

**Encounters with Westerners:**  
**Understanding the Chinese Construction of the Western Other**

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Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master's degree in Communication

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## **Abstract**

In this study we seek to understand how ordinary Chinese people perceive Westerners as the Other through examining their intercultural experiences. In contrast to the numerous studies of social elites' Occidentalism, this study shifts the attention to ordinary people's perceptions in a fast changing Chinese society. From an interpretive perspective, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 participants living in a coastal city in Mainland China. The key findings suggest that the Chinese public has its own way of perceiving and presenting the Western Other. Also, this Other, being defined in an on-going process of intercultural interaction, connotes a wider meaning – a unity of opposition and complementarity, exclusion and inclusion. Thus this study has deepened our understanding of the Chinese construction of the Western Other. The findings can be used in developing intercultural communication training programs to facilitate deeper contact and better dialogue between the Chinese and Westerners.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Peruvemba Jaya, who encouraged me to believe in myself and guided me through the process of thesis writing. Special thanks also to Mindy Woolcott and Dr. Rodney Williamson for their generous support and invaluable comments. Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my family, for their understanding, great patience, and endless love from the beginning to the completion of this project.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### The Phenomenon: The Chinese Public and the Western Other

It is often claimed that foreigners, especially Westerners, are seen as a very different *Other* in China (Brady, 2003; Conceison, 2004; Gries, 2004; Fairbank, 1979; Ford, 2010). Anecdotes from Western visitors or expatriates often mention their experience of *Otherness* – of being easily distinguished as outsiders – due to their exotic appearance and strikingly different features, so noticeable in Chinese crowds (Barrutia & Bao, 2009; Conceison, 2004; Dewoskin, 2005; Gries, 2004; Kristeva, 1974/1977). In her book, *Significant Other: Staging the American in China* (2004), Conceison starts with a vivid description of her encounters with the Chinese during her two visits in China:

During my first stay in Beijing, in 1985, routine daily occurrences included being followed in the streets, being surrounded by a large crowd whenever I stood still, and being analyzed by complete strangers for the duration of bus rides..... More than fifteen years later... similar practices endure....I am still frequently the object of persistent staring and pointing and of comments (p. 1).

She then goes on to tell her readers that no matter how hard she tried to blend into Chinese society, that she, as a Caucasian, constantly received special treatment and was thus reminded of her outsider status. Pondering on this personal experience and other observations of Chinese attitudes towards foreigners, she further posits that the Chinese gazing at Westerners in the streets is not just a casual curiosity, but an expression of a common cultural attitude. Fundamentally, at the core of these encounters is an *Othering* practice against foreigners, a practice of racial discrimination (Conceison, 2004).

Conceison's (2004) account struck a chord with me. I have long been thinking about what foreigners mean to the Chinese. As a native Chinese, and now having lived

abroad over 15 years, I was quite familiar with such scenes of street encounters between the Chinese and Westerners. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the early period of China's *Reform and Opening* era, Westerners began to appear on some streets of China after decades of absence from the scene following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.<sup>1</sup> The sight of a Westerner evoked a reaction in all those who had never seen one before. The typical Chinese reaction to Western foreigners was relentless staring and calling out *wai guoren*, which means foreigner. I also clearly recall that, in various types of encounters with Westerners, many Chinese revealed their feelings that these Western foreigners were special, and treated them very differently, as if they were aliens.

In recent trips to China,<sup>2</sup> when visiting a few medium and large cities, I found that similar street encounters still happen, but to a lesser degree.<sup>3</sup> I also noticed that Westerners have started to integrate with local people – as colleagues, friends, even as neighbors. Thus some real interaction and communication between Westerners and Chinese is now taking place everywhere. Nevertheless, as described by the Western scholars and expatriates (e.g. Brady, 2003; Conceison, 2004; Gries, 2004; Fairbank, 1979; Ford, 2010), the same practice of viewing Westerners as a different Other still characterizes the behavior of many Chinese. In addition to this general attitude towards

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<sup>1</sup> The economic reform started in 1978 accompanied by the open door policy as reflected in the slogan *Gai Ge Kai Fang (Reform and Opening)*. This policy encourages foreign trade and foreign investment, which, as a result, gradually attracts foreigners, especially people from Western countries, to come to China (Gelber, 2007; Fairbank & Goldman 1998; see also Fewsmith, 2010; Fishman, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> The trips were taken respectively in 2005, 2007 and 2010.

<sup>3</sup> This refers only to some medium and large cities where Westerners are most common. In small cities and the countryside, especially located in the hinterland, I believe the practice still remains the same.

Westerners, the Chinese public's anti-Western sentiment has been noted as being strong and intense with the rise of a new nationalism in China in the post-Cold War era (Barmé, 1995; Colvin, 2008; Gries, 2004; Sheridan, 1996; Third Tone Devil, 2006-7; G. Xu, 2001; York, 2004). Western media and scholars have paid lots of attention to the big mass protests against some Western countries or to the public's great enthusiasm for anti-Western books and films. <sup>4</sup> Barmé (1995) suggests that there is a strong resurgence of the century-old Chinese resentment towards Westerners. Similarly, Gries (2004) states, “[h]umiliated by past Western aggressions, China turns the tables, humiliating the West and getting its revenge” (p. 42). Observing the general attitude towards Westerners and this new wave of anti-Western sentiment, I ask again what is really in Chinese people's minds regarding Westerners, and what is the dynamic which drives them to perceive and treat Westerners as the Other.

### **The Theory of Othering: Critique of Orientalism and Occidentalism**

The issue of the Other is a fundamental question regarding how human beings identify the Other – individuals or groups, and understand themselves. It has become a most significant theme in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical thinking (Theunissen, 1977/1984). The problem of Otherness or Othering between social groups has also been given much

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<sup>4</sup>The most reported and analyzed events are: The 1993 hit tele-series called *Beijing Ren Zai Niuyue* (*A Beijinger in New York*), the 1996 national bestseller *Zhongguo Keyi ShuoBu* (*China Can Say No*), and the furious street demonstrations which erupted in dozens of Chinese big cities right after the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia was bombed by US missiles, an operation of NATO force in May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

attention by scholars of social sciences in recent years (Papadopoulos, 2002; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).<sup>5</sup> Papadopoulos (2002) points out that, in circumstances of interacting with people from other ethnic or cultural groups, when attention naturally focuses on their differences or strangeness, people seize on the Otherness of the Other. “With reference to otherness in social groups, what is usually referred to is the tension between two groups of people, regardless of whether one group aspires to imitate, or despises and wants to distance itself from the other group” (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 166). In other words, Otherness often suggests establishing a boundary to distance from or discriminate against the other group by identifying it as a strange, different and oppositional entity.<sup>6</sup>

The critique of *Orientalism* and *Occidentalism* specifically focuses on the issue of Othering practice between Western and non-Western people (Bonnett, 2004; Buruma & Margalit, 2004; Said, 1979; N. Wang, 1997). It looks at constructing the Other through a very different lens, relating Othering to discursive practice and power structure. Said’s (1979) critique of the discourse of Orientalism has been regarded as the “most influential” work (N. Wang, 1997, p. 57), and it “literally changed the way we understand the

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<sup>5</sup> Following Wilkinson & Kitzinger (1996), Papadopoulos (2002) differentiates Othering from Otherness by stating that Othering is “an actual process which produces Otherness” (p. 166). In the present study, Othering and Otherness are used interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> Other, Otherness and Othering are key concepts of this research. They should be consistently italicized in this thesis. However, according to *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010), italics can be used to introduce “a new, technical, or key term or label (after a term has been used once, do not italicize it” (p.105). Therefore, these three key terms are italicized only when first appearing in the thesis.

relationship between the West and the East” (Furumizo, 2005, p. 130). Said demonstrates that Orientalism as a discourse creates the Oriental Other by emphasizing the essential differences between the West and the East, and this knowledge has been used to distance the Orient and to further empower the European Self to dominate the Orient. Further his critique sharply points out that Orientalism as a form of knowledge has heavily framed Western people’s perception of the East and its people (Said, 1979).

A parallel critique of Occidentalism deals with how the Western Other is constructed by people in non-Western countries through discursive practices. It is noted that Occidentalism creates a stereotyped West by stressing fundamental differences, as did Orientalism, and also uses the constructed image for various political purposes (Bonnett, 2004; X. Chen, 1995; L. Zhang, 1999), such as to protect and empower non-Western people to resist Western domination (Buruma & Margalit, 2004; N. Wang, 1997). The critique of Occidentalism also highlights distinctive characteristics embedded in various countries’ Othering practice due to different encounters with the West in particular socio-historical contexts (Bonnett, 2005; X. Chen, 1995; N. Wang, 1997). And, similar to Orientalism, the constructed image of a Western Other has framed the public’s perception of the West (e.g. Conceison, 2004; Dikötter, 1992, 1997; Guo, 2004; Ford, 2010). Thus to have an in-depth understanding of Occidentalism requires further investigation into the context of a specific country.

Scholars in the fields of Chinese history, cultural study and political science have discussed Chinese Occidentalism (e.g. Callahan, 2004, 2006; X. Chen, 1995; Conceison, 2004; Dikötter, 1992, 1997; Gries, 2004, 2007; Guo, 2004; Fairbank, 1979; Ford, 2010). Their critical description and analysis, focusing on social elites’ discursive construction

of the Western Other and its impact on the public, has shed light on our understanding of today's Chinese Othering practice. Chinese perceptions of the Western Other have developed over an extended period in their encounters with foreigners and the West (Conceison, 2004; Gelber, 2007; Fairbank, 1979; N. Wang, 1997). It is noted that the initial encounter with the intrusion of Western power in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century left a profound imprint on the Chinese awareness of itself, and thus the West became a most significant Other in Chinese minds.<sup>7</sup> This experiential factor, together with today's social-political reality, and with new interactions with the West, all contribute to Chinese Occidentalism in the post-Cold War era (Gries, 2004; Zheng, 1999).

