who wants to know and the object that is to be known. I would therefore argue the interpretation of the data in my research is not intending to show my understandings of those people, but to show the relationship and connection I built between my subjectivity with participants’ subjectivity. The entire inquiry process should thus be open to critical and systematic reflexivity and reflection (Hiles & Cermak, 2008).

According to Finlay (2002), reflection refers to an activity when a subject reflects on an object, for example, when a researcher reflects on his or her research. Reflexivity, however, refers to a thoughtful self-awareness. According to Hollway (2011), reflexivity uses the researcher’s subjectivity as a research instrument and tracks its implications for obdurate questions of validity, objectivity and ethics in research. As Hiles and Cermak (2008, p.152) define it:

[…] reflexivity is much more than an inspection of the potential sources of bias in a study; it must begin with the conscious examination of the paradigm assumptions, selection of research strategies, selection of participants, and decisions made in collecting the data, conducting the interviews, and in analysing the data and interpreting the findings. Reflexivity highlights the fact that the researcher has a participatory role in the inquiry, is part of the situation, the discursive context and the phenomenon under study.

In addition, since the role of the analyst is in searching for new meaning underneath the surface, rather than for the real meanings of something (because there is no representation of the real) (Parker, 2005), taking the researchers’ individual experience into account is necessary in doing qualitative research. As Bion (1970) suggested, it is not permissible for an observer to state his or her opinions without mentioning the vertex which refers to the observer’s subjectivity and points of view. In psychoanalytically-informed research, subjectivity is viewed as a resource rather than a problem. Three approaches to analysing researcher’s subjectivity were suggested by Parker (2005). The first is to explain what happens to the researcher in the research, the countertransference or the researcher’s reflexivity is adopted. The second is to show the reciprocal impact between the researcher and the issue that is being studied, in this case, the notion of trans-culturality. The third way is to explore our own “forbidden desires” (Parker, 2005, p.118), for example, how readers understand what we write might, therefore, not be exactly what we mean. In light of this, research relationships need to be reflected on.

As I stated earlier, Jerry and Sara were students in my class in a Chinese language school I worked in as a Mandarin language teacher. Emily is Jerry’s mother who is Malaysian-Chinese. Alice is Sara’s mother who is from mainland China. We had known each other for almost three years before the research was conducted. I am not sure whether they treated me as a researcher or not because they might not know what being a ‘researcher’ means, but I am sure that I was still their teacher in their eyes. The advantage is that there is already a connection between us, so they did not seem to need a long time to build trust with me that I was not going to harm them. This means they might be willing to share their real experiences with me because we were familiar with each other and that gained me the trust. On the other hand, they might have unconsciously been hiding something because that some familiarity also brings the risk of embarrassment. Another connection between us is that we shared at least a part of a similar cultural background from being Chinese. This might have helped the participants feel they could be understood more by me than by non-Chinese researchers.

Moreover, psychodynamic research might be taken as an example to do reflection and reflexivity. Practically, free association techniques remind researchers of the idiosyncratic ways in which researchers might project their own issues onto participants, both in the face-to-face relationship and in data analysis. They also offer ways to help bring unconsciousness aspects into awareness so that it can serve as a resource and as less likely to compromise the research, while a product of psychodynamic research is essential for the process of reflexivity. The concept of transference (the unconscious projection of our feelings and meanings onto the other person) is an example of reflection. It enables researchers to become more aware of the difference between what belongs to the participant and what belongs to the researcher (Hollway, 2006). My relationship with my mother might, therefore, be involved when I interpreted Sara’s relationship with her mom. In summary, empirical findings in free association interviews are the product of both the researcher and the participant’s subjectivities (Hollway, 2004).

In addition, four concrete questions that are suggested by Hollway & Jefferson (2000, p.55) might be seen as a useful guide for reflection and reflexivity:

1. What do I notice?
2. Why do I notice what I notice?
3. How can I interpret what I notice?
4. How can I know that my interpretation is the “right” one?

To answer those questions, researchers might engage in ‘social dreaming’ (Hollway, 2001) which is explicitly based on Bion’s theory of thinking. Bion’s theory suggests that reverie enables subjective fantasies to emerge and is key to creative thinking. In Jerry’s narrative about his relationship with his father, I noticed that the gun toy might have been a transitional object for him to digest the emotional experiences in the relationship. Based on my reflections, I think I might have noticed this because first of all, Jerry freely associated the two issues by himself, and secondly, the theoretical foundations allowed me to freely associate the research case with the corresponding theories. I am not claiming that my interpretation about Jerry and Sara and their mothers is exactly who they really are, but rather, the only interpretation I could make is what seems ‘right’ to me. We need to be aware, however, that we are not able to be fully reflexive - that our interpretation of things might be wrong for our interviewees (Squire, 2008). I believe that is relevant to the evaluation of the research, which will be illuminated in the next section. More information about my reflection and reflexivity will be described in chapter 5.

**2.9 Evaluation of the Research**

Narrative research always has to face to various criticisms and challenges. According to Creswell (2012), there are two challenges in narrative inquiry. The first one is that researchers should have a clear extensive understanding of the context of the participants’ life to identify the particular story. In my opinion, the meaning of a particular story might only exist in a particular situation. More stories may hide behind a particular story. For example, to evaluate the work of the Nurture Group Network in Britain, Billington (2012) suggests that it is more important to focus on the contexts in which the narrative emerges rather than only on any constructed reality of individual narratives. That means how the narrative emerges, for example, who tells the story and the story told to whom, is essential as well as the narrative itself.

In terms of evaluating the quality of qualitative research, two terms of validity and reliability which are developed within quantitative tradition are often borrowed in earlier periods (Seale, 1999). In particular, validity and reliability in qualitative research are concerned with truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. With the development of the qualitative paradigm, a criterion of validity and reliability seems inadequate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that, for a criteria of qualitative research, internal validity should be replaced by credibility, external validity or applicability should be replaced by transferability, reliability or consistency should be replaced by dependability, and objectivity should be replaced by confirmability. In other words, qualitative research is contextual and subjective rather than generalizable or objective (Whittemore et al., 2001).

Relativism or constructionism may not fit with the traditional criteria of qualitative research, however, because establishing ‘truth’ is problematic from a constructionist perspective (Seale, 1999). Considering the novelty and diversity of qualitative approaches, I argue that the criteria for qualitative research should be flexible. As Mishler (1995, p.117) suggests, “[there is] no singular or best way to define and study narrative” and researchers should be encouraged “to pursue alternative, more inclusive strategies that would provide a more comprehensive and deeper understanding both of how narratives work and of the work they do”. In addition, in terms of the usefulness of case study such as its generalizability, reliability and validity, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that for human affairs, “context-dependent knowledge is more valuable” (p.225), a single case could be generalized although “formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development (p. 230), as long as a unique wealth of information of the case is provided. As Silverman (2010, p.137) suggest, case study “make a lot from a little”.

The principles proposed by Yardley seem relevant to the research. According to Yardley (2000, p.219), characteristics of good qualitative research should include sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. I claim that my research fits with the criteria. For more detailed information, see the table ‘Yardley’s Evaluative Criteria’ in figure 2.1. I immersed myself in the data with a continued consideration of my own positionality and action, kept attention on the balance of power between myself and the participants, and kept reflecting on my own perspective and the research. The utility and limitations of the research will be illuminated in the chapter of discussion and summary.

In summary, this chapter illustrated the methodological issues and methods in the research. In order to answer the research questions, narrative inquiry and psychoanalytic methods are adopted. Since all texts stand on moving ground and there is no ‘master’ narrative (Riessman, 1993, p. 15), I am not claiming that my interpretation is what the participants really intended. Rather, I aim to provide a way to interpret the story from a particular perspective which is based on my own experience and the theoretical foundation I built. Methodology and methods are vehicles by which we are able to go to the places we want to. The next two stops will describe the way in which the data is distilled into several stories and analysed through perspectives of social constructionism and object relations theory.

***Figure 2.1 Yardley’s Evaluative Criteria***

• Sensitivity to context - is the analysis and interpretation sensitive to the data, the social context, and the relationships (between researcher and participants) from which it emerged?

◦ What was the nature of researcher's involvement ([prolonged engagement](http://www.qualres.org/HomeProl-3690.html), immersion in data)?

◦ Does the researcher consider how he or she may have specifically influenced the participants' actions ([reflexivity](http://www.qualres.org/HomeRefl-3703.html))?

◦ Does the researcher consider the balance of power in a situation?

• Completeness of data collection, analysis and interpretation

◦ Is the size and nature (comprehensiveness) of the [sample](http://www.qualres.org/HomeSamp-3702.html) adequate to address the research question?

◦ Is there transparency and sufficient detail in the author's account of methods used and analytical and interpretive choices ([audit trail](http://www.qualres.org/HomeAudi-3700.html))? Is every aspect of the data collection process, and the approach to coding and analysing data, discussed? Does the author present excerpts from the data so that readers can discern for themselves the patterns identified?

◦ Is there coherence across the research question, philosophical perspective, method, and analysis approach?

• [Reflexivity](http://www.qualres.org/HomeRefl-3703.html) - does the researcher reflect on his or her own perspective and the motivations and interests that shaped the research process (from formulation of the research question, through method choices, analysis and interpretation)?

• Is the research important - will it have practical and theoretical utility?

see:  Cohen D, Crabtree B. “Qualitative Research Guidelines Project.” July 2006. <http://www.qualres.org/HomeYard-3688.html>

**2.10 Map of Narratives and Theoretical Interpretations**

In order to provide readers a picture of 10 stories, including what the stories are and what theory will be considered for each story, the table below will show the map of themes and forms of analysis and their locations in the thesis.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2.1 Map of themes and forms of Analysis** | | | |
| ***People*** | ***Stories*** | ***Theoretical Interpretations*** | ***Locations in the thesis*** |
| Jerry | “People with different religions cannot be friends but, if I want to play with him, he also wants to play with me, then friends”. | Construction of individual meaning-framework of ‘religion’ & Selves Constructed in Disconnected relationships | Chapter 3.5.1 |
| “My friend Benny speaks Chinese to other Chinese children but English to me, that is weird”. | Selves constructed in complex linguistic environment and (confused) connected relationships | Chapter 3.5.2 |
| “I like guns, I can shoot people die” and “I want my dad get out of the house” | Selves constructed in a transitional space within play, dream, fantasy and the relationship with his father | Chapter 4.4.1 |
| “(Emily:) my son loves me more than love his dad” vs. “my mom was a liar” | Selves constructed in a relational but paradoxical transitional space within mother-son relationship | Chapter 4.4.2 |
| Emily | “I didn’t grow up in China” but “we are Chinese” | Emily’s cultural experiences and selves, and their possible effect on Jerry | Chapter 3.5.3 |
| Sara | “I want to be clever” & “I don’t like math vs. I quite like math now” | Selves constructed between various inner voices | Chapter 3.6.1 |
| “I want English friends but Benny does not so I don’t have any” | Selves constructed between inner and outside voices | Chapter 3.6.2 |
| “I am spanked by my mum because I am not serious about writing” | Unwanted selves constructed in order to maintain social relationships | Chapter 3.6.3 |
| Selves constructed as a defence | Chapter 4.5.2 |
| “I want to be an artist” or “my mum chose me to”? | Selves constructed in a relational-transitional space with relational-TP | Chapter 4.5.1 |
| Alice | “I am depressed and empty” | Alice’s anxiety and its possible effect on Sara’s self-construction/transformation | Chapter 4.5.3 |

**Chapter 3 Self-Transformation in Social Relationships**

***We die to each other daily***

***What we know of other people is only our memory of the moments during which we knew them***

***And they have changed since then***

***- T. S. Eliot (1950. p.71. from ‘unidentified guest’)***

**3.1 Introduction**

Zhuangzi’s butterfly story introduced in the first chapter inspired me to think about the way in which the butterfly, as an external object, could become a self-position for Zhuangzi. I would like to share another personal story, in order to show the influence of different social environment on people. Once my nephew and I were in a lift and there was a screen on the wall. My nephew was trying to touch and slide the screen whereas I was only standing and watching. Why my nephew and I had different reaction to the screen? In other words, why a screen is ‘for watch’ to me but is ‘for touch and slide’ to him? I think, in a simple way, the reason why we constructed different meanings of the screen is that we grew up within different technical environments: I grew up with TV whereas he with iPad. That is, one’s knowledge is constructed only within the environment he or she lives in.

In order to explore more about how one’s selves are constructed and transformed within his or her social relationships, this chapter consists of two parts. The first is the theoretical exploration through a social constructionist approach and mainly focuses on the idea of relational being (Gergen, 2009); Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Gieser, 2011) is included as a compatible perspective. In addition, I will explain the cultural issues in constructing Chinese identity, for example, adopting Confucian philosophical viewpoints to interpret the importance of social relationships, especially family relationships, in Chinese people’s self-constructions and transformations.

The second part consists of selected data extracts and analysis. In Jerry’s stories, I will illustrate: 1) how he constructed a personal meaning-frame of ‘religion’ which reflects the way in which he constructed cultural-self-positions in disconnection, 2) how he constructed uncertain self-positions with his confusion about why his friends speak Chinese to each other but English to him, and 3) how Emily’s cultural identity affected Jerry. In Sara’s case, I will illustrate three stories also: 1) how Sara constructed ideal self-positions relevant to an individual meaning-frame of ‘clever’ she constructed, 2) the way in which Sara reconstructed her narrative about her feelings on ‘learning maths’ and how this reflects her self-positions, and 3) the way in which Sara constructed complex cultural self-positions in a transcultural environment.

**3.2 Basic Principles in Social Constructionism**

In mainstream social psychology, according to Gergen and Wortham (2001), exogenic and endogenic perspectives are two traditional thoughts originate from mind/world dualism, both of which emphasise neutrality. In particular, exogenic tradition is world-centred that sees the material world as a given, and sees individual values as potential hazards to neutrality; whereas endogenic tradition is mind-centred that views the mental world as self-evident, and values the power of individual reason (Gergen & Wortham, 2001, p.116).

Locke (1690), for example, from the exogenic perspective, claims that a human being’s mind is a blank slate at birth and is filled by the experience of the world throughout his or her whole life. In the field of education, this idea has had a positive influence because it emphasised the effect of education in human beings’ development. On the other side, however, the Lockean view claims that the “mind is a mirror of the world as it is” (Gergen, 1999, p.10) which Gergen believes is misguided and problematic from a social constructionist perspective. Locke can be challenged by asking how we can construct abstract knowledge of, for example, understanding ‘democracy’ or ‘Buddhism’ since it could not be experienced through sensations; or how can we make sure that our mind mirrored the outside world correctly (Gergen, 1999). For another example, Descartes (1637)’s dualist assumption of “I think, therefore I am” claimed that the soul could be separated from human being’s body, and the self is a mental achievement. This point is critiqued as “the dogma of the ghost in the machine” and a “category-mistake” by Ryle (1949, p.11).

Social constructionism locates between the exogenic and endogenic perspectives (Gergen,1985). In other words, social constructionism is different from, but not necessary dismissive of, mainstream psychology. As Burr (1995) suggests, social constructionism originated in the intersection between sociology, psychology, and postmodernism; and is influenced by the history of Western philosophy and mainstream psychological theory. The central principle in social constructionism is its critical stance on knowledge. Burr (2003, p.3) suggests that social constructionists are cautioned to be suspicious of assumptions about how the world appears to be. The theory, consequently, questions things that are normally taken for granted. One of the most significant features of the approach is that it re-thinks and critiques the Cartesian way of seeing the world and ourselves.

The mission of social constructionism, however, is not, unconditionally, against tradition or any other theories. Nor is its aim to overthrow all the dominant knowledge and existing rules of the world. This is because that the dominant knowledge makes contributions to help people understand the world. Gergen (1999) suggests that, even though social constructionism maybe opposed to mainstream psychological theories such as positivism to a certain degree, mainstream theories should not be abandoned, nor that this new theory can be always right or can be the nearest to the truth. Social constructionism was inspired, in fact, by the social constructionists’ experiences in mainstream psychology. For example, in a research which intended to demonstrate the effects of varying social conditions on self-presentation and subsequent self-description, Gergen (1965) tried to generalize the research result that the more positive feedback on the presentation of self the participants receive from the interviewer, the larger extent to which their self-description increases. Impact of language and social practice on each individual leads Gergen to realise that searching for a value-free and generalised science is misguided (Gergen, 1996). Therefore, with doubts regarding mainstream psychology, he changed his thought on ‘generalization’ and turned his interest to social constructionist psychology, which aims at providing a different angle for us to re-understand the world, as a world which is created by, and which itself creates, human beings.

The development of social constructionism went through several turning points. One of the most crucial points is the discursive turn with a significant sign of emphasising the performativity of language (Bozatzis, 2014). Language plays an important role since people’s thoughts are, at least partly, constructed and determined by language. In particular, ‘self’ and identity could be seen as being constructed through language (Burr, 2003). Children, for example, are encouraged or taught to experience and identify feelings through language usage in a relational process. Imagine a familiar scenario in which a baby girl is crying while her mother tries to comfort her by saying “don’t be sad”. One possible occurrence in the girl’s mind is that her naturally making a connection between the feeling she has and the word ‘sad’ which is embedded from her mother. It might be problematic to take the girl’s acquisition of the word ‘sad’ for granted, however. For example, how can her mother, or the girl herself, be sure that the feeling is ‘sad’? How can we be sure the feeling of ‘sad’ means the same thing to both her and her mom? I would argue that the knowledge of a ‘sad feeling’ the girl constructed through language usage is relational, it results from the interaction with her mom. To sum up, language is not only an objective tool for communication but rather is involved in constructing subjects. Burr (1995, p.5) suggests that language is a pre-condition for thought and a form of social action, and the focus of social constructionism is, accordingly, on social interaction and process. Therefore, in order to study the self, social constructionist focus is neither on the individual psyche, nor the social environment, but the interactive process that happens routinely between people in which a certain kind of knowledge (especially about the self) is gained (Burr, 1995, p.8).

In terms of the self, a dominant approach based on dualism has the pre-condition of assuming two worlds: the material world, and the individual, psychological, world. The self is usually seen as located in the individual psychological world (‘in here’, rather than in the external material world, ‘out there’) (Gergen, 1999). It seems to be common sense that people can differentiate these two worlds spontaneously. If someone says, for example, “the pen is on the table”, it is likely that he or she is talking about the objective fact that a ‘material pen’ is on a ‘material table’ with a proof that it can be seen by anyone in a ‘material world’. If someone says, “I should work hard”, it would be commonly interpreted as his or her inner thought; something absolutely subjective. It seems that ‘self’ does not exist in the former example, but the latter one. Judging the self as existing in the inner world is problematic, as is judging the pen as a material thing only that is outside of the human beings’ mind. With a social constructionist view, dividing human beings’ experiences into either physical or mental realm reflects a philosophical presumption of idealism which “separates mind and world, subject and object, self and other” (Gergen, 2009, p.xxi). In other words, the “common sense of personality” which assumes that personality exists as a separate, discrete, spontaneous, and stable inner self (Burr, 1995, p.18) is problematic because it overlooks the effect of outside relationships on a person. Take this point a step further, Western perspectives traditionally see relationships as by-products of interacting individual selves which are placed in the centre of society (Hwu, 1998), whereas social constructionist perspective argues that individual selves are constructed within social relationships.

The “common sense” position of treating the material and psychological worlds as separate from one another and seeing the self as solely the totality of the psyche is problematic, even though it has cultural foundations (Gergen, 2009). Seeing ‘self’ as purely psychological might have a flaw that, if the self is defined as stemming from the individual rather than socially, it is possible for people to take for granted that they are allowed to be distrustful, narcissistic and uncreative, and turn societies into unpleasant places (Gergen, 1999). One might attribute success to individual aggression, for example, instead of taking societal factors into consideration. It might be hard for folks to think about others, and to build harmonious society, if the self is seen as isolated from, and irrelevant to, the outside world. Gergen (1999) goes on to argue that, the psychological world cannot be shown to be irrelevant to the material world. He suggests that, in order to study the self, both the psychological and material world should be taken into account. This is because they are mutually dependent upon one another for existence (Gergen, 1999). Therefore, a conventional definition of the self holds that there is something essentially, and inherently, existent inside human beings; whereas social constructionists argue that the self is conceptualised, and presupposed, by society in some parts (Shweder & Miller, 2012).

In light of this, a person’s inner world might be, at least partly, a product of the ongoing relationships by which he or she is surrounded. Gergen (2009) suggests that a human being’s mental discourse originates from social relationships, and aims to serve relationships in return, but is only able to function within the relationship. This means that thoughts, such as desire, memories, and the sense of the self, are embedded in outside relationships because the world in which human beings live is not made by people, but by the relations between persons (Gergen, 2009). We are all born into multiple relationships such as the parents-children relationship that are pre-conditions under which we are able to become who we are. Unlike in the Western dominant perspective, according to which the self is treated as the fundamental element of society (Gergen, 2011), the self is seen as a by-product of a relational process through a social constructionist viewpoint (Gergen, 2009). The term “relational self” (Gergen, 1999, p.80) or “relational being” (Gergen, 2009, p.xxvii) is not only supplementary to the dominant thought about self; rather, it puts the dominant thought under scrutiny. For example, relational being is not a supplement to ‘bounded being’ (Gergen, 2009, p.3), but might replace it.

In terms of the knowledge human beings construct about the world and ourselves, social constructionist perspective sees knowledge as a by-product of communal relationships (Gergen & Wortham, 2001, p.118), which is a critique to the dominant epistemological perspectives in social psychology such as positivism, empiricism, essentialism and realism (Burr, 1995; 2003). In terms of its being anti-essentialist, social constructionism maintains that a human being’s self-concepts are not solely the product of a social environment, nor are they solely caused by biological factors. Social constructionism suggests instead that there is no single essence inside people. Terms such as brave, shy, or aggressive are often used to express someone’s personality and are descriptions of a person in a particular situation; one may be shy and silent with a stranger but be very friendly and sociable with a friend. It is also inappropriate to describe a person who lives alone in a desert as friendly because ‘friendly’ requires relationships.

From a social constructionist point of view, knowledge is seen as being historically and culturally constructed, rather than an objective mirror photograph of the world; and as being sustained by social processes, going together with social action, and changing with social development (Burr, 1995, p.4). The knowledge people construct about the outside world may not be a direct presentation of reality because the assumption of the existence of objective truth is problematic; the way in which we divide knowledge and concepts into different categories such as gender and race may not refer to the ‘truth’ but a historical and cultural stereotype. Additionally, Burr (2003, p.38) suggests, “[..] health, illness and disability are not only socially created; they’re sustained by social practices that often serve the interests of dominant groups in society”. That is, the taken-for-granted knowledge might be the product of bias and power wrestling between various social groups. Re-think the knowledge itself and the way in which it is constructed is necessary. Overall, knowledge, according to this theory, is a relational achievement (Gergen, 2009). Knowledge is constructed subjectively because there is no absolute, objective, fact (Burr, 1995). Each person accepts and constructs ‘knowledge’ in his or her own way.

Moreover, social constructionism suggests a change in the nature of social psychology and the experimental methods. Social psychology has aspired to be similar to natural science, aiming to explore, and accumulate knowledge about, the world. Under this approach, a large number of experiments are conducted and the results are used to discover things about people. The only difference between natural and social science is that the former aims to explore nature whereas the latter is dedicated to understanding human beings. Social constructionists argue that knowledge regarding human beings cannot be studied in the same way as the objects to be found in natural science because human beings are not stable (Gergen, 1973). Social psychology cannot be value-free for the reason that the social psychologists’ values do affect their work and needs to find ways of accounting for history and context without any experiments.

Furthermore, Gergen (1996) summarised that social constructionism issues three challenges to mainstream social psychology. Firstly, it has an empirical challenge; the outcomes of a psychological study are flexible and directly keyed-in to social concerns. The meaning of the results of psychological studies should be interpreted with regard to the specific social context rather than described as a general finding without taking any social factors into consideration. Secondly, it has a reflexive challenge. The spirit of inquiring should bear in the social constructionists’ mind at all times. History, society and culture must be the concerns in social psychological research as shifting concepts because there is nothing fixed absolutely ‘right’, ‘good’ and ‘true’ wherever and whenever. Thirdly, it has a creative challenge. Compared to mainstream psychologists, who aspire to give accurate accounts of reality, social constructionists can create new research practices and even create new cultural forms.

Overall, as Gergen (1996, p.125) described:

[Social constructionist psychology is] unbounded in potential: it neither specifies the margins of the discipline nor fixes the parameters of inquiry in advance. It is psychology closely tied to cultural life; inviting passionate engagement; linking intellectual work with change-oriented practices; favoring provocative dialogue both within and external to the discipline; firing the imagination of futures; and yet, retaining considerable humility toward to its own assumptions and respect for the assumptions of others. The message of a social psychology in a constructionist frame is, then, profoundly optimistic.

In particular, the terms ‘constructive’, ‘construction’, or ‘constructionist’ indicate the idea that people are free to constitute and construct different realities of the world for themselves. Societies are also free to construct themselves in many ways (Shweder & Miller, 2012). The most important part of this theory, in my opinion, is that it challenges us with an assumption about the connection between the individual and the society. Gergen (1978) suggests that the generative capacity of this competing theoretical account is challenging almost all of the taken-for-granted theories on social science, and thereby provides a new perspective regarding social life. It is not only social theory that are constructed in society, but also social forms that can be created through the exploration of theories (Gergen, 1978). In addition, it also has a special application in cross-cultural work that considers non-Western cultures (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism provides a dynamic approach to research in aspects of human being which it claims is better designed to understand the dynamics of the situations in which people live.

Considering the principles of social constructionism (Burr, 1995; 2003; Gergen, 1999), the role of social constructionist perspective in this section is to be a platform upon which several compatible ideas viz. ‘relational being’, and ‘dialogical self theory’ can be bridged together; by bridging them, an open perspective on the self and any other social scientific issues can be held. Considering social constructionist perspective in particular, I assume the existence of self. The purpose of this section, then, is not to focus on what the second-generation Chinese/UK children’s selves are, but rather on the way in which those children construct their selves from the social interactions and relationships with significant people they encounter e.g. their parents and friends. In light of the construction of individual knowledge, my purpose is, for example, not to provide an answer as to whether those children see themselves as Chinese or British, but to explore what ‘Chinese’ and ‘British’ mean to each of them individually, and how they construct their own understandings. I believe that, although those young people share the similar outside environment, the ways in which they engage with and understand the environment, and in doing so the ways in which they see themselves, might be different. In addition, I believe that each participant should be treated as a particular human being instead of a research sample, and I am interested in each person’s own story. I am going to analyse and interpret Jerry and Sara’s stories separately. The content below consists of three sections. The first is the social constructionist theoretical framework, the second is story telling (data analysis), followed by the third, a discussion section.

**3.3 Social Constructionist Approach to ‘Self’**

**3.3.1 The Self as Socially Relational**

According to Gergen (2009), the self is relational and can only be the product of relationships. The self does not only refer to the individual, but also to the complex relationships the person engages in within his or her whole life. Even when a person is alone, his or her self is still constructed in relationships. Reading and writing alone is a social activity, for example, in which people construct selves within relationships. When a writer is writing, he or she is having a dialogue, either with the social ideas or people in the text; when a reader is reading the text, he or she is having a dialogue with the writer who is behind the text. All situations are inherently relational. In this particular relational process, both the writer and reader, intentionally or unintentionally, are constructing their own selves through an invisible interaction; the self, can be seen as existing only in the relationships between people (Burr, 1995).

According to Gergen (2009), there are three ways in which human beings become relational beings. The first way is imitation. Other people’s behaviours can be imitated and can serve as a model for a person to fill his or her consciousness; in doing so they will become, at least part of, the person who was imitated. One scenario, for example, is an infant learning how to pronounce “mama” by observing and imitating the way in which the adult (the mother most of the time) says it. Imitation could be unconscious also e.g. a person’s accent might change if he or she moves to another place after a period of time without them becoming conscious of it. Taking a developmental account into consideration, imitation serves the infant’s realisation of distinguishing between a ‘me’ and an ‘other’, and provides an early means of communication (Meltzoff & Moore, 1998, p.49).

The second way is to adopt a certain social role in the different contexts (Gergen, 2009). By adopting the role, the features of it will become a part of one’s self. Someone who goes to school, wears school uniform, and prepares for examinations several times a year, for example, is normally seen as a student rather than a housewife.

The third way is interacting with other people. In social interaction, for example, dancing, the focus is not only on one’s own actions but also other people’s actions; our selves are always being constructed as relational (Gergen, 2008) because relational practices are boundless, they occur all the time and in many places. As a consequence of the saturation of relational practices in human life, the relational self is dynamic and has many forms.

According to Gergen (2009), there is no any bound between the inside and outside of a relational being. I assume that the relational self is not constructed in the outside relationships only, but also, considering dialogical self theory which will be introduced in next section, in the inner relationships between various inner activities such as self-negotiation, self-contradiction, and self-integration (Hermans, 2001). From my own perspective, inner relationships refer to not only the connection between the self and the outside world reflected in the mind, but also the relationship between a person and his or her own self in the mind. In addition, Gergen (2009) suggests that the inner dialogues emerge when we are participating in multiple and perhaps conflicting relationships. In other words, the inner conflicts reflect the social conflicts in the environment we live in. I would propose that the outside relationships and the inner relationships may mutually affect one another e.g. the way in which you reconcile with other people in an interpersonal conflict might be a reflection of the way in which you reconcile with yourself.

Self-construction is not a static process; rather, it is changeable and always changing. As Burr (1995, p. 31) puts it: “the multiplicity and fragmentation of selfhood, its changeability, and its cultural and historical dependence are at the heart of social constructionist account of the person”. The way in which human beings construct their selves, with the contribution of both inner and outer world, seems complex. Is the self constructed and developed in a process of stable experience accumulation or as an unpredictable changing process with multiple possibilities? In my opinion, the process of growing up is an ongoing process in which both children and adults seem to keep destroying and reconstructing their values about themselves and the world within the context of various and unpredictable relationships, as opposed to a predictable and stable process of accumulating knowledge or experiences.

Self-construction may not necessarily be a process of becoming mature, therefore. According to Gergen (2008), a person’s development should not aim at becoming a coherent, independent and well-ordered person. The aim might be a restriction to a relational being because the self is relational, multiple and full of possibilities. What kind of person you are becoming is not only down to your genes or inner deep characteristics or intentions, but also based, at least partly, on the impetus of ongoing and unpredictable relationships (Gergen, 2008). I claim, therefore, that the track of a human being’s development seems like a regressive line. In other words, self-construction is not always building or moving forward, but also includes destroying and stepping back.

Additionally, Gergen (1978) suggests, in order to explore the alternatives of relationships and knowledge, we should consider common sense assumptions of what people are and what social life is. From a social constructionist perspective, there is no stable social pattern for each person to follow, or for every society to copy, because social patterns are fragile, temporary, and alternative. Researchers need to not only look for ‘what now exists’ but also consider other possibilities. For example, education could focus on investing in relational processes instead of individual student education (Gergen, 2001); psychological therapy could aim at transforming people’s relational networks in a collaborative manner (Gergen, 2008). The relationship between communities of persons rather than each individual is the focus in this research.

A social constructionist person is relationally constructed performative because the person’s mind might already be preoccupied by social or cultural agreements. According to Gergen (1996), what we say and do is not only an expression of our thoughts or feelings or the like, but, rather, it is a performance within a relational context. The concepts “psychological discourse as performative” and “performance as relationally embedded” put forward by Gergen (1991, p.131; p.133) provide theoretical supports for the claim that, on the one hand, what we say and do is a performance for inviting other people’s actions. On the other hand, this performance is absolutely embedded within relationships and social culture, otherwise it would not make sense.

Judith Butler (1990), in particular, suggests gender can be seen as a performative identity that only shows who you are in a particular time and place. Biology is not the only factor deciding one’s gender identity, but rather social context may have a more significant influence on it. For example, once one of my female friends told me that she fixed her washing machine on her own and that she “felt like a man”. It seems clear that she thought fixing a machine was a ‘male ability’. The reason why she thinks in this way might be that the distinction between male and female was embedded in her mind by society even though it may not make sense. The performative feature of the self, therefore, seems to be relationally embedded also.

The character of the performative might not be conscious but implicit in the self. For my part, the way in which we perform ourselves, might be unconsciously influenced by social accountability such as other people’s intentions. The influence of intention on one person might have many roots, for example, according to Shotter (1974a, p.218), a baby’s development is not a “natural process” but an “intentional one” because, to some degree, the way in which infants grow is embedded within their parents’, frequently their mother’s, intentions of what kind of adult they expect their children to be. Children, however, are not blank slates; they have their own intentions as well as the adults. For example, according to Meltzoff, Gopnik and Repacholi (1999), by age 2, children are able to tell the difference between other people’s intentions and their intentions. Both parents and children want to “satisfy one another’s intentions and pursue their own intentions within the interaction” and “they do have the power in some sense to complete or fulfil one another’s intentions” (Shotter, 1974a, p.230).

Social accountability is about “how we talk about ourselves and our behaviour, with the way in which in a moral world we make our conduct accountable” (Shotter, 1985, p.167); is, at least partially, based on the way in which we interpret and define one another within interlocking social activities; and is the key factor regarding which self is constructed. According to Shotter (1985, p.168), one is hardly to be seen as a responsible and complete social being if we cannot talk in a way that is both “intelligible and legitimate to others”, “make[s] sense to them and relate[s] to interests in which they can share”. Shotter’s concern turned from “how we talk about ourselves” to “how we must talk about ourselves”. When analysing the participants’ self-constructions, one needs to pour attention into not only how the self *is* socially constructed, but also how the self *must be* constructed in a way it must be constructed. As Shotter (1984, p.9) suggests:

[The task of social psychologists is] not to make or do but to talk: to describe what is, as well as what might be possible, and the conditions of its possibility, and thus by implication to criticise current forms of life - they do not themselves have a brief to make changes.

In sum, one important characteristic of the self is that it is constructed in multiple and dynamic internal, and external, relationships. According to Gergen (1999, p.131), “the meaning of utterances is generated in a dialogic relationship”; “the ability of the individual to mean anything is owing to relationship”. I propose that one way through which the various relationships are embedded into one’s self might be the interpersonal dialogues. From the perspective of ‘Dialogical-self Theory’ (DST), social relationships are dialogical and multivocal (Foley, 2006). In next section, I will borrow ideas from DST, in order to explain the self as dialogical.

**3.3.2 The Self as Dialogical**

According to Hermans and Gieser (2011), Dialogical Self Theory (DST) can be used as a bridging theory that provides a space for various perspectives to meet and create new linkages with each other. Unlike the social constructionist perspective which focuses more on social relationships, DST argues that the need that almost everyone has to have both globalizing process and local stability should not be seen as an impasse for a theoretical notion of the self, but as intrinsic aspects that are “owned” by an embodied self which includes multiplicity, heterogeneity, contradiction, and tension (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.49). To put it another way, the self is extended. In doing so, a new concept, the self, is created as an agent of a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions (Hermans, 2012).

Generally, DST is developed based on the foundations of Bakhtin’s metaphor of “polyphonic novel” which “brings together the notions of dialogue and multiplicity of voices” (Hermans & Gieser, 2011, p.6) and William James’ suggestion that the self is a combination of “I” (the self-as-knower) and “me” (the self-as-known) (Hermans, 2001). In particular, in his book of “Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics”, Bakhtin (1984, p.10) states that the content of the novel, which reflects the author’s worldview, is determined by someone else’ consciousness which influences the author as an autonomous subject. Thus, Bakhtin provides an idea that everyone is inescapably affected by others. James believes that one’s self is extended into the environment in which one encounters (Hermans, 2001), and the constituents of self can be divided into the material self, the social self, the spiritual self, and the pure ego (James, 1890, p.292). Under James’ view, a self is constituted by its body, mind, and social life; the viewpoints from James and Bakhtin do differ to some extent, however.

In James’s view, the ‘I’, as an aspect of the self, has the characteristic of continuity; a person’s personal identity is the same in different time realms (Hermans, 2001). James’s view is supported by Locke in so far as he claims that the reason why one person is always the same over time is that they are conscious of experiencing and intensifying the sense of ownership of their experiences (Raymond, 2000). Bakhtin underlines the discontinuity more than continuity, which is also supported by Morse and Gergen (1970) who suggest that people are subject to a temporary self-concept in particular situations instead of having a stable and enduring self-identity. James also emphasises the sociality of the self, whereas Bakhtin only focuses on dealing with internal and external dialogical relationships of the person (Hermans, 2001). Taking both James and Bakhtin into account, DST locates itself in the middle of these two; the Dialogical self is consequently a combination of continuity and discontinuity (Hermans, 2001). On the one hand, the self is continuous because one’s experience and memory continuously belonging to him or her. On the other hand, the self is discontinuous because one’s dialogue and voice is structured and might change in different specific time and spaces.

Overall, DST suggests that the self is a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions in the society of minds (Hermans, 2001). The person in the intrapersonal relationship could be differentiated from the same person in the interpersonal relationship (Hermans, 2001). The term “society of mind” (Minsky, 1985; Hofstadter, 1986) has been adopted from computer scientists who hold the idea that the human brain or mind is an organized community of many smaller minds or voices or agents that functions together as a ‘society’ (Hermans, 2001). Each of these smaller agents has its own voices. For example, when a person needs to make a decision, many different voices may have conflicts with each other in the mind. If one of the voices has become strong enough to solve the problem, then other voices can be suppressed or silenced during which the decision is easy to make. If one applies this idea to DST, each self-position has its own voice (Hermans, 2001). An inner monologue emerges when there is only one voice in the mind. An inner dialogue, on the other hand, will emerge between each voice if there is more than one voice and the power of each individual voice is equal; the decision can come about from the discussion or argument between these inner voices. If the inner dialogue cannot solve the problem, an external dialogue might be needed; one person has many I-positions in different situations to solve this problem. These I-positions are dynamic, they can move from one to other positions with the change of particular situations.

In a similar fashion to the society of mind, the real society in which we live is also full of various voices such as other people’s perspectives and social cultures. These outside voices can be seen as collective voices which have their power in the self alongside the individual inner voices; the self and the society are mutually inclusive (Hermans, 2001). Other people’s voices, furthermore, either real or imagined, can occupy a position in the self; this means that others can be part of the extended self (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). The disparity of power between collective voices is the reflection of the power differences between inner positions in the self (Hermans, 2012). In light of this, one’s inner voices are also collective.

In fact, I would argue that it is hard to distinguish individual and collective voices. In terms of my research, since the participants are second-generation Chinese immigrant children, I assume, on the one hand, the Chinese culture from their own families and Chinese language school can be considered collective voices, and might be embedded in them as a part of their selves. On the other hand, British culture from the local school, and the city they live in, is another collective voice occupying some of their self-positions. I believe that their self-positions are deeply affected by collective voices; therefore, one of my research purposes is to explore the way in which different collective voices can function in a person’s self-construction in a transcultural environment.

Thus, according to the DST, the self is both social and individual. The individual has social contact with other people so that other people can occupy positions in the individual’s multi-voiced self (Hermans, 2001). William James believes that belonging to oneself should be taken in a broad sense because the things called “one’s own” are not only one’s thoughts or feelings, but also includes other persons and matters (Hermans, 2012). Selves are embedded in interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogical encounters (Martin, 2013); other people and external environments are a part of the dialogical self. In children's self-construction, for example, their parents might be the significant others who can be seen as parts of the children’s selves.

Gergen (2009) goes further and suggests that inner conflicts are a reflection of social conflicts; individual voices are the reflection of the collective voices of the society. In other words, the reason why a person accepts other people’s voices and allows these external voices to become part of their selves may not be that the external voice is strong enough to occupy or change one’s own idea, but that those external voices actually reflect the person’s inner voices. On the other hand, individual voices are deeply infiltrated into society; social dominance is not extrinsic but rather intrinsic to dialogical relationships (Hermans, 2012). The reason why the voice of one self-position is the most powerful is that the corresponding collective voices are deeply internalized in the self, that the self is deeply infiltrated by other people and society. The dialogical self is constituted by both internal and external positions (Hermans, 2012), and external positions, or social positions, of the self are created by people's relationships with others in external situations. DST suggests that all external voices in real or imagined dialogues autonomously intrude on the sense of the self and occupy part of I-position (Burkitt, 2010). Culture can be seen as a collective of voices and functions as a social position in the self (Hermans, 2001). Others, the relationship between the self and others, and society are not bound ‘over there’; rather, they are important parts of our inner world. We are part of others, conversely, others are also part of us.