### **The Research Question**

Occidentalism is a form of Othering practice. The critique of Chinese Occidentalism mainly targets social elites' Othering practice through analyzing well documented or published discourses (Callahan, 2004, 2006; Conceison, 2004; Dikötter, 1992, 1997; Guo, 2004; Renwick & Cao, 1999; Z. Wang, 2008; B. Xu, 1998; Zheng, 1999). However, ordinary Chinese people's views of Westerners are private expressions, which may be quite different from the social elites' discourses. To understand today's Chinese Othering practice, it is important to look into ordinary Chinese citizens'

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<sup>7</sup> According to Gelber (2007), early in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, a trickle of Europeans travelled overland and made their first presence in China. They were mostly Italian adventurous merchants or traders and a few missionaries. Europeans' venturing into China in a larger scale started only in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The serious conflict with the West erupted in 1839, with the Chinese lost the first Opium War to the British in 1842.

perceptions of the West. As is known to all, the dramatic change in Chinese society – social and economic progress, emergence of new cultural ethos, and new developments in communication technology (Dodson, 2011; Gifford, 2008), all play a role in shaping current ordinary Chinese people's interactions with, and thus their perceptions of, Westerners. What is especially important is that direct contact between the ordinary Chinese and Westerners is now taking place. As some intercultural contact theories (Allport, 1954; Hall, 1959, 1976) tell us, real contact between peoples from different cultural/ethnic groups has a great potential to change perceptions, reduce bias, and facilitate understanding of the Other.

Being interested in how Chinese people perceive Westerners in contemporary China, I am investigating in this thesis the ordinary Chinese individuals' experiences of interacting with Westerners. It must be acknowledged that these interactions involve the feelings and perceptions of both Chinese and Westerners. A *Western perspective* of the Chinese Othering practice – Western expatriates' accounts of their Otherness experiences and scholars' descriptions of the public's anti-Western sentiment in today's China – definitely reveals a kind of social reality. But to understand ordinary Chinese people's Othering practice, it is also crucial to listen to what they have to say. Actual face-to-face contact between ordinary Chinese and Westerners is a new phenomenon. Through carefully examining actual intercultural experiences, we can gain a better understanding of how the Western Other is constructed in this new reality from a *Chinese perspective*.

Thus, the central question to this research is:

RQ: How do the intercultural experiences of ordinary Chinese people reveal their construction of Westerners as the Other?

More specifically the study aims to address the following:

1. What factors do the ordinary Chinese people attribute to their construction of the Western Other?
2. What is the role that the ordinary Chinese people play in this construction?
3. What images of Westerners have been produced and what attitudes towards Westerners are manifested in this construction?

It is very timely to bring up these questions into the discussion. As China eagerly opens her door to the rest of the world, and plays an important role in current international society (Fishman, 2005; Kurlantizick, 2007; Lam & Graham, 2007), more people from the West are becoming interested in China, and want to visit or work in China. The result of this study will inform us as to how ordinary Chinese people perceive Westerners in various contexts in contemporary China. This knowledge will raise the Chinese public's awareness of their Othering practice. It will also help Westerners to understand ordinary Chinese people's attitudes and perceptions, and thus learn how to work with them. In essence, this study will potentially facilitate better communication between the Chinese and people from Western countries.

### **The Methodology**

These questions indicate that in the present study we seek to understand the meaning of the intercultural experiences of ordinary Chinese. Qualitative interviewing is taken to be the most useful tool for this study. This method has been widely used in searching for interpretive knowledge which focuses on understanding the meaning of human activity (Baxter & Babbie, 2004). Moreover, it is particularly well suited to understanding the lived daily experiences of social actors from their own perspectives

(Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Kvale, 2009). In this study, the ordinary people's view of Westerners is not a public, well- recorded discursive practice, but a private expression. Interviews can reveal their stories, accounts and explanations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), which allow us to fully embrace their subjective worlds, and then unfold and interpret meanings of their Othering practice.

The present study focuses on native Chinese living in a city on the east coast of China which has a colonial history and continues to host many Westerners. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 1990), and semi-structured in-depth interviews (Baxter & Babbie, 2004) were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data. This analytical tool provides an operational way to dissect a text through a systematic coding process, as well as to organize codes and themes in a meaningful fashion (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of six chapters. After this Introduction, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature which has shed light on the issue in question. It first describes and examines theories pertaining to the issue of Othering practice between Western and non-Western people, critiques of Orientalism and Occidentalism. Then it will present a critical review of the studies of Chinese Occidentalism. Subsequently, a different theoretical approach is proposed for the purpose of widening our understanding of the Chinese construction of the Western Other. Chapter 3 articulates the methodology employed in this research. Qualitative interviewing is justified as the most appropriate approach to answer the research questions. The key strategies and measures which were used in collecting and analyzing the data are described, including designing the semi-

structured interview, adopting purposive sampling, and choosing thematic analysis as the analytical tool. At the end of this chapter, particular attention will be paid to justifying the validity and credibility of this study.

Chapter 4 and 5 present the results and discussions. First, Chapter 4 analyzes the identified themes, representing the main building blocks in constructing the Western Other, supported by the vivid evidence in the data. Then Chapter 5 moves on to describe the major findings drawn from the analysis and discuss how they answer the research questions. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings' important contribution to our understanding of the Chinese Othering practice towards the Western Other. It further addresses the findings' practical implications for promoting intercultural communication. Finally, the strengths and limitations of this study, and possibilities for future research are identified.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will begin with an overview of the critique of Occidentalism, a discursive practice of constructing the Western Other, followed by a summary and critique of discussions and perspectives on its particularly Chinese form. The literature review reveals a prevailing approach to the Chinese construction of the Western Other, which is to focus on official and intellectual elites' views about the conflictual relationship between China and the West, and on how cultural tradition, historical memory, or foreign threat generate and reinforce the Chinese anti-Western mentality (Callahan, 2004, 2006; Conceison, 2004; Dikötter, 1992, 1997; Gries, 2004, 2007; Guo, 2004; Fairbank, 1979; Ford, 2010; Renwick & Cao, 1999; Z. Wang, 2008; B. Xu, 1998; G. Xu, 2001; Zheng, 1999). This focus has led to an understanding that the Western Other is primarily a political construct, only one important aspect of Chinese Othering practice. Through a critique of this elite-centred and political perspective, an alternative approach, shifting attention to ordinary people's views, will be proposed, in order to investigate further the Chinese construction of the Western Other in contemporary China.

### **Occidentalism: Constructing the Western Other**

The practice of constructing the Western Other is captured in the term Occidentalism, which began to appear in the early 1990s, and gradually gained attention in postcolonial literature. Though the term is a "quasi-theoretical" concept (N. Wang, 1997, p. 62), and there are widely diverse understandings or usages of the term (Conceison, 2004), Occidentalism generally refers to practices in which non-Western people, including both social elites and the general public, perceive and present the West and its people. *The West* is often defined as the European colonisers (Said, 1979), or as

Western European and North American countries, representing the ideology and culture based on bourgeois values or ideas of modernization (N. Wang, 1997; Bonnett, 2004). Occidentalism, then, is evident in academic works, literature and art productions, and political discourses (Bonnett, 2004, 2005; X. Chen, 1995; Conceison, 2004; L. Zhang, 1999), and also expressed in institutional practices (Buruma & Margalit, 2004; Gries, 2007, Ford, 2010). Scholars usually discuss its characteristics in relation to Orientalism, a discursive practice of constructing the Oriental Other.

### **Orientalism and the Oriental Other.**

Orientalism was first defined and critically examined by Said (1979). Said defines Orientalism's three aspects: The first refers to a Western academic field, which studies the Orient and the Oriental, and the second, to binary thinking regarding the fundamental opposition between the Orient and the Occident based on their ontological and epistemological distinctions. The third includes the corporate institution seeking to apply such studies and ways of thinking to manage or control the Orient. Thus, Said's (1979) critique of Orientalism focuses on two points: the constructed image of the Orient and the instrumental implication of this image in colonialism.

Said (1979) demonstrates that Orientalism has created a distorted image of the Orient as essentially different from the Occident. This image originated in response to a perceived threat from the Orient, since for Orientalists, in that strange, exotic, and unknown Orient, its place, people, and lifestyle, all "wore away the European discreteness and rationality of time, space, and personal identity" (p. 167). Therefore, "the most effective approach to reduce this threat was labelling and creating a fiction about the Orient" (Furumizo, 2005, p. 131). Said (1979) further points out that the

creation of essential difference was promoted by scholars as “the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts” (p. 3).

However, Said’s (1979) greater concern is the political and economic reason for Orientalists’ promotion of the Orient as being opposed and separate. Said asserts that “the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination” (Said, 1979, p. 5). As he sees it, the creation of the Orient as inferior, with the Occident superior, was not simply a necessity of self- awareness, or self- defence, but essentially empowerment of the Western Self. “The construction and domination of the Orient are inextricably linked” (Singh, 2002, p. 15), and especially the construction of an inferior Orient was used to develop “a moral justification for colonialism” (Prasad, 2003, p. 13). Besides, the Orient had been created as an object, and so denied capacity to represent and speak for itself (Conceison, 2004; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).