In terms of the relationship between voices and self-positions, according to Hermans (2001), social positions are organised by collective voices that can be seen as a meaningful system of social rules and beliefs. The way in which personal positions embed collective voices could be paralleled with the way people organise their personal experiences and understanding of their lives. Because both individual and collective voices are reflections of self-positions, the distinction between these two voices is based on the distinction between personal and social positions. If a boy is naughty at home, for example, but shows good behaviour in the school, this discrepancy could be seen the performance of different selves in different situations. He has to perform a social self in the school whose behaviour is guided by school rules, but can perform the individual self at home where he can do whatever he wants because rules at home are not as strict as at school; each of his self-positions respectively reflects the collective voices from the school and home. I claim that one’s self is performed differently in different situations because the internal and external dialogues take charge. In other words, both internal and external dialogues construct the self. Hermans and Gieser (2011, p.19) suggest:

It is at the heart of the present theory that internal dialogues within the self and external dialogues with actual others are both needed in order to reach a cross-fertilization of the mini-society of the self and the macro-society at large.

In the process of self-positioning, which includes positioning, repositioning, and counter-positioning; the movement of the self-position from one position to another is a consequence of various social relationships (Hermans & Gieser, 2011). In children’s self-positioning, according to Bertau (2011), the dialogical self of an infant is embedded within a significant others’ voice. This mother-infant or caregiver-infant communication is mostly made by the dialogical self of the mother, or the caregiver, which involves both the mother or caregiver’s individual and cultural voices. Overall, in the framework of DST, the self can only be understood in its spatial and temporal realm (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The dialogical self, “which deconstructs the self, is a narrative structured self built by various voices; is multivoiced and decentralized, unified as well as multiple; is perceived as a heterogenic entity, where an ongoing process of (re)organization takes place… Its internal changeability is intertwined with its dependency on context” (Batory, Oleś, & Puchalska-Wasyl, 2010, p.47-48).

The self, in closing, from a social constructionist viewpoints, has multiple and dynamical I-positions and voices within various external and internal relationships. In particular, social constructionist perspective critiques the mainstream idea of the self such as the self is bounded, and emphasises the important influences of outside relationships in one’s self-construction. From the perspective of DST, the self is constructed through outside and inner dialogues with multiple voices. In addition, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) suggest, the particular relationships which emerge between people also emerge within the self. This does not mean that the self is only decided by outside world, however. In addition to the focus that is on outside relationships, I think the ‘inner-self-relationship’, which refers to the relation between the ‘I’ and ‘me’ also needs to be stressed. In my opinion, the sense of self is also constructed within the effect of inner world; this point will be explicated in next chapter.

In sum, those theories provide me with an approach to study the children's self-construction via focusing on the multiplicity, dialogicality, and dynamicity of various I-positions/voices in the self. In addition to social constructionist perspective, the importance of social relationships in one’s self-construction/transformation is also emphasised in Chinese perspective. In effect, the construction/transformation of Chinese identity is quite complicated and complex that is affect by various factors such as history, culture, race, and philosophy. In the next section, I will adopt one of the mainstream Chinese philosophy – Confucianism- to interpret self-transformation in social relationships from a Chinese perspective.

**3.4 Chinese identity and Confucian Philosophical Approach to ‘Self’**

**3.4.1 Chinese Identity as Civilisation-Heritage**

Chinese identity is flexible. According to Wu (1991), the unity and continuity of Chinese identity is deeply rooted in a sense of belonging to a great civilisation, which is seen as a historical identity. Jacques (2011) also suggests that China is exclusively a civilisation-state rather than a nation-state, in which the paramount role of the state is to maintain the unity of Chinese civilisation. Consequently, Chinese identity is more like a ‘civilisation-heritage identity’ rather than a ‘nationality-identity’.

Put it simple, I would adopt Wu’s (1991) suggestion that Chinese people tend to identify themselves as ‘Chinese’ for two particular reasons. One is their connectedness with the fate of the Chinese nation; another is a sense of being bearers of Chinese culture as ‘the Chinese race’ and being separate from non-Chinese people (Wu, 1991, p.161). Considering my research participants, I think the second reason is much more significant in terms of second generation immigrant Chinese children’s cultural identity construction. This may explain why both Alice and Emily did not want their children to lose their Chinese identity, because being Chinese is not only a label for them, it also refers to a connection with a union of multiple and dynamic ancient civilised cultures. Considering the principle of complementarity, I think that treating China and Chinese identity as a union of civilisations in this research, rather than simply a state, might help Western people to understand the Chinese mindset and even China culture better, since Chinese culture is likely, over time, to exercise considerable influence (Jacques, 2011).

However, it would be too difficult to cover all the historical and civilizational factors since it relates to the development and change of language, geographical environment, race, dynasty, culture and so on. Therefore, I will only pay attention to Chinese philosophy since it plays an exclusive role in Chinese civilisation. In Chinese history, the Spring and Autumn Period, dating back to at least 700BC, was a prosperous age for Chinese political progress and cultural development. That period is also known as “hundred schools of thought” (Ebrey, 2010, p.42) within various schools such as Legalism, Mohism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Chinese philosophy might be able to provide new angles from which to look at the self and the world. Compared to Western theory, in general, the self in Chinese philosophy is considered as an ethical problem (Kupperman, 1999) whereas in Western culture it is more about a psychological or social problem. The idea of the ethical self in Chinese philosophy considers judgements from parents, educators, and perhaps any other members of the community or society, for example, whether a child is spoken of as ‘good’ or not.

Going in depth into the full history and the theories of these different philosophical schools is beyond the scope of the present section, but the different perspectives on what a human being is or should be will be outlined briefly in order to build a picture of the diversity and contradictories within Chinese philosophy. The Legalist school of thought, for example, advocates that human beings are primarily citizens of the state, thus individuals’ desires and behaviours must always be subordinated to the state (Berling, 1985). The Mohist tradition, on the other hand, suggests that human beings are only motivated by their own self-interest (Fraser, 2008).

In particular, Confucianism is one of the most influential philosophical streams in both ancient and modern China. In next a few sections, I will interpret Confucian thoughts about human beings and ‘self’. The reason why I locate this section herein following social constructionist theory is that it might almost be said that Confucius was the earliest social constructionist. As King (1985, p.57) summarised, the basic concern in Confucianism is “the social life here and now”; the basic theoretical and practical question is “how to establish a secular harmonious world”; the basic focus “is on the organic relationship between the individual and society and consider the two inseparable and interdependent”. Consequently, the self in Confucianism is not defined as an isolated individual, but a social being.

**3.4.2 The ‘Ideal Self’ in Chinese Social Intentions**

Confucians did not discuss the self or self-construction/transformation directly. Instead, they developed the image of an ‘ideal man’ (Junzi 君子) or ‘ideal self’ as a prescription for the ultimate goal of self-development. A Junzi or an ideal man is seen as a ‘true gentleman’ or a ‘superior man’. Characters used to express this idea include Ren (benevolence) which is a virtue through which the individual and society can exist harmoniously (Fang, 2004). In the book called The Analects, benevolence is at the core of society, which means loving other people, being loyal, and considering others (Waley & Yang, 1999). The quote from the Confucian scholar Youzi might reflect one key standard of a Junzi. In book of The Analect, he said that a Junzi must:

[…]in private life behave well towards their parents and elder brothers, in public life seldom show a disposition to resist the authority of their superiors. And as for such men starting a revolution, no instance of it has ever occurred. It is upon the trunk that a gentleman works. When that is firmly set up, the Way grows. And surely proper behaviours towards parent and elder brothers is the trunk of goodness! (trans. Waley & Yang, 1999, p.3; for the Mandarin see Box 3.1).

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| Box 3.1  有[子曰](http://baike.baidu.com/subview/85077/11234476.htm):“其为人也孝悌，而好犯上者，鲜矣；不好犯上，而好作乱者，未之有也。君子务本，本立而道生。孝弟也者，其为[仁](http://baike.baidu.com/view/188237.htm)之本与！”出自《[论语·学而](http://baike.baidu.com/view/2403825.htm)》。(Waley & Yang, 1999)  子曰：“君子义以为质，礼以行之，孙以出之，信以成之。君子哉！”出自《论语，卫灵公篇15.18》(Legge & Shih, 1869) |

In addition, Confucius himself said “the superior man in everything considers righteousness to be essential in everything. He performs it according to the rules of propriety. He brings it forth in humanity. He completes it with sincerity. This is indeed a superior man” (trans. Legge & Shih, 1869, p.225; for the Mandarin see Box 3.1).

In addition to following social rules and respecting superiors, Confucian self-construction also sees introspection as an essential way to achieve self-construction and self-development. Confucius’s student Zengzi suggests “吾日三省吾身”, which indicates:

Every day I examine myself on these points: in acting on behalf of others, have I always been loyal to their interests? In intercourse with my friends, have I always been true to my word? Have I failed to repeat the precepts that have been handed down to me [from my teacher]? (Waley & Yang, 1999, p. 2).

In light of this, Confucius advocated that observing other people and self-examination are good ways for people’s improvement. He suggested that “见贤思齐焉，见不贤而内省也”,which means “in the presence of a good man, think all time how you may learn to equal him, in the presence of a bad man, turn your gaze within” (Waley & Yang, 1999, p.36). More specifically, even in self-examination, Confucians still suggest that people examine their relationships with other people. Confucius taught his students, for example that “己所不欲，勿施于人”, which means “never do to others what you would not like them to do to you” (Waley & Yang, 1999, p. 251).

In these Confucian descriptions, it is clear that the good features of an ‘ideal man’ or a ‘superior man’ are reflected in his or her social relationships, especially within family relationships. This viewpoint has not only affected the way in which individuals develop, but also the way in which Chinese society and even the nation is structured. As I have argued, the self in Chinese Confucianism is an ethical issue. The ethical aspect is in its focus on interpersonal relationships (Ho, 1998). In order to explore Chinese people’s self-constructions, one’s family relationships, which are rooted within Confucian philosophy, must hence be considered. In fact, family relationships are seen as a basic type of social relationship, while the ‘rulers’ and the ‘ruled’ might be a basic pattern in Confucian social relationships.

**3.4.3 Family Relationships as Dominant Social Relationships in Chinese Society**

Mencius, a famous Confucian philosopher, pointed out five basic human ethical relationships when he was asked for advice about the best way to govern the country. The five basic human ethical relationships could be seen as a central value system in Confucian society. By these five relationships, Mencius meant that “the people might be taught…human relationships, namely, affection between father and son, righteousness between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, orderly sequence between old and young, and fidelity between friends” (Zhao et al, 1999, p.119. for the original Mandarin see Box 3.2). These relationships define each person in terms of a basic social role, for which reason each social role should follow its own social rules. The ideal society Confucians wanted to build was a community that involved different individuals living in harmonious relationships with each other (Liu, 2004).

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| Box 3.2  五伦 wu-lun: “父子有亲，君臣有义，夫妇有別，长幼有序，朋友有信”. (Zhao et al, 1999) |

It may seem that Confucianism and social constructionism share some points in common, for example, both of them highlight that it is inevitable that various outside relationships will affect human beings’ self-constructions. The significant difference between Confucian and social constructionist perspectives, however, seems to be that social constructionists emphasise the influence of social rules, but also question whether they should be taken for granted, whereas Confucianism suggests that social rules must be used as a prescription for social relationships that people must be trained to follow. As the quote from Mencius says, “[the sovereign should] encourage [the people], rectify them, assist them, make them know their place, and do them acts of grace” (Zhao et al., 1999, p.119).

According to Kupperman (1999), in the Confucian perspective, parents should usually act as rulers and children are usually treated as followers, according to which punishment is seen as undesirable but inevitable if necessary. It is therefore not rare to see that in my research, parents from both Chinese immigrant families admitted that they used corporal punishment with their children, even though they did not want to. Both Jerry and Sara complained about punishment at home. It seems to me, that both parents and children are already used to this ‘Chinese parenting’ pattern in which parents might be seen as authoritarian. It might, however, be hasty to describe Chinese parenting as being ‘controlling’ or authoritarian. Rather, it could be interpreted as ‘training’ (Chao, 1994). In other words, according to a Confucian standpoint, parents are expected not only to raise their children with food and love, but also teach and equip their children with skills in order to help them to be effective social beings. As Chao (1994, p.1112) suggests, the concepts of ‘authoritative’ and ‘authoritarian’ are somewhat ethnocentric and do not capture these important features of Chinese child rearing, rather, seeing the feature of Chinese parenting as ‘training’ rather than ‘controlling’ is much more apt in explaining the success of Chinese students in school.

In addition to being trainers, parents are seen as mediators through whom traditional and cultural values can enters the lives of young people, in a somewhat complicated and unconscious way (Kupperman, 1999, p.41). In my research, for example, Jerry’s mother told me that she read the story of an ancient Chinese hero to Jerry and hoped that he would learn something about Chinese culture from the story. I also found that in a transcultural environment, children are also the cultural mediators who deliver Western values to their parents in both positive and negative ways, for example, chatting about English school life or complaining to their parents that they are unsatisfied with their parents’ behaviours, such as use of physical punishment. Both parents and children thus become mediators, but of different cultures and in different ways.

Basically, role of parents in the Confucian family is that of rulers. The children’s roles are to be rule-followers. This might reflect another very important feature of the Confucian ‘ideal man’, which is filial piety (孝 ‘xiao’). This strict and indisputable point in Confucian theory is that individuals’ lives are the continuation of their parents’ physical lives (Hwang, 1999). In the book of Xiao Jing, for example, Zengzi says that “Our body and hair and skin are all derived from our parents, and therefore we have no right to injure any of them in the least. This is the first duty of a child. —that is the beginning of Xiao” (trans. Chen, 1908, p.1; for the Mandarin see Box 3.3). With this perspective, I would argue that in order to study a person whose heritage culture is Chinese, his or her parents and family relationships must be seen as a core rather than a supplementary factor in his or her self-construction, for the reason that they might be embedded within the Confucian viewpoint that family members are conceptualised as one body (Hwang, 1999).

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| Box 3.3  孝经，开宗明义篇，第一章：身体发肤,受之父母,不敢毁伤,孝之始也。(Chen, 1908) |

In the Chinese family, the father is a powerful and essential figure. Challenging parental authority is forbidden in Chinese Confucian culture (Ho, 1998). Western culture, on the contrary, encourages people to express rather than suppress conflict, and treat individual needs as a matter of rights, which are more important than any sense of collective authority. The conflict between two different sets of cultural values in the parent-child relationship was particularly reflected in my research.

Taking my participant Jerry’s relationship with his father as an example (details of this story will be interpreted in chapter 4), in my view, Jerry, as well as other children at his age, was going through a basic developmental stage, that is to internalise social rules and learn to handle conflicts with his father and other authority figures. Due to the conflicts between Western and Chinese culture, however, he might have to experience and cope with more conflicts. On the one hand, he accepted his father’s authority and tries to rationalise his father’s behaviour to himself. Emily also helped him to get well on with his father. On the other hand, he tried to express his anger and anxiety when he cannot handle it himself. Jerry said, for example, that he wanted his dad to get out of the house and he did lock his father out of the kitchen. In general, the way in which Jerry coped with the father-son relationship is in conflict between Chinese culture and Western values. Jerry had to accept that the father-son relationship is unequal and involuntary due to Chinese culture, while he also needs to fight for his own right to be an independent individual due to the influence of Western culture. Keeping a balance between those two sets of values might be a lifelong developmental task for him.

Family relationships are a core system in Confucian society, based on which many non-family relationships are patterned following the same structure and values (Kupperman, 1999), for example, teachers might be seen as rulers, even though the learners are encouraged to be active rather than passive. The position of ‘being a group member’ is given more attention than ‘being an individual’ in the Confucian concept of the self. According to Porras (1985), Chinese view on the self is quite similar to that of the ancient Israelite concept of ‘corporate personality’ which means an individual who intends to identify him/herself as a member of a group rather than as an independent individual. Even though Porras was only intending to show that understanding the Chinese view of the self is a good way to improve the presentation of the Gospel to Chinese people, she did point out that the Chinese view of the self might be closely linked to collective identity. That is, the human relationships around Chinese people are very important in constructing their understandings of the outside world and themselves. Furthermore, some recent research has showed the same indication, for example, Wang (2004) examined the emergence of cultural self-constructs as they were reflected in children’s remembered and conceptual aspects of the self. The researcher compared European, American, and Chinese children. The results showed that American children’s understandings of the self were focused on their own personal roles and feelings, whereas Chinese children tended to locate the self in terms of social roles and context-specific characteristics. Chinese children’s self-constructions are thus embedded within their relational social interactions. Both Jerry and Sara’s mothers’ narratives implicated that their primary position was as a mother. As Alice said in the interview, “[my] children are the centre of my life”.

Tracing the viewpoint of “the self is identified within the group” back to its historical cultural context, as I mentioned, in *The Analects*, Confucius stressed the importance of rules and relationships in people’s everyday lives. Confucians believed that the self is interrelated with others and can internalise rules (Liu, 2004) with their own specific responsibilities. The idea is reflected in his words of “君君，臣臣，父父，子子” which means “let the prince be a prince, the minister a minister, the father a father and the son a son” (Waley & Yang, 1999, p.205). Confucius holds the theory that each social role should keep their particular social characteristics, because once these characteristics are confused by people, society will not be in harmony. In other words, Confucius believed that people should follow the specific stable rules of society, in which the social self takes primacy over the private self because social responsibility, as carried by each social role, is the main priority of society. According to Shotter (1974b), responsible actions are related not to individuals but to shared interests. That is, a responsible person is expected not only to have self-awareness, but also the awareness of the circumstance he or she finds him/herself in.

Practically, the parents and children showed their particular understandings of their own and each other’s roles in my research, which seemed to me to constructed in a Confucian way. Parents especially fathers assumed, for example, that their responsibility is to provide a good environment for their children and train their children to be good people. In particular, I found in my research that fathers were usually in charge of earning money and mothers for taking care of the whole family. This is the reason that why the fathers refused to take part into the research since they do not have time. In the parents’ eyes, children were expected to obey their requirements, such as studying hard. The interesting point is that the children have also had the viewpoint embedded within them viewpoints that fathers are supposed to work outside the home and they have to listen to their parents concerning almost everything to some degree.

Overall, Confucianism is a philosophy that promoted ‘entry into society’. It not only stresses the importance of social relationships and social rules, but also teaches people the way through which the ideal self, which is seen as an agent of action, can be constructed through following the “Way of Humanity” (Hwang, 1999, p.165). This ‘ideal self’ can be developed via various external relationships and inner introspection. Similar to the social constructionist viewpoint of the self, the Confucian self is also relational and changeable, not only in relation to other people, but also to social moral principles and in terms of the person’s own moral orientation. As Yao (1996) suggests, the Confucian self is essentially a concept of moral relationships which is based on its social context, thus whether a person could be seen as a Confucian person should be examined in its public dimensions. Self-construction or self-development in Confucianism is thus a constructive process within various practical programmes designed for cultivating humanity. Confucian philosophy thus explains the understanding that people of Chinese heritage should hold on to their familial and social relationships.

In order to cope with the negative features of human nature, Confucians argue that it is necessary to undertake moral training and education (Yao, 1996). In this aspect, I think Confucians are more focused on controlling and changing people rather than accepting the weaknesses and vulnerability of human nature, as modern psychotherapists would suggest. This viewpoint is quite compatible with the conventional Western perspective, which denies that human beings actually lack power over the world and even over ourselves, because the Western scientific concept of self is very bound up with ideas about mastery and control (Shotter, 2005). Practically, this affects Chinese parenting as well, for example in my research, one word frequently used by Emily was ‘change’; i.e. that she was intending and trying to change and correct Jerry’s shortcomings. It seems to me that Emily’s intention to control and change Jerry might be one of the reasons why both Emily and Jerry experienced conflicts and anxiety.

In summary, both social constructionist and Chinese Confucian philosophy argued that one’s self is and even should be constructed and transformed within various social relationships especially family relationships. In light of this, the content below will provide readers with several stories about Jerry and Sara, in which their construction of knowledge about the world and of themselves will be examined from a perspective of self-transformation in its social relationships. It is necessary to remind the readers that, however, the interpretations of the data are based on the theoretical framework but not limited to.

As illustrated in Chapter 2, free-association was used in the interviews. Thus, the participants were encouraged to share anything that comes into their minds. Therefore, fragmentation of the data was inevitable as a result. It would be confusing for readers to read the stories in its original state as interview transcripts. In light of this, I did engage in a puzzle game in which all the themes, relationships and clues were pieced together in order to interpret Jerry and Sara’s stories in a clear way. That is, all the stories are structured from both the participants’ original words that are extracted from the interviews data, and my own interpretations.

**3.5 Jerry’s Stories**

In this section, I will illustrate three stories about Jerry. The first one in 3.5.1 will illustrate Jerry’s narratives about his friends, by which his self-positions constructed in disconnection with various relationships; the second one in 3.5.2 is about Jerry’s confusion within the group of Chinese friends, mainly about language and cultural self-positions; the third one in 3.5.3 will describe Emily’s life experiences and the way in which her experiences interact with Jerry’s, in doing so Jerry’s self-construction is looked at through his relationship with his mother.

**3.5.1 “People with different religions cannot be friends but …”: Selves Constructed/Transformed in Disconnected Relationships**

Jerry:

*I have Sara as my friend in school because she and I are in the same class in Chinese school. She has some friends as well, and I probably like someone called Benny in the other class because he is like, when I say something silly, he always laughs, and when he says something silly, that is quite funny. And Lucy, like, half friend, because most of the time, when I run in a game, she always grasps my back. When we get together, we play a game like, when the first one who just did that (touch the shoulder) to the one who is frozen, if the same one keeps running, the one has to defence the one who is frozen, only the person who take all of them wins, if he takes all the people who are in, and four people can only play it. Well, someone at my school, is like, now he is in different religion to me, but I still play with him, only a tiny bit.*

This story starts with a description of a game he likes play with his friends Benny and Lucy who are also second-generation Chinese immigrants as well as Jerry and Sara. I admit I do not understand the rule of this “running/ frozen” game, but it is clear to me that Jerry enjoyed playing this game with a group of friends of which he identifies as a part because they share common cultural identity. The causal relationship between ‘friends’ and ‘identity’ seems uncertain. On the one hand, game playing enhanced his connection with his Chinese friends, therefore his cultural identity is identified as more Chinese in his Chinese friends’ group by himself. On the other hand, identity might be partially determinative in Jerry’s choice-making about who he plays with.

In the interview, at first, I was interested in the way he constructs his cultural identity within the particular group through play. Right after talking about the game with his Chinese friends, however, Jerry mentioned another person who is a ‘different religion’ that attracted my attention and changed the way in which the conversation went through.

Considering Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000, p.55) suggestion of paying attention to ‘what do I notice’, ‘religion’ is a significant word in Jerry’s narrative to me in this case. At first, I was surprised and wondered whether I should continue this topic since it might seem politically sensitive. However, it clearly reflects Jerry’s cultural self-position that he did not identify with the one who is ‘not in the same religion’ as him. It would be convenient for me to interpret ‘religion’ in a conventional way. For example, according to Idinopulos (1998), religions consist of fetishisms, animisms, polytheisms, and monotheisms, and reflect the geographic, social, and linguistic diversity. I do not think the conventional manner of defining ‘religion’ is sufficient to help me understand Jerry’s perspective, however. From a social constructive perspective, in Jerry’s case, I am more interested in exploring the way in which he constructed the meaning-frame of ‘religion’ and the way in which this term affected his self-construction.

Therefore, three questions emerged in my mind at that moment:1) What does the term ‘religion’ mean to Jerry? 2) How can he be sure that he, and the friend in question, are in different religions? 3) What the influence of being in different religions has on his friendship with the friend and his own self-construction in the relationship?

Accordingly, I asked him, *“Do you think religion is something between you and others?”* He said, *“It’s like, for example, Christians and Chinese people, they are different. Christians don't believe in other religions, they believe in their religion; and others believe in their religions”.* Anyone who has a little knowledge about religion would notice that Jerry is misunderstanding what it means to be Chinese because ‘Chinese’ is not a religious identity but rather a cultural, or national, identity. From a social constructionist perspective, the aim here is not to discuss whether Jerry’s understanding about religion is a mistake, but rather the way in which he constructed this particular piece of knowledge regarding religion; in other words, how does Jerry understand religion and why does he understand it in that way?

It seems that Jerry treated religion as a barrier between people. In order to know more about this, I asked him: *“Do you think that, if people have different religions, then there are some difficulties between them to make friends with each other?”* He answered:

*Well, to be honest, if I want to play with him, and he wants to play with me, then friends. But if I don’t, not friends. The difficulty is like, hard with another person who isn’t in your religion, because if you are playing with your friends that are same in your religion, the one who is not in your religion not know what, what I am saying to others, in Chinese of course.*

Two points seem clear to me herein. Firstly, according to the narrative of *“I want to play with him, and he [also] wants to play with me, then friends”*, relationship indicates a relational intention rather than an individual intention. That is, only if *“both you want”*, then the barrier could be breaking through. Secondly, according to the narrative of *“the one who is not in your religion not know what I am saying in Chinese”*, one essential reason that people from different religions are hard to be friends is the linguistic issue.

To summarise Jerry’s concern about the influence of different religions on friendship, different religions make it difficult to build friendship between people because people may not understand each other well since they believe in different things and speak different language. However, if both of them are intending to be friends then the difference in religion should not be a problem. In order to understand Jerry’s understandings of ‘religion’ more specifically, the conversation continues:

*I: “do you mean that, if someone is Christian and another one is Muslim, then they are different?”*

*Jerry: “there are three religions, ours, Christians, Muslims.*

*I: You mean ours is also a religion too? Chinese?*

*Jerry: yes*

*I: What kind of religion is it?*

*Jerry: well, I don't know the name of it, in might start with C, China? well, not sure*

*I: Ok. If a Muslim want to become a friend with a Chinese, can they?*

*Jerry: no*

*I: what if the Chinese also wants to be friends with Muslim?*

*Jerry: well, well, if the Muslim just talks to his friends in, well, I don't know*

*I: you mean in their language?*

*Jerry: yes, to…friends, you wouldn't, the Chinese person wouldn't know what they are saying*

Different from the common knowledge of ‘religion’, in Jerry’s knowledge, there are only three religions in the world: Chinese, Christian, and Muslim. In my opinion, interpreting the reason why he constructed an individual knowledge of religion should take the social context he lives in into account. The social relationships into which Jerry encountered might be categorised into these three ‘religious’ groups. In particular, some of his classmates in English school are Christian and some of them are Muslim. Most of his friends in Mandarin school are heritage Chinese. Therefore, I would argue that the way in which people construct their knowledge of the world is very individual and constrained by the information they get from their daily life.

Additionally, I take it that it will not confuse things if I replace the term ‘religion’ with ‘language’ since he thinks Chinese people cannot understand Muslim people because they speak a different language, for example, *‘Chinese people would not know what they(Muslims) are talking about’*; or with ‘culture’ since he describes ‘China’ as a religion rather than a country. To put my opinion simple, ‘different religions’, as well as ‘different languages and cultures’, may be referring to ‘differences and disconnections among people’, because, in Jerry’s opinion, differences lead to misunderstandings or even to a complete lack of understanding among people; as a consequence, people are disconnected with each other. In other words, Jerry is in a process of noticing differences and trying to make sense of the relations.

From the perspective of ‘relational being’, I assume that disconnection is just as much a relational factor as a connection through which people construct their self-positions through identifying with particular social groups. Jerry’s knowledge about friendship and the self was not fixed, however. Even though he thought people who have different religions (or languages) are not friends, Jerry claimed that they can be friends if both of them want to. That is, in his opinion, differences make people disconnected but the intention to solve the disconnection makes people connected. By making friends with people who are in different religions such as Muslim, I assume that, although consciously he would not identify himself as Muslim, being a Muslim is inevitably embedded into Jerry’s self-construction because he created a relationship with Muslim culture by making Muslim friends. In other words, he has his own understanding of Muslim and this itself is a connection.

The assumption in Jerry’s case is that the relational-self is constructed by both one’s connections and disconnections with others. In Jerry’s case, he constructed the self-position of being Chinese not only through connecting himself with his Chinese friends, but also disconnecting himself from his non-Chinese friends. He disconnected because he became aware of the differences between himself and non-Chinese people, such as the different languages they use and the different cultures they are in. There are two concerns that need to be explored, however. First, in terms of ‘identifying the self by language use’, Jerry encountered the problem that he might be defined not as Chinese by his Chinese friends. Secondly, in terms of ‘Chinese as a religion’, his mother, Emily, provided a narrative that adds more information regarding the way in which Jerry constructed his knowledge. In the next two sections, Jerry’s confusion about his Chinese-self-position and the way in which he constructed his Chinese-self-position in relationship with Emily will thus be explored.

**3.5.2 “He speaks Chinese to Lucy but English to me, that’s weird”: Selves Constructed/Transformed in (Uncertain) Connected Relationships**

As I discussed in the last section, language is a key issue via which Jerry was noticing the similarity and difference between him and others, in doing so his (cultural) self-positions was being constructed. It might be over-simplified to assume that Jerry identified himself as both English and Chinese because he speaks both languages, however. In fact, a linguistic issue inside his Chinese friends’ group is an issue that made him to be confused about his self-position as being a Chinese. In this section, I will interpret Jerry’s cultural self-positions by looking at the way in which he located himself, and how other Chinese heritage children located him inside the Chinese group.

When we were discussing his cultural self-positions, I asked Jerry to choose a number from 0 to 10 (see box 3.4).

|  |
| --- |
| Box 3.4:  I am Chinese - 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 - I am British |

*Jerry: well, seven*

*I: what things make you think you are British?*

*Jerry: because I speak Ch, not Chinese, I speak English*

*I: just because of language?*

*Jerry: and play the games, my primary language is English on the games, and my mum says I am like a, I eat bread a lot, my mum calls me, what is called, bread man.*

*I: what things make you think you are a Chinese?*

*Jerry: well, things I think, I speak Cantonese which is a part of Chinese, and my appearance is like a bit Chinese but…*

Jerry located himself between being a British and a Chinese. Linguistic issue, for example, *“I speak English…my primary language on game is English…I speak Cantonese which is a part of Chinese”*; food such as *“bread*”; and physical issue, for example, *“my appearance is like a bit Chinese…”* were three factors influenced Jerry’s construction of cultural self-positions. In addition, in terms of *“my mum calls me bread man”*, *“I am a British because I am a bread man”* can be seen as an embedded dialogical self-position. In particular, the ‘but’ in his description of his own appearance seems important to me, so that I continued the conversation as:

*I: ok, do you think you look like Chinese?*

*Jerry: well, I need to look in the mirror (he looked at the TV screen as mirror). well, I don't know how I look, because it's dark……Well, I speak English a lot of times when play happened at English school, because my friend Benny, we do a lot of crazy stuff, and we always say, we always speak English, but when he talks to Lucy, he speaks Chinese, that’s weird.*

*I: why do you think that’s weird?*

*Jerry: because he speaks English to me, but didn’t speak English to Lucy*

*I : do you speak English with your parents at home?*

*Jerry: well, sometimes, cause I like, sometimes I speak English to my parents even through my mum with a, in a Chinese religion.*

In this conversation, first of all, Jerry expressed his appearance as *“a bit Chinese”* and *“I don’t know how I look”*, about which he was not certain because the screen he looked into was too dark to see his reflection clearly. This information allows me to claim that he might not be talking about his appearance in his own eyes but unconsciously explaining how other people see him. In other words, Jerry was confused about his cultural self-position not only in his own eyes but also other people’s eyes. Secondly, Jerry explained his confusion of a linguistic issue that, even though he *“speaks English a lot of times”,* when he is playing in English school *“Benny speaks English to him”*. Speaking what kind of language can be explained not only as natural but also as Jerry’s performance in order to fit into social activities. He was trying to play a role as a Chinese by speaking Mandarin, but his friend Benny did not treat him as Chinese since he speaks English to him. Jerry’s relational self-position within his relationship with other Chinese children was uncertain to himself.

In particular, Jerry’s confusion about his Chinese identity might be caused by the difference between how he sees or wants to see himself and how his Chinese friends see him. Jerry said, *“it is weird that Benny speaks Chinese to Lucy but English to me”.* The reason why Benny treats Jerry in this way may be found in Sara’s narrative. Sara claimed:

*My class got lots of different countries ones, only me is Chinese, Jerry is Cantonese, he is not Chinese, he is only Cantonese. Sometimes Chinese is Cantonese, sometimes Chinese is not Cantonese. I don’t know whether he (Jerry) celebrates Chinese New Year, I think he maybe celebrate, I don't know.*

It is clear to me that the best explanation of Benny’s behaviour toward Jerry is language. The children who only speak Mandarin may find it is hard to understand Jerry, who speaks Cantonese which is his heritage Chinese language; the only way for them to solve the problem of miscommunication is to speak English. Consequently, because they could not understand each other well through Chinese language, they may not identify others as having the same cultural identity as them. In this case, all children were in a process of making sense of the outside world, for example, who are as same as themselves. In my opinion, the reason why Jerry showed double self-positions is that he was simultaneously accepted and excluded by the same group.

Overall, this story reflects the phenomenon that some second-generation Chinese young people, such as Jerry, may construct an uncertain heritage self-position since they experience both connection and disconnection with the same heritage group. In other words, they might be confused about what kind of self-positions they ‘should’ construct since they are both included and excluded by the same cultural group. This is very much a dynamic and social process in which the children are busy ‘constructing’ not only their own self-positions but also other people’s self-positions in different situations. In the words of DST, people are in a process of continues positioning and repositioning their self-positions according to changeable situational circumstances and requirements (Batory, Bak, Oles & Puchalskawasyl, 2010, p.47).

**3.5.3 “I didn’t grow up in China” but “We are Chinese”: Emily’s Historical and Cultural Experiences and Selves, and Their Possible Effect on Jerry**

In the section 3.3.1, a question was left to be answered - why Jerry thought Chinese was a religion? In addition to exploring this question, the way in which his mother’s cultural identity affects his hesitation between identifying himself as a Chinese and British will be explored. Emily’s narrative about the reason why Jerry was sent to Chinese language school and her own life experience may provide a richer understanding of the context in which Jerry’s self-construction takes place.

When explaining why she sent Jerry to Chinese language school, Emily told me a story to explain why:

*I was worried that there is no Chinese culture in Jerry’s mind. I’ve seen a lot of examples, like my auntie’s son. He was sent to Chinese language school when he was young but he didn’t like it. So my aunty didn’t force him. Then he became, only speak English at home, very westernized. It’s very terrifying. He is just like a British.*

Her cousin’s story made Emily think:

*I don’t want my son to be like that, because I think Chinese culture is good for children, like our Chinese etiquette and some great Chinese people. Those stories could affect him and let him to be better. So I sent him to Chinese language school. He has been there for over one year; he has been improved. The most important thing is he changed himself. He doesn’t think he is very British or very Chinese. He is in the middle, knows that those things are something he should learn, Chinese culture and British culture.*

The reality created some obstacles but also provided some help for her plan:

*But his English teacher says, it’s better to speak English with him at home because English is not his first language. But we told the teacher that it is hard for us because we, as parents, our English is not good. Sometimes Jerry gets angry if I say something wrong in English. But he said he will try his best to learn English. Because our mother language is not English, it is harder for him to catch up with other students. So the teachers ask us Chinese people to speak more English. I was worried about Jerry’s Mandarin, but since I rent a room to a student who came from Beijing, Jerry’s Mandarin has improved a lot. When he was young, he didn’t like speak Mandarin with his dad. But that student changed him. Jerry knew that student is from China and speaks Chinese. Children have to experience something himself so he will be willing to change.*

Emily explained her fear of *“worried that there is no Chinese culture in Jerry’s mind”.* She told me a story of her auntie’s son who *“only speak English at home”* which seems *“very terrifying”* to her because he was *“very westernized”*. She showed her intention of *“I don’t want my son like that … just like a British”.* Therefore, she insisted that Jerry needs to learn not only Chinese language but also Chinese etiquette and culture because *“Chinese culture is good for children”.* It may seem like Emily was afraid of Western culture. However, I would rather interpret her fear as being disconnected with her son and the culture and worldview she believes in. For example, she told me another story about her fear of ‘westernized culture’, she said:

*Western people are different. They may have complicated relationships. I’ve heard a story. A British woman got divorced after having 5 children. Then she got a boyfriend and her ex-husband got a girlfriend. I don’t know how those 5 children would think about their life. It’s too complicated to Chinese people. Western people get married and divorced as long as they are willing to. We Chinese cannot do this. Because Chinese are Chinese. We have a lot of elder members in the family, like mother’s mother, mother’s auntie, can they accept it? Our traditional minds and viewpoints are always remained. You cannot say you can change to be a British. No way. I told Jerry that you can dream to be a British, but in your mind, you have your Chinese family, we cannot accept your British worldview, this is Chinese tradition. Jerry’s English school is kind of reserved since there are some Muslim students in. The primary school that my sister’s daughter goes in, she talked about get married and have baby when she was in year 3. I cannot accept that.*

Emily emphasised the importance of family relationship in every individual Chinese’s life. That is, whatever one does, he or she should consider how other family members see this. It seems to me that Emily was trying to be a protector of Chinese tradition and culture not only for Jerry but also for herself. In order to illustrate the disadvantage of losing Chinese traditional culture, she told stories about her auntie’s son and her sister’s daughter. Emily was trying to maintain the connection with her Chinese relatives and culture by educating her son to be at least part of Chinese, as she said *“you cannot change to be a British, no way, your Chinese family will not accept your British worldview”*.

The reason why Emily was worried about the disappearance of the Chinese language and culture in her family might be traced back to her own life experience and self-positions. Emily moved to Malaysia from mainland China when she was very young. She said:

*I didn’t grow up in China, so I don’t really understand Chinese culture. Just heard it from my parents. If there is something I want to know, I will read books or ask old people, because I want my son to know (Chinese culture). We are Chinese, our traditions and minds are different from Western people. So I encourage my son to read Chinese, for example, the Buddhist Scriptures. He couldn’t understand it well; I will explain it to him. I told him, one good thing about being Chinese is that we have access to Buddhism. I took him to Taiwan once to worship Buddha. But I told him that it’s just Buddhist culture, you don’t have to believe in it. You also can be Christian or Muslim, no difference, just one point, change yourself to be better, do more good things.*

Emily’s cultural identity can be clearly seen in this extract: *“We are Chinese”.* However, Emily herself was lack of connection with Chinese culture. For example, she said *“I did not grow up in China”* and *“only heard things about China from my parents”*. I would assume that protecting Chinese culture in her family is because she may want to maintain the connection with her own parents. Moreover, her narrative about Buddhism explained that the reason why Jerry treats being Chinese as a religion is embedded within Emily’s understanding of Chinese culture and intention of educating Jerry. As Emily said, “*I encourage my son to read Chinese, for example, the Buddhist Scriptures. He couldn’t understand it well; I will explain it to him. I told him, one good thing about being Chinese is that we have access to Buddhism”.* Buddhism is an important part of Chinese traditional culture (Fan, 2000). Therefore, it is reasonable for me to argue that Jerry’s meaning-frame of “religion” and “Chinese culture” is relational and that it is constructed by his relationship with his mother, Emily.

However, Emily herself hold a paradoxical attitude to British culture. She said:

*The way British people educate children is better than Chinese. For a simple example, someone’s son hits my son. Chinese mom may tell her son to hit him back. But Western mom would not do this. She would ask her son to ask the boy say sorry to him because he hits you, but if you hit back, that’s wrong. You should ask him to say sorry, if he doesn’t, then you can tell your parents or teacher. So you say, the difference in education is significant.*

Therefore, Emily sent Jerry to Chinese language school to learn language and culture but also would like him to be educated as British. Emily’s intention of both maintaining Chinese language and culture and educating Jerry in a British way seems paradoxical to me, however. Her intention and effort had significant influence on Jerry as she hoped: *“he changed himself, he does not think he is very British or very Chinese, he is in the middle”*. However, “in the middle” may not only be a situation, but an emotional issue. According to what Emily said, the English teacher asked parents to speak English with children, but she could not do it because her English is not good. The dominant social requirement challenged her individual intention of maintaining Chinese language and culture at home. Additionally, this conflict caused Jerry’s negative emotional experiences. For example, “*Sometimes Jerry gets angry if I say something wrong in English…it is harder for him to catch up with other students”.* In my opinion, “in the middle” might not only mean being both Chinese and British, but also mean being neither Chinese nor British.

From examining Emily’s narrative, in sum, I can conclude two points: 1) Emily’s anxiety over losing her Chinese culture is embedded into Jerry’s mind and allows him to identify himself as in the middle of Chinese and British. 2) Jerry’s self-position of “in the middle of British and Chinese” might not only be a cultural identity but also a relational and dialogical self-position: having relationships and dialogues with both Chinese and British people may allow him to be both Chinese and British but also possibly neither of them. In Jerry’s case, positioning the self in between Chinese and British is not only based on his personal experiences but also through the embedding of outside voices and relational connections. I can also make a further claim: 3) Emily’s claim of *“one good thing about being a Chinese is that we have access to Buddhism”* may affect Jerry’s conception of religion.