Thus, Said’s (1979) critique sharply points to the profound influence of Orientalism presented as a form of knowledge, which not only deeply affected the academic field but also heavily framed Western people’s perception of the East and its relationship with the West. As Rosenblatt (2009) states, “At certain moments in history, Orientalism constituted the underpinnings of Western culture, popular opinion, and even foreign policy” (p. 52). As for the Western public, through popular culture, such as novels and films, they have read, watched, and absorbed the much distorted image of the Oriental Other (Bernstein & Studlar, 1997; Yin, 2005).

### **Occidentalism as a counterpart of Orientalism.**

Though controversial, and drawing criticism from many sides (Prasad, 2003), Said’s (1979) critique of Orientalism has provided a powerful lens for social scientists to

inquire further into the relationship between discourse, power, and Othering practice (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). Most important, his critique has evoked a strong interest in how the Western Other is perceived and constructed by non-Western people (Buruma & Margalit, 2004; N. Wang, 1997). Influenced by this critique, that of Occidentalism seeks a similar relationship of self-empowerment and Othering practices.<sup>1</sup> In addition, it further demonstrates that non-Western people have their own singular logic in differentiating the Western Other, based on their own experiences of interaction with the West in different social-historical contexts (Bonnett, 2004, 2005; Buruma, 2004; X. Chen, 1995; N. Wang, 1997).

Scholars have identified at least three characteristics of Occidentalism. First, though often seen as an answer to the Orientalist's creation of the distorted Orient, it was a practice long before that term was coined (Bonnett, 2004; Conceison, 2004; N. Wang, 1997). For instance, perceptions of the West had developed in China ever since Western powers made their aggressive intrusion during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (N. Wang, 1997), or even as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Gelber, 2007; Fairbank, 1979). Bonnett (2004) also asserts that people in various non-Western countries, such as Russia, Japan, and India, have been creating and stereotyping the West for at least a century before the idea of the West became the West's own key geo-political concept.

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<sup>1</sup> Compared to the critique of Orientalism initiated by Said (1979), the study of Occidentalism is thus far quite immature. Wang (1997) asserts that "it has not yet become an independent discipline like that of Oriental studies in the West" (p. 62). Conceison (2004) also states that the critique of Occidentalism only takes a very small portion in the field of postcolonial scholarship, lacking of "broader, deeper critical attention" (p. 41).

Second, Occidentalism has been associated with the intrusion and influence of the West by force and/or ideas during the colonial and postcolonial periods (Bonnett 2004; Buruma, 2004; N. Wang, 1997). As Buruma puts it, “European colonialism provoked Occidentalism, and so does global capitalism today” (Buruma, 2004, para.9). This portrays the construction of the Western Other as strategy-motivated: evoked by or responding to Western influences. This includes two opposing constructions of the West. On the one hand, the West is constructed as a superior Other, as opposed to an inferior Self, paralleling Orientalism. Here, Western ideas and values, such as democracy, science and technology, as well as lifestyles are depicted as modern, developed and advanced, and non-Western values and lifestyles are described as archaic, underdeveloped and stagnant ( X. Chen, 1995; L. Zhang, 1999). This binary portrayal suggests that the superior Other is also a model Other. On the other hand, in contrast, the West is constructed as an evil Other, as opposed to a victim Self. Buruma contends that “Occidentalism is fed by a sense of humiliation, of defeat” (Buruma 2004, para.10). This feeling was not just inflicted on a world that had lost long-lived grand civilizations, such as Arab countries, but also affected developed Oriental countries, such as Japan. This sense of defeat comes from perceiving that Western ideas of modernization have been penetrating and threatening non-Western countries’ authentic or traditional cultural values (Buruma, 2004).

Third, Occidentalism characteristically has been used as a political lever for non-Western countries to pursue wider national interests (Bonnett, 2004, 2005; Buruma & Margalit, 2004; X. Chen, 1995; Dikötter, 1992; Gries, 2007; N. Wang, 1997). Thus, while the West as a model Other was utilized to criticize traditional values or even

transform socio-political systems, the West as an evil Other repelled Western ideas and defended non-Western countries' cultural and political identities. According to N. Wang (1997), Occidentalism plays a key role in supporting the movement against Western colonialism and cultural hegemony. He maintains that reinforcing the Western image as hegemonic helps non-Western countries to decolonize and defend national interests: to form an independent social-economic system and to protect cultural integrity.

In addition to the above common portrayal of Occidentalism with three characteristics, Conceison (2004) further argues that Occidentalism, in its form of representation of speaking subjects, inherently follows the same logic as Orientalism, though it does not completely share the Orientalists' system of hierarchical binary opposition. She posits that, just as the Oriental Other is represented as an object by the Orientalists, so too have foreigners, particularly Westerners, long been silenced, represented and objectified by non-Western people for self-identification. Moreover, Occidentalism as a self-defining strategy is instrumental for non-Western people not only to assert their national/cultural identities but also to claim their global positions. In this sense, Occidentalism also has the tendency to dominate the Western Other.

As noted above, Occidentalism as a discursive practice is embedded with a deep political implication. Its impact on the non-Western world cannot be underestimated. There is no doubt that the general features of Occidentalism show themselves in Chinese practice, with China having faced similar situations to those of other non-Western countries: struggling against Western colonialism and cultural imperialism. The Chinese construction of the Western Other and its implications nonetheless has singular

characteristics due to its particular experiences both past and present.<sup>2</sup>

### **Chinese Construction of the Western Other**

As stated in the introduction, the Chinese Othering practice against Westerners has been increasingly reported by the Western media, described by Western expatriates' anecdotes, and has received attention from scholars (e.g. Barmé, 1995; Conceison, 2004; Gries, 2004; Sheridan, 1996; G. Xu, 2001; York, 2004). Regarding the Chinese public's general attitude towards Westerners, the main argument is that the Chinese have an ingrained xenophobia and anti-foreign and anti-Western mentality, due to their long struggle in fighting with foreign invaders, and to the influence of a constructed Confucian tradition (Dikötter, 1992; Fairbank, 1979; Ford, 2010). As for the new wave of public anti-Western sentiment, fear and hatred of the West is rooted in constructed Chinese modern history (Barmé, 1995; Callahan, 2004, 2006; Gries, 2004; Renwick & Cao, 1999; Z. Wang, 2008). Also, the Chinese Othering practice is largely a product of present constructed threats from the West (Guo, 2004; Jia, 2005; B. Xu, 1998; M. Zhang, 1999; Zheng, 1999).

#### **Cultural tradition and the Western Other.**

##### ***Sinocentrism and the foreign Other.***

Some scholars propose that Chinese cultural tradition plays a central role in

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<sup>2</sup> China has been regarded as a semi-colonial state by its officials and historians since it had never been completely colonized by Western countries (Conceison, 2004). Nevertheless, China has long been struggling against Western imperialism, first to become an independent state, then to maintain its own political ideology and protect its cultural traditions (Fairbank & Goldman; 1998; Guo, 2004; Said, 1994).

official or intellectual elites' construction of Westerners as an alien Other (Fairbank, 1979; Dikötter, 1992; Ford, 2010). Fairbank (1979) theorizes that Chinese people have long held two myths: one of their unity, the other of their superiority. He contends that these beliefs were originally crystallized in a Confucian universalist world view, also called Sinocentrism, and has been continuously constructed and reinforced by political leaders in their continuous struggle with foreigners, thus influencing Chinese people for over 2000 years.<sup>3</sup> The core of this view is that China, representing the highest human civilization, is at the center of the world, and all other people, within its periphery or outside of it, are uncivilized and thus inferiors or barbarians. A Chinese sense of cultural superiority has divided the Chinese from the non-Chinese Other (Fairbank, 1979).

Frank (1979) further points out that Western colonization, starting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, severely shattered this world view. However, its influence continues to be felt. In a sense, the Western Other is a special addition in the framework of Sinocentrism. The only difference between the Westerner and other non-Chinese is that the former is a real challenge to the Chinese sense of superiority and thus has become a significant Other:

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<sup>3</sup> According to Fairbank (1979), the Chinese ruling class deeply believed that the Confucian tradition was the key to successfully manage, assimilate or overpower foreigners, even when the nation was under alien rule. He points out that in Chinese history north China had frequently been invaded by nomads. As a result, China was under alien rule in a number of dynasties. However these emperors of foreign origin found that the only possible way to rule China was to follow the Chinese way – the Confucian principles. Thus, though under alien rule, the Chinese socio-political system and Confucian tradition had always been maintained. This fact had confirmed the belief that Chinese civilization was superior and the only thinkable alternative.

Modern man in China could never forget the West, and since his civilization had consciously developed on the basis of its own central superiority, he could never overlook the self-confident Western claims to Western superiority. China's sense of identity could hardly be impaired, but her self-confidence could be severely shaken (p. 145).

Fairbank's approach has been commonly adopted and /or elaborated on by many scholars (e.g. Z. Chen, 2005; Conceison, 2004; Liu, 1997; Ford, 2010). Some scholars maintain that a Confucian Sinocentric view is xenophobic (Conceison, 2004; Ford, 2010). In Conceison's view, the continually constructed perception of unity and cultural superiority is an aspiration to overpower and expel the foreign Other. She further asserts that this inherited anti-foreign xenophobia is reconstructed and manifested in many contemporary official and unofficial cultural productions, which in turn have an unavoidable influence on the Chinese public. Current Chinese Othering practice is fundamentally a re-articulation of long-standing anti-foreign tradition (Conceison, 2004).