In summary of interpreting Jerry’s stories from a social constructionist perspective, I argue that his sense of self was in a constant state of construction through ‘connection’ and ‘disconnection’. In particular, the connection between the individual and significant others can be made not only from outside to in, for example, Jerry identified himself as Chinese because he made strong connections with his family and his friends; but also from inside to out, for example, Jerry made friends with a particular group of children because he identifies himself as Chinese. All these connections and disconnections are relational.

The connection is reciprocal, however. In addition to the fact that he made connections with significant others, others needed to make a connection with one also; without this, Jerry’s self-construction may be confused. Jerry was hesitant to call himself as a Chinese because his friends did not speak Chinese to him, which can be interpreted as sign that his friends did not make a ‘Chinese connection’ with him. Disconnection is also as a way to construct the self; by seeing the disconnection between himself and someone who is not in the same religion, Jerry might enhance his identity of being Chinese.

Connection and disconnection can change, and construction is on-going, however. Jerry said that if people who are from different religions want to be friends with each other, *“then friends”* i.e. ‘making friends’ is to make a connection. Jerry might not identify himself with the new connection, but it does not mean the new connection is rejected. Rather, connectedness and disconnectedness are opposites but can transform in a union. This point will be interpreted from a Taoist complementary perspective in chapter 5.

**3.6 Sara’s Stories**

The stories told by Sara below involves different aspects of her life experiences such as friendship, school courses, her understandings of two cultures, and her relationship with her mum Alice. I organised all the resources into three stories. The first story is about the way in which Sara constructed her meaning-frame of the word ‘clever’, and the way in which she narrated and re-narrated her narrative about math, both of which reflect her construction of her self-image and cultural self-positions. The second story, therefore, will flow into Sara’s cultural self-positions, by looking at the way in which she coped with her relationships with both Chinese and English groups. The third story will look at her relationship with her mother Alice, and interpret the way in which and the reason why she constructed a negative self-position from a social constructionist perspective.

**3.6.1 “I want to be clever” & “I don’t like math vs. I quite like math now”: Selves Constructed/Transformed between Various Inner Voices**

I will illustrate two sub-stories in this section. The first one is about the way in which Sara constructed her meaning-frame of ‘clever’, the second one is about the way in which she reconstructed her narrative about ‘math’, both of which, seem to me, reflect her construction of the ideal and cultural self-positions in a transcultural social context.

*Benny is my friend. He is very clever because he can think about a lot of games very quickly… I like Twilight Sparkle, in an English cartoon called my little pony I like watch. She is very clever too. She is keep reading book until she knows how to do something… And Vikings, people who with helmet on the head, and leather boots, and some weapons, really clever, they can make things out of anything like animal skins and wood, even stones, grass, they use leather to make boots, really clever. I like clever people…I quite like math and literacy now, because I want to be clever.*

“Clever” was significant to me, not only because Sara uttered it many times with various explanations of its meaning, for example, a clever person is who “can think about games very quickly…keep reading books until she knows how to do things…make things out of anything”; but also because she showed a strong intention to be a clever person as her ideal or intended self-position, for example, “I like clever people … I want to be clever”. I would interpret ‘clever’ as a subjective identification rather than an objective standard to Sara. In other words, the meaning of clever in Sara’s narrative is very individual within a transcultural context.

According to Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006), the ideal self is personally constructed and socially influenced. In Sara’s individual meaning-frame, “clever” constitutes various social relationships. Take, for example, her friend: *“Benny is very clever”,* her favourite cartoon character, *“Twilight Sparkle is clever”*, or her discussion of historical figures: *“Vikings are clever”*; people who *“like maths”* are clever, in her opinion (She said *“I like maths because I want to be clever”*). She constructed the meaning-frame of “clever” in various social situations such as interacting with friends, watching cartoons, drawing and learning maths in school, all of which inevitably involves outside voices especially cultural voices. I assume that “clever” can be taken as a relational and dialogical term that reflects Sara’s ideal self-position and inner voice of ‘wanting to be clever’ which is relationally and dialogically constructed.

In particular, Sara extended and even reconstructed her narrative about ‘math’:

*In English school, we learn maths, literacy, science and arts. Science and arts are my favourite because they are a bit interesting. In science, we investigate something like materials and liquid. I like drawing, painting and making things. What I don’t like is doing maths? En… and reading and writing. I don’t like doing test because I get it wrong. Maths makes me unhappy in English school. I am not good at it. (After one week) And even at home, I don’t like write things and do maths. ……I always get homework from Chinese school and sometimes from English school…… I quite like maths and literacy now. I want to be clever. I also enjoy reading in Chinese school because I learn lots of words, new words.*

Sara’s shifted in narrative regarding “maths” is interesting. The way in which the interview occurred must to be illustrated in detail because my positionality and the way I asked questions and responded to her answers should be seen as an outside influential element in Sara’s narrative. In the first interview, I asked her: *“what do you not like to do in English school?”*, She replied: *“doing maths?”.* That was the first time she mentioned “maths” with hesitation. Upon reflection on my positionality, I have two assumptions about the reasons why she answered me in that particular way. Firstly, she might not be sure about whether she dislikes maths, or not, at that moment. Secondly, if she did dislike maths, she might feel it awkward about telling me, her teacher, because, as I interpreted in last section, “like maths” is an expected characteristic in clever people as Sara understands. I assumed, therefore, that she was probing my attitude and I decided to respond honestly.

My response was my genuine feelings about maths: *“oh, maths, I don’t like it either”;* Sara laughed for a while. Afterwards, after talking about some other things, I asked a question about her English school again: *“what makes you unhappy in English school”,* Sara answered *“maths”* almost without thinking. This could be seen as a slight reconstruction of her narrative that her tone changed from uncertain to certain. I assume it might because of the encouragement, or the resonance of my empathy: *“I don’t like maths either”.* My discourse might be interpreted as an external voice embedded into or interacting with her inner voice in her mind, therefore. In doing so, I assume that Sara’s self-position of “does not like maths” herein is a dialogical self-position and a relational self which was, at least, reinforced in our conversation.

In addition to this, afterwards, when she was talking about her strength, she said “I am good at drawing, but I think I am not good at maths”. It seems as another aspect of her self-positions that is “Sara knows she is not good at maths”. That is, if “does not like maths” is based on her feeling, then “not good at maths” is based on her self-knowing. So far, both Sara’s “feeling” and “knowing” about maths seems negative.

However, after a while, when I asked Sara: *“what do you enjoy to do in your English school”,* she told me: *“I quite, now I quite like maths and literacy now”.* I was surprised and reminded her: *“but you told me you didn’t like maths last time”.* She answered me: *“no, I like it, forget that one, I want to be clever”.* Two interesting points emerged herein:1) Sara changed her narrative about maths suddenly; 2) Sara associated the characteristic of liking maths to the meaning of ‘clever’ in her mind.

It seems to me that the self-position ‘Sara likes maths’ was constructed based on another self-position of “Sara wants to be clever” because maths is a sign of cleverness in her mind. As explained above, ‘clever’ is an ideal self-position Sara constructed from her particular social activities. She wanted to be recognised as a clever girl by others, and herself. In order to be recognised in such a manner, she has to “like maths”. I assume that “like maths” is also an ideal self-position used to cope with the anxiety of a current self-position of ‘dislike maths’. The self-position, ‘like maths’, can be interpreted as socially relational and stemming from the dialogical self.

What I am interested in, however, is not exploring whether she likes maths or not, but the process in which her narrative was changed and her self-positions were constructed. Sara changed her narrative about her emotional experience on maths twice. I assume, in the first instance, her narrative which changed from an uncertain (“I don’t like maths”) to a certain (“maths makes me unhappy”) which seems to have been affected by my voice in the conversation. In the second instance, her narrative changed to “I quite like maths now” which might be caused by the embedment of outside voices such as “people who like maths are clever” (possibly both school and family). Both the self-position of “Sara does not like maths” and the self-position of “Sara likes maths” are dialogical and relational.

In my opinion, the cause of the change of self-positions is threefold: 1) Sara is in a process of constructing knowledge of the outside world e.g. her understanding of ‘clever’ is being reconstructed and enriched with voices from the outside world. 2) Her inner narrative or re-narrative can be seen as an inner dialogue for her to manage the outside information, her own desires, and to reconstruct her self-positions. In addition to this, the narrative is not used to express one’s feeling or thoughts but to create and form them. In this case, “I like maths” is not an expression of Sara’s real thoughts, but a tool she used to tell herself: “you must like maths if you want to be seen as clever”.

Interpreting the story of ‘clever’ and ‘math’ from a social constructionist perspective, and in order to answer the research question of ‘how do children construct their self-positions within outside and inner relationships’, I would argue that, ‘being clever’ and ‘like math’ reflect a process in which Sara is busy constructing her ideal self-positions in a transcultural context. As illustrated before, Sara constructed the meaning-frame of ‘clever’ within activities involving cultural issues, for example, playing with Chinese friends, watching English cartoon, and go to English school to learn math. Therefore, I would assume that ‘want to be clever’ and ‘like math’ may reflect Sara’s wish of ‘to be more British’ which seems unknown to her. The next story will explain Sara’s cultural self-positions further.

**3.6.2 “I want English friends but Benny does not”: Selves Constructed/Transformed between Inner and Outside Voices**

I asked Sara to choose a number from 0 to 10 in order to identify whether she is British or Chinese (see box 3.4), she gave me two similar answers but with slight differences.

In the first interview, she said:

*I will choose 5 or 4, more Chinese, because I speak Chinese. I know China (she showed me a picture of Fujiyama which is in Japan), my mom told me it is China, has a tall tower, a mountain and snow. That word (a picture of Fu) is Chinese. At home, I usually make dumplings with my mum, I like make it. Sometimes I like Chinese food, but sometimes English.*

In this narrative, Sara showed a cultural self-position of ‘more Chinese’. However, it seems to me that Sara’s construction of ‘China’ and “Chinese” is lack of experiences. For example, most experiences about China she had was about language and food. She even treated a Japanese mountain as Chinese.

In the second interview, she said:

*I feel I am both Chinese and English, in the middle of it. We only speak English at school, Chinese is not allowed. I feel a little bit be 6, more English because I go to English school every day. But in the future, I will be 3 (more Chinese). Because we gonna do it, we wanna do it, Chinese people at other countries. I want to go to China in the future because I’ve learnt a lot more Chinese. And I was doing Chinese things like dumplings and fan. Doing maths, literacy and science makes me feel I am English.*

It is convenient to interpret Sara’s cultural self-position as “in the middle of being Chinese and British” because both Chinese and British culture has been embedded into the construction of her cultural self-position. The position of ‘in the middle’ is not as simple as it seems to be, however, especially since she illustrated two self-positions which seem paradoxical: “more English now” but “more Chinese in the future”. In order to explore more about the way in which Sara constructed her complex cultural self-positions, more narrative with obvious cultural information is collected below:

*We are Chinese because our eyes are a little bit smaller than English people, and I get a small nose. My friends and I speak Chinese when we get together. I don’t have foreign friends; Chinese is a kind of. I don’t have English friends or other countries, because Benny doesn’t want English friends. I want because English people are quite better, because we just want to learn things.*

*I am Chinese. I am excited about Chinese New Year because you get to decorate your home, get the party food, and the lucky red package with money in it. I drew some Chinese things such as Chinese lanterns in Chinese New Year. English people don’t celebrate Chinese New Year because they are not Chinese. My class got lots of different countries, only me is Chinese.*

*Jerry is Cantonese, he is not Chinese, and he is only Cantonese. Sometimes Chinese get Cantonese, sometimes Chinese are not Cantonese. He maybe celebrates New Year, I don’t know.*

*I have my grandma and cousins in other country, in China. My best moment with family is go to China because I can see my big sister (cousin). She is very bigger than me. She can drive motorbike. And my aunty buys things for me. I’ve been China once and I missed my English, only a little bit, I am not sure.*

Sara’s description of her cultural self-positions involves various aspects, for example, in general, physically, she realised she is Chinese because *“my eyes are smaller than English people and I have a small nose”*; linguistically, she thought she is both Chinese and English because *“I speak Chinese with friends, and English in English school because Chinese is not allowed”;* culturally, she thought she is Chinese because she celebrates Chinese New Year but *“English people don’t”*.

In particular, I would extract three pieces of narratives in order to interpret the way in which Sara constructed her experience about China and how this affects her self-construction. Firstly, one the one hand, she identified herself as Chinese and made a strong attachment to her grandma and other relatives in China; on the other hand, she described Chinese friends as *“a kind of foreign friends”* and China as *“other country”*, and said *“my best moment with family is go to China…[but] I missed my English”.* Sara’s identity of being Chinese seems paradoxical which may be because of geographical issue.

Secondly, she said *“I want English friends but Benny does not so that I don’t have English friends”, “English people are quite better”.* Considering the previous story in 3.6.1, I would assume that one of Sara’s ideal self-position may be “being an English” since English is a dominant identity in the UK. In other words, Sara’s opinion of *“English people are quite better”* are constructed in an English dominant social context. However, she does not want to betray her Chinese friends. The significant people in her life keep her in an ambivalent position. The result of *“hav[ing] no English friends”* can be seen as a compromise between Sara’s inner voice: *“I want to have English friends”* (I would interpret this as “to be more English”) and the outside voice from Benny who does not want to (I would interpret this as “I cannot be more English if I want to be a Chinese”). In addition, Alice’s narrative about Sara and her Chinese friends might provide more information. She said, *“Sara has some Chinese friends, they are like a group. English children with English, Chinese with Chinese. She is going well with both, but her Chinese friends complained she always play with English friends. Sara told me her Chinese friends were not happy about this (she plays with English friends)”*. In light of this, I assume that both Benny and English friends are what she wants but she can only choose one. I assume that in the process of hesitating between Chinese and English friends she was also undergoing a process in which she was busy exploring and constructing her self-positions, especially cultural self-positions.

Considering this with her narrative of *“I am more English now. But in the future, I will be more Chinese”*, I would interpret her imaged self-position of “more Chinese in the future” as an inner voice she told herself, in order to make a compromise with two opposite social intentions: to be more English as the dominant society wants, and to be more Chinese as the Chinese community wants. Constructing this self-position might help her cope with the expectation she cannot achieve currently and the anxiety caused by the situation.

Thirdly, the narrative also shows that Sara constructed her identity as Chinese by realizing difference and disconnection with others, for example, “*my class got lots of different countries, only me is Chinese”.* However, one interesting point emerged to me when she said *“Jerry is Cantonese, he is not Chinese, and he is only Cantonese. He maybe celebrates New Year, I don’t know. Sometimes Chinese get Cantonese, sometimes Chinese are not Cantonese”.* It may relevant to inner Chinese cultural conflict, but in this case, I would rather interpret it as a linguistic issue. Therefore, at this point, I would argue that Chinese culture and identity are quite complex, for example, people from different areas in China may speak different Chinese languages and have different cultural customs. It would be over simplified to see Chinese as only a national or cultural identity. This point will be further discussed in chapter 5.

**3.6.3 “I am spanked by my mum because I don’t listen to her”: Unwanted Selves Constructed/Transformed in Order to Maintain Social Relationships**

In this section, I will particularly compare Sara’s description about herself and Alice’s description about Sara, in order to explore the way in which Sara’s self-positions are influenced by her mother Alice, and interpret that accepting unwanted comments from Alice might be a way Sara used to maintain the relationship.

In the interviews with Sara, I found that she often described herself in a negative way:

*The unhappy thing I remember at home is being scolded by my mum, and also being spanked. I don’t like it. It was because I don’t listen to my mum. … I don’t get time properly for my work, because I always want to play with…*

In two interviews with Alice, it was also very rare to hear Alice gave positive comments about Sara except that the “teacher says Sara is good at drawing”. The words Alice used to describe Sara were quite negative, such as “lazy” “not focused” “not serious” “emotional” “be distracted easily” and so on.

*Sara is lazy…she doesn’t do review after homework... You can’t force her to learn more…Her spelling is not good enough, she has no confidence...But if someone is better than her, she’ll be very upset and crying. I told her that you are not as good as other people so you need to work harder, not cry. She is upset but [does] not work hard. … She is emotional, but other children are not…She is not focused and not serious on her study, she could be distracted easily. Sometimes I think why children in other families are good, only she doesn't listen to me? Sometimes I compare her with other children, why she can’t do something that other children can easily do? …She is not happy and even argues with me sometimes asking me why I compare her with other children? Why didn't I praise her about her drawing? I said your drawing is good but why don't you improve your homework… she doesn’t listen to me. She ignores me until I get angry”.*

It seems to me that she constructed a very negative self-position via embedding Alice’s voices. However, the reason why she embedded in the negative voices about herself needs more thinking. From a perspective of DST, in order to maintain and secure the relationship, or due to being afraid to challenge the power of dominant partner, the lower status female would accept the interpretations or meanings constructed by the higher status female (Miller-Day, 2004). I would argue that the reason why Sara embedded Alice’s negative comment of her may because of an intention to maintain a good relationship with Alice which might be unknown to Sara herself.

On the one hand, Sara loves Alice and likes spending time with her. That is, Sara relied on Alice and made a very strong attachment with her. As she said, *‘I always talk to my mom when I get homework, I like making dumplings with her… at winter, I like going out and make snow man with my mum and my little brother, when we finish, my mum put the flower right on the snow man’s head, we even make snow chairs, and even snow table, and a kind of small castle’.* On the other hand, Sara may have had a sense of crisis of losing her mom that may be unknown to herself. This assumption is made based on Alice’s narrative of “*sometimes I think why children in other families are good, only she doesn’t listen to me? Sometimes I compare her with other children, why she can’t do something that other children can easily do? …She is not happy and even argues with me sometimes asking me why I compare her with other children? Why didn’t I praise her?”* Therefore, I would argue that embedding outside voices might be one’s unknown intention to maintain a good social relationship, by doing so, opposite selves might be constructed between opposite inner and outside voices.

**3.7 Summary of Research Outcomes**

In summary of this chapter, based on a social constructionist approach, the self is socially relational, dialogical, and has diverse self-positions. Social environment affects the way in which each individual interprets the world and themselves. In this research, for instances, with embedment of particular cultural and social information, Jerry constructed an individual meaning-frame or understandings of ‘religion’ (“people in different religions are hard to be friends”), Sara constructed an individual meaning-frame or understandings of ‘clever’ and ‘math’ (“people who like math are clever”), ‘English people’ (“English people are quite better”), and ‘Chinese people’ (“Cantonese may not Chinese”). Individual meanings about the world and themselves are being constructed in an ever-changing process within various social relationships.

Considering the thoughts inspired by the data, and in order to answer the research question of ‘how do the children construct their self-positions in the context of external relationships’, I would like to describe some outcomes and make some arguments, and extend some theoretical points further below:

First of all, the influences of social relationships and intentions on Jerry and Sara are quite contradictory and paradoxical. Taking linguistic issue as an example, English school does not allow them to speak Chinese languages, in order to educate them more English; whereas Chinese school and their families tried to help them maintain more Chinese characteristics. The linguistic issue is not only between English and Chinese, however; it also exists within Chinese language between different dialects such as Mandarin and Cantonese. In order to make sense of the outside world, the children are busy constructing and reconstructing their self-positions via various ways in order to integrate into different groups.

Secondly, one’s self-positions are contradictory and paradoxical to each other. For example, Jerry and Sara located themselves in a paradoxical position of in the middle of Chinese and English via a process of busy constructing their understandings of the contradictory and paradoxical issues in the outside world and making sense of their various paradoxical inner voices. Jerry and Sara’s cultural position could possibly be explained as ‘both/and’ (they are both Chinese and English), and ‘neither/nor’ (they are neither Chinese nor English). As Chau and Yu (2001) argued, Chinese people in Britain have a foot in both mainstream society and Chinese community but lack the full support of either. In other words, they may in a position of trying to integrate into but being isolated by both camps.

Thirdly, the process of self-construction/transformation is paradoxical. One’s selves are constructed not only via making connections with one group and disconnecting from other groups, but also via constructing the sense of both connectedness and disconnectedness to the same significant others or groups. According to McNamee (1996), people are no longer living in small and isolated communities in which it is difficult to find the ‘other’. In effect, we have massive opportunities to recognise and meet people that are different from us. Since each of us is always in a process of changing, the sense of difference and similarity is changing as well. Constructing the self consequently must meet the challenge of a multitude of relationships which are both connected and disconnected. For example, Jerry positioned himself as Chinese because he realised the difference, or disconnection, between him and someone who is non-Chinese. He also experienced disconnection with the Chinese group due to the linguistic issues, however.

Furthermore, fourthly, I would argue that one’s selves are being constructed and transformed in-between different outside and inner voices. In doing so, self-negotiation plays an essential role in one’s self-construction via constructing and reconstructing one’s narratives and meaning-frames of the outside world and their own life experiences. For example, Sara was in-between the inner voices of “I like maths” and “I don’t like math”.

In order to keep a balance between two contradictory social voices (i.e. be more English vs. be more Chinese) and cope with anxiety from social expectations, in particular one may create ideal self-positions. For example, Sara constructed a self-position of to be a person who is clever and likes math, and a position of be more Chinese in the future in order to match the outside expectation from her parents and Chinese friends. Those self-positions may have a positive effect such as being motivation, but may also cause more anxiety since it is a position that she cannot achieve currently.

In order to maintain one’s social relationships, one may identify him or herself with an identity he or she may not know well or not agree with. For example, Jerry and Sara identify themselves as Chinese, even though they do not have a clear understanding of ‘China’ or ‘Chinese culture’, in order to maintain their relationships with Chinese group. For another example, Sara accepted and constructed a negative self-image (“I am lazy”), even though she did not want to, in order to maintain a good relationship with her mother who thought she is lazy.

In light of this, I would like to argue that, in addition to the characteristics that social constructionism gives rise to, self-positions are contradictory - even paradoxical. In particular, the cultural-environment in this research should not be seen as ‘dual’ because it suggests that the British and Chinese cultures co-existed. I argue instead that the dual-cultural environment is both in relational harmony, and conflicts without clear boundaries. Living in a complicated context, full of uncertainties, Jerry and Sara cannot clearly categorise which things are British and which are Chinese. Constructing/Transforming selves seems to be a process of balancing diverse and contradictory factors. The children in my research were searching for a balance between: ‘what they want to be’ and ‘what their parents want them to be’, ‘what they can be’ and ‘what they must be’, ‘what they know’ and ‘what they do not know’, and ‘keeping the heritage identity as Chinese’ and ‘becoming more English’. In keeping the balance, the ‘self’ is transformed without being noticed. Change, or transformation, is not always happening and it is not always good (Smith, 2016). The construction of the self does not always tend toward maturity and perfection, but also includes the process of retrogression i.e. transformation includes change and temporary stability.

In sum, in the content above, I explored the first research question: “how do the children construct their self-positions through interaction with various outside relationships”. In terms of the third question, ‘how do the mothers affect the children’s self-constructions’, Emily’s influence on Jerry were explored as well. In the next chapter, I will explore the way in which understandings of self can be constructed inside one’s psychological world.

**Chapter 4 Self-Transformation in Inner Relationships**

***The paradoxical aspect of my experience is that***

***The more I am willing to understand and accept the realities in myself***

***The more change seems to be stirred up***

***- Carl Rogers (1995, p.20)***

**4.1 Introduction**

As Berling (1985, p. 108) suggests, Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream “take[s] advantage of our full imagination potential”, and does “not limit our capacity for empathy and openness”. In addition, I would like to share another my personal story herein in order to show the inspiration I get from my own life experiences and how this affects my research.

According to my research diary, when immersed in thinking about the relationship between Sara and Alice, I dreamt about a little girl who protected me from being bullied by other people. In the dream, I was frightened and did not know what to do when scary people walked up to me even though I was an adult in the dream. At that time, a girl who was only about seven or eight years old came to me and stood in front of me and screamed “go away” to the bullies. The bullies miraculously really went away. After calming myself down, I looked at this little girl. Her face was not clear in the dream, but somehow I felt there must be a connection between her and me. After I woke up and regained consciousness, I realised that she was actually me, a littler me, who was not afraid of the world at all.

In the dream, I unknowingly transformed from my current self-position as an adult to the past self-position of a little girl. I think my dream also open a space, as same as Zhuangzi’s dream, for me to think about the relationship between one and himself or herself. For example, one may experience as being both child and adult, which might affect how he or she performs in the social relationships. In this chapter, I am going to look at self-transformation in inner relationships via utilizing psychodynamically-informed readings.

It may seem paradoxical to adopt a quote from Carl Rogers, a humanistic psychologist who rejects the deterministic nature of some psychoanalytic theory, to start this chapter, because the content in this chapter is mainly about psychoanalytic theory. As I claimed earlier, however, I am not taking an ‘either/or’ position, but adopting the principle of complementarity, which holds a holistic perspective. In light of this perspective, in addition to social constructionist theory which was illustrated in the last chapter, I will adopt some ideas from psychoanalysis, particularly object relations theory, in order to explore the second research question of “how do the children construct their self-positions psychologically through various inner relationships?”, and the third question of “how do the mothers affect the children’s self-constructions?”.

In the content below, I will start with a short but important section to illustrate why and how it is possible to adopt psychodynamic ideas in my thesis, and briefly introduce psychoanalytic theory in order to locate object relations theory that has been utilised to analyse the data in this chapter. Then, I will turn to a specific theoretical framework in which the concepts of transitional space, transitional objects, and transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1971) are adopted to explain where the self is located and where self-construction takes place; imagination and fantasy (Mannoni, 1999) could, for example, be seen as transitional objects or phenomena through which human beings are able to explore themselves; Bion’s (1962) idea of digesting emotional experiences is adopted because it inspired me to connect constructing selves with digesting emotional experiences, this point will be reflected on later in Chapter 5 when emotionality is discussed. Moreover, I argue that narrative means (White & Epston, 1990) could be seen as a link between two different cultures and as another possible way, which may unknown to oneself, to construct selves.

Utilizing those theories, Jerry and Sara’s stories will be interpreted from a different perspective to how they were in the previous chapter. In Jerry’s case, I will: 1) Illustrate Jerry’s play of gun-toy and dreams and fantasy of shooting people, in order to examine how he coped with his emotional experiences about his father and in doing so how he constructed/transformed his own self-positions 2) Compare Jerry’s narrative of “my mom was a liar” and Emily’s narrative of “my son loves me more than he loves his dad”, in order to analyse how Jerry coped with his emotional experiences in a relational-transitional space (this term bring an extension of the concept of Winnicott’s ‘transitional space’) within his relationship with his mother Emily. In Sara’s case, I will: 1) Interpret how Sara’s favourite activity of drawing created transitional phenomenon in which Alice and Sara saw drawing with different meanings, and in doing so the way in which Sara’s selves were constructed in the relational-transitional space between her and Alice’s transitional spaces; 2) Interpret the way in which Sara constructed negative self-positions as a defence; 3) Explore Alice’s life experience and how it possibly affected Sara’s self-construction/transformation.

**4.2 Choosing and Using Psychodynamic Ideas**

Before I decided to use psychodynamic ideas and choose object relations theory as a principle one, I asked myself three questions. Firstly, is it possible to use psychoanalytic theories since it is well known as used in clinic? Secondly, how can it be used outside clinic? Thirdly, why do I choose to mainly use object relations theory in my thesis?

Psychoanalysis and using psychoanalytic ideas is different. The text in psychoanalysis requires a live encounter between the analysand and the analyst (Frosh, 2010) which is not the same as a transcript of a conversation (Parker, 2010). Frosh (2010, p.4) also suggests, when a social psychologist or a philosopher uses psychoanalytic ideas to understand some particular topics, it is not psychoanalysis. Therefore, I do not claim that I believe in psychoanalysis or my research is psychoanalysis, albeit that some psychoanalytic ideas are employed.

Psychoanalytic theory became widely known not only as a practical theory in the clinic, but has also been gradually applied outside the clinic, especially in the social sciences, to make sense of non-clinical phenomena (Frosh, 2010). For example, psychoanalysis has been applied in film theory since early 1970s, and the influence continues (Creed, 1998); it can be used in feminism for theoretical support on gender and sexuality as well (Mitchell, 1974); it also offers a plenty of concepts such as Oedipus complex in literature study (Frosh, 2012). I would also suggest that adopting some of psychoanalytic ideas are very helpful and feasible to understand ‘self’ and the role of self-construction/transformation in this thesis as well.

In terms of the way in which psychoanalytic theory could be used, according to Parker (2010, p.158), the aim of using psychoanalytic approach is not to “dig things up from under the surface, but to show how the surface of the text itself constitutes certain objects, subjects and relationships between them”. Thus, psychoanalytic theory is used in this thesis to, as Frosh (2012) and Parker (2010) suggests, analyse and interpret the data rather than colonize it with psychoanalytic discourse. In other words, I am intending to understand my participants from a psychodynamic perspective, rather than digging ‘meanings’ up or labelling them with some psychoanalytic terms. For example, ‘unconscious’ is a common psychoanalytic word. According to Freud (1915), one reason for intending to do certain things might be that we are driven by the ‘pleasure principle’ to satisfy our unconscious impulses, but that we might not even know what those impulses are. Freud suggests that the unconscious is not only a place where forgotten memories are stored; rather, its influence infiltrates into every aspect of human life (Power, 2000), and that even a slip of the tongue might give away minor indications of unconscious processing in action (Reason, 2000). However, I do not think I am able to claim that I know someone’s unconscious minds or even prove the existence of unconscious. Therefore, I would rather use ‘unknown to the individual’ to replace ‘unconscious’ in my thesis, albeit the idea of exploring the relationships between certain subjects and objects that might be unknown to the individual is inspired by the psychoanalytic term of ‘unconscious’.

There are several main schools of psychoanalysis, for example, Jungian and Adler, Anna Freud, Kleinian, American ego psychoanalysis, British psychoanalysis, and Lacanian (Frosh, 2012). Each of the schools has a different focus and differs in terms of key beliefs. For example, unlike Freud who suggests that the psychological phenomena and behaviours of humans are driven by primary biological forces such as sex, Kleinian psychoanalysis intends to be more relational and emphasises ‘unconscious phantasies’ (Frosh, 2012, p.25). Kleinian psychologists claim that these drives are always in relation to objects. In other words, drives are seen as relationships rather than as solely inner biological expressions (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). In Klein’s viewpoint, human beings’ sense of self depends on the quality of his or her relationships with parents and other people and is “either as a secret and undiscovered murderer or as a repentant and absolved sinner, in the extreme” (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, p. 127). This point guided me to explore the children’s self-constructions via looking at their views on their relationships with their parents.

Therefore, although some concepts, such as defence mechanism, projection, and introjection are referred to, it is the relational possibility within ‘object relations theory’ which seemed to provide a more relevant theoretical lens because I tend to focus on relationally informed theory. As I stated very earlier on, the Taoist principles of complementarity and transformation allow me to keep integrating multiple theories and thoughts through the whole process of the research.

Object relations theory aims to make sense of the relationship between people’s outside worlds and their psychological processes and how this has influences on psychological functioning (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, p.12). The nature of ‘objects’ in object relations theory relates to internal representations that result from our interpretations of external stimuli objects such as one’s parents, the mother’s breast, or even oneself (Frosh, 2012). As Winnicott (1975, p.99) suggests, “if you show me a baby you certainly show me also someone caring for the baby, or at least a pram with someone’s eyes and ears glued to it…that the unit is not the individual, the unit is an environment-individual set-up”. That is, the quality of the relationship between one’s inner world and external world plays a central role in one’s self-development. The outside world is imbibed, in effect, is in all kinds of ways – obvious and subtle. If the environment is high-trust, for example, one’s true self can be constructed; if it is unreliable, one may construct a false self (Winnicott, 1960b). The relational perspective makes psychoanalytical theory easier to adopt in social studies (Frosh, 2010).

Considering object relations theory with social constructionist theory, I would argue that, on the one hand, the object relations theory is compatible with social constructionism since both of them are relationally formed. As Parker (2005, p.119) suggests, psychoanalysis is powerful in challenging ideas we take for granted and opening new ways for us to structure how we think about ourselves. In particular, object relations theory looks at human beings’ relationships as well as social constructionism. On the other hand, it goes beyond a purely constructionist position since it also studies individuals’ inner worlds in addition to their social relationships. As Bateman and Holmes (1995, p.17) suggest, psychoanalytic theory is concerned with the effect of early experience on the development of mind, and unconsciousness, and theoretical and practical psychoanalytic treatment. This theory might, therefore, address a gap that the social constructionist perspective does not cover.

Additionally, while principally using object relations theory, some Lacanian thoughts are utilized as well. The perspectives from Winnicott and Lacan might be seen as different to each other from a mainstream perspective, they do have some points in common with each other (Kirshner, 2011). For example, Winnicott and Lacan have junctures on the question of the object, of the mirror stage, and of the self (Vanier, 2012, p.280). In particular, Winnicott’s distinction between the true and the false self is similar to Lacan’s distinction between ego and subject (Kirshner, 2011, p.xii). Additionally, some psychoanalytic researchers such as Maud Mannoni study both Lacanian psychoanalysis and Middle Group which is represented by Winnicott (Luepnitz, 2009). Mannoni’s work will be adopted with Winnicott’s theory in next section. Thus, Lacanian and Winnicottian thoughts is compatible with each other to some degree.

However, in this thesis, Lacanian is adopted only around imagination and linguistic issue. According to Frosh (2012), Lacan treated language as a way in which the unconscious is created, rather than a tool through which the unconscious is expressed. That is, language also creates human subjects. Moreover, Lacan also differentiated the orders of experiences into ‘the imaginary, the symbolic and the real’ (Frosh, 2012, p.114). In particular, ‘the Imaginary’ is an order of fantasy by which one could adopt a sense of ego from outside in order to relieve one’s sense of fragmentation about oneself; in contrast to ‘the imaginary’, ‘the symbolic order’ indicates that individuals need to be ‘subject’ to language in order to be social members; ‘the real order’ indicates experiences that cannot be symbolized, which probably because that the unconscious is real but cannot be symbolised (Frosh, 2012, p.115). The Lacanian perspective on language was illustrated in the section of ‘transparency of language’ in the methodology chapter, and will also be considered to interpret the data in this chapter later on.

Overall, I have ‘mined’ those psychodynamic theories which speak to the nature of process and complement notions of construction, relationality, and transformation. In particular, Winnicott’s theory of ‘transitional space’ is the platform on which Mannoni’s thoughts about fantasy and imagination, Bion’s assumption of digesting emotional experiences, and White and Epston’s illustration of narrative means are integrated and utilized to interpret the data.

**4.3 Theoretical Framework of Object Relations Theory**

In object relations theory, one’s self is structured through the person’s relational experiences, involving specific maternal provisions, for example, one’s early relationship with caregivers (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983). The term of object “refers to the things themselves, but its main meaning is that of the mental representations to which these things give rise, the internal, fantasized versions of people that populate the mind” (Frosh, 2012, p.129). Thus, object relations theory focuses on the inner world, but opens to environmental and social issues and have concern about the quality of one’s relationships (Frosh, 2012, p.131).

In this section, I will adopt: Winnicott’s theory of transitional space, transitional objects and transitional phenomena, which allows me to explore one’s mental activities through outside objects and phenomena, in which how one cope with his or her social relationships could be looked at; Bion’s assumption of alpha-function, which guides me to look at human beings’ emotional experiences in relationships and how it may affect one’s self-construction/transformation; psychoanalytic thoughts of defence mechanisms and narrative means, which are useful for discussing the way in which people may digest their emotional experiences in their social and intrapersonal relationships.

**4.3.1 Constructing/Transforming Selves in Transitional Space through Transitional Objects *(TO)* and Transitional Phenomena *(TP)***

Winnicott assumed that the relationship between the individual and the objects (real or imagined) are pivotal instead of the satisfaction of instinctual drives which was highlighted by the Freudian school of psychology (Praglin, 2006). This could be seen as a significant distinction between object relations theory and Freudian drive theory. In particular, Winnicott (1953; 1971) suggests that in addition to inner reality and outside world, there is the ‘third part’ of human life. It is an intermediate area of experiencing which can be called ‘transitional space’, to which inner reality and external life both contribute (Winnicott, 1953, p.90). In transitional space, transitional objects (TO) and transitional phenomena (TP) might be created and used by individuals for different functions such as comforter or defence to anxiety. They exist neither in one’s external world nor inner world; rather, they exist in an intermediate area between the subject and the object, between acknowledgement and unawareness, between the inner world and the outside world (Winnicott, 1971).

TO and TP are both real and symbolic, and enable the child to live in the realms of fantasy and reality at the same time (Frosh, 2012, p.112), and invoke processes linked to symbolism. They allow the infant goes through a journey of progress towards experiencing beyond ‘pure[ly] subjectivity and objectivity’ (Winnicott, 1971, p.6). For example, a baby gets a blanket from other people; the blanket is held and even sucked by the baby and became a comforter that can comfort the baby when he or she is crying; the blanket cannot be replaced or even cleaned unless the baby let it to. All these processes that may involve thinking and fantasying are transitional phenomena, and the blanket is transitional object (Winnicott, 1953, p.90).

That is, according to Winnicott (1971), TO is a ‘not-me’ possession that children start to use and manipulate at an early age and may reuse at a later age perhaps at times of crisis. Each individual may use different TO and create personal patterns of TP. For example, TO could be a toy such as a teddy bear, which may be carried by a child all the time. TP could be listening to a particular song in order to prepare for sleep within the intermediate area, ‘along with the use made of objects that are not part of the infant’s body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality’ (Winnicott, 1953, p.89). TO or TP patterns that have been set in infancy may persist into childhood and may even remain into adulthood (Winnicott, 1971).

According to Winnicott (1971), TO must fulfil two conditions; one is that the internal object must be alive and ‘good enough’; another is that the internal object’s quality depends on the ‘aliveness’ of the external object. These objects will possess some kinds of psychological or emotional significance. That is, TO may “stand for the external [object], but indirectly through standing for an internal [object]” (Winnicott, 1971, p.10). When an infant uses a blanket as a transitional object, for example, the blanket must stand for an inner object such as the mother’s breast in his or her mind. Existence of the ‘inner breast’ depends on the real breast being known as an external object.

TO and TP therefore stand not only for internal objects and external objects, but also the relationship between those two kinds of objects, i.e. the relationship between the subject and objects. As Greenberg and Mitchell (1983, p.195) summarise, the essence of TO and TP is the nature of the person’s relationship to the objects, which carries a developmental station between “hallucinatory omnipotence and the recognition of objective reality”. In brief, the effect of employing TO and TP is to enable individuals to make sense of both internal and external reality or make the connection between.

Practically, TO and TP might be seen as an opportunity for analyst to observe one’s defence mechanisms when internal reality and the external reality are in conflict with each other. A story illustrated in the book of *Playing and Reality* (Winnicott, 1971) accounts how a boy used a string as a TO, standing for his communication with the outside world in order to defend against his negative experience of being separated from his mother. Another story in the same book shows that a woman unconsciously used her dream of a train accident as TP in order to make sense of her memories of a war she had been through, which could not be consciously digested. Consequently, TP could be psychological tropes such as dreams, imagination, or fantasy. However, I am not claiming that I believe TO and TP are truly existing; rather, they are useful interpretations or metaphor for me to observe and make sense of human beings’ experiences. As Winnicott (1953, p.92) suggests, TO is what we see of the journey of progress towards experiencing.

Additionally, according to Greenberg and Mitchell (1983), the capacity to play is a precondition for employing TO and TP. They suggest that the ‘capacity to play’ refers to both children and adults’ capacity to relate to external objects and one’s own fantasies, being ready to be surprised by the world’s possibilities (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, p.196). Playing is an essential activity in transitional life. However, play theory itself is very complex. In this thesis, ‘playing’ is only refers to Winnicott’s (1971, p.41-50) definition that, playing is “doing, is a form of communicating with both outside and inner worlds, a precariousness of interplay between individual inner reality and the experience of controlling outside objects, a creative experience, and a basic form of living”.

Playing, which is caused by human beings’ desire to control external things not only by thinking or wishing but also doing, takes place neither inside the individual nor outside them; rather in a transitional space between the subject and the objects within the psychosomatic partnership. That is, playing might be seen as a form of both TO and TP. In addition, according to Winnicott (1971), it is only in the activity of playing that children and adults are able to discover or search for the self. I therefore assume that the self is constructed in this third area, which is also called the ‘transitional area’ or the ‘potential space’, through ‘playing’ and using TO and TP.

Moreover,considering that the purpose of my research that is to study immigrant children’s self-constructions in a transcultural environment, culture is an important factor contributing to Jerry and Sara’s self-constructions. The reason for choosing object relations theory in this thesis is that it attempts to cross the chasm between our inner psychological lives and the external world. Object relations theory takes seriously the construction of selves within a culturally defined context.

According to Winnicott (1971), culture is an inherited tradition in humanity, to and from which both individuals and groups of people contribute and benefit. In other words, culture is both individual and collective. “Cultural experience”, on the other hand, is seen as an extension of transitional phenomena and of play that is located in the potential space between the individual and the external environment (Winnicott, 1971). In my research, I will explore the idea of ‘cultural experience’ as an approach through which each individual plays with culture. I assume that each individual might have different cultural experiences, even though a broadly similar culture is shared by all of them.

Mannoni (1999, p.82) also suggests that a precondition of using an object is that the infant is allowed to be alive in an environment surrounded by the objects. This point highlights the importance of the external world in human beings’ lives, especially the psychological aspect of life. Transitional space might function as a ‘holding’ environment. Furthermore, according to Arthern and Madill (2002), in clinical environment, ‘holding’ refers to maintaining a physical, cognitive, and affective relationship between the client and therapist within the processes of interweaving and interacting, in which the usage of TO and TP allows the client to be aware of continuity and connectedness and the new sense of self, which includes an ability to care for their own vulnerability. In this situation, it seems that ‘holding’ does not take place only in the client’s transitional space, but also in the therapist’s transitional space. In Bion’s (1962;1970) words, the therapist’s transitional space could be seen as a “container” of the client’s emotional experiences, which are only digested in client’s own transitional space. I assume, therefore, that self-construction may not only happen inside one’s own transitional space, but also in the spaces between one’s own and another person’s transitional spaces, i.e. in a relational-transitional-space. They may use the same TO or TP to represent different meanings to each one of them. In doing so, each of their cultural experiences might have mutual effects on each other through their shared relational-transitional space. In my interpretation of the data, for example, Sara’s drawing would thus be seen as an example by which to interpret the way in which one’s self is constructed and transformed in a relational-transitional space with her mother.

In particular, in terms of immigrant identity, Sengun (2001) suggests that migration is a transitional space between one’s birth culture in which one was brought up and the new culture. Based on clinical experience, Sengun suggests that migration might be a potential trauma for people who cannot withdraw from their culture of origin and find it difficult to integrate into their new culture. In effect, even though it is not migration itself that directly causes this, people are more liking to experience new cultural values, since the world is becoming increasingly globalised. Explaining Sengun’s point based on Winnicott’s thoughts, the new culture one experienced through migration could be seen as presenting new TP that might even conflict with a person’s former TP, which may in turn be rooted in the context of their cultural heritage. A particular pattern of TP (i.e. a particular song), with which one has already constructed a model of ‘self’, may need to be replaced by a new pattern of TP or to be added a new meaning to help them integrate into a new environment. For example, in Sara’s story, I will explain the way in which the meaning of drawing as TP has changed.

Moreover, imagination and fantasy are assumed as key creative factors in the individual’s self-construction. According to Winnicott (1971, p.69), the creative impulse is “something that can be looked at as a thing in itself ……something that is present when anyone looks in a healthy way at anything or does anything deliberately”. Engaging in creative activities is a healthy state, and makes people feel that life is worth living (Winnicott, 1971). Playing music, for example, is an activity through which people may be able to release their feelings and enjoy themselves, which is a healthy way to be creative. Creative activity works in another way to people who have had traumatic experiences, however. According to Mannoni (1999), people who have been through trauma, either with or without the help of psychotherapy, may use some creative activities such as imagination or fantasy to transform their painful experiences into acceptable ones. Imagination and fantasy might, therefore, be interpreted as TO or TP.

Creative activity could be either known or unknown or both to the individual. On the one hand, when a person is drawing a picture and he or she knows what to draw, he or she is intentionally performing creative activity. On the other hand, if a person consciously fantasised about something but forgot about it later, psychoanalytic theory suggests that the fantasy could become an unconscious creative experience. Unconscious creative activity is not meaningless, however. According to Freud’s ideas, unconscious fantasy might translate as repression and thus have an unconscious influence on one’s daily life, rather than being completely forgotten (Mannoni, 1999). I therefore assume that experiences that are unknown to the individual are also assimilated into one’s self-construction. Furthermore, Freud also suggests that imagination provides the kind of individual pleasure and satisfaction which may not be found in real life (Mannoni, 1999).

According to Mannoni (1999), the effects of imagination and fantasy on ‘normal and healthy’ children’s or adults’ play are different from their effects on ‘unhealthy’ children and adults. A child who is in a healthy state of inner security, for example, will truly discover the world with transitional objects or transitional phenomena at the expected time. A string might be used creatively, as it was in the example I outlined previously. Something such as a string which promotes creativity through playing for children who have no negative emotional problems might, however, be used as a way to deny separation for children who are anxious via the experience of having power over objects (Mannoni, 1999, p.76). Mannoni emphasises the importance of imagination and fantasy to ‘unhealthy’ children. Categorising human beings into ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ is problematic, however. The social constructionist perspective suggests that health, illness, and disability are not only socially created; but also sustained by social practices that often serve the interests of dominant groups in society (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009). That is, the judgement of what is ‘normal’ and/or ‘healthy’ is a social value rather than an objective truth. Winnicott also holds a similar view. He suggests that ‘normality’ is defined according to the social expectations of a particular social group at one particular time (Winnicott, 1971, p.78). In my opinion, therefore, the children should not be labelled as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’, albeit they may use fantasies to cope with negative emotional experiences. In my research, for example, Jerry used fantasies of gun-play and Sara used the activity of drawing to represent their anxiety, which might be caused by their unconscious intention to maintain a balance in their cultural experiences, both in their inner and external worlds.

The term ‘trauma’ as it is used in this thesis does not refer only to dramatic events such as a kidnap, but has a broad meaning, referring to any undigested negative lived experiences, remembering that trauma is experienced in different ways by different people. According to Sengun (2001), for example, an immigrant may realise they can no longer rely on their original culture or original life, which may be a traumatic experience. In particular, for the children in my research, as second-generation immigrants, English is their first language since they were born in the UK. From my interactions with them as a Chinese language teacher, it seemed to me that they were more familiar with English culture and British social values than Chinese language and culture. Their parents, however, as first generation immigrants, were immersed in Chinese or Pan-Chinese culture, so they kept pushing their children to also build close relationships with Chinese culture. It seems that there is a cultural gap between those children and their parents, which unfortunately caused trauma for both the parents and the children. When the children are learning Chinese, for example, the learning activity might be bound up with feelings of pressure and anxiety. Parents’ anxiety might come from the recognition that they cannot rely on Chinese language and culture any longer. If they cannot cope with or digest those experiences, trauma may be the result. In next section, I would like to adopt Bion’s (1962) assumption as an approach to mental lives in order to explain an assumption of the way in which digested and undigested experiences contribute to individuals’ self-constructions/transformations.

**4.3.2 Constructing/Transforming Selves through Experiencing**

In Bion’s (1962) assumption, the trauma or undigested cultural experiences are due to the failure of the alpha-function, through which alpha-elements are produced. It means that ‘undigested cultural experience’ is caused by the failure of the process of digesting or integrating into unfamiliar culture. In this section, I will adopt Bion’s assumption of alpha-function or ‘functions of the personality’ (Bion, 1962, p.1) to discuss the way in which selves are constructed and transformed through learning from experiences.

In his (Bion, 1962) assumption, ‘Alpha-function’ refers to “the mental activity proper to a number of factors operating in consort” (p.2). “To learn from experiences alpha-function must operate on the awareness of the emotional experience”, by doing so “alpha-elements are produced from the impressions of the experiences” so that individuals are able to do “dream thoughts and for unconscious waking thinking” (p.8). Alpha-elements can be both conscious and unconscious (p. 17). However, if alpha-function fails, beta-elements will be produced. “If there are only beta-elements [that are produced by disturbed, fail, or inoperative alpha-function], which cannot be made unconscious, there can be no repression, suppression, or learning” (p. 8). Simply put, beta-elements are raw and undigested senses of impressions and emotions (Brown, 2009) whereas alpha-elements are emotional experiences that have been successfully digested. Emotional experience can only be learnt through a successfully operating alpha-function which works upon individuals’ undigested experiences (Bion,1962).

Take my personal anecdote of learning to use chopsticks at early age as an example to explain my understanding of Bion’s assumption. Learning to use chopsticks is a process not only of learning a skill, but also of digesting emotional experiences. For example, I had to tolerate anxious feelings caused by failure of using chopsticks for many times and the possibility of losing my parents’ patience on me. Since the emotional experience of learning is successfully transformed into alpha-elements through alpha-function, which means I have successfully digested the emotional experiences successfully, according to Bion’s theory, the conscious mind is able to become one with the unconscious mind during the learning process, which means I became able to use chopsticks without any consciousness of doing so. However, if beta-elements are the result of the emotional experiences during the learning process through maladaptive alpha-function, which means I have not digest my emotional experiences, I would fail to learn the technique of using chopsticks.

Therefore, as Bion (1970, p.1) suggests, “reason is emotion’s slave and exists to rationalise emotional experience”, I assume that selves are not only a result of intentional and rational thinking, but also originate from affective experiences that may be unknown to individuals. In addition, another hypothesis is that the way through which affective/emotional experiences are transformed into rational thinking might be seen as a similar process in which selves are constructed and transformed into consciousness. In other words, self-construction/transformation is with a process of digesting and learning from emotional experiences.

In addition, for Bion (1962), thoughts, which consist of emotional experiences, exist before the realisation of thoughts. The aim of alpha-function is to transform the thoughts that we were not aware of but already existed into alpha-elements, in order to bring them to awareness. If the alpha-function fails, however, the thoughts and emotional experiences will remain unchanged. Successful ‘thinking’ and ‘learning’ thus takes place only through successful alpha-function. Similarly, it seems to me that selves also exist before they can be realised by the individual. In light of this, I assume that if alpha-function is working correctly, the aspects of selves that are unknown to the individual, which are constituted of emotional experiences, could be transformed into alpha-elements and became known to the individual. Otherwise, if the alpha-function fails to transform emotional experiences, beta-elements will be produced, therefore any sense of those selves will not be available to be clearly noticed by the individual.

Moreover, according to Brown (2009), Bion’s alpha-function is in essence a superordinate ego function. It seems that, as a personality structure, alpha-function is flexible. In other words, alpha-function is not fixed; rather, it can be developed. As the figure shows below, I assume that digesting emotional experiences might be in a recycle process that alpha-function transforms emotional experiences to alpha-elements and beta-elements, both of which could be digested or re-digested as a new form of emotional experiences again and again, in which process alpha-function itself is evolving, by doing so selves are kept being constructed and transformed. Overall, transforming an emotional experience into alpha-elements is the central part of alpha-function, because “failure to use the emotional experience produces a comparable disaster in the development of the personality” (Bion, 1962, p.42).

Alpha-Function/personality-function

Alpha-elements/Beta-elements

(New) Emotional Experiences

In addition, Bion (1962) suggests that in early relationships, if the infant is not able to digest his or her own emotional experiences, he or she can transfer their feelings to the mother’s alpha-function one may borrow another person’s alpha-function to digest his or her own emotional experiences. In doing so, therefore, the mother’s alpha-function works as a container for the infant’s emotional experiences that cannot be digested by the infant. The mother might be able to use child’s alpha-function to digest her emotional experiences as well. In light of this, I assume that alpha-function is relational. As Bion (1962, p.42) suggests, “an emotional experience cannot be conceived of in isolation from a relationship”.

More specifically, Bion (1962, p.43) postulated three basic emotional relationships of “love, hate, and know”. Taking ‘x knows y’ as a particular example, Bion (1962, p.47) suggests, “the statement x K y, in so far as it means that x has a piece of knowledge called y, falls in the category of a relationship between the person making the statement and the person to whom it is made and a relationship with x and y about whom it is made”. Thus, ‘knowing someone or something’ indicates a psychoanalytic relationship between the subject and the object. In addition, “K represents an emotional experience, an active link and has about it a suggestion that of x K y then x does something to y” (Bion, 1962, p.47).

Adopting these points in my research, I assume that a statement of ‘I know myself’ refers to not only a relationship between ‘I’ as a subject and ‘myself’ as an object, but also an emotional experience. As Bion (1962, p.50) suggests, “a sense of confidence” of being able to “consciously of emotional experiences and to abstract from it a statement that will represent this experience adequately”. In light of, getting to know selves refers to creating a relationship with selves and the outside world with which selves encounter through digesting one’s emotional experiences. For example, one who identifies him or herself as ‘British’ might interpret that, there is a firm link between the person and what he or she knows about being British rather than that the British culture possesses him or her; the identification is based on his or her emotional experiences about being British. The process of abstracting the statement requires alpha-function to digest one’s emotional experiences.

Overall, Bion’s assumption of alpha-function and interpretation of ‘x knows y’ inspires me with two thoughts. Self-construction/transformation might be interpreted as two processes. Firstly, it is a process of relationally digesting and re-digesting one’ emotional experiences. According to Bion’s (1962) assumptions, emotional experiences could be transformed into alpha-elements through successful alpha-function or beta-elements by failed alpha-function. I assume that both alpha-elements and beta-elements that output from alpha-function could input into alpha-function again in order to re-digest emotional experiences. Secondly, it is a process of constructing and transforming a relationship between one as a subject and one’s self as an object. In other words, it indicates a process of ‘objectification’ which seems to me is compatible with object relations theory.

Bion’s assumptions might not be explicitly prominent in the data analysis, however, they do support my overall approach to self-construction/transformation, and allow me to look at the data from a dynamic and multi-faceted perspective. In this research, I am therefore going to look at how children digest their relational emotional experiences and cope with relationships with their self-positions. In particular, emerged from my research data two main approaches via which the children in my research tried to digest their emotional experiences have shown, that are approaches of defence mechanisms and narrative means, each of which will be discussed in two separate sections below.

**4.3.3 Constructing/transforming Selves through Defence Mechanisms**

Defensive mechanisms are one of the key concepts in psychoanalytic study. In classical psychoanalysis, the effect of the defence mechanism is to unconsciously protect the individual from suffering excessive anxiety (Carmer, 1998), which may be provoked by the threat of unconscious conflicts from both external and inner worlds (Frosh, 2012), via keeping unacceptable thoughts, impulses and wishes out of the individual’s consciousness (Carmer, 1998). Defence mechanisms enable the individual to reduce conflicts and tension and makes adaptation possible (Bateman & Holmes, 1995). In other words, the defence mechanism is the ego’s way of protecting itself (Frosh, 2012) which makes human beings’ lives bearable. The focus of defence mechanism theory has shifted, however, from the idea of keeping a sense of internal safety towards being a set of relational patterns in relationships with significant others (Cooper, 1998). That is, the interest in defence mechanisms has turned towards the interpersonal implications of this phenomenon. Therefore, I assume that defence mechanisms are used to maintain one’s relationship with other people, in doing so one’s selves are constructed in an unknown way to oneself.

According to Frosh (2012), some common defences could be listed as regression, denial, projection, displacement, sublimation, and identification with the aggressor. They are common phenomena in our daily life. In particular, from the perspective of Kleinian psychoanalysis, two of the most important defence mechanisms are ‘splitting’ and ‘projective identification’. ‘Splitting’ refers to the separation of an object into its positive and negative aspects (Frosh, 2012). A child might, for example, split his or her mother into two opposite aspects: the ‘good’ mother that he or she loves and the ‘bad’ mother he or she hates. In doing so, the child’s inner conflict between loving and hating the same mother can be relieved (Bateman & Holmes, 1995). For example, in the section of data interpretation later on, I will explain the way in which Jerry split his parents into ‘good’ and ‘bad’, by doing so his relationship with his parents and his own self-positions have been transformed.

As its sub-defence, projective identification refers to an unconscious phantasy of projection in which a child splits off the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ parts of the self and projects them onto others, especially the mother figure (Bateman & Holmes, 1995). In terms of ‘projection’, according to Bateman and Holmes (1995), an example might be that one may blame other people who are close to him or her for one’s own shortcomings. In other words, from the perspective of intra-psychological functioning, projection is an externalisation of one’s (negative) feelings about others in order to, for example, reduce one’s own responsibility and protect oneself from self-blaming.

The functions of projective identification can be thought of as both ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ (Frosh, 2012). On the one hand, Klein sees it as a negative function, which may even give rise to paranoid schizophrenia and/or personality disorders, whereas on the other hand, Bion sees it in a more positive light, positing that the receiver (the mother) could be a container for projected painful feelings, which are thus returned in a digested form to the projector (the infant) (Bateman & Holmes, 1995). In other words, a positive function of projective identification could be seen as the interactive process between the projector and the receiver, indicating the interpersonal function of projective identification. For example, in my research, Sara and her mother, seems to me, projected their own emotions to each other. Positively, they could be the receiver for each other. Negatively, they both experienced anxiety more than their own through projective identification. This example will be discussed in detail later on in this chapter.

In addition, according to Cooper (1998), the therapist might become angry themselves when a patient attributes his or her own anger to the therapist. This idea which indicates the interpersonal interaction of affection could be adopted in order to do my research reflection and reflexivity. For example, in the second interview with Sara, I felt that Sara was impatient to have conversation with me. Reflectively, it may because Sara was really impatient. It may also because I projected my worry on her because I was worried that she might be distracted by Benny and her brother who were playing outside the room. Overall, defence mechanism is a psychological approach through which not only the children’s self-constructions/transformations can be interpreted in an intra-psychological and relational context; but also I as a researcher can reflect on my own emotional experiences in the research.

**4.3.4 Constructing/Transforming Selves through Narrative Means**

‘Narrative’ and ‘narrative inquiry’ were introduced as a methodological approach earlier in chapter 2. For example, narrative is defined similarly to the word ‘story’ and focuses on people’s oral narratives of events or experiences in past, present, future, or in the imaginary world (Wells, 2011). Hollway and Jefferson (2008) also suggest to connects psychoanalytic thoughts such as free association with narrative interviews.

However, in this section, idea of ‘narrative’ that is mainly adopted from White and Epston (1990) will be approached differently from but compatible with the ideas in chapter 2, in order to theoretically explain the way in which human beings construct/transform and re-construct/transform selves. Considering the assumption that emotional experiences can be re-digested I advocated which is based on Bion’s (1962) theory in section 4.3.2, the next concern is the ways in which emotional experiences can be re-digested. Narrative means is considered to be a possible way to achieve this. Through narrating, people are able to establish and re-establish the relationship between their inner reality and the external world. In doing so, selves are constructed and transformed in a never-fixed process.

According to White and Epston (1990), people know things about life through their lived experiences which are storied to make sense of their lives and express themselves. The way in which people interact with others and organise their lives is determined by the way in which people narrate their lives, through which the evolution of lives and relationships also occur (White & Epston, 1990, p.12). I assume that narrative is a way for people to make sense of both the inner and the external reality, as well as a way for people to construct and re-construct selves. Narratives express people’s subjective opinions and experiences of the outside world which cannot be objective or value-free. Narrative is situated in texts and can be told and re-told by the individual. In my opinion, considering Winnicott’s theory, narrative might be seen as an extension of transitional space. To some extent, the outside world is transformed or re-imagined in one’s transitional space through narrative means.

An individual’s process of narrating or ‘storying’ their experiences is not always successfully achieved. As White and Epston (1990) assume, people may experience problems when their narrative cannot sufficiently represent their lived experiences. There is a meeting point with Bion’s (1962) assumption that when the alpha-function fails, the alpha-elements, such as the narrative used to present the situation or emotions, will not be produced successfully, thus people are not able to digest their experiences. With Winnicott’s (1971) theory that if transitional objects cannot be successfully used by the person, their inner reality and the outside world will not make sufficient contact, thus the process of self-construction will be disturbed. In light of this, White and Epston (1990)’s idea of storying and re-storying lives and experiences seems appropriate to be adopted in order to interpret my data.

The main approach to storying and re-storying experiences, as introduced by White and Epston, is called “externalizing”, a term of which refers to, in a simple way, “encouraging one to objectify and personify the problem they have, and give the problem an external and alternative definition rather than see the problem as part of oneself” (White & Epston,1990, p. 38-53). This approach might enable people to divide the problems they are facing from their self-identities. For example, clinically, a patient is encouraged to describe their experience of depression as ‘I have depression’ rather than ‘I am depressed’ in order to externalize the problem/experience and possibly relieve anxious feelings. In this process, depression is treated as an outside object rather than a subject’s symptom, therefore a relationship is built between the subject and the object through the narrative. As a consequence, the self is re-constructed from the position of ‘the problem is within me’ to ‘it is an external problem that is with me at the moment’.

In my opinion, externalising problems outside of the self provides people with a way to re-use transitional objects in narrative and re-build the relationship between ‘me’ and ‘myself’. In other words, the person becomes both the observer and the object, which is placed under observation and storied as they are encouraged to perform new meanings of the problem, to understand the requirements of the problem, and to revise their relationship with the problem (White & Epston, 1990). According to White and Epston (1990), narrative therapy helps people realise their authority over their own problems; narrative helps people to re-digest and take control of their own experiences and problems. In my research, for example, interviewing might be seen as a narrative means through which the participants are encouraged to freely recall and talk about both positive and negative lived experiences. This might be a process for both the children and adults to rethink and redefine their lived experiences and to re-construct their ideas of ‘self’.

In light of White and Epston’s ideas, I believe it might be appropriate to see narrative means as a vehicle for transformation. As Behr (2005) suggests, transformation is a function of narrative. Through the process of narration, the facts do not remain unchanged, but are transformed by the narrative. In other words, the narratives of ‘what happened’ and ‘what will happen’ enable the facts to remain both same and different. In my research, children’s narratives allow for a relational-transitional-space to be built between significant others and themselves. In doing so, they are transforming their self-positions. At the cultural level, in this thesis, narratives from the theoretical and methodological framework, from the data, and from my interpretation of the data allow links to be made between Chinese civilisation and British culture. These narratives also attempt to provide a new angle from which to look at globalisation and human beings, since almost everyone these days lives in a globalised context. This is also an important reason why I chose narrative as the methodology. As Behr (2005, p.128) describes, “we meet the stranger face to face and find that he is us, transformed by narrative”. I hoped that narrative in this thesis would guide the two cultures to face each other and find that, in effect, we are different but the same.

In summary, in light of object relations theory and other relevant thoughts, I assume that firstly, the selves are constructed/transformed not only in one’s transitional space, but also in the shared relational-transitional-space between ours and significant others’ transitional spaces via the use of transitional objects and transitional phenomena. Secondly, the process of self-construction/transformation is rooted in digesting and re-digesting one’s relational emotional experiences. The important possible ways in which one is able to digest and re-digest emotional experiences that would be mainly applied in this thesis are defence mechanisms and narrative means. Narrative means also enable us to transform the meaning of life and allow different cultures to integrate with one another. In next a few sections, I will apply those thoughts in order to interpret Jerry and Sara’s stories.

**4.4 Jerry’s Stories**

In this section, I will illustrate two stories about Jerry with the application of the theoretical framework of object relations theory. The first story will look at Jerry’s narratives of gun-play, dream/fantasy of shooting people narrative, and relationship with his dad; and explore the way in which Jerry digested emotional experiences about his father and constructed selves via application of TO and TP which were created by his fantasy of gun-play. The second story will look at his relationship with Emily, and the way in which he constructed selves in a relational-transitional-space with Emily. Relational-transitional-space is a term I developed based on Winnicott’s thought of transitional space and a social constructionist perspective about relationship, which is located between one’s transitional space and the significant other’s transitional space.

**4.4.1 “I like guns, I can shoot people die” and “I want my dad get out of the house”: Selves Constructed/Transformed in a Transitional Space within Play, Dream, Fantasy and Relationship with his Father**

The interpretation starts from Jerry’s story about his gun-play and dream of shooting people, to the story about his relationship with his father, as he freely associated those two in his narrative.

Jerry is obsessed with model toys, especially toy guns. He said:

*I like guns [because] I can shoot people, people die. I feel excited about it. Once I even dreamt about being in an army. There are lots of guns in the army. I get to shoot people but…I have permission to shoot people, so why not. I get to shoot people in the other country which is an enemy to our army. In the dream, I was burning the soldiers in the other country, and was saying, hey come here you, I will burn you to death. I would like to protect both Chinese and British army [but/although] it’s hard for a man. However, if British army fights with Chinese army, I would be on the side of Chinese army, because my dad lives there.*

According to my notes, Jerry’s narrative of *“I can shoot people, people die”* while showing me a Lego gun-toy model he made was the first significant moment for me. Each time when I was listening to the interview recording, I could feel his strong and excited feeling at that moment, because his tone had risen. As he said himself “*I feel excited about it”.*

Surprised by what he said, I asked him *“why he wants to shoot people die”*. He did not answer my question directly, but started to talk about one dream he had once. As he described, he was *“in an army”* where he had *“lots of guns”* and he *“get to shoot people, but”*. After he paused for about five seconds, he added *“I have permission to shoot people, so why not”.* Those five seconds of silence were the second significant moment to me in that interview. It seemed to me that in those five seconds, there was something going on in his mind. He may have realised, for example, that it might be improper to talk about shooting people in front of his teacher, or he may have been surprised by what he said himself, so he was trying to make sense of it for himself and to me. I assume that moment in silence gave Jerry time and space to reflect on or even rationalise his narrative of *“shooting people”.*

What interests me here is that he emphasised that he *“got permission to shoot”.* In my opinion, “permission” is a socially-constructed concept that implies a social relationship such as between the person and authority. Jerry’s inner scene of gun-play or shooting fantasy/dream is not isolated from the outside world; rather, it creates a transitional space into which his understanding of real and objective social relationships was brought as well. Adopting outside rules, of which Jerry himself may be not realised, allowed his fantasy and emotional feelings to be more real. In other words, social values and relationships contribute to this transitional space, to which Jerry’s inner desires also contributed. In doing so, I would interpret, according to his narrative, that he constructed two self-positions in this transitional space, one is a person who has the power to shoot, while the other is a person who has permission to shoot. Both of them are relational self-positions.

Afterwards, Jerry freely associated the narrative about gun-play and dream with his dad. In particular, he identified himself with his father that may indicates his own cultural self-position to some degree. He said he will shoot people *“in the other country which is an enemy to our army”,* and would protect *“both”* the Chinese and British army. However, he would be on the side of *“Chinese army”* if *“British army fights with Chinese army”* because *“my dad lives there”.* This was another significant moment to me, in which he freely associated his imaginary narrative to his real relationship with his dad. As I mentioned above, it may not be appropriate to categorise Jerry’s cultural self-positions into ‘British’ and ‘Chinese’ as a result of this extract because it may be misleading. After he said *“our country”,* I asked him *“what do you mean by ‘our’; British or Chinese?”.* Reflecting on this, I think my question might have limited his answer. It is possible that his ‘our’ includes Malaysia as well, since his mother Emily is from Malaysia.

In addition, it is clear that he positions himself as being a ‘man’ (He said *“it’s hard for a man”*) and his fantasy of being the protector of his dad shows his identification with his dad. Therefore, I would focus on Jerry’s self-construction in his relationship with his dad. Emily said: *“My husband told my son that ‘you are a man, you need to bear with pressure. for example, don’t clean your clothes even if it's dirty, that’s a girlish thing. We are man’*. *My husband changed him. Once I told Jerry his treasure is dirty, he needs to clean it. He said no because his dad said man is just like this. He changed”.* This is a good example of the influence Jerry’s dad had on him. Jerry constructed a concept of ‘being a man’ via interacting with his dad; for example, a man *“does not clean dirty clothes”,* a man *“should be able to bear pressure”,* and a man *“should protect his family and country”.*

In Jerry’s particular transitional space within his fantasy and dream of shooting people and protecting his dad and country, ‘gun’ is a key object. According to Mechling (2008, p.197), “guns represent power in the male initiation, which itself is based on biological and developmental imperatives”. I assume that “gun” may stand for an internal object of power. For example, Jerry may see himself as “who is powerful enough to shoot other people and protect people he wants to protect”. In particular, *“I got permission to shoot”* shows that he realised that his power is given by some kind of authority and allowed by society’s moral values. The most important point seems to me is that Jerry constructed a self-position of “who is willing to and able to protect his dad”, which can be interpreted not only as he identified himself with his dad, for example, ‘being a man’ reflects the embedding of a sense of masculinity via interaction with his father; but also as “he is more powerful than his dad in his fantasy”.

With the consideration of more information about Jerry’s description about his feelings about his dad, however, along with another example Emily provided below, and considering Bion’s assumption of digesting emotional experiences and psychoanalytic thoughts of defence mechanism, a psychoanalytic reading might assume that the fantasy of ‘protecting dad’ was a defence mechanism that Jerry used to defend or digest negative emotions he had experienced in the relationship with his dad. For example, his dad might have made him feel a lack of power or control over his own life in reality, to which his fantasy of being powerful enough to protect his dad could be seen as a defence, in order to digest negative emotions caused by the conflict between what Jerry wanted and what he got in reality. Gun-play and “shooting people” might be functions as a kind of self-healing for Jerry.

In addition, the same story about a girl but in different forms, as told by Emily and Jerry respectively, might reflect Jerry’s relationship with his dad as well. Emily’s narrative provides a form of story in her eyes:

*There was a room in my house rented to a student who came from Beijing. That girl taught him [Jerry] how to write Chinese, he liked it. Maybe it’s destiny that tied them together. That girl told him, you speak English with me, I speak Chinese with me, so we can learn from each other. He loved talking with that girl so he worked harder on learning Chinese because if he didn’t learn, he has nothing to talk. He liked to go to her room. It’s a good motivation drive him study Chinese harder*.

Emily was pleased that the girl played a positive role in Jerry’s life, especially in helping him learn Mandarin. He was motivated by the girl to work harder at learning Chinese because he wanted to communicate more with the girl. Jerry also confirmed that he and the girl had a close friendship. He said: “*There was a girl who is from Beijing and lived in my house before. I liked her very much”.* Jerry’s dad, however, seemed bothered Jerry’s friendship with the girl in Jerry’s narrative. Jerry said:

*But my father didn’t want me to play with her. He always bothers who I play with for no reason. He even told her to leave but I don’t know why. There was no reason about it, because she didn’t even bother him. She worked hard but my dad didn’t seem to even understand. I feel very sad about it and wanted my dad to get out of the house because I don’t like him anymore. But he did make money for me so that wasn’t a reason to ask him [to] get out.*

From this narrative, I have two pieces of interpretations. Firstly, Jerry felt that his friendship was always under threat from his dad, which is where his conflict with his dad comes from. Secondly, it was hard for Jerry to digest the negative emotions, for example, *“he felt very sad”,* caused by the conflict with his dad, for example, *“there was no reason”* for his dad to tell the girl to leave.

On the one hand, Jerry wanted his dad to get out of the house because he was angry at what his dad did to him. On the other hand, Jerry knew he couldn’t ask his dad to go out because *“he did make money for me so that wasn’t a reason to ask him get out”.* Socially, Jerry realised that his life relies on his dad. A psychoanalytic reading might suggest, however, he assumed that his life was under threat from his dad because his dad was more powerful than him in the reality. Responding to the self-position of ‘Jerry who has power and is willing to protect dad’, two contradictory assumptions came up through the perspective of psychoanalytic ideas. On the one hand, Jerry saw himself as a powerless person who could not even protect his friendship in reality. “Protecting dad in his imaginary world” was therefore a fulfilment of his unconscious desire to be more powerful than his dad. It might thus be seen as a remedy. On the other hand, “protecting dad in his imaginary world” might be a defence caused by his guilt at thinking that he wanted to get rid of his dad.

Jerry’s interpretation about why his dad wanted him to leave the girl alone slightly changed later on. After some other conversations, I turned the topic to the story of the girl again. Jerry said, *“Once I went into her room, but my dad told me to go to the kitchen but I didn’t. But I just like, lock the door, so my dad didn’t open the door, so I just like, play with her”.* My follow-up question was asking him whether she bothered him or he bothered her in his dad’s opinion. After thinking for a while, he said *“she didn’t bother me, well, sometimes I bothered her cause when she does her homework I found it to be really boring about it”.* This was a very interesting and important re-narrative moment in that it was the only time that Jerry admitted that he was at fault rather than his dad. I assume that in the process of storytelling and re-storytelling, Jerry re-constructed his narrative. As a consequence, his understandings and narratives of his relationship with his dad might have been, slightly reconstructed at that moment as well. The reconstruction of the narrative did not change his feeling about his dad in a whole, however. He said:

*I didn’t like to spend time with my dad because, he always jumps on me in the mornings in order to wake me up. It makes me…panic. I had to find ways out…to save my life. I also got bum slap by him sometimes, and once he even carried me to the bin without my trousers and socks on.*

When I asked him to make sense of why his dad did this to him, he said *“he thinks I am like very naughty, but at school, very good at writing, well, when I think, my math skill was very bad, it turns out to be good. So what was the reason [for] that?”*. He added: *“at home I get to rest, but he thought I rested for a long time, didn’t do, well, I did do homework, but he thought I didn’t because he didn’t see me do it”.*

In addition to Jerry’s narrative, Emily’s narrative about the relationship between her son and her husband might enrich the story. She said: *“In fact, my husband spends lots of time at home with Jerry even though he thinks Jerry is annoying sometimes. It may because Jerry always has a lot of questions for his dad, like, why are you coming back so early, why don’t you have meal with us”.* It seems to me that Jerry’s questions reflect his desire to spend time with his dad. Emily also said, however: *“when we are having meal together, Jerry always ask his father don’t finish food he likes. His father likes make joke of him. Jerry doesn’t like the movies his dad likes”.* Jerry likes show his drawing to his dad but *“if his dad ignores him, he gets mad. So his dad would say ‘your drawing is promising’”.* It seems to me that this could be a negative side of Jerry’s relationship with his dad. Jerry did not want his dad to discount the things he likes. They do not really share same hobbies. Jerry wanted to impress his dad and receive positive feedback from him, but his dad seemed to be perfunctory when doing this.

In this story, in his relationship with his dad, Jerry may constructed three self-positions, the first one is ‘Jerry who is under the threat of his dad’, the second one is ‘Jerry who relies on his dad’, and the third one is ‘Jerry who is always misunderstood by his dad’. In other words, Jerry placed himself in a helpless position under the authority of his father. He tried to revolt, for example, by locking himself in the girl’s room or expressing his desire to get rid of his father, but failed. According to Hollway and Jefferson (2008), threat to one’s self creates anxiety at an unconscious level. It seems that Jerry’s dad was the cause of his negative emotions. Through the perspective of social development, it might be a necessary progression for Jerry to realise that ‘dad’ is the outside ‘subject’ who might have a different understanding of the same issue than him, rather than an outside ‘object’ that he can control, or an inner ‘object’ who understands him fully.

From a clinical practice viewpoint, Arthern and Madill (2002) suggest that transitional objects embody relationships through their physicality, so that the client can be aware of a touchable and visible relationship even when the therapist is absent. It seems to me that the toy guns could be seen as a TO, and Jerry’s fantasies about shooting people and protecting his dad could be seen as experiencing TP through TO in his transitional space, even though his dad is absent in the physical world. According to Hollway and Jefferson (2005, p.147), in addition, human beings are “divided psychosocial subjects of unconscious conflict, which is located in social realities mediated not only by social discourses but by psychic defences”. I assume that Jerry’s self-positions or identities were constructed in a transitional space, to which both his social relationships and psychological relationships had contributed. Optimistically, the relationship with his dad contained his anxiety so that he could deal with it consciously, for example, expressing his dissatisfaction with his dad openly. It might also give him an opportunity to realise the inter-subjectivity between the two and help with his social development from a psychosocial perspective. What worried me, however, is that Jerry’s traumatic experiences in his relationship with his dad, who could be seen as an authority figure, might influence his future relationships with other people.

Moreover, it seems that his external world and internal world were in a conflict with each other. Each of these two worlds had their own ambivalence and paradoxes. In the external world, I would interpret that Jerry was in a stage of experiencing both identification with and detachment from his father. He identified himself as a “man” with his father, but rebelled against his father at the same time. In the inner world, he felt excited about getting rid of his father in his fantasy but also showed reliance on him and a little bit of guilt, since his father provides him with food, so *“there was no reason to”*. To deal with or digest the conflict between both inner world and external world, TO and TP which were created by gun-play were employed as a medium, through which Jerry could defend against anxiety. In this process, I assume Jerry constructed multiple contradictory self-positions at levels of both known and unknown to himself. On the one hand, he identified himself as a ‘man’ and a protector of his father. On the other hand, however, he may put himself in the position of ‘victim’ who was threatened by his father which has not been realised by himself, in which position, he desired power. The only way through which to access this power and release his anxiety was through his fantasy.

In summary, according to his narratives, I assume Jerry constructed various contradictory self-positions in his fantasy and within the father-son relationship. It is not necessary, however, to see the conflicts between his inner and external world and the ambivalence between his multiple self-positions as a problem in his development, because in this case it seems to me that his use of TO/TP helped him deal with his emotional conflicts successfully. In terms of further implications of exploring Jerry’s or any other second generation Chinese immigrant children’s self-constructions, cultural factors need to be taken into consideration. Inner conflict might be the reflection of cultural conflicts between British culture and Chinese culture, for example. Furthermore, culture also can be seen as a transitional area (Winnicott, 1971) in which people are constantly constructing the self in their relationships between themselves and their social cultures.

**4.4.2 “My son loves me more than love his dad” vs. “my mom was a liar”: Selves Constructed/Transformed in a Relational but Paradoxical Transitional Space within Mother-Son Relationship**

This section is going to compare Emily’s and Jerry’s narratives about their mother-son relationship. I, as Jerry’s Chinese language teacher who saw him almost every Saturday, felt that Jerry spent more time with Emily than with his father. It was always Emily who dropped Jerry off and picked him up from the Chinese language school, for example. Emily also said in the interview that her husband is very busy at work. Furthermore, I found that Emily even played a role in helping Jerry to get on well with his father.

Emily told me:

*Jerry’s father likes to make joke of him but Jerry doesn’t like it. But it’s not a big deal in fact, because we are a family. Jerry doesn’t like the movies his dad likes so he always stays with me, reading, playing games or drawing. Once, Jerry told me that “in our family, I like mom more because mom cooks for me and helps me with many things”. I asked him “don’t you love your dad? He buys good stuff for you”. He said: “I do, but not as much as I love you”. I can’t do anything about it but told him that “your dad loves you, be good to your dad. Your dad is going to take care of you if I’m ill”. He responded that “I will try my best to build a good relationship (with my dad)”. Jerry also complained to me that “dad never give in to me, never does what I want”. I told Jerry, “it is not that dad doesn’t want to suit you but that he wants to see your behaviour”. Sometimes my husband intends to do something bad to him in order to see my son’s reaction.*

This episode of narrative sent me three messages. Firstly, Emily thought Jerry loves her more because he told her so. Secondly, she played the role of peacemaker between Jerry and his dad. Thirdly, Jerry seemed not very close to his dad, but trying to build good relationship with him because of Emily. Emily thought Jerry loves her more is because *“she helps him with many things”* but *“dad never does what he wants”*. In other words, Emily might be a ‘good mum’ to Jerry but dad is a ‘bad dad’. In my opinion, defining ‘bad dad’ might be a necessary stage for Jerry to develop socially. Through digesting the experience of *“dad never does what I want”,* Jerry might learn to build relationships with other people rather than try to occupy or control them.

Emily’s role seems like a ‘container’ for Jerry’s anxiety, concerning his relationship with his father. She was trying both to mitigate Jerry’s negative emotions and relieve the tension between Jerry and his father. In order to make sense of Jerry’s dad’s behaviour to Jerry (and me as well), she gave it a reasonable explanation that it is a special way that her husband uses to interact with and educate Jerry. In order to build a good emotional relationship between Jerry and his father, she was trying to convince Jerry that his dad is good because he buys Jerry a lot of things. This might be an external dialogical factor, however, because Jerry split his dad into two roles; one was the person who makes money for him, and another one was seen as a threat to him.

Emily seems to play a successful role as a container for Jerry’s emotions, however, this container is not always ‘good enough’ (Winnicott, 1971). The example of their trip to Taiwan might be a good one to see how differently Jerry and Emily feel about the same issue. In doing so, it might also be appropriate to see different interpretations of the mother-son relationship between Emily and Jerry.