Focusing on the connection between Confucian tradition and today's Chinese Othering practice, later work by Ford (2010) contributes a more systematic analysis. Ford grounds his analysis on an assumption that cultural tradition is significant in shaping people's attitudes, perceptions and expectations since it is unavoidably internalized into people's ways of thinking and thus becomes part of their personalities. He then goes on to argue that the Chinese are perhaps the most past-oriented people in the world, having a strong sense of history and tradition. They often look to tradition and classics for wisdom and choice. Therefore the Confucian view, having particular implications for China's relations with non-Chinese peoples, has "an extraordinary presence in contemporary

Chinese life and thought” (Ford, 2010, p. 9), especially in the political elites’ mentality. The contemporary official “anti-foreign themes ... seem to have a clear connection to long-standing assumptions about moral and civilizational gradients and the general depravity of barbarian societies remote from the Sinic cultural core” (Ford, 2010, pp. 217-218). Ford substantiates this assertion through the complex Chinese foreign affairs system since 1950s, which, for half a century, deeply controlled Chinese contact with foreigners and thus made the public fear and distance foreigners (Ford, 2010).<sup>4</sup>

***Cultural Other and racial Other.***

Related to the tradition of Sinocentrism is another important issue. How then did the Sinocentric view differentiate the Chinese from the foreign Other? And how does this differentiation affect Chinese perceptions of the Western Other? A prevailing view is that, though ethnic origins and physical features were used to build boundaries between the Chinese and foreigners, the foreign Other was mainly constructed by cultural differences (Z. Chen, 2005; Fairbank, 1979; Ford, 2010; Poo, 2007). Z. Chen (2005) straightforwardly refers to Sinocentrism as traditional culturalism. According to this view, as Confucian tradition became established, the ancient Chinese developed a strong sense

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<sup>4</sup> Brady’s (2003) study of the Chinese foreign affairs system provided an excellent case for Ford (2010). In her book, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (2003), Brady describes in detail how the practice of the Chinese foreign affairs system managed to control the foreigner’s stay and activity in China for the last half century. According to Brady, the Chinese foreign affairs system gave all kinds of special treatment to foreigners and kept Chinese citizens away from them: Even as the regulations against foreigners started to be relaxed in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the system was still functioning with a focus on constructing foreigners as aliens or outsiders.

of cultural consciousness. They drew a boundary between self and the foreign Other based on Confucian values and moral codes, and believed the boundary could be erased as long as foreigners accepted those values and codes and fully participated in Confucian society. This popular view indicates that using cultural differences instead of racial ones to separate or repel foreigners was a tradition in the long history of Sino-foreign relations.

Dikötter (1992, 1997) refutes this popular view, contending that a racial consciousness is rooted in Confucian tradition. In Dikötter's view, the modern binary of culture and race cannot be applied to understand an ancient Chinese perception of foreigners, since "[p]hysical composition and cultural disposition were confused in Chinese antiquity" (Dikötter, 1992, p. 3). Supported by a large number of Confucian classics, he argues that in the Confucian belief, cultural difference could be measured by physical distance, and cultural levels were associated with physiological features, such as skin colors (Dikötter, 1992). In addition, to distance and expel foreign groups, Confucian elites constructed the Han race and its mythological ancestral Yellow emperor based on a traditional belief in patrilineal descent and blood kinship (Dikötter, 1997).<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Dikötter (1992) maintains that, although Confucian tradition promoted cultural universalism in which foreigners could be Sinicized and so benefit from Chinese culture, there was a significant part of Confucian tradition which emphasized biological

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<sup>5</sup> The Yellow Emperor is one of the five legendary Emperors of Chinese ancient history and mythology. Today in China, he is regarded as the symbol and common ancestor of the nation (Yang & An, 2005). Here, Dikötter has described how the Yellow Emperor was constructed as an ancestor of Chinese Han ethnicity in biological terms. This created image was used to resist first Manchu ethnicity in the late Qing dynasty (1644 -1911), and then against Westerners.

differences in constructing the foreign Other. He further posits that this tradition of racial consciousness contributed to the construction of the Westerner as a racial Other at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, as Dikötter (1997) notes, racial difference and biological specificity became a dominant issue in the minds of official/intellectual elite, and so a racial theory became systematically developed, in which racial markers, especially hairiness, were used to differentiate and distance Westerners. Although the racial discourse emerged from a need to unite the nation to survive Western powers (Poo, 2007), Dikötter insists that it is embedded in Confucianism, whose influence on the Chinese perception of Westerners was profound. He believes that, through textbooks, popular science books, or government publications, the racialized image of Westerners was widely accepted by ordinary people in the colonial period (Dikötter, 1992, 1997).

Although Dikötter's (1992, 1997) analysis focuses mostly on official/intellectual discourse in Chinese modern history, it also touches on renewed racial discourse in contemporary China. His analysis suggests that the myth of race had early on been successfully disseminated in the public and later continued to influence the Chinese view of Westerners. Following Dikötter, Conceison (2004) also believes in the connection between the Confucian view, the long standing anti-foreign tradition, and Chinese racial consciousness in contemporary China. She discovers that “[h]air and eye color, degree of hairiness, and size of nose all continue (along with skin color) to be the most common racial markers of difference from the Chinese perspective” (Conceison, 2004, pp. 20-21).

### **History of humiliation and the Western Other.**

#### ***The narrative of humiliation and the West as enemy.***

As noted above, Western aggression by force in the colonial period cast a long

shadow over the Chinese attitude towards the West.<sup>6</sup> While many scholars concede that the heavy weight of the century-long colonial history does influence the shaping of Chinese perceptions of and relations with Westerners, they insist that the new wave of strong anti-Western sentiment is more a result of the national narrative, *a century of humiliation*, in which the history has been reconstructed by the official elite against the Western threat to defend its political legitimacy (Callahan, 2004, 2006; Renwick & Cao, 1999; Z. Wang, 2008).<sup>7</sup> Callahan (2006) observes that the narrative of national humiliation has been “an enduring narrative of modern Chinese history and identity” since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (p. 187), and is elevated and reconstructed whenever it is imperative to deal with national security crises. Therefore, Callahan argues that the revived official narrative of humiliation is mainly a political act to mobilize the public to protest against foreign enemies, the external Other (Callahan, 2006). Following this argument, Z. Wang (2008) also emphasizes that historical memory is crucial in creating artificial enemies and promoting hostility towards other groups for the internal cohesion and consolidation of the regime. As he puts it, “In crisis situations of confrontation and conflict, especially when confrontation is perceived by the Chinese as an assault on fundamental identity, face, and authority, then history and memory very often serve as major motivating factors” (Z. Wang, 2008, p. 802).

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<sup>6</sup> This period begins with China’s defeat by the British in the first Opium War in 1842 and ends in 1945 when China won the war against Japanese invasion.

<sup>7</sup> Those authors have discussed the background and dynamic of this new Western pressure starting in early 1990s, which is beyond the scope of this study.

The theme of this narrative portrayed an ancient glory, a modern shame or sense of defeat, and a dream of recapturing China's international status mixed with a desire for revenge. Thus the narrative fundamentally expressed victimhood (Barmé, 1995; Callahan, 2004; Gries, 2004; Renwick & Cao, 1999; Z. Wang, 2008). China as a victim of Western aggression has been narrated in two ways: It was China's backwardness in military and economic power that made her vulnerable to Western aggression (Barmé, 1995). Or it was Western aggression which had made China backward and underdeveloped, and thus China's status was unfairly taken away by the Western aggressors (Gries, 2004). Either way the narrative blamed the West for China's fall from her ancient glory and her perceived inferior status in the current international order. The underlying message from this narrative is that the West is a dangerous enemy which continues to threaten China's sovereignty and prosperity (Callahan, 2004; 2006).

*The impact of the official narrative.*

It is maintained that the official discourse of national humiliation, through constructing historical memories, exerts a tremendous impact on Chinese people's perceptions of themselves and of the Western Other, stimulating a strong desire for revenge on the West (Barmé, 1995; Callahan, 2004, 2006; Renwick & Cao, 1999; Z. Wang, 2008). Renwick and Cao (1999) observe that the narrative has been expressed through invented stories, symbolic arts or legendary figures, and especially educational textbooks which serve as a tool to reproduce official discourse. Thus, they claim, a strong collective sense of victimhood has been cultivated within the Chinese public.

Later work of Z. Wang (2008) has greatly supported this claim, but with an emphasis on how the official narrative has successfully reinforced and institutionalized

the public's historical memory through educational socialization. Though recognizing that it is hard to measure the impact of top-down politics on collective memory, Z. Wang believes that "when institutions intervene, the impact of an idea may be prolonged for decades or even generations. In this sense, ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them as principled or causal statement" (Z. Wang, 2008, p. 798). He argues that, as "[t]he content of history and memory has become embedded in Chinese education systems, party-history systems, popular culture and public media" (Z. Wang, 2008, p. 799), the official narrative has penetrated deeply into people's daily lives, especially influencing young people's attitudes and perceptions towards the outside world. Thus, he claims that the new anti-Western movement proves that the official narrative works effectively.