Emily’s narrative about the Taiwan trip is:

*Jerry thought that trip was very good in general. The trip was not for fun. My purpose was to go to there to worship Buddha. All the members in our group were adults, the only child was him. He had to wait for me when we having activity so he felt like being deceived by me. So I said “I told you to stay at home, but you wanted to come with me. Just wait for me. We are going to eat something good after the activity”. He thought that Taiwan is crowded. But in the temple there was an uncle who is very nice and gave children a lot of toys. Since then, Jerry waited for that uncle every time when we were going there. He likes that uncle. And also there were some aunties liked chat with him. I felt it was strange so I asked him whether he can understand Mandarin well or not. He said yes. He was happy talking to those aunties. I asked those aunties whether they can understand him or not, because I was worried that his Mandarin is not good enough. They said it’s ok. So I just left him with them. He has learnt a lot. He was happy even though we didn’t go to any interesting places in Taiwan. The only thing he was not happy about was the food there. He didn’t like Chinese food that much.*

The experience in the temple was described as a *“disaster”* by Jerry, however:

*Before going to Taiwan, I have to take an anti-mosquito injection. It was painful. Most of the parts [of that trip] I was like very nervous, because I was on the coach and had to wait about one or two hours until we got to a destination where the Buddha was. I had to go with her [to worship Buddha]. One thing made me happy was that there was a master there, that day was his birthday, we got cake, yeah! Also, I enjoyed the apartment we lived in. I kind of enjoy like all of the parts [of that trip], but one part was [a] disaster. I felt very disappointed that my mum said the master would but he didn’t touch my head for wishing me good luck. He didn’t touch other children either, but I still felt disappointed. I don’t know how to explain this [feeling].*

Comparing Emily’s narrative with Jerry’s narrative about the same trip, I found that Taiwan trip might create TP, with both same and different meanings to Emily and Jerry, by which they had different and even contradictory emotional experiences. In particular, according to Emily and Jerry’s narratives, even though it was not her intention to take Jerry travelling, Jerry still asked to go to Taiwan with her. Jerry was so eager for a fun trip he expected that *“he was willing to take a painful anti-mosquito injection”.* This may show a strong attachment Jerry constructed with Emily. The reality of the trip was, however, that *“he had to wait on coach for couple of hours which made him very nervous”.* To Emily, the experience of the Taiwan trip could be seen as positive by which she had a chance to know more about Jerry; for example, she was worried that Jerry’s Mandarin may not being good enough to communicate, but it seemed good enough when it came to it; for another example, she thought Jerry was happy about the trip in general especially enjoyed his time in the temple because there was an uncle who gave them toys. In other words, in Emily’s eyes, Jerry’s emotional experience about Taiwan trip was ‘happy’ for most of the time.

What I have noticed the most from Jerry’s narrative about his emotional experiences, however, is *“very nervous on the coach” “disaster”* and *“very disappointed”.* The ‘disaster’ he described was an issue that he did not have his head touched by the master as he expected because Emily told him that the master would. This “disaster” made him feel “very disappointed”. He seems did not know why he was disappointed (*“I don’t know how to explain it”*), however*,* which seems to me that the negative experience had not yet been fully digested. Emily did not mention this issue in her narrative. It might because either she did not know about it or she thought it was not important, so it is possible that Jerry had to digest this experience by himself without any container. On the surface, it seems that Jerry’s negative experience was caused by the gap between his expectation and reality. However, it might reflect his feelings about his relationship with Emily. For example, it seems to me that the reason why he felt “disappointed” is not because of the master but Emily; he might, for example, have felt that his trust in his mum had been betrayed. Emily was always his container, but this time, she became the cause of his anxiety. Consequently, Jerry’s self in this particular story might be deduced as occupying two positions; one attached closely to Emily, but another one that had been hurt by the relationship.

In addition to the story of the Taiwan trip, Jerry’s narrative about his daily life shows his contradictory perception of his relationship with Emily as well. On the one hand, Jerry had a strong attachment with Emily. For example, he thought Emily knows him well because he remembers *“my mum told the visitor I love pork”,* and *“I am good at drawing and my mum thought [my drawing] was amazing”.* He even identified himself with Emily’s comments about him such as *“bread man”*:

*At home, I usually stay in my mum’s bedroom. Sometimes my mum cooks, some meals she cooks by herself, what I really do love she cooks is pork, juicy pork. When that visitor came [to] supper, my mum told him that I love the kind of pork at the end of the dinner. I am good at drawing, I’ll show you the picture, because my mum thought it was amazing. It makes me feel I am an English because my mum says I am like a…I eat bread a lot, my mum calls me bread man.*

On the other hand, his narrative showed his realisation of the differences between him and his mom in a cultural level, to some degree, such as language and food. He even called his mother as a *‘liar’* by an example that Emily told him a Chinese restaurant has a dish he likes but there was not. He said:

*Sometimes I speak English to my parents even though my mum with a, is in a Chinese religion. Sometimes she goes on the iPad [to] watch her TV and I think it’s boring but she thinks it’s interesting. I don’t like movies. I like Chinese food. Spring roll is my favourite. Plus, sweet and sour, like, I'm not sure if it’s Chinese or not, sweet and sour? Yesterday my mum was a liar, she said it was like, English people like it as well, so when she said at Hong Kong Wok (a restaurant), there wasn’t a sweet and sour chicken, she was a liar. She doesn't like [to] speak English which I am very good at.*

Jerry’s understanding of his relationship with Emily not only came from his own mind, but was created in a relational transitional space in which the interactions between him and Emily cannot be seen as totally transparent to each other. It seems to me that the transitional space Jerry created for digesting the emotional experiences from his relationship with Emily could be seen as, in Kleinian words, a paranoid engagement, based on both his fear of losing his mother and need to separate himself from his mother. On the one hand, Emily is a source of happiness and comfort by providing him the food he likes and being the container of his anxiety. On the other hand, Emily is a source of his anxiety as well, for example, ‘betraying’ his trust and being a kind of obstacle on his way to maturity even though she is not doing so on purpose.

In addition, Emily saw herself as a protector or container of Jerry’s emotions, as shown by how she dealt with Jerry’s emotional experience with his teacher. She said:

*Once Jerry told me that his teacher in English school scolded him. I asked him “did you cry? Were you frightened?”. He said “no because I remember you said that teacher scolded me is because…is it my problem? Is it because she wants to teach me something?”. I said “yes, you need to think why [the] teacher scolded you. Maybe because you did something wrong. You think she blamed you, maybe she did not. She did that because she loves you. She was wondering why you could do something good before but not now. You can’t blame her”. I always tell him this only. Sometimes he told me that he is not happy after school. I told him that you should tell me what happened, nobody is going to save you if you don’t ask for help.*

It is clear that Emily embedded an idea into Jerry’s mind that she is a loyal emotional container for him. In order to do this, Emily tried her best to give a reasonable explanation for her behaviour so that Jerry would understand why she did something he might not be happy with, for example, Emily said:

*Sometimes he asks me what is the TV program that I watch…because it is in Mandarin. I just tell him that “you are annoying. You should learn Mandarin yourself. I can’t tell you all of it. Can you tell me all the things in English?”. So he thinks it’s right, it is annoying. So he has to learn it himself.*

She also encouraged Jerry to do things he likes such as drawing:

*I watch him drawing sometimes, he likes draw his own stuff, but it looks messy. He wants me praise him, so I always say “very good”. He wants me to ask what does he draw, he feels comfortable and happy if someone likes his stuff. He likes drawing but he doesn’t like to draw some specific things. He always draws something, like lines, going up and going down. I asked him what it is. He said it is an airplane. His dad and I were like “huh? Airplane? I don’t understand”. Once, I remember, his teacher forced him to draw Cinderella when he was in Grade 2. He was mad. But Sara was happy because girls like it. But those boys said “we don’t like Cinderella”. He likes to draw fruits, but not families. I remember once, his teacher gave them homework to write [about] where they [went] for holiday. We went to a beach that time. He drew something like [a] tortoise. I asked him “what it is, a tortoise?” He said “no! it’s you Mom!”. I was like, “oh, it’s so ugly”. You know, boys are like that, don’t like drawing. Girls are much better”.*

A relational-transitional space is built on mutual knowing and trust, because ‘knowing’ and ‘trust’ indicates a close relationship. However, this relational-transitional space not only involves people who are in the current relationship, but also relates to other relationships each one of them were/are in. For example, Emily’s behaviour in the relationship with Jerry was affected by her relationship with her mother. She said, *“Because my mom didn’t go to school, she didn’t help me with my life. So I have to learn things by myself, change myself. Then I see my son, I want to help him, let him be more comfortable”*. A psychoanalytic reading might assume that she had projected part of herself, who was young and helpless, into the relational-transitional space with Jerry. In other words, Emily conceived what Jerry needed and provided any possible help in advance, but that might actually be what she (in the past) needed. One possible positive effect of this is that Jerry has successfully built a close and trustful relationship with her. It also had negative effects, however, as Emily admitted herself:

*There is something bad about him, don’t be too close to him. If he is too close to you, he will cry when you say no to him. He cannot stand it. That’s why his dad is not that close to him. But I am (close to Jerry), so I can’t say no, I just take care of his life. But his dad is able to give him lessons. If teachers are not close to him, just teach him [they can teach him better]. Once there was a teacher who was very close to him [who] scolded him, he cried and thought that “you didn’t do this to me before, why are you doing this now”. He couldn’t stand it and didn’t know how to react. That is his shortcoming.*

The closeness between Emily and Jerry may hurt the relationship and be an obstacle to one’s self-construction/transformation. Emily said:

*He is quite confident about his maths. He said “my maths is good, nothing to worry about, I can pass the test”. I told him that “you’re over-confident. You may be good in your school, but compared to students in other schools, you are not good enough. You cannot even do the textbooks I bought you. Why? Because the teacher only gives you the test [that] matches your level”. He was unhappy about this. So I told him to ask his cousin. He did and his cousin said “it is like what your mum said. Maths is getting difficult”. So he accepted this.*

One interpretation to why Jerry was unhappy about what Emily told him might be that Emily failed to achieve his expectation. In other words, Emily failed to be a mother as he expected as the one who always accept and support him rather than accuse him of *‘over-confident’*.

In addition to the information from interviews, an incident that happened after the interview might be a further reflection of Jerry’s and Emily’s interactions. I asked Jerry to show me his bedroom after the first interview, so we went upstairs. Here is the record in my notes:

*Jerry showed me one room and told me “this is where I and my mum live”. Emily told me that “in fact he has his own bedroom, but because he needs to read [a] story book before going to bed, so I asked him to sleep in this room with me. He is scared of sleeping alone” but Jerry kept shouting “No! No! No! Mum, you didn’t say! What a liar!”.*

This was the second time I heard Jerry calls Emily *“a liar”*. It seems to me that ‘a liar’ may actually mean ‘you disappointed me’. Apparently Jerry did not want me to know his secret. Considering that he defined himself as a ‘man’, he might not have wanted me to know about his vulnerability (being afraid of sleeping alone). But Emily seemed not to put any value on her son’s objection. In this case, I assume that both Emily and Jerry, wanted and thought they can have/control each other, but in fact, they have to cope with the anxiety caused by the illusion of completely having each other in their relational-transitional space.

Overall, in the story of Jerry’s relationship with Emily, I interpret Emily’s role as a both successful and failed emotional container for Jerry. On the one hand, with the help of Emily, Jerry digested his emotional experience with his dad via splitting his dad into ‘good’ ( for example, *“dad made money for me”*) and ‘bad’ (for example, *“he always bothers who I play with”*). On the other hand, Emily did not help him to digest negative emotions caused by Taiwan trip, and even became the cause of his anxiety, for example, accusing him ‘over-confident on math’.

Adopting Winnicott’s theory of transitional space, I would argue that Jerry and Emily’s interactions took place in a relational-transitional-space which is located between each of their own transitional spaces. In this space, in addition to digesting each other’s emotional experiences and trying to understand each other, people also affect each other based on misunderstandings which might be caused by projective identification. For example, Emily’s image of herself at a younger age might be projected into Jerry, so that taking care of Jerry is like taking care of the little Emily who did not get good care from her own mother. She might, however, have seen Jerry as a ‘subjective object’ rather than an ‘objective object’. In doing so, unknown to himself, Jerry may have to construct himself as a person who needs his mother’s caring even if he may not need it, in order to satisfy Emily’s projected intention.

However, Jerry has his own desires and needs to grow up and construct/transform selves as independent. That is, Jerry needed to separate himself from his mother. Therefore, he split Emily into ‘all good’ and ‘all bad’ as well. On the one hand, Jerry identified himself with Emily when Emily satisfied his expectation or made him happy, for example, he thought he was good at drawing and Emily also thought his drawing was amazing (even though Emily did not really think so in her narrative), and called himself ‘bread man’ as Emily said because he likes bread. On the other hand, Jerry separated himself from Emily, for example, called Emily a liar, when Emily disappointed him.

Optimistically, as Winnicott (1993, p.6) suggests that “a separation that is not a separation but a form of union”, separating or detaching oneself from one’s parents, especially from the mother, might be the only way to rebuild a better relationship with them. In this process, children’s illusion of their parents as omnipotent would be dissolved. It may force them to interact with their parents in a different way and realise that they could not be totally understood, supported and protected by their parents. If TO and TP function well and the negative experience can be digested successfully via alpha-function, the separation would become a union between the children and parents, i.e. a healthier relationship in which both of them accept the necessity of separation. It is not only children’s job to make this unity happen, however. Parents also need to digest their anxieties about their children. Both children and parents may need to accept each other as an ‘objective object’ instead of ‘subjective object’. In doing so, for example, in my research, Jerry became able to emotionally separate himself from Emily to fulfil his own developmental, social, and psychological needs. When the trust in Emily was broken he built trust in himself.

In summary, through immersing myself into Jerry’s story, I saw the characteristics of ambivalence and paradox in his self-constructions within the relationships with two significant people – his father and mother. In the process of coping with relationships with parents and digesting each other’s emotional experiences in their relational-transitional-spaces via, for example, splitting and defending the splitting, a new experience of his parents might be learned, the relationships might be re-examined, and a new sense of selves might be constructed. Psychosocially, it might be a necessary process for children and parents to go through identifying with and separating from each other so that some new unfixed selves would have a chance to be constructed. For example, in this case, Emily may need to think that ‘is she constructing a relationship with Jerry or using Jerry to re-build a relationship with herself?’. In other words, relational-transitional space provides an area for both parents and children to construct new experiences and self-positions.

**4.5 Sara’s Stories**

In Sara’s case, I will mainly focus on her relationship with her mother Alice since his father is almost absent in the conversations. Three stories will be illustrated. One is exploring the way in which ‘drawing’, which is Sara’s favourite activity, created TP for both Sara and Alice, but has different meanings to each of them. The second story will discuss that constructing unwanted negative selves might be a way in which Sara defended her anxiety. The third one looks at Alice’s life experience and how it affected Sara’s self-construction/transformation.

**4.5.1 “I want to be an artist” or “my mum chose me to”: Selves Constructed/Transformed in a Relational-Transitional Space with Relational-TP**

Sara showed great enthusiasm for drawing in the first interview. She showed me a lot of pictures she drew and told me her feelings about drawing:

*I like drawing the most. I don’t know why I like it, [but] I am happy when I am drawing. I like [to] draw horses and penguins because it’s easy. Sometimes I draw plants, but not people. I did draw something for my brother Leo, he likes it…I like this picture because I drew it with Sunny, she is my good friend. I like this Hello Kitty because I drew it with Lucy…My hands are good because they can draw. I want to be an artist in the future because I can draw, I don’t wanna be a house designer, my parents want me to do that, to create something, to draw a building, but I don’t want to, I like [to] do pictures of a long time ago, like Vikings, because they are clever, really clever, they can make things out of anything like animal skins and wood, even stones, grass. I also like [to] draw Twilight Sparkle, because he is clever, he…keeps reading books until he knows how to do something….*

To Sara, the activity of drawing might be seen as a TP that represents both her inner emotional experiences and outside relationships. Through drawing, Sara experienced positive emotions *(“I am happy when I am drawing”*), had enhanced confidence in herself (*“drawing is easy”*), built good relationship with other people (*“I drew something for my brother”, “I drew it with Sunny/Lucy”*),created a positive embodiment of herself (*“my hands are good”*) and constructed a positive future self-position (*“I want to be an artist”*). Drawing is not only Sara’s TP, however. As she said, *“I do not want to be a house designer [like] my parents want me to be”*. It gives me a clue that drawing might also link to her relationship with her parents.

In addition, in her second interview, which took place only 13 days after the first one, Sara said: *“I enjoy drawing maybe, but I don’t know why…the best moment in Chinese school is drawing class, I like drawing, I win the drawing competition”.* After a while, she mentioned drawing again: *“I don’t remember I said I want to be an artist, um, my mum chose me [to] want to be an artist, because I’m good at drawing, I’m not sure whether it’s because I like drawing, I like drawing sometimes”*.

As I described in the setting the interview scene section, the second interview took place in her new bedroom and she seemed distracted by her friends who were playing in the living room. I did not sense her excitement about drawing as she showed in the first one and her dubious reply of *“I enjoy drawing maybe”* or *“I like drawing sometimes”* proved my assumption that Sara might have a complicated relationship with drawing. In addition, her narrative of *“I want to be an artist”* in the first interview changed to *“my mum chose me want to be an artist because I am good at drawing”* in the second one. These clues delivered me a complicated but vague message that this narrative may not only a presentation of her inner feelings, but also an indication of an embedded self-position. In other words, both of Sara’s narratives of *“I like drawing”* and *“I am good at drawing”* may seem positive, but may contained different emotional experiences. *“I like drawing”*, for example, could be seen as an innate original feeling, whereas *“I am good at drawing”* may contain expectations of herself and her future as projected from the outside world onto her.

Since Sara freely associated drawing with her parents especially her mother, I think it is necessary to have a look at her mother Alice’s narrative about Sara’s drawing. Alice said:

*Sara is good at crying and drawing…Every teacher says she draws good, especially draw animals’ eyes, teacher said it’s very good. She said she wants to become an artist or a designer. I think it’s good, just keep one dream, don’t change too often. She also said she wants to design pretty house[s], I said ok, it’s good. So she said she wants to draw. I said “you must treat drawing as your favourite, you need to work harder. You have to do your homework first”. She said drawing doesn’t need to write. I said “you can’t draw without knowing how to write, at least you should know the meaning of your pictures, right?” Then she said “fine, I’ll try my best”.*

*She just likes drawing, this even caused conflicts between us. As soon as I told her to do her homework, she said she hasn’t finished drawing yet. She must draw something before doing homework. I can’t be too strict, must be compromise, otherwise, she would say “I don’t want you mum, you are too mean, you are a monster”. She has complained that “why you always compare me with other children, saying other children can do something good but I can’t. I am good at drawing, why don’t you praise me”. I said “you are good at drawing but it’s just a supplementary course, I can’t praise you only for that, you didn’t improve your compulsory homework”.*

*I used to have a dream of to be an interior designer. Sara told me she likes drawing, I asked her whether she wants to design houses. She said it’s ok. I said you like it now but you might change in the future. She doesn’t have a goal yet, just likes drawing. If she likes it, of course I hope she can develop well [in drawing]. It’s good to have something to focus on, as long as she loves study. I hope she will have a goal, be mature.*

Alice’s narrative is very informative. Firstly, Alice recognised Sara draws well but her recognition is dependent on outside standards, such as teachers’ comments and her own comparison of Sara with other children. Secondly, as Alice said, Sara’s drawing caused conflict between them since Sara’s fondness for drawing caused Alice to feel anxious about Sara’s future. What I am interested in herein is Alice’s emotional experiences about Sara’s drawing.

On the one hand, Alice was happy and proud of Sara’s drawing. When I first went into their home, Alice asked Sara if she had shown me her pictures. In her narrative, Alice also said *“Sara is good at drawing”* because *“every teacher said she draws well”.* Teachers, in Alice’s narrative, might play a role of authority. As a consequence, Alice had high expectations of Sara’s drawing. On the other hand, however, “Sara’s drawing” caused conflict between her and Sara. Alice wanted Sara to do homework, but Sara insisted on doing drawing first. Sara called her *‘monster’* when she was strict. She was worried that Sara’s preference for drawing might have a negative influence on Sara’s study in compulsory courses. She was also worried that the effort and time Sara put into drawing would be wasted if Sara lost her interest in drawing later. Alice was under a realistic parental pressure, wondering what is the future in drawing? There seemed to be no guarantee for Alice that Sara will have a bright future in drawing. Thus, Alice was not happy about Sara’s drawing. Besides, Alice thought that Sara was not mature enough to stick to one goal. She therefore asked Sara to *“keep this dream, do not change it”.*

However, the third point I found very important underneath Sara and Alice’s emotional experiences might be that, in simple words, Sara’s drawing did not belong only to Sara. On the one hand, as I explained above, ‘drawing’ created TP for Sara through which Sara experienced various life experiences such as friendship, sense of self-accomplishment and a positive image of her future. It also contained anxiety from her mother. On the other hand, ‘drawing’ may create TP to Alice as well, containing Alice’s own self-expectations, which she had already given up but wants Sara to fulfil. As she said, *“I used to have a dream of to be an interior designer. Sara told me she likes drawing, I asked her whether she wants to design houses”.* This might be a reason why she encouraged Sara to follow this particular dream. However, Alice also asked Sara to focus on compulsory study rather than drawing. I assume that Alice’s double-faced attitude in the interaction with Sara is rooted in her own selves because drawing was her dream but was not fulfilled. Therefore, she might both wants Sara to fulfil it and afraid that Sara might fail as well. Therefore, from a psychosocial viewpoint, Alice transferred both her own expectations and pressure onto Sara, which has had a twofold influence on Sara’s development. Thus, I assume ‘drawing’ created relational-TP between Sara and Alice, includes two meanings of ‘Sara’s drawing’ and ‘Alice’s drawing’ which are sometimes in conflict with one another.

In terms of Sara’s self-construction/transformation, Sara’s embedded self-expectation might be projected by Alice to some degree through ‘drawing’ as a relational-TP. It might be an explanation of that why Sara gave two different narratives about her dream (*“I want to be an artist”* and *“my mom chose me to want to be an artist/house designer”*). In other words, unknown to both of them, Alice projected her past selves *(“wants to be an* *interior designer”*) onto Sara. I assume, therefore, that Sara’s self-positions were being constructed in a relational-transitional-space, to which both Sara’s and Alice’s transitional spaces contributed, and in which Sara was having an endless battle with Alice because the same TP represents different things to each of them. Therefore, in this relational-transitional space, “drawing” played a role as a double-faced relational-TP, through which Sara constructed a double-faced self-position that is *“I like drawing and want to be an artist”* but also *“I don’t know whether I like drawing and it was my mother who wanted me to be an artist”.*

In addition, considering the transcultural environment Sara and Alice lives in, I would claim that “drawing” links not only Alice’s and Sara’s personal transitional spaces, but furthermore, it links two sets of cultural values of Chinese traditional cultural value and Westernized cultural value. In particular, Alice represents Chinese culture whereas Sara could be seen a representor of at least partly Westernised individual. I will discuss this point later on in this chapter after discussing Alice’s emotional experiences about living in the UK in section 4.5.3.

**4.5.2 “I am spanked by my mum because I don’t listen to her”: Selves Constructed/Transformed as a Defence**

In addition to the interpretation of the way in which Sara constructed and transformed selves in a relational-transitional space with Alice in the previous section, I am going to explore the way in which Sara constructed selves in her interactions with Alice via interjecting Alice’s negative comments and dissatisfaction on her. In the section 3.6.3, I interpreted this story through a social constructionist perspective that Sara constructed unwanted negative selves about herself is because of her desire of maintain a good relationship with Alice. In this chapter, I will look at this story from psychodynamic perspective which explains Sara’s acceptance of Alice’s negative comments as a way of defence mechanism.

Sara was asked to describe negative emotional experiences she had at home in the interviews. For example, what does she not like to do at home, and is there anything unhappy at home. Sara’s negative experiences at home were mainly caused by the punishments she got from her parents, especially from Alice. She said:

*The unhappy thing I remember at home is being scolded by my mum, and also being spanked. I don't like it. I like [to] spend time with my mum sometimes maybe, until I may get told to do my homework…I was told by my mum really angry about [how] I don’t get time properly for my work, because I always want to play with…but not always … my mum told me “what have you done” like every [time], “just get it done and do your work”.*

In two interviews with Alice, as explained in section 3.6.3, Alice seemed very strict on educating Sara. The words Alice used to describe Sara were quite negative, such as *“lazy” “not focused” “not serious” “emotional” “be distracted easily” and “not as good as other children”.* In addition, Alice said:

*Sometimes I think why children in other families are good, only she doesn’t listen to me? Sometimes I compare her with other children, why she can’t do something that other children can easily do? I may get angry and scold at her.*

A psychoanalytic perspective may suggest that Sara played as a container for Alice’s negative emotions sometimes. In fact, Sara tried to reject this role or digest her own negative emotions by arguing with Alice. Alice said:

*Sometimes she[Sara]’ll say “I don’t want you, you are a monster” if I force her to do her homework. She is not happy and even argues with me sometimes asking me why I compare her with other children? Why didn’t I praise her about her drawing? I said your drawing is good but why don't you improve your homework. She ignores me until I get angry.*

However, according to Sara’s narrative, another way to digest those negative emotional experiences is accepting and even introjecting the negative comments from outside world, as she said:

*What I don’t like to do at home is being scolded, because I’m not serious about writing… It was because I don’t listen to my mum.*

In addition, Alice provided more information relevant to how Sara copes with negative emotional experiences:

*She[Sara] has tests every week, she feels very upset when other people got 100 marks while she didn’t…If she gets good mark in dictation, she’ll be happy. But if someone is better than her, she’ll be very upset and crying. Unhappy thing to her in school, is like, someone got a prize but she did not.*

In order to make the story simple to interpret, I would summarise four points I noticed from these information: 1) Alice got angry when comparing Sara with other children and wondering why Sara does not listen to her; 2) Sara felt bad about herself, for example, when her classmate got high marks but she did not;3) Sara ignored Alice until Alice gets angry;4) Sara thought being scolded is her own fault, for example, ‘it was because I don’t listen to my mum”.

The first two points show me that one way in which Sara getting to know herself is to compare herself with other people, which is learnt from Alice because Alice often compares her with other children, even though Sara did not like it. The third point indicates that Sara had to became the container for Alice’s emotions although she may not want to. The last point shows the way in which Sara tried to cope with and digest her negative emotional experiences is attributing the punishment to her own improper behaviour. By doing so, I assume Sara constructed a self-position like “I should be responsible for being punished” and “it was my fault rather than my parents’ that I was scolded or spanked”.

Considering both Alice and Sara’s narratives, I think there are two ways to interpret the way in which Sara constructed this particular self-position. The first possible approach is social constructionist perspective which was explained in the section 3.6.3. Sara’s construction/transformation of this negative self could be seen as relational and dialogical. In other words, the self-position has been embedded by Alice. Social constructionist perspective would explain the reason as trying to maintain the relationship.

Secondly, however, adopting ideas of defence mechanism, I would interpret Sara’s construction/transformation of negative self-position as a defence or even resistance. In particular, Alice’s scolding and punishment caused Sara’s anxiety and reduced her self-confidence. Sara might also be anxious about being controlled by Alice. In order to defend the anxiety, she accepted and absorbed Alice’s comments about her so that she may feel less guilty about her improper behaviour. That is, “destroying myself is a way to get rid of your control”. Furthermore, I would argue that Sara’s construction/transformation of this negative self is a way for her to digest both her own and Alice’s emotions. In other words, Sara received Alice’s anxiety and tried to digest it for Alice by introjecting it. Rationalising punishment might be a way for Sara to protect her inner relationship with Alice. In other words, it is a way in which Sara copes with her inner conflict with Alice. By doing so, Sara keeps an image of Alice as a good and reasonable mother in her mind, which might help her feels less anxious in the mother-daughter relationship.

Overall, I would argue that, from a psychoanalytically informed understanding, in order to digest both her own and Alice’s negative emotions, and to protect the inner relationship with Alice, Sara accepted Alice’s negative comments and constructed negative selves, which might be seen as a way of defence. It feels not sufficient for me to understand Sara without digging into more about Alice’s life, however. One question emerged into my mind is, why did Alice, as a mother, have such a negative perception of her own daughter? In next section, I will look at Alice’s life experience, and explore how this affected Sara’s self-constructions/transformations.

**4.5.3 “I am depressed and empty”: Alice’s Anxiety and its Possible Effect on Sara’s Self-Construction/Transformation**

It is necessary to state that before digging into Alice’s narrative, I found myself thinking that the reason why Alice thought negatively about Sara is she thought negatively about herself. I also assume that Alice’s expectations of Sara are a re-emerging of her former expectations of herself which might be unknown to herself. In other words, Alice’s attitude and behaviour towards Sara contained her own image of an ideal self-position of herself (*“a house designer”*). Sara was the one who had to contain Alice’s self-expectations and emotions. In this section, I will share a story of Alice’s memory about her life in China in the past and her feeling about her life in the UK as a Chinese immigrant full-time housewife who cannot speak English very well.

Alice’s cultural identity is quite clear, she said “*I’ve been living in the UK for almost 9 years but I think I am still Chinese”.* She described how she make friends in Britain, or in other words, make social connections:

*Our life circle is very small. We cannot really fit into local life here I only make friends with Chinese, maybe one or two English but no deep conversation, they don’t understand us, I don’t understand them. Most of my friends here are just like me, migrated from China with their husbands. We feel very bored here. We are depressed, more or less. Like my family, my husband just goes to work then go home, maybe go shopping on Saturdays, that’s it, very boring, nothing fun.*

She described English people as and her Chinese immigrant friends and herself as *“very bored” and “depressed”.* Alice thought there is a chasm between Chinese and English people that is *“they don’t understand us, I don’t understand them”*. She also identified herself with other Chinese immigrants as ‘we’, for example, *“we are very bored”* and *“we are depressed”*.That is, socially, she identified herself with the Chinese group; psychologically, she tried to hold the sense of belonging by sharing the same emotional experiences as she claimed. In addition, she described her personal emotional experiences when she came to Britain the first time:

*When I came here the first time, I felt that this city is too old, everywhere is grey. I was so depressed. I don’t understand people at all, I was hiding at home, did not dare to go out, even take bus. I was terrified. It felt so depressed because it was a completely strange country to me using a language I did not understand at all. You know, I don’t talk about my troubles with my family in China, don’t want them to worry about me. Then I was introduced to some Chinese, so I was getting used to life here gradually. I got to know more Chinese people, I can talk with them.*

Alice had and may still have some difficulties to fit into British society. The difficulties are hidden in every single aspect of her life, such as communicating with people and taking bus. This experience made her felt *“depressed”* and *“terrified”.* At the meantime, she cut off her emotional connection with her family in China because *“she doesn’t want them to worry about her”.* However, when Alice was experiencing a very difficult time with both linguistic and psychological problems, she was *“introduced to some Chinese people”* and started *“getting used to life”* because she got someone to *“talk with”.* Considering the ideas about trauma which was illustrated in the section of theoretical framework, I would claim that Alice had a traumatic experience which is caused by the change of cultural experiences. She had problem to make a link with new cultural experience but also lost the link with old cultural experience. However, even though she felt “depressed and terrified”, she still chose to stay in Britain:

*But we have to stay here, for our children. An important reason that I felt better was I have my children, so the centre of my life is my children. In the UK, we like here because of its environment and education.*

This piece of narrative explains why she stayed in Britain – *“for our children”*. Her claim of *“the centre of my life is my children”* seems like she tried to be a good mother by giving up her own life for her children. However, she was not able to deny her feeling of losing herself:

*My friends in China seem very busy; they don’t really reply to my messages. They said they are very stressed about earning money. I felt very upset; I am a person without job. It feels like, empty, degenerated, very empty inside. Job will give you a feeling of enrichment, you have your own salary, you can control your life, go to anywhere you want. Having a family but without job, it’s like, my husband is very stress[ed] but I cannot help. I am upset, feels like being isolated by the outside world”.*

Comparing herself to her friends in China, she felt *“very empty, degenerated, upset and isolated”* because she is *“a person without job”.* In order to move to Britain, she had to give up her job, detach from her old friends, and press the desire of having a job and feeling enrichment. However, ‘have to’ does not equal to ‘willing to’, she said:

*Sometimes I want to move back to China, because at least I have found a job there. My friends asked me to go home once, because I was an accountant, they said the salary in China is good. I thought about it, but I can’t, because my children would not fit themselves into China. Maybe (I will go back) after they grow up.*

Alice attributed the reason why she could not go back to China to her children. Her children especially Sara became the container for her emotional experiences:

*Sometimes when I get angry, I would say something [to Sara] like “you must study hard otherwise you will screw [up] your life” to my children. Sara is lazy. Sometimes I told her “I will not take care of you when you are after 18” but she said “it doesn't matter; I will figure my life out myself when I grow up”. Maybe I don’t need to think that much.*

In addition to the way in which Alice digested her emotional experiences (transforming it to Sara), this piece of narrative may reflect a conflict between Alice and Sara, and may also reflect a conflict between two generations, and even two cultural values. Alice, who holds a Chinese cultural value thought, told Sara *“you will screw up your life if you do not study hard”*. She was worried about Sara’s study and future because she thought she has the responsibility to help her children. Sara, who is growing up in British cultural value, however, argued *“I will figure my life out myself”* because she identified herself as an independent individual rather than a collective person. That is, Sara may do not think Alice should be responsible for her life. As Alice thought herself:

*Sometimes I asked myself why we are so tired as Chinese. English people, they are like, it’s not their responsibility at all when children grow up. But for Chinese people, we also think about children’s future. Maybe I think too much, right?*

Alice freely associated her personal life with identity of being Chinese. I assume the conflict between her and Sara helped her reflect on herself. In other words, Alice was in a process of self-transforming as well.

Considering Alice’s narrative about herself and about Sara, and reflecting on Winnicott’s theory of TO/TP and Frosh’s (2012, p.128) suggestion of “the people and parts of people towards which love and hate are directed are known as objects”, I would proffer a bold hypothesis: Sara might be treated as a TO by Alice to digest her emotional experiences. It suggests a process of objectification of other people. However, since Sara is not a real object who has her own emotional experiences, the situation became complicated. In the next a few paragraphs, I will interpret 1) the way in which Alice intended to use Sara as a TO; and 2) the way in which Sara reacted to Alice’s intention and how this interaction affects Sara’s self-construction/transformation.

According to Alice’s narrative, her anxiety is serious and complicated, for example, she felt *“bored”; “empty”; “depressed” “terrified”; “worried”; “empty”; “upset”,* and *“isolated”*. It seems to me that all those emotions are the product of a traumatic experience which is leaving her own country/culture and trying to fit into a new culture but failed. For example, Alice had to detach herself from her old friends in China because they did not have time for her, but she could not fit into British group because *“I don’t understand them, and they don’t understand me”* – not only a linguistic but also a cultural issue. She missed her life back in China as a person who has job, but she is also worried that China will not be the same as she remembered. It seems to me that Alice faces to two conflicts; one is the outside cultural conflicts between Chinese and British cultures, while another one is the inner conflict between who she is now and who she was in China.

Applying the theoretical framework of object relations theory above, I assume that Alice was tolerating and trying to digest her anxiety in what could be thought of as a transitional space to which both her present living environment and her inner memories and self-expectations contributed. For example, identifying herself with other Chinese immigrants and imaging her “enriched” life in China might create a TP to defend against the anxiety she experienced in her real life in the UK. However, Alice was not able to digest all the emotional experiences by her own. Therefore, she tried to transfer her emotions to Sara. As she said, she lived in a world she personally did not want to be in, but *“have to stay for the children”.*

Thus, Sara became the container for Alice’s emotional experiences. However, I would claim that I only see this interpretation as one possible aspect rather than the whole picture of the relationship between Alice and Sara. In other words, I assume Sara was used by Alice as a TO which represents three things: one is her daughter in the reality, one is a new cultural value, and one is a continuation of her own self.

For the first role as her daughter, Alice felt she is responsible for Sara’s life and future, which may have aggravated her anxiety because she has not fitted into a world she wanted Sara to fit in. For the second one of a new cultural value, Sara played a role as a bridge between Alice and British culture since Sara speaks both Mandarin and English but Alice only speaks Mandarin. Sara is more familiar with British culture than Alice as well. For the third one, it might be unknown to her and Sara that Alice saw Sara as a continuation of herself, for example, she *“chose”* (in Sara’s words) Sara to *“want to be a house designer in the future”* because she wanted to be a designer herself but did not make it happen. In other words, she projected her own desires onto Sara.

In addition, I assume that she may have projected her anxiety into her children as well. As she said, *“Sometimes when I get angry, I would say something like ‘you must study hard otherwise you will screw [up] your life’ to my children”*. Alice’s dissatisfaction with Sara might be a dissatisfaction with but unknown to herself. In other words, Alice’s comment of *“Sara is not good”* probably has an underneath meaning that ‘I am not good’. It seems to me that Alice’s anger towards Sara was about her own incapability. However, Sara is not an object which passively accept the projection from outside world. As I explained earlier on, Sara tried to digest her own and Alice’s emotional experiences in a relational-transitional space through, for example, both accepting and defencing against Alice’s intentions. In doing so, Sara constructed and transformed dynamic and even paradoxical selves.

In summary, the interpretation of Sara’s self-construction/transformation in the relationship with her mother Alice was drawn out by three stories illustrated above. In particular, I think “drawing as a shared transitional phenomenon” is a powerful medium to show the way in which Sara’s selves were constructed and transformed in a relational transitional space with Alice. Alice’s selves were also in a process of transforming, but since it is not the research purpose, I will not explain more than is needed. Additionally, Jerry and Sara’s story inspires me to re-think the role of parents and children in their relationships, especially the relationship between mother and daughter considering my own gender. Radically, I would argue that these two roles can transform each other. Conventionally, parents need to help children digest emotional experiences. In this case, however, Jerry and Sara actually take on the role of digesting their mothers’ anxiety in this particular dual-cultural environment.

**4.6 Summary of Research Outcomes**

This chapter explores Jerry and Sara’s self-constructions in the theoretical context of Winnicott’s theory of transitional space, Mannoni’s views about children’s imagination and fantasy, Bion’s assumptions about digesting emotional experiences, and White and Epston’s perspective on narrative means. Based on the data interpretation, I would make a few arguments.

Firstly, one’s selves are not only constructed/transformed in one’s own transitional space, but also in a relational-transitional space that overlaps with one’s own and significant others’ transitional spaces. In light of this, I suggest that the parents’ self-constructions/transformations in their own transitional spaces should be taken into account when studying the children’s self-constructions, because parents’ transitional space is part of children’s relational-transitional space.

Considering the way in which two transitional spaces are linked as a relational transitional space, I assume, secondly, the relational-transitional space might be bridged by the same transitional object or phenomenon that has different meanings to each person in this particular relationship. Drawing, for example, could be seen as a relational transitional phenomenon to both Sara and Alice, but with different meanings, which may have caused Alice and Sara’s conflicts. The conflicts are represented by a concrete transitional object, though which people may able to tell the narrative. In doing so, the conflict may be resolved. In addition, since one’s transitional space and relational-transitional space (as well as the transitional object and phenomena) are unstable; the self-construction/transformation is also very flexible and unpredictable. That is, the relationship between parents and children, for example, is not rigid, but has the chance to change and transform.

Thirdly, therefore, in the relational-transitional-space, a person needs not only to digest his or her own emotional and cultural experience, but also digest relational emotional and cultural experiences, which are created via the interactions between oneself and significant others. As Winnicott (1964) suggests, playing provides a place for children to experience separation without having real separation. Jerry uses his fantasy and gun-play as a way of digesting anxiety which is relational rather than individual because it is rooted in his relationship with his father.

In my research, for example, parents seemed find it more difficult to adapt to British culture than the children in a dual-cultural environment. In this circumstance, parents may fail to be the container for children’s anxiety. Therefore, the children have to not only digest their own emotions but also help their parents to digest emotions by taking a role of bridging the gap for their parents with English language and British culture. In doing so, the children are possibly treated as a transitional object by the parents. In light of this, I think it is worth to reconsider the conventional way of seeing adults and children, for example, adults as being generally more mature than children. I would argue that the roles of parents and children can transform and change. In other words, children might take the role of ‘parents’ since they have more experience of living a British life, whereas the parents might be ‘children’ since they lack experience in this area. Therefore, one can be both parent and child.

In summary, the research outcomes in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 are a little like scattered puzzles from which we can form ideas about the way in which one’s selves are constructed/transformed within both the inner world and the outside world. Social constructionist theory and object relations theory were respectively adopted as means of exploring the ways in which Jerry and Sara, as second-generation Chinese immigrant young people, construct the self in a dual-culture environment. The social constructionist perspective enables attention to be focused on the outside relationships and interactions in which selves are constructed socially and dynamically. Object relations theory, from a psychological perspective, allows the exploration of self-construction in a way that both outside and inner relationships work together in one’s transitional space. These two Western approaches enhanced my understanding of the concept of ‘self’.

In particular, similar to Winnicott’s suggestion that subjectivity is a paradoxical property of being both a product of external determinants and a unique sort of creative freedom (Kirshner, 2011, p.xv), the research outcomes also shows that the self and self-construction/transformation involves various diverse and even contradictory components. People have to cope with various opposite issues such as complicated emotional experiences in the process of constructing/transforming selves. The research outcomes guided to me look at Taoist philosophy because it pays much attention to understanding opposites and paradoxes. Therefore, with principles of complementarity and transformation, the fourth research question began to present itself: “How can the research outcomes be interpreted by Taoist philosophy?”.

**Chapter 5: Turning to Taoist Philosophy**

***One must speak very much before one keeps silent***

***- Fung Yulan (1948, p.564)***

**5.1 Introduction**

Returning to Zhuangzi’s fanciful and amusing butterfly dream, which was introduced in the first chapter, as an example of how to reflect upon Western theories chosen for this research, it is possible to consider its meaning through different perspectives. From a social constructionist perspective, the existence of an objective connection between Zhuangzi and the butterfly could be assumed as relational beings. From the perspective of object relations theory, an inner relationship between Zhuangzi and the butterfly could be interpreted. The butterfly might be seen as a transitional object through which Zhuangzi’s unconscious intention emerges, for example. As the hint, as explained by Zhuangzi himself, at the end of the story shows, it is about the transformation of things.

Returning to the centre point for this study, from both social constructionist viewpoint and object relations theory, the self is relational, dialogical, changeable and never fixed; self-construction is occurring in one’s transitional space via multiple ways of experiencing, such as via transitional objects and phenomena, defence mechanisms, in narrative streams. That is, the process of self-construction/transformation is unpredictable, uncertain and full of possibilities. In this process, people need to digest various emotional experiences and some of the emotional experiences might be failed to be digested.

Additionally, considering the data interpretation in chapter 3 and 4, I would like to argue that one’s selves and the process of constructing selves are various, uncertain, contradictory and paradoxical. In light of this, one questions emerged to my mind: how is it possible to cope with various paradoxical selves in an unpredictable process of self-construction/transformation in a transcultural context? Therefore, I would like to turn to Taoist philosophy because, as one of the mainstreams of Chinese culture, it developed principles of complementarity and transformation which are very inspiring study on constructing selves. In other words, this chapter is going to explore the fourth research question of this research: “How can the research outcomes be interpreted by Taoist philosophy?”.

Taoism is adopted as a Chinese philosophical approach with the consideration of two questions. Firstly, why not Confucianism? Although both Confucian and Taoist schools see the realisation of true human nature as a central goal of human beings’ development, the understandings of what is natural from these two schools of thought are distinct. Confucianism sees the nature of the self as “within the restraints of decorum” whereas Taoism believes the Confucian self to be artificial and even somewhat ridiculous (Kupperman, 1999, p.18). That is, Taoists take to look at the world and human beings is quite different from that of Confucians.

Unlike Confucianism, which sees ‘self’ as an ethical issue and emphasises values such as piety, Taoist philosophy holds a holistic perspective that sees the self as biological, psychological, and spiritual (Shien, 1953). If Confucianism could be seen as a human-centred or humanist philosophy, Taoism is a nature-centred philosophy that stresses detachment and transcendence from the material world. As Fung (1948) suggests, Confucianism is a ‘this-worldly’ philosophy, whereas Taoism is an ‘other-worldly’ philosophy. From the ‘this-worldly’ point of view, ‘other-world’ philosophy is too idealistic and not practical, for example, Taoism entails separating ourselves from the entangling net of a world that is corrupted by material things and desires (Fung, 1948, p.6). On the contrary, ‘other-world’ philosophers think that ‘this-worldly’ philosophy is too realistic and superficial: “[This-worldly philosophy] is like the quick walking of a man who has taken the wrong road: the more quickly he walks the further he goes astray”(Fung, 1948, p.7).

As I stated in previous chapters, I am not intending to choose either/or standpoint in this thesis; rather trying to adopt a holistic perspective. In effect, I think the critique of the ‘other-worldly’ philosophers concerning ‘this-worldly’ philosophy is actually paradoxical in terms of their own holistic principles. I would argue that to study social factors in one’s selves and help one exists in harmony with other people, ‘this-worldly’ philosophy could be a useful guide since it considers more about social rules and relationships. In order to interpret outcomes of this research, however, ‘other-worldly’ philosophy is more effective.

Secondly, is it possible to utilize Taoism with social constructionism and object relations theory? From the perspective of complementarity, the self is not only social, psychological, and ethical; but also spiritual, philosophical, and opens to any other possible forms. Additionally, Taoist philosophy shares similar epistemological and ontological perspectives with social constructionist perspective and object relations theory. For example, according to Kupperman (1999, p. 64), Zhuangzi holds an anti-realistic perspective of “there is no single definitive way the world is, and there is no optimally correct account of any reality”, which seems compatible with social constructionist viewpoint about reality and truth.

However, Taoist philosophy has its distinction from Western philosophies. The way in which Western people perceive the world and themselves is deeply influenced by various Western philosophies (Nisbett, 2003). For example, two of the well-known Western philosophical perspectives - Aristotle’s logic of “either/or” explicit dualisms and Hegel’s implicit dualism of temporary “both/and” - are different from Taoist philosophy (Li, 2012, p.854). It seems to me that both logics have their own limitations. According to explicit dualism, for example, the young people in my research have to choose to see themselves as either Chinese or British, while according to implicit dualism, those young people need to identify themselves as both Chinese and British, or neither of them. The idea of seeing contradiction as a problem to be solved from Western perspectives does not completely convince me. Taoist philosophy may thus provide the solutions I am seeking from a holistic perspective.

In this chapter, I will explore the last research question of “how could the research outcomes be interpreted by Taoist philosophy?”. In particular, I will: 1)Introduce the fundamental thoughts in Taoist philosophy such as ‘opposites in unity’ and ‘the law of circle movement’; 2) From a spiritual perspective, explain Taoist term of ‘selflessness’ as a possible form of the self and a stage in the process of self-construction/transformation; 3) Adopt Taoist thought of ‘Wuwei’as a radical suggestion about the way in which human beings could cope with the paradoxes between the external world and the self; 4) Employ Taoist principle of Yin Yang to interpret and sublimate the research outcomes and arguments, for example, selves are Yin and Yang, relationships and culture are Yin and Yang, and the process of self-construction is Yin and Yang; 5) Apply Taoist viewpoints to reflection and reflexivity, for example, illustrate the transformation of my own mind and selves, and my emotionality during the whole process of this research.

The data may not seem very prominent in this chapter, however, for two reasons. Firstly, since the data was analysed in previous chapters, I do not see that there is a need to repeat the details here, but I will engage the outcomes with the philosophical discussion in this chapter at certain points. Secondly, I hope that this chapter could provide a space for more general deliberation about the self, instead of limiting readers with the participants’ specific stories.

**5.2 Opposites in Unity and Transformation**

Two basic and important laws of Taoism are reflected in Laozi’s explanation of Tao. The first one is that “the opposites are in unity” and could be transformed into one other (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.39). The second one is that “returning to the root or the beginning is the law of circular movement” which is manipulated by Tao (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.40). In the concrete process of transforming and returning, I assume that keeping a balance between opposites might be a key issue to keeping harmony in nature, in which both human beings and non-human beings are involved.

In terms of ‘opposites are in unity’, Taoists see contradictoriness in all phenomena, while between those contradictions, transformation is happening all the time. In the book of Daodejing, it says:

[…]to remain whole, be twisted! To become straight, let yourself be bent. To become full, be hollow. Be tattered, that you may be renewed. Those that have little, may get more; those that have much, are but perplexed. Therefore the Sage, Clasps the Primal Unity, Testing by it everything under heaven. He does not show himself, therefore he is seen everywhere. He does not define himself, therefore he is distinct. He does not boast of what he will do, therefore he succeeds. He is not proud of his work, and therefore it endures. He does not contend, and for that very reason no one under heaven can contend with him… It is upon bad fortune that good fortune leans, upon good fortune that badfortune rests…Therefore the Sage, Squares without cutting, Shapes the corners without lopping, Straightens without stretching, Gives forth light without shining (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.45; p.119; for the original Mandarin see Box 5.1).

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| Box 5.1  曲则全，枉则直，洼则盈，敝则新，少则得，多则惑。是以圣人抱一为天下式。不自见，故明；不自是，故彰；不自伐，故有功；不自矜，故长。夫唯不争，故天下莫能与之争。出自《老子. 第二十二章》  祸兮，福之所倚；福兮，祸之所伏。……是以圣人方而不割，廉而不刿，直而不肆，光而不耀。出自《老子.第五十八章》  故飘风不终朝，骤雨不终日。孰为此者？天地。天地尚不能久，而况于人乎？出自《老子.第二十三章》  （Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999） |

From my own perspective, there are three layers of meaning underneath the explanation of the idea of opposites in unity. The first one is that the whole of a thing is always an integration of opposites. The second one is that the transformation between each contradiction and its opposite is always happening. The third one is that this law applies not only to nature but also to human beings. In fact, it is a feature of the Sage, which refers to an ‘ideal human’ in Taoism.

In particular, transformation between two or more opposites reflects a perspective that one thing cannot always be in only one simple and permanent form. That is, myriad things that are given life by Tao, including human beings, are always changing. It seems to me that this perspective shares one point in common with the social constructionist perspective, which is that there is no permanent or unchangeable truth in the world. As Taoists say, “[…]a hurricane never lasts a whole morning, nor a rainstorm all day. Who is it that makes the wind and rain? It is Heaven and Earth. And if even Heaven and Earth cannot blow or pour for long, how much less in his utterance should man?” (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.47; for original Mandarin see Box 5.1). That is, reality and our knowledge of both nature and human beings are temporary and ever-changing.

Considering the Taoist law of opposites in unity with the research data, Jerry showed his opposing emotional attitudes to his father and Sara showed her opposite emotional attitude to her mother. In my opinion, loving and hating parents at the same time might be a natural and even necessary process for human beings to go through. On the one hand, ‘love’ helps them build identification with their parents, through which they might construct one kind of self-position such as a sense of belonging to their family. On the other hand, ‘hate’ cause detachment from and non-identification with parents, through which another kind of self-position, such as being independent, might be constructed. Furthermore, it seems to me that Jerry and Sara constructed opposite self-positions in their process of cultural-self-construction as well. On the one hand, they were willing and eager to immerse themselves into both Chinese and British peer groups. On the other hand, they had the sense of alienation from each cultural group as well.

It seems to me that experiencing contradictory emotions about the same things is therefore necessary and significantly beneficial for one’s self-construction. On the one hand, experiencing positive relationship and sense of belonging to significant others and groups is helpful to build one’s social self. On the other hand, experiencing detachment from the outside world gives one a chance to explore his or her own individual needs. In the process of self-construction, opposite feelings might be transformed into each other and in doing so opposite self-positions might be constructed. Furthermore, I would argue that these transformations between contradictions might be a basic principle of self-construction. This point turns me to focus on the question of how things transform and move in the law of Tao.

Contradictions, in the Taoist view, are interdependent upon and interrelated with one another and can even be transformed into one another. The processes of transformation and change are in constant motion. The changes and transformations of things are, however, defined by their relationships to each other and their relationships to the whole world (Cheng, 1989, p.171). That is, transformation is not independent but relational. One conversation between Zhuangzi and Huizi below could be seen as an example of how Taoists argue the transformation of emotional experiences.

Travelling with Huizi over a bridge on the Hao River, Zhuangzi said, “The fish is swimming at ease. This is how the fish enjoy themselves”. Huizi said, “You are not a fish. How do you know the fish are enjoying themselves?” Zhuangzi said, “You are not me. How do you know I don’t know about the fish?” Huizi said, “I am not you and I certainly don’t know about you; you are certainly not a fish and you will not know about the fish. That’s for sure.” Zhuangzi said, “Let’s trace back to your original question. You said, ‘how do you know the fish are enjoying themselves?’ This question shows that you know I know about the fish. Since you know about me, why can’t I know about the fish? I got to know it over a bridge on the Hao River” (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999, p.283; for original Mandarin see Box 5.2).

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| Box 5.2  [庄子与惠子游于濠梁](http://baike.baidu.com/view/872995.htm)之上。庄子曰：“鯈鱼出游从容，是[鱼之乐](http://baike.baidu.com/view/6564160.htm)也。”惠子曰∶“[子非鱼](http://baike.baidu.com/view/57583.htm)，安知鱼之乐？”庄子曰：“子非我，安知我不知鱼之乐？”惠子曰：“我非子，固不知子矣；子固[非鱼](http://baike.baidu.com/view/5283909.htm)也，子之不知鱼之乐全矣！”庄子曰：“请循其本。子曰 ‘汝安知[鱼乐](http://baike.baidu.com/view/820170.htm)’云者，既已知吾知之而问我。我知之[濠上](http://baike.baidu.com/view/6494191.htm)也。” 出自《庄子.秋水》(Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999） |

In the story, Zhuangzi argues for the possibility that emotional experiences between the person and the fish could be transformed. In other words, all the creatures are able to sense each other’s emotions.

In addition, the basic principle of transformation or motion is that returning and recycling: “In Tao the only motion is returning” (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.83; for the Mandarin see Box 5.3). But returning to where? Laozi says:

Push far enough towards the Void. Hold fast enough to Quietness and of the ten thousand things non but can be worked on by you. I have beheld them, whither they go back. See, all things howsoever they flourish. Return to the root from which they grew. This return to the root is called Quietness; Quietness is called submission to Fate; what has submitted to Fate has become part of the always-so. To know the always-so is to be illumined; not to know it means to go blindly to disaster. He who knows the always-so has room in him for everything; he who has room in him for everything is without prejudice. To be without prejudice is to be kingly; to be kingly is to be of heaven; to be heaven is to be in Tao (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.33; for the Mandarin see Box 5.3).

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| Box 5.3  反者“道”之动。出自《老子.第四十章》  致虚极，守静笃。万物并作，吾以观其复。夫物芸芸，各复归其根。归根曰静，静曰复命。复命曰常，知常曰明。不知常，妄作凶。知常容，容乃公，公乃全，全乃天，天乃道，道乃久，没身不殆。出自《老子.第十六章》  合抱之木，生于毫末；九层之台，起于累土；千里之行，始于足下。出自《老子.第六十四章》  (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999) |

That is, returning to the root is actually returning to Tao, because Tao is the root of all things. According to Ivanhoe and Van Norden (2001), Tao means ‘so of itself’ or ‘spontaneous’ (自然). It means that the developments of all the things have to follow the Tao, which refers to their own natural law - returning and recycling. “Trees come from the soil; falling leaves will return to the soil, for example. Things go back to their origins and source” (Cheng, 1989, p. 175). One question may thus emerge that if everything will return to its own roots in the end, what is the point for them to be born and to grow? In fact, there is a positive meaning underpinning this law of Tao that returning involves developing. According to Gao (2008), the reason why everything goes to its roots is to be reborn from the root. The world is developed in the process of returning and recycling; rebirth and redevelopment.

Practically, relating to my research, the idea of ‘transforming, returning and recycling’ inspired me to look at family relationships, especially parenting, in a radical way. I would like to suggest that some components or functions of adults and children could be changed and transformed. A new style of parenting could be that the positions of parents and children could be transformed into each other. That is, sometimes parents may not (and do not have to) act like parents, while children are not necessarily seen as children. In general, I believe, the only difference between adults and children might not be that adults are more mature than children, but that adults are seen as more experienced. In some circumstances, however children could be the more experienced ones in the relationship. In my research, for example, Jerry and Sara were more immersed into British culture than their parents, so at this point they are more experienced and could be teachers to their parents. They also played a role as containers for their mothers’ emotions sometimes. In addition, parents may need to ‘return’ to be children in order to understand their own children better. I am not suggesting that parents and children should change their roles, but I would argue that it might be positive to allow both of them to experience each other’s role.

The change and transformation would not happen suddenly. In fact, it is in a gradual process from quantity change to quality change. As Laozi said, ‘The tree big as a man’s embrace began as tiny spout, the tower nice storeys high began with a heap of earth, the journey of a thousand leagues began with what was under feet’ (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.131. In Mandarin see Box 5.3). The construction of the self would thus also be in a gradual process, always coping with transformations between various opposites, including experiencing senses of both selfness and selflessness. In the next section, I will explain selflessness as a form of self, which is in a unity with rather than opposite to selfness.

**5.3 Selflessness in Unity with Selfness**

According to Chen (2009), Taoist view of ‘self’ focuses on the manifestation of the Tao that ‘self’ identifies with and equally co-produces with the universe. In my opinion, this viewpoint of ‘self’ is universal has two layers of meaning. Firstly, that human beings are a part of the universe, so the development of each individual should follows the Tao. Secondly, the universe is in ‘self’ because Taoists believe in “the uniformity of things” (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999). The second understanding is very similar to the Buddhist view that the self is temporary, universal, and even selfless; that everyone and everything is oneself (Mosig, 2006). In terms of the distinction between awakening and dream states in Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream, for example, it might be interpreted as there being no ultimate awakening, just like there is no ultimate dream. Reality is fluid, thus ‘self’ is fluid too.

In particular, Zhuangzi refused set rules for life, but rather presented his approach to life as an art (Berling, 1985). He advocates a relational and transformative perspective in which there are no real differences between things (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999, p.50), and everything comes from the same origin. As Laozi suggested ‘天地万物生于有，有生于无’, which means “all creatures under heaven are the products of being. Being itself is the product of non-being” (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.83). ‘Things’ therefore come from ‘nothing’, ‘self’ comes from ‘no-self’. This point is in contrast to Confucianism, which suggests that self-construction is a process turning from ‘having-self’ to ‘no-self’. Taoism sees this as a movement from ‘no-self’ to ‘true-self’ (having-self).

Based on his observations of nature, therefore, Zhuangzi came up with the concept of ‘selflessness’, through which the distinction between subject and object can be removed and all the things can be transformed into the self from nature and vice versa (Chen, 2009). Selflessness does not mean forgetting or getting rid of the self; but rather, it refers to the empty mind ‘coming from a letting go of self-consciousness as a specific impetus to prompt the operation of sensation’ (Shin, 2002, p.252). In the stage of ‘selflessness’, one has a chance to empty the mind and join with the universe, thus allowing the outside world and the internal self to become one and the same. In other words, a person can thus experience the feeling of being a thing outside of the self, which provides a space for a person to share the self with others, for example, Zhuangzi could share ‘self’ with a butterfly.

Experiencing selflessness might therefore be an approach to enrich the sense of selfness. In doing so, one could become more creative and sensitive, because selflessness has innate characteristics of creativity which refers to the movement from one to many by expanding the unity to diversity, and sensitivity which refers to collecting the diversity into unity by moving from many to one (Chen, 2009). That is, creativity relevant to divergent thinking whereas sensitivity relevant to integrative thinking. Additionally, As Zhuangzi suggested, 至乐无乐，至誉无誉, which means “perfect happiness is derived from the absence of happiness; perfect fame is derived from the absence of fame”. (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999, p.287). I would suggest that through a Taoist perspective, the ‘perfect self’ is derived from the absence of the sense of self.

This state of selflessness is not something people can easily enter, however. In order to achieve the stage of selflessness, individuals must go through a state of self-abandonment, which means individuals should give themselves up to themselves so that they are no longer defying but simply disregarding themselves (Lin, 1947). In particular, Taoists reflect on the outside world as well as on their inner selves. A mature Taoist will start with a process of debunking humanity and end with a thorough debunking of himself (Lin, 1947, p.263). The purpose of ‘debunking’ is to feel truly free. As Lin (1947, p.265) suggests, “a Taoist recluse has all the ease and gracefulness of the truly free. He is truly free because he is so thoroughly the Child of the Present. He lives from moment to moment, taking life as it comes and giving it up as it passes”. In my opinion, experiencing selflessness is immersing ‘self’ into the ‘here and now’, and escaping from the limitations of time and space. In doing so, one’s attention could be moved away from self-judgement or self-image. One could enjoy the present moment instead of thinking about the past and the future and free oneself from notions of what kind of ‘self’ one should construct.

Overall, selflessness, which could be seen as a form of the self or as a stage of constructing the self, does not deny the existence of self. Rather, it suggests that the feeling of having self is not necessarily ‘I could be me’, but also ‘I could be you, I could be anyone, I could even be nothing’, just like Zhuangzi’s experience of being a butterfly. One may experience the situations of ‘no-self’ and ‘having-self’ at different points in time. In effect, to construct the self, one has to go through a process of selflessness. According to both the Taoist viewpoint and Dialogical Self Theory, selflessness can be understood as one experiences the self in a detached and non-judgemental way (Hermans-Konopka, 2011). To achieve a stage of selflessness, one has to go through a process of constructing, destroying, and reconstructing the self. It is hard to figure out where to start with this, but maybe there is no need to figure it out. The superlative form of ‘being’ might be ‘not being’; the superlative form of ‘self’ might be ‘no-self’. The essential point of being oneself in Taoist viewpoint is being natural. In terms of how to be natural, Taoists offer a suggestion of Wuwei.

**5.4 Wuwei (Non-action) in Unity with Action**

Human beings tend to “forsake their proper place and upset the natural harmony of the Tao” due to our unbridled desires and unique capacity to think, act intentionally, and alter our nature (Ivanhoe & Van Norden, 2001, p.158). In the Taoist view, however, human beings are part of the world, so we should follow the Tao as well. Taoists believe that transformations in everything take place naturally, so that human beings’ behaviour should also be natural. That is, no intervention is needed. Wuwei (non-action) is therefore seen as a guide for how human beings should view the world and behave within it.

The concept of wuwei is a technical term that serves to explain Taoist ‘nature’ in practice. Even though it is translated as ‘non-action’, ‘non-assertive action’, ‘non-coercive action’, ‘inaction’ or ‘effortless action’, it does not mean doing nothing or total inactivity. In fact, wuwei asserts that the Tao is characterised by spontaneous creativity and by regular natural patterns, such as day following night, which proceed without effort (Fang, 2004).

Tao is natural but human intervention is against nature. No intentional intervention is therefore the best kind of intervention. To explain this point, Laozi uses water as a metaphor to show the power of wuwei as ‘effortlessness’ in Tao: “The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain. It is this that makes water so near to the Way…because they prefer what does not lead to strife, and therefore does not go amiss” (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.17; for original Mandarin see Box 5.4).

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| Box 5.4  上善若水。水善利万物而不争，处众人之所恶，故几于 ‘道’。……夫唯不争，故无尤。出自《老子.第八章》  天下之至柔，驰骋天下之至坚。无有入无间，吾是以知无为之有益。出自《老子.第四十三章》  天下多忌讳，而民弥贫；人多利器，国家滋昏；人多技巧，奇物滋起；法令滋彰，盗贼多有。出自《老子.第五十七章》-  (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999) |

Practically, the concept of wuwei hence advocates minimal government intervention (Fang, 2014). For example:

[…] the more prohibition there is, the more ritual avoidances, the poorer the people will be. The more ‘sharp weapons’ there are, the more benighted will the whole land grow. The more cunning craftsmen there are, the more pernicious contrivances will be invented. The more laws are promulgated, the more thieves and bandits there will be(Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p.117; for original Mandarin see Box 5.4).

In terms of the value of wuwei, Laozi suggests, “what is of all things most yielding can overwhelm that which is of all things hardest. Being substanceless it can enter even where there is no space; that is how I know the value of action that is actionless” (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p. 89; for Mandarin see Box 5.4). That is, wuwei is powerful rather than powerless because Taoists, especially Zhuangzi, suggest that power causes harm, so a person should neither do too much good, nor strive too hard, but simply live in between because, considering the law of returning, when an extreme is reached, a reversal occurs (物极必反) (Xing & Sims, 2011).

Roughly, Zhuangzi believed that social rules limited human beings’ natural potential (Berling, 1985). As Zhuangzi said, “the heaven is clear because it does nothing; the earth is quiet because it does nothing. As neither the heaven nor the earth does anything, everything in the world is born out of them” (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999, p.287; for original Mandarin see Box 5.5). He was therefore searching for absolute spiritual freedom. Non-intervention does not mean ignoring social rules or individual intention, however. Zhuangzi suggested: “Right is infinite and wrong is infinite, too. Therefore, it is said that the best thing to do is to observe with a tranquil mind” (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999, p.23; for the Mandarin see Box 5.5).

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| Box 5.5  天无为以为清，地无为以为宁。故两无为相合，万物皆化生。《庄子.至乐》  是亦一无穷，非亦一无穷也。故曰：莫若以明。出自《庄子.齐物论》  (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999) |

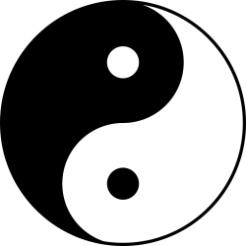
In my understanding, the practical value of wuwei is to keep everything in its own natural situation. This does not mean action is not needed at all, however. In effect, according to Gong (1980) and Sabelli (1998), wuwei refers to ‘no action’ and ‘no desire’. In particular, ‘no action’ means “intense concentrated action without allowing unrelated thoughts or ideas interfering with the moment of being”; ‘no desire’ means “perceiving the world as it is” without presuppositions and wishful thinking, because perceptions are actions (Sabelli, 1998, p.432). That is, wuwei is to avoid forceful and unnecessary action. In light of this, I would suggest that wuwei refers to ‘less intervention’ rather than ‘no intervention’. In other words, sometimes actions should be taken but sometimes we should keep wuwei.

The idea of wuwei might be compatible with the goal that we should not seek to increase mastery over other people; rather, we should cultivate mastery over our own destiny and the way we want to live, from a psychological perspective (Shotter, 1974b). Practically, the idea of wuwei might be employed in Chinese parenting in that parents should not have to perform too much intervention in their children’s lives. The viewpoint of ‘no-mastery’ might also be applied to one’s self-construction. That is, non-action in self-construction/transformation to some degree might help one’s self to remain in a natural state. It might also help decrease one’s anxiety about action, for example, the anxiety about what one must ‘do’ to create a sense of self.

Overall, Taoist philosophy discusses human beings’ lives and selves from an ‘other-worldly’ perspective. It suggests that the self involves the sense of ‘having self’ and ‘no-self’, for example, and that these two senses are ever-changing and can naturally be transformed into one another. In light of this, Taoists suggest the principle of wuwei to cope with paradoxes and contradictions in life. I believe, however, that wuwei is not the only way we can use. ‘No-action’ should be combined with action, which seems to me more harmonious with Yin Yang rather than sticking to only one point of view; even this view in itself is Taoist. Next section will introduce another key principle in Taoism: Yin Yang.

**5.5 The Principle of Yin Yang**

The Taoist Yin Yang symbol is well known. According to Yates (1994), one possible origin of Yin Yang is from the book of I-Ching (also known as Yi Jing or the Book of Changes) which refers to the discourse of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. It is also shown in the book of Daodejing by Laozi, who tried to explain the fundamental principles of the universe. In Taoism, Yin and Yang (also known as Taiji) are the symbolic of universal change and transformation between opposites.

**Figure 5.1:

As shown in Figure 5.1, the symbol is divided into two equal halves by a curved line, one side of which is black (Yin) and the other white (Yang) (Fang, 2011). ‘Yin and Yang’ refers to two opposite cosmic energies (Cooper, 1990). According to Fang (2012, p.31):

Yin represents a ‘female’ or dark energy, such as the moon, night, weakness, darkness, softness, and femininity; while Yang stands for a ‘male’ or bright energy, such as the sun, day, strength, brightness, hardness, and masculinity. The white dot in the black area and the black dot in the white area connote coexistence and unity of the opposites to form the whole. The curvy line in the symbol signifies that there are no absolute separations between opposites.

In addition, according to Cheng (1989), Yin refers to the process of potential changing into reality and Yang represents the changing of reality into potential (p.177). The unity of Yin and Yang implies “the unity of light and shade, the unity of motion and rest, and the unity of firmness and softness” (p.188). Explaining it in a general way, the unity of Yin and Yang for me represents the balance and the transformation between contradictions and opposites, which could be realised in an unlimited number of ways (p.189).

In Taoist philosophy, all universal phenomena are shaped and complemented, and the development of all things is promoted by the integration of two opposite cosmic energies (Fang, 2012). As Laozi illustrates in the Daodejing:

It is because everyone under Heaven recognise[s] beauty as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists. And equally if everyone recognised virtue as virtue, this would merely create fresh conceptions of wickedness. For truly, Being and Not-Being grow out of one another; Difficult and easy complete one another. Long and short test one another; High and low determine one another. Pitch and mode give harmony to one another. Front and back gibe sequence to one another(Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999, p. 5; for original Mandarin see Box 5.6).

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| Box 5.6  天下皆知美之为美，斯恶已；皆知善之为善，斯不善已。有无相生，难易相成，长短相形，高下相盈，音声相和，前后相随，恒也。  老子《道德经》第二章 (Waley, Chen & Fu, 1999) |

To put it simply, the philosophical principles of Yin Yang could be summarised into three points (Fang, 2011): Yin and Yang coexist in everything; Yin and Yang give rise to, complement, and reinforce each other; and Yin and Yang form a dynamic and paradoxical unity. The Taoist Yin Yang perspective values contradiction and paradox. Contradictions are regarded as the natural and organic core of both existence, which refers to ontology, and knowledge, which refers to epistemology; and treats all contradictions as permanent yet relative; contrary yet complementary (Li, 2012). Yin and Yang are not seen only as being balanced with each other, but also as interdependent upon and interweaved with each other. In light of this, according to Knoblauch and Falconer (1986), Taoists see intuitive logic as more important than the Western concept of rationality, valuing the power of acceptance rather than control. One fundamental difference between the Western perspective and the Yin Yang perspective is that the former sees paradox as exclusive opposites, but the latter sees it as interdependent opposites (Chen, 2002).

The application of the Yin Yang perspective is very broad and practical. In the study of culture, for example, based on Yin Yang, each culture is conceived as having a life of its own. The original and potential values in each culture is paradoxical, therefore they should embrace the opposite traits of any given cultural dimension (Fang, 2011). A holistic view allows culture to be understood as a whole; a dynamic view sees how culture changes and develops over time, and a dialectical view looks at how culture embraces paradox (Fang, 2014). In terms of psychotherapy, Yin Yang can be adopted as a theoretical frame for unifying the positive and negative aspects of experience; in doing so, clients are encouraged to accept and trust in this sense of interrelatedness via the principle of wuwei (no-action) (Knoblauch & Falconer, 1986). In the area of medical care, Chan, Ho and Chow (2002) argue that health could be perceived as a harmonious equilibrium that exists between the interplay of Yin and Yang; rather than as discrete entities consisting of body, mind, cognition, emotion, and spirituality, as Western medicine sees it, due to the failure of over-specialised Western health care to provide satisfactory cures. In terms of conflict management, Du, Ai and Brugha (2011) suggest when relating Taoist Yin-Yang thinking to Western norms, keeping a balance between adjusting to others and adjusting the self is the key to resolving conflict. In the content below, I will apply the principle of Yin Yang to the theoretical framework and research findings from this study.

**5.5.1 Yin Yang in the whole Theoretical Framework**

In terms of my research, I believe that it is beneficial for a researcher to keep an open and flexible mind to various theories and ideas. The cognitive frame I hold here, therefore, is the Chinese Taoist Yin Yang perspective, because it is an open system that accommodates a balance between “either/or” and “both/and” (Li, 2012). From the Yin Yang point of view, it is therefore problematic to divide human beings into ‘collective or individual’ and ‘both collective and individual’. It is more reasonable to see Chinese people, as well as other people, as collectivists in some situations and contexts, but individualists in some other situations and contexts (Fang & Faure, 2011). In summary, the Yin Yang perspective holds a holistic, dynamic, and dialectical worldview (Li, 1998). As a consequence, based on the Yin Yang point of view, I would argue that accepting and using paradoxes within various theoretical approaches is much more effective than only sticking to one approach. As Caramia (2001) suggests, a unique theoretical construction of the self is not plausible; rather, a gradual and evolutionary transformation of the self might be possible.

In light of this, the theoretical framework of my thesis could be explained via the principle of Yin and Yang. In particular, in terms of Western theories, both the social constructionist viewpoint and psychoanalytic viewpoint could be seen as embodiments of Yang and Yin, because the former focuses on one’s outside relationships and the latter pays more attention to one’s psyche. In terms of traditional Chinese philosophy, Confucian and Taoist viewpoints could be seen as Yang and Yin. Confucians taught people to follow social rules and become an ideal social being, whereas Taoists emphasise the importance of individual spiritual freedom. Practically, Confucians advocate social action such as education, but Taoists advocate less intervention. They may seem opposite to each other, but they also complete each other. As Lin suggests, “the positive and the negative elements in Chinese life-the yin and the yang which complement each other and operates dialectically to lead life out of its periodic impasse; and thanks to them, China is no nation of monomaniacs and monotones” (Lin, 1947, p.260). Furthermore, Western theory and Chinese philosophy could be seen as Yang and Yin, through which the self could be interpreted from different perspectives. The advantage of applying the Yin Yang principle to theoretical frameworks is to see those different theories as integrating with and complementing each other, rather than being isolated from each other. In doing so, theoretical systems might become more comprehensive.

Yin and Yang could also be adopted to interpret my research findings. In brief, the self could be seen as a unity of Yin and Yang, involving one’s outside relationships and inner emotional experiences, within each of which Yin and Yang could also be experienced. In family relationships, for example, parents and children could be seen as Yin and Yang to each other. In one’s individual emotional experiences, positive and negative emotional experiences could be seen as Yin and Yang to each other as well. As Cheng (1989, p.178) explained, human beings are in an opposite position in which he or she feels both

[…]stability, freedom and confidence for the reason that he can identify himself or herself in a network of relationships with other people and things which are essential for his or her growth, satisfaction, and self-fulfilment, and instability, bondage and uncertainty for the reason that all relationships need appropriate strengthening, development and substantiation, for which appropriate knowledge and action (or inaction) are required.

The alternation between Yin and Yang in unity is a creative process of differentiation (Cheng, 1989, p. 177). Anything comprising Yin and Yang, including the self, is always in a process of change that in turn has the potential to change. Consequently, I would argue that the general law of self-construction might be keeping a balance in diversification and pluralism, drawing nourishment from various perspectives rather than sticking to one while rejecting another, for example keeping a balance between inner and external worlds; between Eastern values and Western values, between a certain self-identity and uncertain self-identity and even ‘non-self’.

**5.5.2 Yin Yang in ‘Self’**

The theoretical framework in this study has interpreted the characteristics of the self in three different but compatible ways. In particular, according to the social constructionist and object relations theory, ‘self’ is relational, dynamical, multi-faceted, changeable, and constructed within the contribution of both outside and internal worlds. According to Confucianism, the self is collective and moral, whereas Taoism suggests that the self is independent and connected to the natural forces of life (Hsu, O’Connor & Lee, 2009). I am not taking any of those concepts for granted because I believe that ‘self’ cannot easily be defined. Indeed, the thesis is not trying to give the self a definition; rather, it intends to provide more and even opposing understandings about ‘self’. Based on these theoretical interpretations and taking into account of the perspective of Yin Yang, which holds a balanced view of personality and overcomes the idea of the self as a separate, enduring entity (Kitayama & Markus, 1999), I would therefore explain my understanding of the self as a transformable unity within both Yin and Yang.

One’s self is often historically and socially categorised into various and even opposite domains, for example, either Chinese or British; parents or children; male or female. It seems that even though the self has multiple positions with social labels, we still need to identify who we are in different situations. One conventional and common example might be that if I claim myself as female, I cannot say I am male. I would argue, however, that this conventional perspective is insufficient for understanding and describing a person as a whole. I would argue that ‘self’ is both Yin and Yang; we are both male and female; both localised and globalised; both parents and children. The argument may seem reasonable, but also strange to some degree. A person could be both localised and globalised, but how can we be both male and female? In effect, this point has been discussed from the perspective of social constructionism and a feminist point of view for decades, for example, Butler (1988, p.520) makes the strong argument of “gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo”.

I agree with this aspect of the social constructionist perspective, so I will not add more argument on this since it has already been explored in depth. I would, however, like to look at it from the Taoist point of view by adopting the important concept of ‘reversion’ which means that all things ultimately revert to their primordial, original tranquil state of equilibrium - the Tao itself (Hsu, O’Connor & Lee, 2009), to explain the relationship between opposites. The concepts of male and female, no matter whether these are biologically or socially constructed, are conventionally seen as opposite to each other. Based on the Yin Yang perspective, however, they are seen more as being in a relationship of coexistence, interdependence, and symbiosis. That is, because there is a concept of ‘male’, there is a concept of ‘female’, and vice versa. In addition, these could be transformed into each other and the transformation process itself is a never-ending cycle. From a Taoist philosophical point of view, we are therefore both male (Yang) and female (Yin) and only if we accept these two forces and balance them can the self develops in a natural way.

In the research, for example, both Jerry and Sara showed that they had British and Chinese identities. It might be oversimplified to identify their identities as dual-cultural, because the implicit meaning of this involves separating cultural identity into distinct categories. It seems problematic for me to treat British and Chinese identity as totally different from and thus opposite to each other. I found that when I asked them to choose how much they felt like they were Chinese, they hesitated and showed significant anxiety. Once they had to choose one side or locate themselves somewhere between the two, they lost the freedom of being a whole self. In addition, in Sara’s case, it seems to me that her narrative of “British people are better” represented her unconscious anxiety due to unconsciously feeling like she had to compare these two identities and choose a group to fit herself in. I think this problematic issue might be caused by a stereotype or conventional understanding of cultural identity - even though we can choose both, we still unconsciously split ourselves into two separate parts, therefore I would suggest that it might be inspiring to look at cultural identity from the Taoist Yin Yang viewpoint.

In this paradigm, British identity could be seen as Yang, while Chinese identity could be seen as Yin and vice versa. Their relationship is not opposite in the model of Yin Yang, but in harmony. Furthermore, I would argue that the children’s cultural identity is a mixture of British culture (Yin) which contains the seeds of Chinese culture (Yang), and vice versa. In Jerry’s case, for example, one way in which he constructed his self-position of being Chinese was feeling disconnected with non-Chinese people. Here, the ‘non-Chinese’ identity is the seed of the Chinese identity, thus Chinese identity is also the seed of non-Chinese identity. Seeing multiple identities as whole rather than separated and limited positions means, for the Taoist, the possibility of escape from the mundane world and enjoying unbounded freedom (Hsu, O’Connor & Lee, 2009).

In summary, I would argue that the self is both Yin and Yang; multiple different and even opposite self-positions are not only limitless, but can also coexist with and be interdependent upon each other. One important characteristic of the self or those self-positions is that each self-position is relational. In particular, the positions of being an adult and being a child can exist in unity in one person. The next section will discuss external relationships and culture from the perspective of Yin Yang.

**5.5.3 Yin Yang in Transforming Social Relationships and Culture**

From a social constructionist perspective, the self is embedded within particular social relationships and social culture. Based on the last argument that ‘self’ is both Yin and Yang, I would like to argue that relationships and culture are both Yin and Yang as well. It means that social relationships and culture, from the Taoist perspective, are seen as part of the universe and treated as having lives of their own (Fang, 2011). Globalisation does not bring paradox. Paradox is existing already, globalisation just makes paradox more significant. In other words, human beings might have no control over external relationships and culture, even though we are part of them and co-create them. Culture in action is full of paradoxes, diversity, and change (Fang, 2011).

The development of parenting style in China (PRC) might be an example. China’s cultural values have developed over a period of 4000 years and most of these values are maintained by the language. According to Fan (2000), contemporary Chinese culture consists of traditional culture, communist ideology, and Western values that started to come into China mainly through the open-door policy which began in 1978. According to Shek (2006), the Chinese traditional parenting style socialises children to obey their parents unconditionally, so children are not encouraged to have their personal views on their own upbringing. With the assimilation of Western educational values such as child-centred parenting into China, modern Chinese parents are encouraged to be more relaxed and flexible regarding their parenting behaviour (Shek, 2006).

Traditional Chinese parenting values and the contemporary Chinese parenting style, in the perspective of Yin Yang, which emphasises the importance of accepting and understanding the paradoxical nature of everything (Fang, 2011), could be interpreted as two intra-cultural forces in a counter-balancing paradox that complete and improve each other, rather than replace or conflict with each other. The assimilation of Western values into Chinese culture has reshaped the Chinese cultural system. In doing so, the Chinese cultural system keeps developing by both retaining traditional values while also adopting modern values. The power between two opposite forces is not always in balance, however. In different situations and contexts, some values could be promoted whereas others are suppressed; as Fang (2005) suggests, metaphorically, every national culture is an ocean with a life of its own full of dynamics and paradoxes, changing from Yin to Yang and from Yang to Yin in a dynamic process of internal transformation. Based on this, I would suggest that two different cultures could be seen as external driving forces for each other and could also be transformed into one another. In summary, social culture is not fixed; rather it is in a dynamic process of change, catalysed by both local and global culture as Yin and Yang. As a consequence, the interactions and relationships among people are culturally based. The collision and paradox between different cultures have a significant and dynamic influence on people’s daily life and self-constructions. According to Shek (2006), as migration represents “culture shock” within the family, so how the family members wish to preserve their ethnic identities is an important issue. In this research, the children’s ethnic identities are also rooted in their relationships with their parents.

In my study, for example, Emily told me that she refused to explain a Chinese TV drama to Jerry when he asked her to, telling him to learn to understand the Chinese language by himself. It seems to me that Emily’s rejection to some of Jerry’s requests might be seen as Yin that put the relationship at risk, but Jerry’s desire to understand what his mum was watching could be seen as a Yang force that could rebuild the relationship and reconstruct his own ethnic identity through learning more Chinese vocabulary to understand the Chinese drama (and thus Chinese culture). Emily also said, however, that Jerry felt like she was bothering him once because she asked him to explain his book to her because her English was not good enough. In this case, Emily had to give up her dominant cultural position and let Jerry take the power. It is the power flows in a relationship between two people (Yin and Yang) that keep the relationship growing in balance. This concept might provide us with a radical angle to look at the relationship between parents and children and how they might construct their own selves within this relationship. Social relationships are therefore transformable within Yin Yang. A continued relationship needs both separation and union to be complete.