While the official narrative indeed has a powerful influence on the public, it is hard to deny that the efficacy of the government's efforts is built on the basis of the nation-wide patriotic consensus (Barmé, 1995). Thus the narrative is official propaganda augmented by a large sympathetic audience (Callahan, 2004, 2006). Callahan (2006) argues that the narrative is a political performance at the levels of both the official and the non-official. Different from Z. Wang (2008), Callahan not only emphasizes the impact of the official narrative as a practice of social engineering, but also recognizes the dynamic of popular culture itself in constructing and circulating the historical memory. As Callahan sees it, the public responds to and supports the narrative as they consume the media products – not just art and literature, but also daily commodities. While people consume national humiliation, they unconsciously differentiate the Chinese from the foreign Other and practice anti-foreignism on a daily basis, thus adding meaning to the

narrative. As a result, the popular culture creates its own space where historical memory continues to be constructed as cultural products continue to proliferate. Therefore, he concludes that the constructed national enemy is “not just a state’s construct but a product circulating in the market, where government’s initiative loses its control” (Callahan, 2006, p. 203). The impact of the official narrative lives in the popular culture to which the public’s action has made a great contribution.

### **A New Western threat and the Western Other.**

#### *The intellectuals’ view of the new Western threat.*

As official Occidentalism intensified in the 1990s, Chinese intellectuals also demonstrated their critical role in defining new Western threats and promoting the new anti-Western movement (Lee, 2006; B. Xu, 1998; G. Xu, 2001; Zhao, 1997).<sup>8</sup> As discussed in the previous section, the official reconstruction of the past threat and its patriotic sentiment do appeal to the public. However, it mainly reiterates that present Western hostility is an extension of past conflict, which continues to threaten China’s sovereignty and limit her prosperity. Thus, as B. Xu (1998) comments, this official

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<sup>8</sup>This literature review mainly discusses the study of the intellectuals’ Occidentalism since the 1990s and its impact on the public. It should be noted that the intellectuals’ discourse of the West in the 1980s had mostly portrayed a positive model Other (X. Chen, 1995; L. Zhang, 1999). X. Chen (1995) asserts that this discourse, having painted a free, democratic, and advanced Western civilization, was “a powerful anti-official discourse using the Western Other as a metaphor for a political liberation against ideological oppression within a totalitarian society” (p. 8). But Zhao (1997) argues that this discourse actually portrayed the West “as an aggressive, hostile power that had attacked, exploited and humiliated China”, and it encouraged the Chinese people to “reinvigorate themselves by acquiring the spirit of science and democracy, the secret of the West’s success” (p. 729).

narrative lacked the ability to define what the new Western threat actually meant to post-Cold war China, and it “had a hard time finding new things to say about the outside threat beyond China’s past conflict with foreign powers” (p. 207).

Differing from official Occidentalism, Chinese intellectuals were trying to define the new Western threat as political and cultural imperialism. Western imperialism had two expressions. One was the vast impact of Western ideas, values, and Western-style modernization on Chinese society. The other was the harsh Western attitude and the renewed attacks on China’s international status and image. In defining this new threat, the Chinese intellectuals have created new images of the Western Other, which supported and supplemented the official construction (Guo, 2004; B. Xu, 1998; Zhao, 1997; Zheng, 1999).

*The discourse of Western cultural imperialism and its impact.*

In academic circles, the new cultural discourse since the 1990s adopted Western post-perspectives, such as post-modernism and post-colonialism, to identify the new Western threat and portray the Western Other as a cultural imperialist (Guo, 2004; B. Xu, 1998; L. Zhang, 1999). B. Xu (1998) argues that this post-modernist discourse, which he calls *the nativist cultural theory*, gave a brand new presentation of the Western threat in the post-Cold War era, completely different from official Occidentalism. As he sees it, for the cultural nationalists, Western threats were those “from Western values, Western cultural heritage, Western modes of knowledge, the West’s vision of history, in a word, from an absolutely incompatible, unchangeable, and alien Westernness” (B. Xu, 1998, p. 208). Thus the Western idea of modernization was not just a threat to the Chinese state, the ruling party, or the territorial sovereignty, but also to “the Chinese way of life,

essential Chinese values, Chinese perspectives and perceptions, Chinese history and cultural tradition, in a word, the very core of Chineseness” (B. Xu, 1998, p. 207).

This post-modernist theory insisted that China had suffered from the Western idea of modernization for a long time (L. Zhang 1999; Zhao, 1997). Observing the Chinese post-modern debate, L. Zhang (1999) finds that, “[These] critiques see the entire modern period [of China]... as dominated by misplaced trust in Western values of freedom and democracy and the efficacy of modernization, and by the influence of the Western discourse of Orientalism” (p.189). Thus, these Chinese critiques claimed that Western values had not only eroded the Chinese scholars’ mind-set but also influenced the social ethics of Chinese society, which produced blind and irrational worship of the West and threatened Chinese cultural tradition (Zhao, 1997). Furthermore, in order to counter Western imperialism, the intellectuals tried to prove that the Western idea of modernization did not adapt well to the Chinese reality. Thus they made a call to revive traditional cultural values, reject Western thought, and set up a new Chinese way of thinking of modernization (Guo, 2004; B. Xu, 1998; L. Zhang, 1999).

As for the impact of this post-modernist discourse on the general public, some scholars argue that it cannot be underestimated (Guo, 2004; B. Xu, 1998). On one hand, the discourse strategically reinforced the notion of opposition between Chinese and Western culture, and created the image of the West as an essentially different Other. The rhetoric of irreconcilable cultural difference could easily be used to justify prejudice and conflict. As Guo (2004) states, “[that] opposition in turn provides a framework that helps focus all sorts of anti-Western and anti-foreign sentiment and constitutes a grid for filtering the Occident into Chinese consciousness” (p. 131). On the other hand, the

discourse shared the same philosophical basis of cultural nativism and ingroup essentialism with the official rhetoric. This ironic coincidence facilitated the official anti-imperialist campaign. In addition, since the intellectuals' critiques "discarded official ideological rhetoric, their arguments seemed more influential and persuasive to many Chinese" (Zhao, 1997, p. 736).

However, as many authors imply, no matter how big a potential it had in shaping the public's perception, the discourse in academic circles had limited impact in real life. It was the intellectuals' discourse in the circle of popular culture that quickly disseminated the image of Western imperialism and generated the momentum of the anti-Western movement (e.g. Lee, 2006; G. Xu, 2001; Zhao, 1997). The 1990s witnessed a wave of anti-Western best-selling books, literature and art works, which was seen as a responsive act to the increasing US-led Western countries' hostility towards China since 1990 (Jia, 2005; G. Xu, 2001; M. Zhang, 1999; Zhao, 1997).<sup>9</sup> This popular discursive practice had created negative images of the West in general and the US in particular. According to G. Xu (2001), some publications focused on social problems in the West and presented written and visual images of Western society as dishonest, materialized and morally corrupted. They implicitly warned the Chinese people that the West intended

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<sup>9</sup> These authors posit that, for Chinese intellectuals, Western countries' hostility towards China is evident in their constant attacks on China on a whole range of issues regarding its foreign and domestic policies (such as China's policies on Taiwan, Tibet, human rights and its military forces), in its interference with the acceptance of China by the international community (including trying to influence the decisions on China's application to the World Trade Organization, China's Most Favoured Nation status and Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympics), and in its intensive China-threat rhetoric among Western policy makers and academic circles.

to change China by imposing its cultures, values and lifestyles through communication media. Other publications particularly pointed to the American-led Western policy of containing China or to the mainstream media's negative coverage of China. This counterattack sent a strong message to the Chinese people that the West fabricated information to demonize China, so as to block her road to prosperity and maintain its domination of the world (G. Xu, 2001; M. Zhang, 1999).

This popular anti-Western discourse had a great impact on the public (Jia, 2005; G. Xu, 2001; M. Zhang, 1999; Zhao, 1997). The 1996's bestseller *China Can Say No* was said to have widely influenced Chinese people's perceptions of and attitude towards the West.<sup>10</sup> As Lee (2006) states, "[D]iscussions of nationalism normally were limited to the academic world.... However, the publication of this book turned the tables...and fanned the spread of nationalism among the general public" (p. 146). The public's strong reaction to those publications indicated that it shared the same sentiment as those authors – The West has pushed hard on China with its own social models and values, showing no respect for China's interests (Jia, 2005; M. Zhang, 1999).

### **Critique of the Study of Chinese Occidentalism**

As demonstrated in the extensive literature, there is a recognition that both the social elites and the Chinese public have participated in the construction of the Western Other. However, scholars' main attention has been drawn to official/ intellectual elites since it is empirically easier to identify their views and attitudes by analysing their discursive practices. Most important, the elites are seen as active agents in constructing

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<sup>10</sup> Sheridan (1996) reports that this bestseller, with 100,000 copies sold in one month, is a measure of the nation's mood.

the Western Other, with the public assumed to be influenced, informed, or manipulated. It must be noted that, as Poo (2007) states, representing the main constructive force in shaping social ideology and perceptions, official attitudes towards foreigners largely depend on political agendas, while the public's view of foreigners is quite a different story. Apparently, the elite's attitudes have had profound influences on those of the public. However, we can hardly deny the private expressions of the public, which are based on its own imagination and/or interaction with Western peoples and cultures.

As for the cause that lies behind the social elite's Occidentalism, the literature has discussed a number of factors – cultural tradition, historical trauma and current Western threat. Differing emphases on these factors demonstrates a tension between the past and the present. It is held as certain that Sinocentrism denotes a strong confidence in Chinese values and a sense of Chinese cultural superiority, which, as continually reconstructed by the ruling elites, encourages the Chinese to differentiate from and distance foreigners. Also held unquestionable in this literature is that cultural tradition has a prolonged life and profound impact in shaping people's attitudes and perceptions. However, it is debatable whether this anti-foreign tradition, developed in certain social historical contexts, has not also been challenged as Chinese society goes through fundamental changes. Despite the influence of the past on the present, we simply cannot conclude that today's anti-Western practice is solely the expression of some age-old tendency to view China as superior and so to distance and expel foreigners. As indicated by Zheng (1999), past anti-foreign sentiment is varied in meaning and intent during particular historical periods, and evolving Chinese history exhibits both continuation and a break with this anti-foreign and anti-Western tradition.

Furthermore, the discussions of social factors imply that the Chinese construction of the Western Other results from responses to differences and conflicts. In particular, they highlight how intergroup threats shape the perceptions of people from other cultures. Indeed, the extensive intergroup research supports a causal link between intergroup threats and negative attitudes towards outgroups (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). As intergroup theory tells us, threat from another distinct group will lead to a strong identification with the ingroup. Strong group identity reinforces the differences between groups and encourages ingroup favouritism at the expense of the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is certainly true that the constant external threat in China's long history has nurtured Chinese people's defensive attitude towards foreigners. However, conflict is not the only motivating factor in defining the Other. To define oneself through defining the Other reflects a profound human passion, since "[t]hat one is not what the Other is, is critical in defining who one is" (Sarup, 1996, p. 47). Throughout human history in different civilizations, we can observe that constant effort has been made by human groups in searching for knowledge of their own existence, often by defining the foreigner, the outsider, or any unknown as the Other (Capetillo-Ponce, 2003/4; Poo, 2007).

Finally, returning to the critique of Occidentalism, we can see that the discussions of Chinese Occidentalism have provided a vivid and rich field of argument, demonstrating that the response to Western intrusion by force or by ideas is central to the Chinese construction of the Western Other (N. Wang, 1997). In addition, the discussions suggest that to a certain degree Chinese Occidentalism is a true counterpart of Orientalism (Conceison, 2004). On one hand, the Chinese have been fully capable of constructing the Western Other based on their own experiences (e.g. Fairbank, 1979;

Ford, 2010). On the other hand, this construction has significant political implications – not only for the sake of self-empowerment, but also for the purpose of gaining power and authority in international relations, especially with the West (e.g. Gries, 2004, 2007; Zheng, 1999). Thus, the study of a Chinese construction of the Western Other has deepened and expanded our understanding of Occidentalism.

It appears that, despite a notable contribution, the current literature on Chinese construction of the Western Other focuses primarily on the social elites' discursive practices in the context of nationalism or foreign relations. Although the public's emotions and views receive some attention in the literature, they are fundamentally regarded as influenced by or sharing sentiments with the elites. Here, it is worth noting Gries's (2004) criticism of the dominant top-down approach in nationalism study. He argues that this approach emphasizes the social elites' role in constructing nations and traditions, which, as evident in the critique of Chinese nationalism, "has shifted attention up and away from the masses to the elite level" (Gries, 2004, p. 119). Thus he calls for a bottom-up approach to investigate Chinese anti-Western practice. By taking this approach, he adopts the social psychological concept of *face* and posits that Chinese people's anti-West practice involved the emotional desire to save face (Gries, 2004).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Following the sociologists' concept of face (e.g. Cooley, 1922; Goffman, 1982; Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944), Gries (2004) asserts that face is present in all societies but languages of face and rules of regulating face may vary in different cultures. Therefore to understand the Chinese attitude towards the West, we must consider "the 'rules of the game' that Chinese take into interpersonal and intergroup encounters" (p. 26). For more about discussions of face issues in the context of cross-cultural and interpersonal encounters, see Ting-Toomey (1994).

Gries (2004) defines face as a universal human concern about “the self displayed before others” (p. 20). Having face indicates being respected by others and obtaining a proper status in a social network. Thus, Gries (2004) maintains that individuals who identify with their nation would make every effort to defend its face, since individuals tie their self-esteem to the fate of the nation and gain collective self-esteem from its positive image and accomplishments. A fear of losing national face, or a desire to regain it after a perceived loss, often motivates people to take revenge on the Other. Thus, various forms of Chinese anger with the West, Gries (2004) explains, are efforts to restore their self-esteem, or regain face for China. It is this genuine emotional commitment that drives ordinary people to participate in nationalistic politics, and thus we cannot assume that public anti-Western practice is a result of the ruling elite’s propaganda.

Following Gries’ (2004) view, it is clear that, though insightful and critical, the elite-centred approach cannot provide a complete picture of Chinese perceptions of the Western Other. However, Gries’ analysis shares a similar limitation as the literature: it focuses basically on the political aspect of constructing the Western Other. As we can see, using this political lens reflects a common interest in highlighting long Sino-West conflict, threats and power relations, and unavoidably emphasizing past Chinese anti-foreign/anti-Western sentiment. Most important, Chinese xenophobia, anti-foreignism /anti-Westernism are often portrayed as unchangeable phenomena. Moreover, cases were sensationalized by selecting a small number of elites’ discourses, a few anti-Western publications and popular TV series or a couple of mass protests. This serves the thesis that Chinese anti-Western sentiment has intensified since the 1990s.

In fact, the Chinese anti-Western phenomenon is not at all that dominant (Jia, 2005). The literature simply ignores or omits evidence which clearly demonstrates that the Chinese perceptions of the West have become richer and more multi-faceted. As Fei (1998) notes, China's increasing contact with the West brought new aspects to Chinese perceptions, which are "not a simple repletion of the old anti-Western mood but a mix of neonationalism and better-informed views of the West" (p. 113). Jia (2005) also notes that, in terms of attitudes towards the West, in many ways the Chinese nowadays are more relaxed, open-minded, and less nationalistic than before. It is to these updated and less defensively nationalistic attitudes that we should pay more attention.

The point here is not to challenge the insights brought by the literature, but rather to argue that the idea of the Western Other as a political construct cannot encompass the entirety of how the Chinese perceive the West. Admittedly, it is impossible, certainly in a world of global competition, for social elites to avoid entirely a political agenda. Nonetheless, defining the Other is not always a process of top-down power politics. Thus, to go beyond the elite-centred and past-oriented political approach, and so have a better understanding of a Chinese construction of the Western Other, it is necessary to investigate ordinary Chinese people's views and perceptions in this new historical era.

### **Proposed Approach: Shifting Attention to Ordinary People**

#### **Examining ordinary people's actual encounters with Westerners.**

To investigate how ordinary Chinese people perceive the Western Other, I contend that a valid approach is to examine their actual encounters with Westerners. As stated before, this interaction is a new phenomenon since from 1949 to the late 70s the

Chinese public was basically kept away from the rest of the world. Even in the colonial period, the Chinese public had very limited interaction with Westerners (Wood, 1998).<sup>12</sup> Therefore the Chinese public usually perceived the West and Westerners through either pure imagination or information provided by various media, especially controlled by governments, making official discourse, propaganda or cultural products the most influential instruments for shaping its view of the West. Today, this situation still exists but is no longer dominant, as ordinary Chinese are becoming closely connected with the world,<sup>13</sup> and find much opportunity to interact directly with Westerners.<sup>14</sup> The West still retains much mystery for most Chinese, but at least the veil is lifted.

The process of lived cultural experience is critical to our understanding of the Chinese perceptions of the West. In the process of encounters and interaction with Westerners, old imaginations, myths, or historical memories might be reinforced or

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<sup>12</sup> Conceison (2004) states that, it was in this period that Westerners first settled and resided in Chinese cities and this was the first time that ordinary Chinese had a chance to interact with or observe Westerners by themselves. However, as Wood (1998) describes, these chances were very rare. Most Western residents lived in special city areas called treaty ports, which were separated from the Chinese public and were “created to serve as vehicle for British and other Western interests in trade, diplomacy and evangelism, and established in the face of Chinese opposition” (p. 1).

<sup>13</sup> This connection is greatly reinforced and consolidated by a constantly renovated communication technology. According to Internet World Stats (2010), at the end of June, 2010, the number of internet users in China was 420 million, compared to 22.5 million in 2000.

<sup>14</sup> According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (1996, 2009), in 1990 there were 1,747,300 overseas visitors, among them 727,100 from the European, North American and Australian regions. In 2008, those numbers increased to 24,325,300 and 9,404,800 respectively.

contested by real personal experience. As old arrogant perceptions and defensive responses to perceived threats mix with genuine curiosities and new understandings, the images of the West become far more complex. In a word, through examining the process of Chinese exchanges with Westerners, we can see how the Western Other is constructed in the collision between a new reality and an existing belief system shaped by a certain socio-historical context.

### **Intercultural contact theories and the Other.**

As stated above, direct interaction between ordinary Chinese and Westerners is now taking place. It is fascinating to see how the images of Westerners change as they become real and concrete in Chinese people's daily lives. Intercultural contact theories have provided us insights in this regard. Intercultural contact or communication theories are generated to "describe or explain communication between people from different cultures" (Gudykunst & Lee, 2005, p. 4). The development of Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Brewer & Miller, 1984; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998), with lots of focus on changing attitudes between ethnic/cultural groups, suggests that genuine contact between human groups will greatly influence people's perceptions of and attitudes towards the Other, the outgroup members. Also, Edward Hall's theory of unconscious culture (1959, 1976) demonstrates that real contacts between peoples from different cultures is the key to developing cross-cultural awareness and to gaining a better understanding of self and the Other.

### ***Intergroup Contact Theory.***

The Contact Hypothesis, also known as Intergroup Contact Theory, first well defined by Allport (1954), has been viewed as "highly influential" and "has received

extensive empirical attention” (Dovidio et. al., 2003, p. 7). This hypothesis proposes that real intergroup contact and acquaintance under certain conditions will effectively reduce prejudice and change perceptions. “The deeper and more genuine the association, the greater its effect” (Allport, 1958, p. 454). In essence, true and concrete contacts play a critical role in formulating an appropriate view of outgroup members and thus promoting intergroup understanding.