**5.5.4 Yin Yang as a Catalyst for Self-Construction/Transformation**

As I have argued above, the self is Yin and Yang, but the relationships and cultures in which the self is embedded are Yin and Yang as well. This philosophy provides a macroscopic view through which everything in the universe consists of Yin and Yang, which are necessary forces for the development of all things. Based on this, I would argue that self-construction, which I also call self-transformation, is a process that is accelerated by Yin and Yang as well. These forces could be interpreted as external relationships vs. inner relationships; social accounts vs. personal accounts; positive emotional experiences vs. negative experiences, and so on. Self-construction/transformation is an uncertain process that can have a direction, but does not need to have a destination. In addition to those interdependent forces, according to Hsu, O’Connor and Lee (2009) life undergoes constant cycles of production (Yang) and destruction (Yin). From the Chinese worldview, I would argue that the process of self-construction itself is also a continued transformation between Yin and Yang, in which Yang indicates building and constructing the self and Yin indicates destruction of the self.

I found that Jerry and Sara had been through a continuing process of destroying and constructing their self-positions within the transformation of their narratives. Jerry changed his judgement about his dad from “he bothers me for no reason” to “it may be because I bothered other people sometimes”. It seems to me that he deconstructed his position of ‘victim’ and constructed a position of ‘a person who bothers other people and that might be the reason why my dad bothers me’. In doing so, he was able to create a reasonable image of both his father and himself, which made him feel less anxious about why his father bothered him. Sara also transformed her position from ‘I hate math’ to ‘I like math’ through the force of the notion that ‘I want to be clever’ which seemed to me a social concept that had been embedded in her mind. In light of this, I would argue that self-construction and self-transformation are forced by opposite relational drives. As I have illustrated based on the two vignettes above, one’s self is transformed within the process of connecting and disconnecting with particular cultural groups, understandings and misunderstanding with significant others, and psychological separation and union with one’s family members, especially parents.

In summary, adopting the holistic, dynamic, and dialectic perspective of Yin Yang, I argue that both the self and social relationships are transformable and consist of both Yin and Yang aspects. As a consequence, self-construction is a process of movement that is brought to life by Yin and Yang. ‘Self’ is formed by the co-existing forces of destruction and construction, for example. The movement of the process is sometimes forwards, sometimes returning, while the process itself is not always in flux; it also includes periods of temporary stability. In addition, I would argue that it might be possible to see the self not as a part of us, but as a part of a wider world. In other words, we might not be able to own our own selves, not only because self-construction is affected by various uncertain internal and external factors, but also because it might be beneficial for our wellbeing to admit to our limitations as human beings, both in terms of our influence on the outside world and on ourselves. In next section, I will apply Taoist viewpoints into my own reflection and reflexivity.

**5.6 Appling Taoist Viewpoints in Reflection and Reflexivity**

**5.6.1 Transformation of my Mind and Selves**

From the relational-constructionist point of view, the ‘research’ as a process in which “the identities of researcher, research object and related realities are in ongoing re-construction” (Hosking & Pluut, 2010, p.67). As a researcher and an interpreter, my job is to make sense of the participants’ stories and experiences based on the theoretical framework I built and organised. The way in which the stories are interpreted was inevitably embedded with my personal viewpoints. In contrast, my understanding about the world and myself was inevitably affected by the research, especially the books I have read, and the stories I have heard from the participants. Mercieca (2011, p.14) suggests that methods are not only about social scientific research, they also reflect and influence a process of the practitioners’ becoming. This section is going to demonstrate the subjective reflection and reflexivity in my research.

According to Shaw (2010), reflexivity refers to an evaluation of the self. It is a process of reflecting the researcher’s thought back on herself; it is a “continuing mode of self-analysis” (Callaway, 1992, p.33). Because the way in which my positionality affects the research has already been discussed in previous chapters, this section will focus more on my reflexivity. I will look at the transformation of my own self-positions in the research via illustrating my experiences of working with four participants. Then I will discuss the transformation when I cope with my own emotional experiences.

***Working with Jerry and Sara: I am a child***

Through working with Jerry and Sara, I have experienced three different self-positions. The first two are obvious; I was their teacher and the researcher. The other one was unexpected: they reminded me that I was, and still am, a child, like them. I have already explicated my reflection as both a teacher and a research in the previous content. In this section, the way in which I realised I am a child like Jerry and Sara will be exemplified.

The first example concerns Jerry. After the first interview with him, he took me upstairs to show me his room. Emily came with us. Jerry took me to the big bedroom and told me “this is where I and my mum live”. Emily said, “This is not his room. He has a small bedroom but he wants to sleep with me because he fears being alone. And he needs to read story book before sleep”. When Emily was saying this, Jerry got very emotional and even seemed angry by screaming “No! no! no! Mum you didn’t say!”. From a professional perspective, I interpret that he might feel embarrassed that his weakness of afraid of being alone at night was exposed to me because during the interview. He was trying to show that he is grown up enough to protect his father and even call himself as ‘a man’. From a personal perspective, I had a strong empathy to him because I saw myself in his position because I also experienced the same self-position. I did not want to expose my position to other people. I felt nothing but shame and anger along with Jerry. At that moment, I wanted to comfort Jerry by telling him that I know how he feels. I think I also wanted to comfort myself (or my previous self) by comforting him. The aim here in using this as an example is to point out that, in my research, I was not only having a conversation with Jerry and Sara, but also with myself childhood self; the memory of being a child never fades away.

Jerry’s example only reminds me of my childhood memories, the other example of a dream which was illustrated at the beginning of chapter 4, however, inspired me to analyse the self-positions of being an adult and being a child in one person. In the dream, ‘I’ being an adult was protected by another ‘I’ being a child. Considering these two examples, I think one’s self-positions are paradoxical; a person is both an adult and a child. It might be easier to understand that an adult could be a child because he or she was a child. A child can also could be an adult, however, because she can imagine being, and desire to be, an adult. Parents are normally the first model for children to project their desire of being an adult onto. In light of this projection, I think the interactions between parents and children may involve two hidden layers. One layer is that parents are not only interacting with the children but also with themselves because they project their memory and unfinished dream on their children. The other layer is that children are not only with parents but also with their imaginary self-position as an adult which is projected onto the parents. This can explain children being the container for their parents’ emotions also. I argued that the self is paradoxical in so far as it is both adult and child. The relationship between parents and children is paradoxical because their roles and functions may be swapped.

***Working with Emily and Alice: I am a mother***

In addition to being a teacher and a researcher, I also experienced being a mother via working with Emily and Alice because they shared with me their experience of being a mother in a transcultural context. Emily thinks that she is responsible for Jerry’s development because she did not get enough attention and education from her parents. She is trying to keep her eyes on Jerry as long as she can. Once Jerry lost his Chinese textbook in school. Emily went to me and asked me to help her find the book. I tried my best but did not find it. The school told Emily that we could give Jerry a new textbook for free. Jerry thought it was a good idea, but Emily insisted that she only wants the previous one because Jerry’s notes are on that one. I know, as the teacher, I did not ask the students to take notes during class because they are only at a beginners’ level. In the end, Emily accepted a new book, but still felt unhappy about it. From this, I experienced Emily’s anxiety; being too nervous over the issue of Jerry’s education. Alice also told me about her anxiety over being called “a monster” by Sara and Leo.

I inevitably imagined myself as a mother as well as them. I kept asking myself if I were in their shoes (if Jerry and Sara were my children), would I be as anxious as Emily and Alice. I also asked what I should do to cope with the situation. I also kept thinking that, when I have my own children in the future, what kind of mother I want to be and can be. Those questions did not find their answers, but they do put me in the position of being a mother. This position helps me understand Emily and Alice’s narratives and to feel their feelings rather than judging them or providing ‘professional’ suggestions on education. Through feeling the mothers’ feelings, I found that inside their mind they are still children. In facing their transcultural environment, their minds were full of uncertainty and anxiety. In other words, they were no more experienced than Jerry and Sara in this transcultural and bilingual world. This lead me to conclude and argue, in the previous data interpretation, that Jerry and Sara played a role as emotional containers for their parents.

***Professional self-positions: I am a teacher and researcher***

My first known position to the participants is that I am Jerry and Sara’s part-time language teacher. As a teacher, I was in a paradoxical position also. On the one hand, as embedded in Chinese culture, a ‘teacher’ is an authority figure in the class. On the other hand, I was trying to build an equal relationship with the children. In order to keep a balance between these two positions, I tried to treat the student-teacher relationship as a negotiating relationship rather than either teacher-centred or child-centred. I did this by keeping both the children’s intentions and my own responsibility in mind. The school requests, for example, that every class needs to have a final examination, but teachers have the freedom to decide what kind of examination the students will take. The children, of course, do not want to take the exam but they have to. I did not want them to take the exam with negative feelings about it, so I came up with the idea of negotiation. I told them that I noticed and understood their desire not to take the exam, and explained my responsibility to hold the exam. The children seemed open to the exam after I explained this because they felt they were understood and acknowledged that I needed to be understood also. I went further and prepared two forms of exam paper and asked them to choose one to take, one is easier but less fun, another one is harder but more interesting. They chose one and the examination was successfully held. From my own perspective, the children might feel that in this teacher-student relationship they were not only in a position as students who have to do what teacher asked, they are able to control the situation to some degree. This is because they were given the right and freedom to choose from two options, which decreases the degree of uncertainty; the relationship between the children and me was co-reconstructed on both sides. Both sides reconstructed our self-positions in this new relationship.

# Ethical dilemmas are inevitable in research. Mercieca (2011, p.18) uses the example of a person who needs to make a choice between taking care of his mother and sacrificing for the country to illustrate ethical dilemmas. This is similar to the old Chinese proverb “Loyalty and filial piety do not always complement each other”. I argue that ethical dilemmas are closely connected with the researcher’s self-positions. When I was doing the second interview with Jerry, he told me he did not want to continue after a few minutes. He told me that after the first interview he felt throat pain because he talked a lot. Personally, I understood his feeling and also wanted to end interview. From my position as a researcher, however, I needed him to do the last interview with me; otherwise, I would have to find another case to study all over again. Struggling between these two positions, I decided to finish the interview while considering the ethics of doing so. Jerry did decide to continue the interview.

I was, and still am, struggling with my multiple and even inter-paradoxical self-positions that were constructed during the research process. In addition to multiple self-positions, I have also been through various emotional difficulties such as anxiety, uncertainty, entanglement, predicament, and even desperation. Hosking and Pluut (2010) suggest, from a relational constructionist perspective, reflexivity should be seen as an ongoing dialogue rather than removing biases or simply making bias visible. I am trying to do the reflexivity via having a continued dialogue with myself. The self-positions I have described above may be interpreted in a different way later on through dialoguing. An open space for discussing my experience and even the data interpretation is always left open and accessible.

In the next two sections, I will provide some thoughts on emotionality, for example, how I learned to cope with my negative emotional experiences with help from the theories I built for my research. I will also put forward my idea: ‘pursue the non-self while constructing/transforming self’.

**5.6.2 Reflecting on Emotionality: Uncertainty and Anxiety**

Reflecting on my personal experience, the PhD process was, for me, used to reconstruct my understanding of the study and myself. In order to explore and build the theoretical framework for the research, I have been through a process from ‘searching for a certain answer’ to ‘doubting the existence of certainty and being anxious about uncertainty’, to ‘accepting the uncertainty and seeing new possibilities and opportunities from it’. For me, the research ontology and epistemology not only changed, the research was also a transformation of my personal world view, including how I understand emotionality. In this section, I am going to provide some thoughts on the way in which I learned to digest my emotional difficulties caused by the work and the life.

Emotional difficulties such as anxiety, insecurity, and entanglement permeate every aspect of our daily life. In my experience, uncertainty is the most significant reasons for my emotional difficulties. Mercieca (2011, p.12) argues that emotional difficulties are claimed to positive outcomes; writing needs to work with its entanglement because any disentanglement would result in an over-simplification of it. From a positive perspective, uncertainty makes self-construction flexible and creative; as Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) suggest, uncertainty leaves a space for creativity. The most significant feeling that individuals can feel may be ‘not-knowing’. The feeling of ‘not-knowing’ also has its positive influences, e.g. Anderson and Goolishian (1992, p.28) suggest that ‘not-knowing’ opens a space for ‘newness’ so that our understandings, explanations, and interpretations may not be limited by prior experiences or theoretically formed truths, and knowledge. We are then able to learn the uniqueness of each individual’s narratives.

In particular, Smith (2016a, p.278) also argues that ‘unknowing’ is a positive state that is not the same as ignorance. Smith is concerned with what makes a good knower, rather than the knowledge itself. According to him, a good knower is one who does not know sometimes because “one way not to live well with our knowledge is by being knowing”. As I understand him, Smith successfully challenges the traditional way of seeing ‘knowingness’ and ‘unknowingness’. It may seem paradoxical that knowing is about unknowing itself (Smith, 2016a). From a Chinese Taoist perspective, especially the theory of Yin Yang, holding this perspective may be helpful for people in order to live a better emotional life. In particular, knowing and unknowing are two aspects in Yin Yang; they are interdependent upon each other. Without knowing, there is no unknowing; without unknowing, there is no knowing. They also transform each other and are always in a returning process of transforming i.e. knowing could be unknowing, and unknowing could be knowing. One must go through the stage of ‘not-knowing’ to achieve the stage of ‘knowing’ whereas this ‘knowing’ will direct one to the next ‘not-knowing’.

In the process of transformation, a key concept is ‘change’. Change refers to the transition from one stable condition of things to another (Smith, 2016b). From the Western perspective, Smith (2016b) suggests seeing ‘change’ through various critical lenses. Some intend to see management of change as good and important; it also brings in damage, however. Some changes are worthwhile but some are entirely bad. In particular, turning people into ‘change agents’ is seen as a precondition of particular reforms so that “the purpose of change is to become a manager of change” (Smith, 2016b, p.13). It seems that Western philosophy encourages people to change rather than allowing the existence of the current situations. In my understanding, contra the western perspective, human beings are only able to manage change to certain degree. In other words, I do not think we are able to manage change completely because ‘change’ has its own rule concerning uncertainty.

Unfortunately, uncertainty will cause emotional difficulties such as anxiety (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2012). I have personally been through a period of ‘I know what I need to do but I do not want/dare to do it because I do not know what is going on now and what is going to happen next’. The only thing causing me to procrastinate was my anxiety caused by uncertainty. This may be theoretically relevant to Bion’s (1961) assumption of three basic type of emotional state: fight vs. flight, dependency vs. counter-dependency, and pairing vs. counter-pairing. According to Billow (1999), relating Bion’s (1962) assumption of LHK, fight or flight refers to hate which is dominated by hatred and aggression. Pairing points to knowing which is a curiosity for knowledge so that counter-pairing is a rejection of knowledge. Dependency refers to love so that counter-dependency refers to guilt. In particular, take Jerry as an example, he shows his desire of ideal love from his father while on the other hand, he is guilty of his thought ‘getting dad out of the house’ because his dad seems not able to provide him with ideal love. It seems that the basic emotional types in Bion’s assumption are paradoxical – each side is opposite but interdependent upon each other. This point is compatible with Taoist principle of Yin Yang. I have the problem however, of discovering how I can continue with uncertainty’s negative effect on my work and life. How can I find certainty from uncertainty?

According to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010, p.28), certainty does not result from avoiding uncertainty but from *entering* it. For example, from the viewpoint of Dialogical Self Theory, three uncertain propositions are indispensable in constructing one’s self. They are (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 31):

Other persons, groups, or cultures are parts of an extended self in terms of a multiplicity of contradictory voices or positions; relations of social dominance are not alien to dialogue but belong to its intrinsic dynamics; and emotions play a crucial role in closing or opening the self to global and local influences.

Entering uncertainty means trying to know what it is. No matter how much we know, however, there is still an unknown which keeps causing anxiety. I think entering it is only one way to deal with uncertainty, but should be completed with an opposing method. It is important to remember that certainty also comes about because it stems from uncertainty.

It may sound paradoxical to practice entering and exiting from the same thing. In effect, ‘exiting from it’ is adopted from the Chinese Taoist way of seeing emotions. Seeing emotions as natural reactions to external things rather than over-identifying with them. As Zhuangzi says (Wang, Qin & Sun, 1999, p.123. In Mandarin see box 5.7):

The perfect man has a mind like a mirror, which neither welcomes nor sends, which reflects things but does not retain things. Therefore, he can act successfully without hurting his mind.

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| Box 5.7  至人之用心若镜，不将不迎，应而不藏，故能胜物而不伤。  出自 《庄子· 应帝王篇》 |

Fung (1948) gave this idea an appropriate explanation. He suggests that, from Neo-Confucian perspective, the Sage also has emotions. Emotions are natural, but they should not be connected or identified with the self. Inner emotions arise with outside stimuli, once the stimuli are gone, the emotions, which are caused by the particular stimuli, should be gone with it as well. The Sage has emotions but does not suffer them.

Taoist ideas are quite compatible with the Dialogical Self theoretical perspective on emotions. According to Hermans-Konopka (2011, p.432), “learning to look and just to see, to be with whatever arises, is the opposite of trying to change anything.” Dialogical Self theory advocates experiencing emotions without attempting to avoid or suppress them: “being with and allowing experience as it is without any evaluation” (Hermans-Konopka, 2011, p.432). Human beings are able to create a bigger space for containing emotions by growing our awareness of emotions.

Simply, instead of changing one’s emotions, I would rather allow them to exist, but not to be dominated by them. This suggestion is quite similar to the Taoist principle of Wuwei. As I described above, Wuwei does not mean doing nothing, but rather means avoiding unnecessarily intervening. In terms of dealing with emotions, individuals are encouraged to observe and feel but not to fight or change. The paradox is that the change will happen when a person stops trying to change. In my experience, if I am trying to change or control my anxiety, I often feel I am controlled by it which makes me more anxious so I try to calm down and have a dialogue with my anxiety rather than reject it. Every time the anxiety arises, I stop what I am doing and try to increase my awareness by asking myself questions such as ‘how does it feel? What do you think caused your anxiety? Did this feeling happen before? Can you put it down on the floor?’ With this practice, I found that I became more sensitive to my emotions, which is a positive development for me, because as long as I am aware of them, I am able to observe and know more about them. I feel that I do not need to struggle with them in experiencing them as suffering, as before; I have more space for negative emotions. In doing so, both positive and negative emotions make me feel complete. Growing awareness might be compatible with a neo-Confucian method of spiritual cultivation which is “the attentiveness of the mind”, which means “in order to be enlightened, we must always think about enlightenment” (Fung, 1948, p.305). In order to get on well with emotional difficulties, we must have a conscious intention to get on well with them.

The process of practicing observing, communicating with, and changing the way I react to emotions is full of pain and failures. It is also full of progresses, however. In doing so, the self is reconstructed because the self under the influence of one emotion is very different from the one under the influence of another emotion (Hermans-Konopka, 2011, p.432). In terms of self-construction, the way in which one constructs the self perhaps could be seen as a way in which one tries to know him or herself, includes the part of the self that is already constructed and the part that is going to construct. That is, the self-construction includes two aspects: knowing yourself and not-knowing yourself. Knowing your own emotions is the key step in self-construction.

**5.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced some key thoughts in Taoist philosophy and applied them to my research and my own life. I would argue that, ‘self’ is paradoxical, the relationship and culture is paradoxical, and the self-construction is paradoxical. I would like to add one more argument that living a balanced life may require a person to be a person out-of-world but do things in-the world. In other words, I am referring to the act of keeping a balance between following social rules and pursuing personal spiritual freedom.

The interpretations of the data and illustration of my own thoughts in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 may seem complicated and even chaotic. I believe, however, that chaos is a necessary step in establishing order. In order to construct a clear view of the world and oneself, one must go through confusion and uncertainty. Just as Fung (1948, p. 342) suggests, “Before the simplicity of philosophy is reached, one must pass through its complexity. One must speak very much before one keeps silent”.

**Chapter 6 Conclusion: This is not the End**

***What we call the beginning is often the end***

***And to make an end is to make a beginning***

***The end is where we start from***

***— T.S.Eliot (1944)***

**6.1 Introduction**

As I began to conduct the research and write this thesis, I was unsure where this journey would take me. Although this is the final chapter and I am concluding my research as well as my 4-years study, this should not be seen as an end. In this chapter, I will provide a review and conclusion of the whole thesis and research process since it might be a new beginning for me to continue my journey.

This research aims to explore the way in which individuals constructing selves in a transcultural context, via looking at the second-generation Chinese immigrant young people’s narratives regarding their daily life within significant social relationships and embedded within both British and Chinese cultures. As such, a theoretical plurality is appropriate. With principles of complementarity and transformation, three main theoretical approaches - social constructionism, object relations theory and Chinese Taoist philosophy – are adopted, to build a complementary theoretical framework and interpret the data and research outcomes. Methodological framework of narrative case study and research questions are therefore constructed through a transformative process driving by theories and research data. In simple words, the contribution of this thesis is to enrich theoretical thoughts and practical research outcomes on study of the process in which individuals constructing selves in a transcultural context rather than to provide a ‘truth’ about the self.

In the content below, the transformative process of building the theoretical and methodological framework, setting the research questions and interpreting the data will be reviewed in section 6.2. In order to make sense of the complex and pluralist theoretical framework, the juxtapositions between each theoretical aspect will be explained in section 6.3.Based on the theoretical framework, the research outcomes and answers to the research questions will be illustrated in section 6.4.Since this is a qualitative narrative case study research, Yardley’s qualitative research criteria are adopted to evaluate the research in section 6.5, in addition to which, research implications and limitations will be illustrated as well.

**6.2 Summary of the Transformative Process of the Research**

This thesis started with Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream story, through which my own interests in self-construction/transformation gave rise. In addition, my work experiences as a part-time Chinese language teacher in the UK gave me an opportunity to work with some second-generation Chinese immigrant young people, through which exploring the way in which Chinese young people constructing and transforming selves in a transcultural context (UK) emerged as an original research intention.

The process of approaching self and self-construction started from looking at conventional Western especially Cartesian concepts of self. However, seeing individual self as essential and bounded is not convincing to me. Through criticizing Western concepts of self, I therefore turned to social constructionist theory (more details see chapter 3) in order to explore the way in which one constructs selves within social relationships.

Social constructionist theory argues that one’s selves or self-positions are multiple, dynamic, relational, dialogical, unfixed and always in a process of constructing and transforming within social relationships. In other words, the way in which individuals constructing selves is culturally and relationally shaped. Since the participants are Chinese heritage, Confucian philosophy is also taken into consideration to explain the importance of social relationship especially family relationships in Chinese people’s self-constructions. Based on this perspective, the first research question is therefore ‘how do the children construct their self-positions i.e. in the contact of various external relationships?’. Additionally, according to social constructionist perspective that knowledge is subjectively constructed (Burr, 1995), a narrative case study research was conducted to explore each participant’s life experiences.

In addition to one’s self-construction in his or her social relationships, I am also interested in individuals’ inner world such as emotional experiences. Therefore, I turned to object relations theory (more details see Chapter 4) to explore the way in which individuals psychologically constructing selves and coping with outside relationships. Therefore, the second research question is ‘how do the children construct their self-positions psychologically i.e. through the interaction between various internal and external relationships?’.A psychoanalytic interview technique of free-association was used in my research interviews.

Since both social constructionist and object relations theory emphasise the influence of significant relationships on one’s self-constructions, I also interviewed Jerry and Sara’s mothers in order to explore the third research questions that ‘how do the children’s mothers experience their own identities and how does this affect their children’s identity?’. Therefore,four participants’ narratives about their life experiences were collected as the research data and analysed within social constructionism and object relations theory respectively.

However, since the research is transcultural and the participants are Chinese immigrant young people who are embedded within both British and Chinese cultures in their daily life, I think it would be partial to analyse their narratives only based on Westernized theory. Therefore, I set the fourth research question of ‘how could the research outcomes be interpreted by Taoist philosophy?’ to introduce Taoist philosophical ideas into the thesis (more details see chapter 5). Taoist philosophy not only shares quite a few similar points with social constructionism and object relations theory, but also provides an alternative philosophical idea to enrich the interpretations of the research outcomes. Therefore, Taoist philosophical principles of complementarity and transformation became the fundamental principles in the thesis even though they came into the research process later than other two theoretical paradigms. Under the principle of transformation, I allow the research and the thesis writing in a transformative process. Under the principle of complementarity, social constructionism, object relations theory, and two Chinese philosophical thoughts are completing and improving each other in this thesis.

**6.3 Summary of the Theoretical Juxtapositions/Complementarity**

In this section, I will summarise theoretical juxtapositions between three main theoretical paradigms, and illustrate the necessity and feasibility to integrate them with the principle of complementarity which not only allows the co-existence between differences, opposites and paradoxes, but also leaves a space for each perspective to complete each other. However, different theories may suit for different contexts and situations, I do not deny that the usage of theories should be flexible and always open for transformation and change. In this thesis, I would argue that social constructionism, object relations theory, and Taoist philosophy are inseparably interconnected and work effectively together to explore the way in which individuals constructing selves in a transcultural context.

Looking at the Western theories in this thesis. Social constructionist perspective suggests that one’s self-positions are multiple, dynamic, flexible, and every-changing within social contexts. Object relations theory, as a particular strand of psychodynamic theory, also suggests that human beings have basic needs to connect with outside worlds. Both of social constructionist and object relations theory reject Cartesian and Freudian notions of self. As Flax (1990, p.110) suggests, object relations theory does not require a fixed view of human nature but suggest that human nature has multiple forms that could change with social relations. In other words, object relations theory looks at the way in which individuals internalise outside relations through common psychological patterns and be influenced by different social environments. For example, Winnicott provided a psycho-social account of how the self is bound into culture (Yates & Sclater, 2000). Social constructionism and object relations also share some practical perspectives in common. For example, ‘reflexivity’ in social constructionism may be replaced by ‘countertransference’ in psychodunamic theory (Ulus & Gabriel, 2016).

In light of this, I would argue that it is feasible and necessary to combine social constructionist approach with psychodynamic theories such as object relations theory in psycho-social studies, because social perspective offers psychologists an opening to the ‘social’ (Rustin, 2014), object relations theory also addresses a central deficiency of constructionism by conceptualizing the structuring of desire within the individual self (Epstein, 1991, p. 825). Practically, for example, Cohen (2000) illustrated the importance of integrating social constructionist perspective and object relations theory in a case of the development of a deaf woman. For another example, in my research, analysing Jerry and Sara’s narratives within both social constructionism and object relations theory is beneficial for me to understand their selves-constructing both socially and psychologically.

In terms of Chinese thoughts in this thesis, I considered two ancient philosophical perspectives - Confucianism and Taoism - because, as Lau (1996) suggests, although there is a difference between the distant past and the recent past in China, the distant past still has unavoidable effects in the present (Lau, 1996). Confucianism gives insight into social rules and relationships in a person’s life and asks people to follow social rules, whereas Taoism pays attention to the way in which one can live his or her life in harmony with nature (Fang, 2014). They seem different and even opposite but are coexisting perfectly in Chinese culture and Chinese people’s daily life. As Lin (1947) suggests, Chinese people are socially Confucian and individually Taoist (Lin, 1947).

Social constructionism and Confucianism shares a key similarity of emphasising the influence of social context on one’s development. Therefore, I utilized Confucian perspectives in chapter 3 integrating with social constructionist perspective in order to explore the way in which Chinese people constructing selves in social relationships. Additionally, Confucianism helps adapt object relations better in the research because multiple selves and object representations are experienced as extensions of family relationships especially mother-children relationship in Eastern culture (Nagai, 2007).

Taoism also shares similar points with social constructionism such as anti-realistic perspective (Kupperman, 1999) and anti-dualism (Stevenson, 1996). Additionally, Taoism could be seen as a truly integrative theory of ‘self’ and psychotherapy that considers individuals’ social, psychological, biological, cognitive, spiritual and emotional strengths and weaknesses (De Piano et al., 2012, p.176). In other words, Taoism is open and inclusive that holds a holistic perspective, with which different theories are able to be coexisting, completing and transforming each other.

In sum, with the Taoist principles of complementarity and transformation, I would argue that social constructionism, object relations theory, and Chinese philosophy are not only compatible with but also complete each other in this research. On the one hand, they share multiple theoretical juxtapositions. On the other hand, integrating them allows me to build a pluralist theoretical framework, through which individuals’ self-constructions/transformations could be explored socially, psychologically, and culturally in a transcultural context.

**6.4 Summary of the Research Outcomes and Answers to the Research Questions**

In this section, I will revisit the research questions and summarise the research outcomes.

The first research question is ‘how do the children construct their self-positions i.e. in the contact of various external relationships?’. Sub-questions are ‘how do the children construct their self-positions in the interaction with their significant relationships?’, ‘what kind of significant relationships do they think they are in?’, and ‘what kind of self-positions were constructed within those relationships?’.

Based on Jerry and Sara’s narratives, there are at least four significant relationships emerged: 1)The relationship with parents who represent Chinese culture; 2)The relationship with other children in the same position as them who identify themselves as being in the middle between or as both Chinese and British; 3)The relationship with English culture which is represented by English school teachers and language; 4)The relationship with someone who is neither Chinese nor British e.g. a friend with a different religion from theirs, as Jerry mentioned in the interview.

Those significant cultural relationships that they encounter in their cognitive domain are complicated and even contrary to each other. But every social relationship can transform. Jerry and Sara’s relationships with each social relationship can transform as well, for example, Jerry felt both connectedness and disconnectedness to the same cultural group (see Jerry’s story of constructing the meaning-frame ‘religion’ in chapter 3), and experienced both separation and union in the mother-son relationship (see Jerry’s story of his relationship with Emily in chapter 4). The role of each side in a relationship can transform as well. For example, Sara took on the role of a parent in order to be the emotional container for digesting her family’s especially her mother’s anxiety (see Sara’s story of the relationship with Alice in chapter 4). That is, the way in which Jerry and Sara constructing selves is always in a process of transformation within various transformative social relationships. Therefore, Jerry and Sara constructed and may still constructing various, different, paradoxical but coexisting selves, for example, being both Chinese and English, being both children and “parents”.

Considering the first research question, I would argue that, in addition to a social constructionist perspective that selves and the process of transforming selves are multiple, dynamic, changeable, relational, and context based; they are also paradoxical. In other words, a significant status of constructing selves might be struggling with multiple paradoxical self-positions. One’s self-positions could change in a few days, or even a few minutes. Sara, for example, changed her self-position from ‘one who hates maths’ to ‘one who like maths’. Jerry changed his self-position from ‘one who is bothered by his dad’ to ‘one who bothers other people that annoyed his dad’. Both of them located themselves between identification with, and separation from, both Chinese and British culture. I would therefore argue that one’s selves are being constructed in-between various paradoxical social voices, in-between outside and inner voices, and in-between various paradoxical inner voices.

The second research question is ‘how do the children construct their self-positions psychologically i.e. through the interaction between various internal and external relationships?’. Sub-questions are ‘how do they emotionally experience the relationships with other people?’ and ‘how do they emotionally experience the relationships with themselves?’.

Winnicott (1971)’s work, which claims that the self is constructed in the third space between the inner and outer world, takes significant others into account. Rustin (2014) emphasises the value of ‘transitional space’ but suggests that more work should be done from this perspective. Therefore, I argue that individuals constructing selves in a relational-transitional space to which both a person’s and a significant others’ transitional spaces contribute. People’s transitional spaces might link with each other through the same transitional object or transitional phenomena (which I call as relational To/TP) with the same or different even contradictory meanings to them. In Sara’s case of drawing (see chapter 4), for example, drawing functions as relational TP to her and Alice, with which Sara was constructing and transforming selves in a relational transitional space within Alice’s intentions.

In a relational transitional space, digesting emotional experiences is not isolatable. In other words, the other person helps one digest his or her emotional experiences if one is not able to digest it himself or herself. For example, Emily helped Jerry digest his emotional experiences about his dad. However, one may have to digest the other person’s emotional experiences as well. For example, Sara had to digest Alice’s anxiety in their relational transitional space. The selves are being transformed based on one’s process of digesting emotional experiences which not only include one’s own but also the significant others’.

The third question is ‘how do the children’s mothers experience their own identities and how does this affect their children’s identity?’.

Considering both Jerry, Sara and their mothers’ narratives, I would argue that the influence between children and parents is not unidirectional but bidirectional. In other words, parents affect children, children also affect parents. For example, in terms of digesting emotions, it is not only that the adults are playing a role as children’s emotional container, but also, children are playing the same role for their mothers. In this research which was conducted in a transcultural context, on the one hand, parents’ cultural identity as being Chinese had positive effects on their children’s cultural self-position. On the other hand, children are a bridge linking their parents to British culture since they were born in the UK making them more immersed into British culture and more fluent in English than their parents. By doing so, parents’ cultural positions might change as well.

Additionally, sometimes children have to be the container for their parents’ anxiety and their own anxiety of dealing with conflicts between these two cultural values. That is, children have to digest both their own and parents’ emotional experiences. By digesting the parents’ anxiety, they may introject their parents’ identities and intentions. However, when children felt not able to do this job of digesting parents’ emotions, they may psychologically defend themselves, such as through splitting, in order to make sense of parents’ behaviours and their own feelings.

The fourth research question is ‘how could the research outcomes be interpreted by Taoist philosophy?’.

Considering data interpretation with Taoist philosophy (more details see chapter 5), selves are paradoxical and contradictory within different and even opposite self-positions; social relationships in a transcultural context are paradoxical as well. For example, one may love and hate the same person at the same time. Jerry, for another example, shows both connectedness and disconnectedness to the same cultural group. The process of constructing and transforming selves is paradoxical as well, for example, sometimes it seems occasionally regressive, not only accumulating experiences and becoming more mature, but also going back to be “childish”. Self-transformation goes through a recycling process of construction, destruction, and finally reconstruction of the self.

For example, self-destruction is not a consumptive force opposite to self-construction, but rather, they are interdependent upon each other. The Chinese idiom ‘不破不立’illustrates there can be no construction without destruction. Destruction and construction of the self can co-exist at the same time in one’s mind. In the words of Hampden-Turner (1981, p.112), “order and disorder, doubt and certainty can surely be entertained simultaneously in one mind”. This does not mean, however, that things that are destroyed cannot be constructed again.

Relating to Taoist Yin Yang principle that the movement of everything is in a process of returning, for another example, I suggest that a person’s self-construction and development is not irreversible. Things that are destroyed could be constructed again. The children in my study told me that sometimes they feel they are more Chinese but sometimes more British, for example. On the surface, this can be interpreted as a consequence of their being in the middle of two cultures. What I see, however, is that they are in a process of destructing and constructing their cultural identities, in order to balance at least two different selves.

**6.5 Evaluation of the research**

***Yardley’s criteria***

Anderson (2010) suggests, the quality of qualitative research depends heavily on the researcher’s skill and bias, and the findings are hard to generalise as quantitative research. I argue, instead, that, when evaluating qualitative research, it should not be compared with quantitative research. I therefore adopted Yardley’s (2000) criteria of qualitative research (see chapter 2) to evaluate my research from four aspects:

1. Sensitivity to context,
2. Completeness of data collection, analysis and interpretation,
3. Reflexivity,
4. Its practical and theoretical utility

In terms of ‘sensitivity to context’, it might be important for the research to have a prolonged engagement in the research and the research context. My research was conducted in a transcultural context mainly within British and Chinese cultures. As I described in chapter 1 and 2, my situation allows me to embed into Western culture with Chinese civilization. My participants also experienced and are experiencing those two cultures. That is, my participants and I shared a similar social context.

The relationship between my participants and I is also considered in the research. I have known them for quite a few years as the children’s Chinese language teacher, so we are familiar with each other to some degree. On the one hand, the relationship is helpful because there seems no issue of untrusty. For example, they believe that they will not be hurt by me and the research. On the other hand, it might be difficult to build another form of relationship (researcher-participants) instead of an existing relationship (teacher-students). Therefore, during whole process of the research, I kept reflecting on my own position in order to diminish the effect of being a teacher on the research. In addition, familiarity may affect my interpretations of the participants’ narratives. Therefore, I kept reflecting on my subjectivity during the whole process of research especially data interpretation, in order to be conscious of my thoughts that might be taken for granted.

This research allows me to reconstruct a relationship with my participants and myself as well, therefore, in terms of ‘reflexivity’, I reflected on the paradoxical selves such as being a child and a mother I experienced in the research (more details see chapter 5). In simple words, this research put me in a process of transforming my own selves and research interests, by exploring various theories such as social constructionism, object relations theory and Taoism.

In terms of ‘completeness of data collection, analysis and interpretation’, since my research is a narrative case study, the sample size is not big. Two children and their mothers were interviewed respectively for 2 or 3 times. Narratives they shared with me are relevant to their social relationships, emotional experiences, understandings about two cultures and so on. The data interpretation was immersed within three main theoretical aspects. Reviewing the content illustrated in previous chapters, I would argue that there is coherence across the research questions, theoretical/philosophical perspectives, methodological issues and data analysis. However, understanding is imaginary (Parker, 2005, p.120). Human experiences are too complex to be understood clearly and transparently. Therefore, I do not claim that my understanding of the participants and their stories is correct. As I stated earlier on, the aim of this research is not to understand ‘what’ but to create a possible way to ‘how’.

The practical and theoretical utility of my research will be discussed below.

***Research implications/utility and limitations***

The unique characteristic of research is that it provides some thoughts on ‘how to do research in a globalised, transcultural, world’. Firstly, I argue that creating a theoretical framework with various theories which aim at complementariness may be more appropriate than relying on a singular theoretical approach because of the incompatibility of the individual approach. ‘More’, in this case, does not mean ‘better’, however. I suggest that when creating a multi-theoretical framework, the juxtaposition and conflicts between the different theories should always be critically considered. In terms of how to integrate each theory, a Chinese idiom seems appropriate to explain my perspective: ‘求同存异’ means ‘seek common points while reserving difference’.

From a Taoist perspective, similarity and difference, connectedness and disconnectedness are able to transform into each other. In Jerry’s case, for example, the feeling of disconnection from a person who had a different ‘religion’ from him helped him to identify himself as Chinese. This identification also leaves a free space for him, and the other person, to build a relationship, rather than force each other to be the same.

Secondly, I suggest avoiding taken-for-granted thoughts and taking consideration of research context is necessary. For example, the research inspires me to rethink the child’s position in the parents-child relationship. Conventionally, from a Chinese Confucian point of view, parents are often seen as authoritative rulers or trainers to their children. In Western society, however, the equality of parents and children is emphasised. Those two values are respectively accepted in their own social contexts. Both these two conventions put parents and children in positions that separate and are even the opposite of each other.

However, in a transcultural context, it might be not appropriate to explain parents-children relationship according to either only Chinese or only Western culture. In my research, the parents are the first-generation immigrants from China who experienced a more serious ‘cultural shock’ than their children who are born in the UK. Socially and psychologically, on the one hand, the parents play a role of a cultural bridge that links their children to their heritage, Chinese culture. They also function as an emotional container for their children, especially when the children feel anxious and find it difficult to learn the Chinese language. On the other hand, the children play the same role for their parents. They are the cultural bridge to help their parents adapt to British culture. They are also being the emotional containers for their parent’s anxiety caused by cultural differences. That is, the parents are not always acting as parents because the children might be more ‘authoritative’ about British culture. Children are not always acting as children who need support and help from their parents, but rather, they sometimes play the role of helping their parents. However, the Western perspective of equality between parents and children was not fully accepted by the parents and children since they are at least partially influenced by Chinese civilization.

I consequently argue that the concepts of ‘children’ and ‘parents’ need to be understood from a new perspective. Since the participants embedded within a transcultural environment, they might construct a new form of relationship. Their roles in the parents-children relationship could be seen as Yin and Yang, from Taoist perspective, that seems opposite, but are actually interdependent upon, and transform into, each other. Therefore, the parents-children relationship is always in a process of transforming.

Parenting, then, might not be the one-way activity of parents raising children. Parenting, instead, is an interaction through which parents and children help each other; both construct a new sense of self. I suggest that, in order to study children’s self-constructions, we should not only consider their positions in the relationship with their parents, but also take their parents’ own self-constructions into accounts. Because according to the research, I think a child’s self-construction takes place not only in their own transitional space but also in a relational-transitional space to which both their and their parents’ transitional spaces contribute. I argue that enhancing the interaction between parents and children concerning their own negative experiences would be beneficial to both parents and children. Recalling negative memories may be painful, but only through this practice can loss be grieved, anger expressed, and forgiveness given (Bateman & Holmes, 1995, p.31). Seeing the relationship as a unity of Yin and Yang allows the relationship to change and transform naturally in its own way. The new perspective also allows the development of a new form of relationship between parents and children. Parents are not always powerful; they can be vulnerable as well as children. Children may be strong enough to be the emotional container for digesting their parents’ emotions.