The theory has now firmly established certain critical contact conditions in which people will be able to reduce intergroup bias and form a constructive image of outgroup members (Dovidio et. al., 2003). The important conditions include those identified by Allport (1954): equal status between the groups; cooperative interaction with a common goal; and supportive norms within or outside of contact settings. More conditions were added later, such as opportunity for interaction at a personal level (Brewer & Miller, 1984, Miller, 2002); voluntary and intimate interaction (Amir, 1969; 1976); and development of close intergroup friendships (Pettigrew, 1998). These added new conditions emphasize the importance of intimate relationships in changing people’s perceptions of other ethnic/cultural groups.

Furthermore, Intergroup Contact Theory has explained why intergroup attitudes can be improved with certain critical contact conditions (Dovidio et. al., 2003). The most influential approach is to examine critically the contact process through the lens of social categorization. Two theoretical models have emerged: *deategorization* and *recategorization* (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). The function of social categorization has been well addressed in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which asserts that a salient social category is the

catalyst in generating ingroup favouritism and negative attitudes towards outgroup members. Drawn from Social Identity Theory, both decategorization and recategorization models focus on the impact of a changed perception of one's original group membership on reducing intergroup bias (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Gaertner, et al., 1993). The decategorization model posits that in personalized interaction, a strong awareness of individual attributes makes the social category less relevant, which encourages people to discover similarity or dissimilarity across the category boundary. Thus outgroup members can be differentiated and then evaluated fully according to their personal merits (Brewer & Miller, 1984). It is evident that personalized interaction promotes familiarity, similarity, empathy, and trust, which in turn reduce anxiety and discomfort in the intergroup settings, disconfirm the negative aspects of outgroup members, and thereby change the perception of them as a whole (Miller, 2002).

The recategorization model points to the power of social categorization in formulating a pro-ingroup attitude (Gaertner, et al., 1993). Thus, it is not designed to eliminate categorization but to focus on the mechanism of changing members' representations of the membership from two separate groups to a more inclusive single group. It proposes that in intergroup contact, if a common ingroup identity is recognized and perceived by members from different groups, then "this change in members' perceptions of group boundaries enables some of the cognitive and motivational processes that may contribute initially to intergroup bias and conflict to be redirected toward establishing more harmonious intergroup relations" (Gaertner, et al., 1993, pp. 2-3). This model has been tested by research in a natural setting (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastacio, 1994), within which real frequent

intergroup contacts took place. This field research demonstrates that a salient superordinate ingroup identity plays an important role in reducing bias between ethnic/racial groups. In addition, it also finds that when a common group identity (e.g. school body, or American) becomes salient, the perception of subgroup identity (e.g. ethnic/racial identity) still persists. This finding suggests that a dual identity enables an extension of the contact effect (i.e. reducing bias) to additional outgroup members (Gaertner et al, 1994).

***Hall's theory of unconscious culture.***

Edward Hall's theory of unconscious culture (1959, 1976) has established its founding role in the scholarly field of intercultural communication (Rogers, Hart, & Milke, 2002). From a unique anthropological approach, it sheds light on our understanding of and solution to problems with respect to intercultural/interethnic relationships. The theory proposes that culture has two faces: formal and explicit versus informal and hidden. Centered on examining the latter, Hall claims that this part of culture functions outside of our consciousness but exerts a pervasive effect on how we perceive the world, experience ourselves, and manage our lives. "Culture...is a mold in which all are cast, and it controls our daily lives in many unsuspected ways....Culture hides more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its participants" (Hall, 1959, pp. 29-30). He argues that understanding the forces that control our lives will free us from their constraints, increase our self-knowledge, and change our relationships with people from different cultures.

Hall (1959, 1976) conceptualizes unconscious culture through analyzing how culture comes into life, how it is learned and passed down from generation to generation. He posits that cultures have grown out of a wide range of common human activities,

notably organizing space and handling time. As he sees it, there are different behaviour patterns in these activities, suggesting that people have developed varying rules in managing their lives. By participating in these activities, people learn the basic rules and practice them in a holistic way without knowing what they are and how they work. These unspoken rules or unconscious cultures define a group, and are shared and passed down within the group. In essence, unconscious cultures, as different expressions of humanity, are closely tied to authentic ethnicity.

With this concept of unconscious culture, Hall (1976) explains the difficulties of intercultural contact and how Otherness is generated. Unconscious culture leads people to identify with ones “who don’t raise ripples in the pond of life, who give extraordinary consistency to the informal culture of any given group” (p. 239). In intercultural or interethnic encounters, especially when people need to work together, the peaceful pond is profoundly disturbed. Though people may know that the person from another country or ethnic group must have a different set of cultural mores or values, they still extend their own informal rules onto others. When the hidden control system does not function properly, people “experience the other person as an uncontrollable and unpredictable part of themselves” (p. 239). As a result, frustration and irritation often occur, and what other people do is perceived as irrational, unbelievable, and inexplicable.

However, Hall (1959, 1976) recognizes the dynamic of real intercultural contact. He insists that human beings need to realize that the difficulty in intercultural/interethnic relationship lies in a lack of self-knowledge: “The trouble I have with him is me” (Hall, 1976, p. 240). In order to work and live together harmoniously, human beings must learn about these hidden aspects of culture only revealed in intercultural communication. Only

in a real contact situation, when shock and predicament are experienced, can we feel the weight of culture, at which point it is possible to bring that hidden aspect into our consciousness. In addition, just becoming aware of how the unspoken cultural system works will enable us to appreciate the richness of lives, and accept that all cultures are different in a genuine way. Hall admits that to have a real grip on unconscious culture is a huge challenge. From his own intercultural experiences he suggests that to reach this high level of awareness people need not only to be in real contact situations but also to be reflective, open-minded, and empathetic (Hall, 1976).

### **The Research Question**

These intercultural contact theories encourage us to find out how actual contacts contribute to Chinese people's perceptions of Westerners. Focusing on actual contact will allow us to look into the process of constructing the Other. I propose that constructing the Other is always enacted, maintained and modified in a process of interaction. Thus perceptions of the Other can be seen as both persistent and changeable.<sup>15</sup> Actual intercultural experiences often involve a few or a series of interactions, some on a regular basis. The process of each interaction has its own life and meaning. By focusing on the process, we may find out under what conditions the Othering practice is enacted, and how

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<sup>15</sup> This assumption is inspired by Hecht's (1993) insight on communication and identity. In Hecht's view, identities are embedded in the process of communication, and identities emerge, are activated and developed in relationships with others. Therefore identities are not fixed but evolving and changing and can be examined only in the context of communicative exchanges. Seeing constructing the Other and constructing identity as two sides of the same coin, I am applying Hecht's idea of identity to approach how the Western Other is constructed in the context of intercultural exchanges.

different images of Westerners emerge, persist or evolve.

Furthermore, carefully examining the process of actual encounters has the potential to present a balanced picture of the Western Other. There is a common agreement in most academic circles that the concept of Other is imbued with a negative value (Bauman, 1991; Carabine, 1996), as it is in the study of Orientalism and Occidentalism (e.g. Callahan, 2006; Conceison, 2004; Ford, 2010; Gries, 2007; Guo, 2004; Said, 1979). As Papadopoulos (2002) points out, what people usually associate with the Other tends to be “antagonistic, oppositional, hostile and conflictual meanings” (p.165). However, he argues that the Other has a wider range of meanings: In all its grammatical forms, the Other is indeed different from something it depends on. The relationship between the Other and what it depends on can imply opposition, but can also denote complementarity. The nature of dependence in the Other suggests that the Other somehow forges a unity with its opposite something, and they stand on common ground. Papadopoulos’ (2002) view points to the recognition of the Other as a neutral term. Through carefully examining the interactions between ordinary Chinese people and Westerners, we may explore a fuller meaning of the Other.

Thus, aiming to widen our understanding, the present research will explore ordinary Chinese people’s lived intercultural experiences against the backdrop of an increasingly internationalized Chinese society. Central to this project is to ask this research question:

RQ: How do the intercultural experiences of ordinary Chinese people reveal their construction of Westerners as the Other?

More specifically the study aims to address the following:

1. What factors do the ordinary Chinese people attribute to their construction of the Western Other?
2. What is the role that ordinary Chinese people play in this construction?
3. What images of Westerners have been produced and what attitudes towards Westerners are manifested in this construction?

### Chapter 3 Methodology

The research questions clearly indicate that the goal of the study is to explore Chinese people's daily intercultural experiences and to understand the meanings that characterize those experiences in a given context. To achieve the goal, qualitative interviewing is chosen as the method. This chapter first will justify how this method is well suited for this study. Then it will look into the key strategies and measures that were used to collect and analyze the data. Finally, it will address the most challenging issue: how to deal with the researcher's bias to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

#### **Choosing the Method: Qualitative Interviewing**

The research questions concern ordinary people's Othering practice. Different from the official/intellectual elites' construction of the Western Other through public discursive practice, the ordinary people's view of Westerners is a private expression, often implicit and hidden in their daily intercultural experiences. Many qualitative researchers believe that this kind of life experience can be best investigated and understood through qualitative interviewing (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Kvale, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). They point out that this method helps researchers to learn about phenomena that cannot be directly observed, to obtain rich detailed information in an effective way, to probe hidden motivations in human activities, and, most important, to understand people's perceptions in an empathetic way.