Thirdly, I suggest rethinking the relationship between a person and that person’s self in a transcultural context. A person’s self-construction is affected by multiple, dynamic, outside relationships and an internal reality which is “not a simple representation of external reality or the social world because of the workings of psychological processes such as fantasy, desire and defences against anxiety” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p.138). Since it is a globalized society and it seems impossible to avoid influences from different cultures and ideologies. We may all encounter conflict when we try to find out “how we construct the self” and “how we must construct the self” (Shotter, 1985). Inspired by the narrative therapeutic concept of “externalizing” (White & Epston, 1990) and the Taoist concept of ‘selflessness’, I suggest that, instead of seeing self-construction as inside our body and mind, it might be seen as a process of building a relationship between us and our inner selves. The ‘self’ is not inside us, but with us - we are not always being able to feel it or take control of it. The anxiety caused by the pressure of taking full control of the self and repressing the feeling of vulnerability may be decreased by changing our perspectives on self-construction.

Fourthly, in order to understand people in a globalised world, I think qualitative research should glean more attention. Narrative investigation is a good way to link people and cultures. As Holland and Kilpatrick (1993) suggest, through exposure to the stories of another culture, people may enlarge their capacity to understand and appreciate the diverse ways people develop meaning and express value in their lives. The narrative ‘English people are better’ may be seen as racist, but if it is understood in Sara’s story, it is not about racial bias, but an embedded social intention in her personal story. Stories can enrich social researchers’ appreciation of our own and others' cultures, bridges differences, and link social workers into communities. (Holland & Kilpatrick, 1993). This point inspired me to rethink the purpose of studying human beings and the self.

Searching for a certain answer, proving assumptions, or constructing a model to explain human beings’ behaviour and mind, are often the purposes of research on human beings. Shotter (1974a) suggests that the conventional, ‘scientific’, ways of knowing and valuing may mean mastery and possession. In Western social science, researchers are concerned with exploring who we are and are trying to identify ‘self’, but are rarely thinking whether it is necessary to set this intention as a starting point. Knowing what human beings and society are, or even what they should be, seems tempting. It offers people the illusion that there is a truth or a perfect model out there and we are able to ‘know’ and ‘master’ it if we want. This makes people feel comfortable and secure, but it might lead us in a problematic direction.

From a social constructionist point of view, the existence of objective truth should be doubted. From the perspective of psychodynamic, Bion (1962) claims that ‘knowing’ indicates the psychoanalytical process of building a relationship between the subject and the object. I suggest that the purpose of studying human beings is to build a flexible relationship, rather than possessing knowledge; knowledge is always changing and developing within specific historical and social contexts. According to the Taoist Yin Yang philosophy, “being itself is the product of non-being” (Waley et al., 1999, p.83). ‘Knowing’ might be a product of ‘not-knowing’, ‘order’ might be a product of ‘disorder’, ‘certainty’ might be a product of ‘uncertainty’, ‘positivity’ might be a product of ‘negativity’. Searching for an answer or regulation might not be relevant to all human issues; exploring the issue with questions but without rigid assumptions or bias could be a new direction for all the researchers.

From my own perspective, in closing, this research makes two main contributions:

1. It enriches the theoretical understandings on ‘constructing selves’ by taking both Western theory and Chinese philosophical thoughts into account. With a complementary point of view, individuals’ senses of selves are biological, social, psychological, ethical, and spiritual, and opens to other possibilities. With a transformative point of view, selves are always in a process of transforming.
2. It provides deeper understandings on a practical issue concerning doing study in a transcultural context via looking at the way in which the young second-generation Chinese immigrants construct their self-positions in a transcultural environment.

However, the research also has its limitations. Firstly, the way in which the data is interpreted and the thesis is illustrated is limited according to the context I am in. In particular, the theoretical understandings are limited by my personal construction of the knowledge. Secondly, since the data interpretation took a long time owing to the complex theoretical framework, it is difficult to go back to the participants to do more interviews. This is also my personal regret in the research.

Finally,to summarise what I learnt from my research journey, I would like to borrow Rogers’ words (Rogers et al.,1967, p.185-187):

I have gradually come to one negative conclusion about the good life. It seems to me that the good life is not any fixed state. It is not, in my estimation, a state of virtue, or contentment, or nirvana, or happiness. It is not a condition in which the individual is adjusted or fulfilled or actualized. To use psychological terms, it is not a state of drive-reduction, or tension-reduction, or homeostasis… The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction not a destination.

Whether it is for the research or for my own life, the space for new possibilities should always be open. The end of this journey is another beginning for the next journey. I am not intending to set a destination for myself, I do not know where the road will take me, but I think the unknown is exactly the meaning of learning and developing. As Marcel Proust once said in his book of ‘In search of lost time’ (1922-1931), “my destination is no longer a place but a new way of seeing.”

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**Appendix A1 – A4: Selected Interview Transcripts**

Due to the limited length of the thesis, only selected interview transcripts will be provided in the appendix. The tables below will provide a map of each story and its location in appendix A-D. Each story can be traced in the transcripts by its number such as 3.5.1. The transcripts are shown in chronological order.

(J=Jerry, E=Emily, S=Sara, A=Alice, I=the interviewer)

|  |  |  |
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**Appendix A1: Selected Interview Transcripts with Jerry**

**First Interview:**

**Story 4.4.1**

*I: what do you usually do at home?*

*J: play with my Lego. I build it like a tiny gun*

*I: gun, why?do you like gun?*

*J: Yes*

*I: Why do you like gun?*

*J: well, look, cause you can shoot people, people die.*

*I: Why do you want shoot people die?*

*J: well, I was dreaming about being in an army*

*I: oh, an army*

*J: yeah, just like, it’s like lots of guns, I get to shoot people, but, (pause for a while) I have permission to shoot in an army, so, why not.*

*I: (laugh) so, you said you want to shoot people in an army, right?*

*J: yes, in the other country which is not, which are an enemy to our army, so*

*I:what do you mean by “our army”? Chinese army or British army?*

*J: well, both*

*I: both? So you are going to protect both British people and Chinese people?*

*J: well, that’s hard for a man*

*I: yes, that’s hard*

*J: well, what if the two armies get a like a defend the countries*

*I: which side will you choose? I mean, if British army fights with Chinese army, which side will you choose?*

*J: Chinese, because my dad lives there*

*I: your dad, you dad is Chinese, right?*

*J: yes, yes*

**Story 4.4.2**

*I: your mum told me you have been to Taiwan once, right? did you enjoy?*

*J: yeah, most of the parts I was like very nervous cause I was on the coach and I was, I had to wait like about two hours like one hour until we get to a destination, where like, my mum said about that thing, I’ll say, well, I am not sure if it’s right in Chinese, 菩萨？*

*I: yes, 菩萨 (Buddha), (point at the Buddha in the living room), something like that? So your mum 去拜菩萨 (worship Buddha), right? So you have to stay in the coach?*

*J: well, I had to go with her*

*I: so you didn’t enjoy it?*

*J: well, I did, most of the times cause there was a, 师父 (master), it was his birthday, and we got cake, yeah.*

*I: which part you didn’t enjoy?*

*J: well, I kind of enjoy like all of the part, but one part disaster.*

*I: which one? What kind of part is disaster?*

*J: well, it was like that 师父 didn’t touch my head when we went to that to somewhere where we had the cake.*

*I: why he didn’t touch your head?*

*J: well*

*I: you want him to touch your head, right?*

*J: well, my mum said he would, but cause I don’t know*

*I: so you felt a little bit disappointed?*

*J: yes*

*I: do you know why you want him to touch your head?*

*J: well, good luck*

*I: oh right, so he didn’t touch you*

*J: well, the first place he did, but the second place, when we had cake, he didn’t*

*I: did he touch other children?*

*J: no*

*I: no? so why you disappointed?*

*J: well, if, like, I don’t know how to explain it, but I don’t know*

*I: ok, I don’t know if my understanding is right, ok? If I say it wrong, tell me, ok? Is that about your mum told you he will, so you expect for that, right ? (J:yes) But then he didn’t (J:yes) so you feel not happy about it. Is that true? (JQ nodding his head).*

**Story 4.4.1**

*I: how many people in your home? you father, your mother and you, right?*

*J: then, there is a like visitor upstairs in the room somebody gave up cause my dad was bothering her all the time. It was for no reason, like, she didn’t bother him, so that was, that, he didn’t even tell me the reason, nor my mum. Well, my mum di, well, my dad didn’t tell my mum the reason as well.*

*I: so your dad doesn’t like you bother that girl, right?*

*J: well, that wasn’t the reason, but, I don’t know why he told her to leave, so, well, so, like, he, maybe he didn’t like her? There was no reason about it cause she didn’t even bother her, him. And she worked hard but my dad didn’t seem to even understand, well, I don’t know the rest.*

*I: so how do you feel about this?*

*J: well, very sad, well, I want my dad to, like, get out of the house cause I don’t like my dad anymore, cause, well, one reason, he always bothers who I play with, the second reason, like, well I said, was like he told her to get out. So I told him to get out but he didn’t*

*I: you told your father to get out?*

*J: yes*

*I: but he didn’t?*

*J: yes. Well. He did make money for me, so that wasn’t a reason to make him get out of the house.*

*I: do you like to spend time with your dad?*

*J: no*

*I: why?*

*J: he always like, when I am not looking, he always just jumps on me, and, jumps on me on the bed, and I always panic in the middle of the bed*

*I: He just want to play with you right?*

*J: well, he is more serious than that, he, at the morning, he just, like, did this (jump on the sofa) and then it was the like I didn’t have any accident to bring but I kind of way out so, it saved my life that way out.*

*I: so, is there any part you like your dad?*

*JQ: well, sometimes when he always like buy food for me, fast food.*

**Story 4.4.1**

*I: is there anything unhappy happened at home?*

*J: well, getting my bum slap by my dad*

*I: why?*

*J: my dad carry me to the bin without my trousers and my socks, I*

*I: why he did that?*

*J: well, cause I am like, well, he thinks I am like very naughty, but at school, very good at writing, well, when I think, my math skill was very bad, it turns out to be good. so what was the reason of that? my dad just carry me to the bin outside*

*I: because he thought you are naughty, right?*

*J: yes*

*I: why he thought that?*

*J: well, at home I get to rest, but he thought I rested for a long time, didn’t do, well, I did do homework, but he thought I didn’t cause he didn’t see me do it.*

**Story 4.4.1**

*I: you said your dad was bothering her all the time, why?*

*J: because that didn’t have a reason, but he bothered her anyways even when she was doing her homework. Once I went to her room, my dad told me to go to the kitchen, but I just like lock the door, so my dad didn't open the door, so I just like play with her.*

*I: so you dad think, she bothered you or you bothered her?*

*J: well, she didn’t bother me, well, sometimes I bothered her cause when she does her homework I found it to be really boring about it because*

*I: nobody play with you*

*J: yes, plus, I got interested in it but when I saw the homework the book was full of words.*

**Story 4.4.2**

*I: do you like some Chinese food?*

*J: yes, spring rolls, that’s my favourite. Plus, sweet and sour, like, I'm not sure if it's Chinese or not, sweet and sour? Yesterday my mum was a liar, she said it was like, English people like it as well, so when she said at Hongkong work (a restaurant), there wasn't a sweet and sour chicken, she was a liar.*

*I: so you don’t think British people like it?*

*J: well, sometimes British people like to try something new or, like, same to the Chinese people, if they didn’t try cheese cake, they would wonder what it is.*

*I: yes, but you don't think British people really like Chinese food, right?*

*J: yes, well, they, like, don’t believe in that kind of, well, they do eat Chinese food.*

**Story 4.4.2**

*I: can you show me your room?*

*J: yes, I have my watch here (on the desk), this is where I and my mum live*

*E:Acturally he has his own room.*

*J: no !no ! no!*

*E: because he needs to read story book before going to bed, so I asked hime to sleep in this room with me. He is scared of sleeping alone.*

*J: no ! no! no!*

*E:that small room is yours.*

*J: no, mum, you didn’t say! What a liar!*

**Second Interview:**

**Story 3.5.1**

*I: Do you have any friends in the school?*

*J: yes, Sara*

*I: Sara, why?*

*J: Cause she has some friends as well, and I probably like someone called Benny in the other class cause he like, when I say something silly, he always laugh, and when I, when he say something silly, I think that, well… that is quite funny. And there is one more friend as well, Lucy*

*I: why do you like Lucy*

*J: well, she is like, the other friend, like, half friend, like that. cause, well, most of the time, she, when I run in a game, she always grasp my back.*

*I: why you like Sara?*

*J: well, remember in the Chinese class?*

*I: yes, so just because you were in the same class?*

*J: yes*

*I: can you tell me more about them, for example, if you get together, what do you play?*

*J: well, we play this game called, ticky. when, who this, if they take someone, they are slow, and if someone comes running up, and they called like, do that (show me an action of touch arm)to the one who standing there*

*I: so that one can run?*

*J: yes, when the, like, well, when the first one who just did that to the one who frozen, he is frozen, if the same one keep running, the one has to defence the one who is frozen, only the person who take all of them wins, if he take all the people who are in, and four people can only play it. well, someone at my school, is like, now he is in different religion to me, but I still play with him, only a tiny bit.*

*I: yes, do you think religion is something between you and others?*

*J: it's like, for example, Christians and Chinese people, they are different*

*I: what kind of difference?*

*J: cause, oh yeah, Christians don’t believe in other religion, they believe in their religion; and others believe in their religion, like that*

*I: I understand. do you think if people have different religion, is there any difficulty between them to be friends?*

*J: well, to be honest, when they like, they want to play with you, if I want to play with him, and he wants to play with me, then friends. But if I don't, not friends. The difficulty is like, hard with another person who isn't your religion, cause if you are playing with your friends that are same in your religion, the one who is not in your religion not know what, what I am saying to others, in Chinese of course*

*I: so you think, if people in different religions, it's hard to make them friends?*

*J: well, another person who is not, well, a person who not the same religion to the one who in the, for example, Christian religion, em*

*I: From my understanding, if A has a religion of Christian, if B is Muslim,ok? so they are different religions, right?*

*J: yes, there are three religions, ours, Christians, Muslims.*

*I: You mean ours is also a religion right? Chinese?*

*J: yes*

*I: so what kind of religion?*

*J: well, I don't know the name of it, in might start with C, China,well, not sure*

*I: ok, if a Muslim want to become a friend with Chinese, can they? (JQ: no) If the Chinese also want to be friends with Muslim?*

*J: well, well, if the Muslim just talks to his friends in, well, I don’t know*

*I: you mean in their language?*

*J: yes, to the friends, you wouldn't, the Chinese person wouldn’t know what they are saying*

*I: so that makes it hard to be friends, right?*

*J: yes*

**Story 4.4.2**

*I: is there anything not good happened during your holiday?*

*J: well, having those mosquitoes just biting me, just worst thing I can think of cause it's painful! when I sleeping. like in Taiwan, when before I went to Taiwan, my mom told me to (action) (I: injection?) yes. well, I don’ know the reason, and something funny I thought is when she didn’t know how to use it, chi chi chi, it didn’t work, when I, when it worked, I screamed, cause it’s painful, very painful*

**Story 4.4.2**

*I: is there anything you are good at?*

*J: reading, cause I am a superfast reader. I even read the three in one story book like, in two hours, that's very quick.*

*I: reading in English right?*

*J: yes*

*I: your mum told me you are reading something on ipad called Newtree reading?*

*J: what?*

*I: It's like a*

*J: guide reading?*

*I: or something on Ipad*

*J: well, I'm not sure what she means, cause she doesn't like speak English which I am very good at*.

**Story 3.5.2**

*I: now I have another question, here is I am a Chinese…*

*J: well, seven*

*I: seven, really? why? 5 is in the middle, you know, half British half Chinese*

*J: well, I am very, cause like, I*

*I: what things make you think you are British*

*J: because I speak Ch, not Chinese, I speak English*

*I: just about language? and?*

*J: and play the games, my primary language is English on the games, and I. (his mum came in and gave his tips) my mum says I am like a, I eat bread a lot, my mum calls me, what is called, bread man.*

*I: what things make you think you are a Chinese?*

*J: well, things I think, I speak Cantonese which is a part of Chinese, and my appearance is like a bit Chinese but*

*I: ok, do you think you look like Chinese?*

*J: well, I need look in the mirror well, I don’t know how I look, cause it's dark*

*I : what do you think any difference between you and British? no?*

*J: well, I speak English a lot of times when it's play happened at English school, cause my friend Benny, we do a lot of crazy stuff, and we always say, we always speak English, but when he talks to Lucy, he speaks Chinese, that’s weird.*

*I: why do you think that’s weird?*

*J: because he speaks English to me, but didn’t speak English to Lucy*

*I : do you speak English with your parents at home?*

*J: well, sometimes, cause I like, sometimes I speak English to my parents even through my mum with a, in a Chinese religion.*

**Appendix A2: Selected Interview Transcripts with Emily (translated)**

**First Interview:**

*I: Why did you decide to let Jerry to learn Chinese language?*

*E:* **Story 4.4.2:***Sometimes he asks me what is the TV program that I watch…because it is in Mandarin. I just tell him that “you are annoying. You should learn Mandarin yourself. I can’t tell you all of it. Can you tell me all the things in English?”. So he thinks it’s right, it is annoying. So he has to learn it himself.* **Story 3.5.3**

*:I was worried that there is no Chinese culture in Jerry’s mind. I’ve seen a lot of examples, like my auntie’s son. He was sent to Chinese language school when he was young but he didn’t like it. So my aunty didn’t force him. Then he became, only speak English at home, very westernized. It’s very terrifying. He is just like a British. I don’t want my son to be like that, because I think Chinese culture is good for children, like our Chinese etiquette and some great Chinese people. Those stories could affect him and let him to be better. So I sent him to Chinese language school. He has been there for over one year; he has been improved. The most important thing is he changed himself. He doesn’t think he is very British or very Chinese. He is in the middle, knows that those things are something he should learn, Chinese culture and British culture.*

**Story 4.4.1**

*E: His Mandarin is improved a lot. There was a room in my house rented to a student who came from Beijing. That girl taught him [Jerry] how to write Chinese, he liked it. Maybe it’s destiny that tied them together. That girl told him, you speak English with me, I speak Chinese with me, so we can learn from each other. He loved talking with that girl so he worked harder on learning Chinese because if he didn’t learn, he has nothing to talk. He liked to go to her room. It’s a good motivation drive him study Chinese harder*.

**Story 4.4.2**

*I: what do you know about his English school?*

*E: Once Jerry told me that his teacher in English school scolded him. I asked him “did you cry? Were you frightened?”. He said “no because I remember you said that teacher scolded me is because…is it my problem? Is it because she wants to teach me something?”. I said “yes, you need to think why [the] teacher scolded you. Maybe because you did something wrong. You think she blamed you, maybe she did not. She did that because she loves you. She was wondering why you could do something good before but not now. You can’t blame her”. I always tell him this only. Sometimes he told me that he is not happy after school. I told him that you should tell me what happened, nobody is going to save you if you don’t ask for help.*

**Story 3.5.3**

*I: do you speak English with him at home?*

*E: His English teacher says, it’s better to speak English with him at home because English is not his first language. But we told the teacher that it is hard for us because we, as parents, our English is not good. Sometimes Jerry gets angry if I say something wrong in English. But he said he will try his best to learn English. Because our mother language is not English, it is harder for him to catch up with other students. So the teachers ask us Chinese people to speak more English. Sometimes Jerry gets angry if I say something wrong in English…it is harder for him to catch up with other students. I was worried about Jerry’s Mandarin, but since I rent a room to a student who came from Beijing, Jerry’s Mandarin has improved a lot. When he was young, he didn’t like speak Mandarin with his dad. But that student changed him. Jerry knew that student is from China and speaks Chinese. Children have to experience something himself so he will be willing to change.*

**Story 4.2.2**

*I: what do you usually do at home?*

*E: I watch him drawing sometimes, he likes draw his own stuff, but it looks messy. He wants me praise him, so I always say “very good”. He wants me to ask what does he draw, he feels comfortable and happy if someone likes his stuff. He likes drawing but he doesn’t like to draw some specific things. He always draws something, like lines, going up and going down. I asked him what it is. He said it is an airplane. His dad and I were like “huh? Airplane? I don’t understand”. Once, I remember, his teacher forced him to draw Cinderella when he was in Grade 2. He was mad. But Sara was happy because girls like it. But those boys said “we don’t like Cinderella”. He likes to draw fruits, but not families. I remember once, his teacher gave them homework to write [about] where they [went] for holiday. We went to a beach that time. He drew something like [a] tortoise. I asked him “what it is, a tortoise?” He said “no! it’s you Mom!”. I was like, “oh, it’s so ugly”. You know, boys are like that, don’t like drawing. Girls are much better”.*

**Story 4.2.2**

*E: Jerry speaks really slowly.*

*I: is that because he is nervous? Afraid of making mistakes?*

*E:I think it’s inheritance. I had the same problem when I was little. Very nervous, don’t know why. Because my mom didn’t go to school, she didn’t help me with my life. So I have to learn things by myself, change myself. Then I see my son, I want to help him, let him be more comfortable.*

**Story 4.4.1**

*I: how is his relationship with his dad?*

*E: They spend lots of time together. Jerry likes to show his drawing to his dad. If his dad ignores him, he gets mad. So his dad would say ‘your drawing is promising’.*

**Story 4.4.2**

*I: Have your family been to any place for holoday?*

*E: Jerry and I went to Taiwan. Jerry thought that trip was very good in general. The trip was not for fun. My purpose was to go to there to worship Buddha. All the members in our group were adults, the only child was him. He had to wait for me when we having activity so he felt like being deceived by me. So I said “I told you to stay at home, but you wanted to come with me. Just wait for me. We are going to eat something good after the activity”. He thought that Taiwan is crowded. But in the temple there was an uncle who is very nice and gave children a lot of toys. Since then, Jerry waited for that uncle every time when we were going there. He likes that uncle. And also there were some aunties liked chat with him. I felt it was strange so I asked him whether he can understand Mandarin well or not. He said yes. He was happy talking to those aunties. I asked those aunties whether they can understand him or not, because I was worried that his Mandarin is not good enough. They said it’s ok. So I just left him with them. He has learnt a lot. He was happy even though we didn’t go to any interesting places in Taiwan. The only thing he was not happy about was the food there. He didn’t like Chinese food that much.*

**Second Interview:**

*(Emily and I were looking at Jerry’s photos)*

*E:* **Story 4.4.2:***He hates the hair style his dad made for him (laugh). Jerry’s father likes to make joke of him but Jerry doesn’t like it. But it’s not a big deal in fact, because we are a family. Jerry doesn’t like the movies his dad likes so he always stays with me, reading, playing games or drawing. Once, Jerry told me that “in our family, I like mom more because mom cooks for me and helps me with many things”. I asked him “don’t you love your dad? He buys good stuff for you”. He said: “I do, but not as much as I love you”. I can’t do anything about it but told him that “your dad loves you, be good to your dad. Your dad is going to take care of you if I’m ill”. He responded that “I will try my best to build a good relationship (with my dad)”. Jerry also complained to me that “dad never give in to me, never does what I want”. I told Jerry, “it is not that dad doesn’t want to suit you but that he wants to see your behaviour”. Sometimes my husband intends to do something bad to him in order to see my son’s reaction.* **Story 4.4.1**: *When we are having meal together, Jerry always ask his father don’t finish food he likes. His father likes make joke of him. Jerry doesn’t like the movies his dad likes… My husband told my son that ‘you are a man, you need to bear with pressure. for example, don’t clean your clothes even if it's dirty, that’s a girlish thing. We are man’*. *My husband changed him. Once I told Jerry his treasure is dirty, he needs to clean it. He said no because his dad said man is just like this. He changed. I also want him to overcome his shortcomings. There is something bad about him, don’t be too close to him. If he is too close to you, he will cry when you say no to him. He cannot stand it. That’s why his dad is not that close to him. But I am (close to Jerry), so I can’t say no, I just take care of his life. But his dad is able to give him lessons. If teachers are not close to him, just teach him [they can teach him better]. Once there was a teacher who was very close to him [who] scolded him, he cried and thought that “you didn’t do this to me before, why are you doing this now”. He couldn’t stand it and didn’t know how to react. That is his shortcoming.*

*He is quite confident about his maths. He said “my maths is good, nothing to worry about, I can pass the test”. I told him that “you’re over-confident. You may be good in your school, but compared to students in other schools, you are not good enough. You cannot even do the textbooks I bought you. Why? Because the teacher only gives you the test [that] matches your level”. He was unhappy about this. So I told him to ask his cousin. He did and his cousin said “it is like what your mum said. Maths is getting difficult”. So he accepted this.*

**Story 3.5.3**

*I:do you think British culture affects you?*

*E:**The way British people educate children is better than Chinese. For a simple example, someone’s son hits my son. Chinese mom may tell her son to hit him back. But Western mom would not do this. She would ask her son to ask the boy say sorry to him because he hits you, but if you hit back, that’s wrong. You should ask him to say sorry, if he doesn’t, then you can tell your parents or teacher. So you say, the difference in education is significant. But Western people are different from us. They may have complicated relationships. I’ve heard a story. A British woman got divorced after having 5 children. Then she got a boyfriend and her ex-husband got a girlfriend. I don’t know how those 5 children would think about their life. It’s too complicated to Chinese people. Western people get married and divorced as long as they are willing to. We Chinese cannot do this. Because Chinese are Chinese. We have a lot of elder members in the family, like mother’s mother, mother’s auntie, can they accept it? Our traditional minds and viewpoints are always remained. You cannot say you can change to be a British. No way. I told Jerry that you can dream to be a British, but in your mind, you have your Chinese family, we cannot accept your British worldview, this is Chinese tradition. Jerry’s English school is kind of reserved since there are some Muslim students in. The primary school that my sister’s daughter goes in, she talked about get married and have baby when she was in year 3. I cannot accept that. you cannot change to be a British, no way, your Chinese family will not accept your British worldview. So* *I encourage my son to read Chinese, for example, the Buddhist Scriptures. He couldn’t understand it well; I will explain it to him. I told him, one good thing about being Chinese is that we have access to Buddhism. I didn’t grow up in China, so I don’t really understand Chinese culture. Just heard it from my parents. If there is something I want to know, I will read books or ask old people, because I want my son to know (Chinese culture). We are Chinese, our traditions and minds are different from Western people. So I encourage my son to read Chinese, for example, the Buddhist Scriptures. He couldn’t understand it well; I will explain it to him. I told him, one good thing about being Chinese is that we have access to Buddhism. I took him to Taiwan once to worship Buddha. But I told him that it’s just Buddhist culture, you don’t have to believe in it. You also can be Christian or Muslim, no difference, just one point, change yourself to be better, do more good things.* *he changed himself, he does not think he is very British or very Chinese, he is in the middle.*

**Appendix A3:****Selected Interview Transcripts with Sara**

**First Interview:**

**Story 4.5.1**

*I: what do you usually do at home?*

*S: drawing*

*I: anything else?*

*S: writing*

*I: why do you like drawing?*

*S: I don’t know*

*I: are you happy when you are drawing?*

*S: yes*

*I: what do you most like to draw?*

*S: horse*

*I: why horse?*

*S: because it is easy*

**Story 3.6.1**

*S: tomorrow is my birthday.*

*I: wow, happy birthday! Are you going to have a party?*

*S: yes, Benny will come.*

*I: who is Benny?*

*S: Benny is my friend. He is very clever because he can think about a lot of games very quickly…*

*I: is he Chinese or British?*

*S: Chinese*

*I: do you speak Chinese or English together?*

*S: Chinese*

**Story 3.6.3 & 4.5.2**

*I: do you remember anything unhappy at home?*

*S: being scolded by my mum, and also being spanked. I don’t like it.*

*I: why did you get scolded?*

*S: because I don’t listen to my mum. …*

**Story 4.5.1**

*I: let’s have a look of you pictures. Is this a horse?*

*S: yes, pinkie pie.*

*I: why do you like it?*

*S: my friend Sunny drew this with me.*

**Story 3.6.2**

*I: do you have any other friends?*

*S: Benny and Lucy.*

*I: is Lucy British or Chinese?*

*S: Chinese*

*I: do you have any foreign friends?*

*S: Chinese is a kind of*

*I: any other country?*

*S: I have [friends in]other country, I have my little sister, my grandma, two brothers in China.*

**Story 4.5.1 & 3.6.1**

*I: do you remember anything happy in English school?*

*S: drawing*

*I: anything not happy?*

*S: math*

*I: what are you good at doing?*

*S: drawing*

*I: not good at?*

*S: math*

**Story 3.6.2**

*I: do you remember the best moment with your family?*

*S: go to China because I can see my big sister (cousin). She is very bigger than me. She can drive motorbike. And my aunty buys things for me. I’ve been China once and I missed my English, only a little bit, I am not sure.*

*…*

*I: now I have something to ask you? You see those numbers?this said is ‘I am Chinese’, the other side is ‘I am British”, which number will you choose?*

*S: five or four*

*I: a little bit more Chinese? Why?*

*S: because I speak Chinese.*

**Story 4.5.1&3.6.1**

*I: what kind of person do you want to become in the future?*

*S: artist*

*I: why?*

*S:because I can draw*

*I: what do your parents want you to be?*

*S: to create something, to draw a building*

*I: design house?*

*S:I don’t wanna be a house designer, my parents want me to do that, , but I don’t want to, I like [to] do pictures of a long time ago, like Vikings people who with helmet on the head, and leather boots, and some weapons,, because they are clever, really clever, they can make things out of anything like animal skins and wood, even stones, grass.*

**Story 3.6.1**

*I: have you drew anything for you little brother?*

*S: yes, I like Twilight Sparkle She is very clever too. She is keep reading book until she knows how to do something…*

*I: you like clever people?*

*S: yes*

**Story 3.6.2**

*(Sara and Leo were showing their house around to me)*

*S: I know China (she showed me a picture of Fujiyama which is in Japan)*

*I: how do you know it is China?*

*S: my mom told me it is China, has a tall tower, a mountain and snow.*

*I: It’s Japan, here is the words.*

*S: oh, I thought it is China, looks like China. That word (a picture of Fu) is Chinese.*

**Second Interview:**

**Story 3.6.1 & 4.5.1**

*I: what do you usually do at home?*

*S: reading books, drawing, play game, watch a video, and even my mum might to let me to go to math, math working*

*I: what do you enjoy to do?*

*S: drawing maybe*

*I: what do you not enjoy to do? You don’t like?*

*S: I don’t like to write things and doing math*

**Story 3.6.3 & 3.6.2 &4.5.2**

*I: ok, do you like to spend time with your mum?*

*S: maybe, sometimes. Until I might get told*

*I: until you get told what?*

*S: doing my homework*

*I: do you remember when you with your mum, what do you do?*

*S: em, help my mum doing dumplings*

*I: oh, dumplings, you can make dumplings?*

*S: I like make it.*

*I: is dumpling a Chinese food or English food?*

*S: it’s a Chinese food*

*I: do you like Chinese food?*

*S: sometimes like Chinese, sometimes like English*

**Story 3.6.3 & 4.5.2**

*I: Do you remember is there anything unhappy?*

*S: I still remember*

*I: which one?*

*S: be told by mum really angry*

*I: about what?*

*S: about I don’t get time properly*

*I: you don’t get what?*

*S: I don’t get time on my work*

*I: why?*

*S: because I always want to play*

*I: do you talk about your school work with your mum?*

*S: yes, I always talk to my mum when I get homework*

**Story 3.5.1**

*I: what do you enjoying doing in school?*

*S: I quite like math and literacy now,*

*I: but you told me you don’t like it last time*

*S: no, I like it, forget that one. I want to be clever.*

**Story 4.5.1**

*I: ok, do you remember the best moment in your Chinese school?*

*S: er, er, drawing class*

*I: drawing class, why?*

*S: I like drawing, I win the drawing competition*

*…*

*I: last time you told me you want to become a*

*S: artist, my mum was chosen me want to*

*I: why?*

*S: because I am good at drawing*

**Story 3.6.2:**

*I: so last time, you think you are more Chinese, you chose 4. do you still think you are at 4?*

*S: no, I feel a little bit be 6*

*I: 6, more English, why?*

*S: because I go to English everyday*

*I: so you choose 6, what do you want to be in the future?*

*S: I'll be number 3 then*

*I: 3, more Chinese, why? why you want to be more Chinese?*

*S: Em, we gonna do wanna do it, Chinese people at other countries, at Chinese, at China*

*I: so you want go to China in the future?*

*S: yeah*

*I: why?*

*S: because I've learnt a bit more China (Chinese) bit*

*I: ok, so can I ask you what makes you feel you are a Chinese?*

*S: because I was doing what Chinese thing like dumpling, em, and 扇子啊,*

*I: only this?*

*S: yes, only this*

*I: then what makes you feel you are English?*

*S: doing math, literacy, and science Science and arts are my favourite because they are a bit interesting. In science, we investigate something like materials and liquid. I like drawing, painting and making things.*

*…*

*I: how can you say your friends are Chinese, they are not English?*

*S: because their eyes are little bit small than others*

*I: you mean how they look like, right? how can you tell you are a Chinese?*

*S: Er, em, because I got little nose*

*I: ok, do you have any English friends?*

*S: no*

*I: why?*

*S: because Benny doesn’t want English friends*

*I: Benny doesn't English friends, how about you?*

*S: I want to*

*I: you want, why?*

*S: because English people quite better*

*I: why better?*

*S: because we just want to learn things*

**Story 3.6.2 & 3.5.2**

*I: do you know we are in the Chinese new year?*

*S: yes*

*I: how do you feel about this new year?*

*S: exciting…. make dumplings with my mum, I like make it. Sometimes I like Chinese food, but sometimes English.*

*I: why exciting?*

*S: because you get to decorate your home, and get the party food out, and get the lucky red bag, em, what that red package called again? don't remember.*

*I: the package?*

*S: the red package*

*I: 红包. some money in it, right?*

*S: yes, 红包*

*I: you've got 红包from your parents?*

*S: no, from the other people*

*I: ok. this is Chinese new year, how about the English new year?*

*S: it's much different. English one don't celebrate Chinese new year, because they are not Chinese. One of my, my class got lots of different countries ones, only me is Chinese, Ivan is Cantonese, he is not Chinese, he is only Cantonese*

*I: so you think Cantonese is not Chinese?*

*S: sometimes Chinese get Cantonese, sometimes Chinese not Cantonese*

*I: so you think Cantonese don't celebrate Chinese new year?*

*S: I think no no, no, I think he maybe he celebrate, I don't know*

**Appendix A4 Selected Interview Transcripts with Alice (Translated)**

**First Interview:**

**Story 4.5.2 & 3.6.3**

*I: what do you think about Sara’s Chinese language learning?*

*A: Sara is lazy…she doesn’t do review after homework... You can’t force her to learn more…*

*I: does she have any difficulties in learning English and Chinese?*

*A: Her spelling is not good enough, she has no confidence...But if someone is better than her, she’ll be very upset and crying. I told her that you are not as good as other people so you need to work harder, not cry. She is upset but [does] not work hard.*

**Story 3.6.2**

*I: does she have any friends in English school?*

*A: Sara has some Chinese friends, they are like a group. English children with English, Chinese with Chinese. She is going well with both, but her Chinese friends complained she always play with English friends. Sara told me her Chinese friends were not happy about this (she plays with English friends)*

**Story 4.5.2 & 3.6.3**

*I: What do you think Sara is good at?*

*A: she is good at crying and drawing.*

**Story 4.5.1**

*I: so you think she is good at drawing?*

*A: Every teacher says she draws good, especially draw animals’ eyes, teacher said it’s very good.*

**Story 4.5.2 & 3.6.3**

*I: what does she like to do at home?*

*A: just play games… She is not focused and not serious on her study, she could be distracted easily*

**Story 4.5.3**

*I: do you remember any best moment here [in the UK]?*

*A: I’ve been living in the UK for almost 9 years but I think I am still Chinese. Our life circle is very small here. I can’t remember anything happy.*

**Story 4.5.2**

*I: anything unhappy happened?*

*A: Just about Sara. She is emotional, but other children are not…. Sometimes I think why children in other families are good, only she doesn't listen to me? Sometimes I compare her with other children, why she can’t do something that other children can easily do? …She is not happy and even argues with me sometimes asking me why I compare her with other children? Why didn't I praise her about her drawing? I said your drawing is good but why don't you improve your homework… she doesn’t listen to me. She ignores me until I get angry”.*

**Story 4.5.1**

*I: what kind of person do you want her to become?*

*A: She said she wants to become an artist or a designer. I think it’s good, just keep one dream, don’t change too often. She also said she wants to design pretty house[s], I said ok, it’s good. So she said she wants to draw. I said “you must treat drawing as your favourite, you need to work harder. You have to do your homework first”. She said drawing doesn’t need to write. I said “you can’t draw without knowing how to write, at least you should know the meaning of your pictures, right?” Then she said “fine, I’ll try my best”.*

**Story 4.5.2**

*I: is there any family conflicts?*

*A: Sara just likes drawing too much. As soon as I told her to do her homework, she said she hasn’t finished drawing yet. She must draw something before doing homework. I can’t be too strict, must be compromise, otherwise, she would say “I don’t want you mum, you are too mean, you are a monster”. She has complained that “why you always compare me with other children, saying other children can do something good but I can’t. I am good at drawing, why don’t you praise me”. I said “you are good at drawing but it’s just a supplementary course, I can’t praise you only for that, you didn’t improve your compulsory homework”.*

**Second Interview**

**Story 4.5.3**

*I: do you think you are Chinese?*

*A: of course I am.*

*I: why? You’ve been living in the UK for such a long time.*

*A: We cannot really fit into local life here I only make friends with Chinese, maybe one or two English but no deep conversation, they don’t understand us, I don’t understand them. Most of my friends here are just like me, migrated from China with their husbands. We feel very bored here. We are depressed, more or less. Like my family, my husband just goes to work then go home, maybe go shopping on Saturdays, that’s it, very boring, nothing fun*

*…*

*I: how did you feel the first time came to the UK?*

*A: I felt that this city is too old, everywhere is grey. I was so depressed. I don’t understand people at all, I was hiding at home, did not dare to go out, even take bus. I was terrified. It felt so depressed because it was a completely strange country to me using a language I did not understand at all. You know, I don’t talk about my troubles with my family in China, don’t want them to worry about me. Then I was introduced to some Chinese, so I was getting used to life here gradually. I got to know more Chinese people, I can talk with them.*

*But we have to stay here, for our children. An important reason that I felt better was I have my children, so the centre of my life is my children. In the UK, we like here because of its environment and education…. Sometimes I asked myself why we are so tired as Chinese. English people, they are like, it’s not their responsibility at all when children grow up. But for Chinese people, we also think about children’s future. Maybe I think too much, right?*

*I: do you think you gave the children pressure?*

*A: Sometimes when I get angry, I would say something [to Sara] like “you must study hard otherwise you will screw [up] your life” to my children. Sara is lazy. Sometimes I told her “I will not take care of you when you are after 18” but she said “it doesn't matter; I will figure my life out myself when I grow up”. Maybe I don’t need to think that much*

*I: are you still contacting friends in China?*

*A: My friends in China seem very busy; they don’t really reply to my messages. They said they are very stressed about earning money. I felt very upset; I am a person without job. It feels like, empty, degenerated, very empty inside. Job will give you a feeling of enrichment, you have your own salary, you can control your life, go to anywhere you want. Having a family but without job, it’s like, my husband is very stress[ed] but I cannot help. I am upset, feels like being isolated by the outside world.*

*Sometimes I want to move back to China, because at least I have found a job there. My friends asked me to go home once, because I was an accountant, they said the salary in China is good. I thought about it, but I can’t, because my children would not fit themselves into China. Maybe (I will go back) after they grow up.*

**Story 4.5.1**

*A: I used to have a dream of to be an interior designer. Sara told me she likes drawing, I asked her whether she wants to design houses. She said it’s ok. I said you like it now but you might change in the future. She doesn’t have a goal yet, just likes drawing. If she likes it, of course I hope she can develop well [in drawing]. It’s good to have something to focus on, as long as she loves study. I hope she will have a goal, be mature.*

**Appendix B Ethical Approval Letter**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Yijia Zuo  PhD Programme |  | **Head of School**  Professor Cathy Nutbrown  School of Education  388 Glossop Road  Sheffield  S10 2JA |
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Dear Yijia  
  
**ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

**Constructing selves in a dual-cultural environment: A case study of second-generation Chinese children in the UK**

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved.

We recommend you refer to the reviewers’ additional comments (please see attached). You should discuss how you are going to respond to these comments with your supervisor BEFORE you proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Dan Goodley

**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

cc Prof Tom Billington

Enc Ethical Review Feedback Sheet(s)