Lindlof & Taylor (2011) argue that "interviews are particularly well suited to *understanding the social actors' experience, knowledge, and worldviews* [italics are original]" which "are elicited in one of three forms of interview talk: stories, accounts, and explanations" (pp. 173-174). In their opinion, interviews evoke storytelling, which

inevitably reveals participants' motivations, actions, and the contexts in which the actions take place. Also, through interview conversation, people may provide accounts justifying their conduct, and produce explanations of their behaviour based on their philosophy and cultural logic. Thus qualitative interviewing greatly enables the researcher to enter deeply into participants' subjective worlds and interpret their latent meanings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

In this study, we treat ordinary people's daily intercultural interactions as natural human activities involving such elements as events and episodes, intentions and emotions, and processes and contexts. Thus, in face-to-face conversations, we have much opportunity to encourage the participants to present those elements (Kvale, 2009).

Thereby we learn about how the participants' interactions with Westerners evolve, how they form their views and opinions of Westerners at certain times and in certain contexts, and how they apply their life or cultural logic to explain their intentions and emotions in dealing with Westerners. Moreover, in listening to participants' narratives in their own language, we are also able to uncover the meanings of their practices through understanding how they use certain native terms or expressions (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The participants' perspectives are critical to our understanding of their experiences. When all the common ideas from their perspectives are pieced together, we form a comprehensive picture of collective experiences (Aronson, 1994).

### **Collecting and Analyzing Data: Strategies and Measures**

#### **Semi-structured interview.**

This study adopted the semi-structured interview as a tool to collect data. Using a list of open-ended questions and some freedom on the part of the researcher, it has the

advantage of gaining in-depth information in an efficient way (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). According to Baxter & Babbie (2004), a set of clearly defined questions allows researchers to focus on the topics essential to their research and get useful information within a limited time. They also point out that, while following the interview guide, researchers have freedom during the actual interview in terms of the sequence of the questions, the wording, and the follow-up strategy. In addition, the open-ended questions provide participants an opportunity for in-depth talk. Thus, semi-structured interviews can be adapted to each participant's unique situation. As a result, researchers will gain more and deeper insight into the participants' perspectives (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

The design of the interview questions is critical. Following a semi-structured interview protocol (Baxter & Babbie, 2004), an Interview Guide was created for the present study.<sup>1</sup> It includes an extended introduction plus the questions. The introduction sets the stage and prepares the researcher and participant for the interview, and is followed by 10 open-ended questions. There are main questions designed for the participants to describe and explain their intercultural experiences in various contexts. There are also possible questions prepared for potential further probing.

### **Purposive sampling.**

*Ordinary Chinese people* is a broad concept, but this study targets native Chinese who live in a coastal city in Mainland China, an increasingly internationalized city with a colonial history. There are a large number of Westerners who visit, study or work there, and thus ordinary Chinese have the chance to interact directly with them.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I: Interview Guide.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants from the region. This strategy has been widely used in qualitative inquiry (Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Coyne, 1997, Guest; Morse, 1991; Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) states that, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 169). Purposive sampling is characterized by intentionally selecting participants on the basis of predefined criteria (Guest et al., 2006; Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). In addition, it largely relies on the researcher’s judgment of the potential participants within the target of the population (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

The most challenging aspect of using purposive sampling is to identify information-rich cases. This study strategically decided that the structure for inclusion of information-rich cases should be based on two conditions: the range of the cases and the depth of each case. Regarding the first condition, Patton’s (1990) *maximum variation* technique was applied. This technique indicates that the researcher “must decide what kind(s) of variation they want to maximize and when to maximize each kind” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 181). For this study, the variations chosen would be gender, age, educational level, and profession (social background), among which profession or occupation is the key strategic element. The anticipated participants were individuals who had had some actual interaction with Westerners. Since Westerners have just started to integrate with the locals, the majority of Chinese still have hardly any direct contact with them. However, people whose jobs involved Westerners have many chances to interact with them. Thus to recruit suitable participants, it was both logical and feasible to focus

on people within those professions. In terms of the depth of each case, the assumption is that the participant must not only possess rich information but also have the ability to share it (Morse, 1991). This means that the quality of a participant is important and the researcher should have prior knowledge about the participant. An ideal participant has the available knowledge, and is “articulate, reflective, and willing to share with the interviewer” (Morse, 1991, p. 127).

Another important issue is sample size: how many are enough? Guest et al (2006) have provided a practical suggestion for deciding qualitative interview sample size. According to their data saturation experiment, they consider that 12 interviews is a sound number. Crouch & McKenzie (2006) also give a strong justification for a small sample size – usually less than 20. They argue that, in qualitative inquiry, a sample is made not by systematically selecting respondents from a target population, but by choosing “variants of a particular social setting (the real object of the research question) and of the experiences arising in it...[R]espondents embody and represent meaningful experience structure links” (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 493). This concept of sample implies that each case is important enough to lead to a new understanding of meaning, and the understanding will be deepened from case to case within a small number of samples. Drawing from those insights and following the real situation, 16 interviews were planned and completed.

### **Participants recruitment.**

Based on the criteria set up for sampling, the key to recruiting participants was to access certain work places or organizations where Westerners may often be present. A time-consuming but effective way to access sites and approach participants was used:

field observation and interaction. As a customer or a visitor, I entered various sites in the community, such as: a hotel, a Western bakery shop, a Starbucks cafe, a Chinese massage clinic, an international school, a bank, joint-venture companies, and a university. I understand the culture and language, thus had no trouble blending into the field, where I could observe, talk to people, and then make an assessment about the candidates. Then the invitation letter was sent through email or direct delivery. As a result, 14 out of the 16 participants were selected in the field. The other 2 participants were introduced by participants who had been told clearly about the criteria of a candidate's personal experience and characteristics.

Among the 16 participants, there were 5 teachers (international school or Chinese middle school), a joint-venture company vice-president, a hotel manager, a financial broker, an interior designer, a Western bakery worker, a foreign company employee, an international trade salesman, a Chinese clinic owner, an airport taxi driver, an undergraduate student and a graduate student. The gender ratio was 1:1. The age range was from 20 to 49 years old, and the majority (68.75%) was in the group aged 20-30 years. Most of the participants (75%) had a university education. A small percentage (18.75%) had visited other nearby Asian countries before, but none had been to a Western country. Fifteen participants (93.75%) reported that they interacted with Westerners on a regular basis, with 9 of them (56.25%) having interactions every day.

### **Interview process.**

Researchers have recognized that understanding their role and the art of dialogue is instrumental to building a rapport with participants and thus conducting a successful interview (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Fontana & Fey, 2008; Hopf, 2004). Hopf (2004)

suggests that researchers should learn how to keep their roles balanced between a good listener and an active conversation partner, a leading role and an assisting role, and being really involved while keeping a certain distance. While following these suggestions, I also paid special attention to some other issues during the interviews. First of all, how to present myself to the participants was “very important because once the interviewer’s presentational self is ‘cast’, it leaves a profound impression on the respondents and has a great influence of the success of the study (or lack thereof)” (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 132). I presented myself as an overseas Chinese who has been away from China for a long period, was eager to know the profound changes that have happened in China, and was curious about people’s life experiences in this historic time. This self-presentation put me in the position of an ingroup member, and also provided a big incentive for the participants, who then felt empowered to tell and help me to understand the situation.

Second, further attention was paid to the opening question. As the interviews went on, I strongly recognized that the first question was critical to the whole process. When the wording of the question was adjusted to each participant’s background, and so led them naturally to adopt the form of narrating an episode from their experiences, they would feel that they were engaging in a conversation right from the beginning. This desired interview atmosphere established a great flow of information. Third, it was very beneficial to adopt the participants’ terms or expressions. Though originally from Mainland China, I felt a homecomer’s cultural shock – a need to adjust to a new cultural atmosphere and to catch up with new language trends. Trying to use the same terms and expressions as the participants greatly facilitated the conversation.

As a result, 16 semi-structured interviews were completed during the spring of

2010. They were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The interview times ranged from half an hour to 2 hours, with a total of about 20 hours ( $M = 1$  hr 15 min). All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed into written texts in Chinese.<sup>2</sup>The data collection process provided a large body of written information to be analyzed.

### **Thematic analysis.**

Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the interview data. This analytical tool has been widely used, explicitly or implicitly, on qualitative data for its ability to manage, synthesize and interpret a large body of texts effectively (Braun & Clarke, 2006). “A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362). When all identified themes are constructed and linked together, they constitute a comprehensive picture of the participants’ collective story, revealing the essential meaning of the entire data (Aronson, 1994, Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It should be noted that, as discussed before, qualitative interviewing often generates narratives or stories, as do the interviews conducted in this study. However, these interviews are not narrative interviews, where what interests researchers most is the narrative as a particular communication form, and is how people understand their lives as

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<sup>2</sup> Mandarin Chinese, the official spoken language in Mainland China, also called the Common Language (Putonghua). According to Lin (2001), there are 7 major groupings of local spoken languages or dialects in China, but the written forms are the same. For the present study, the written documents prepared for interviews, the Consent Form, the form of Participants Demographic Information, the recruitment letter, and the Interview Guide, were all translated into written Chinese.

a performance of that narrative (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Rather, for the interviews of this study, the focus is the content of the stories, from which the researcher captures or extracts the common themes for an analytic purpose. Narrative analysis as such is not applied in this study.

In essence, the thematic analysis process involves generating codes from data, categorizing the codes to identify themes, and then collating codes and themes in a meaningful way. The process is reiterative, with a characteristic of comparison and refinement – a constant back and forth between data, codes and themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Strauss & Cobin, 1990). Baxter & Babbie (2004) provide a 7-step coding process in great detail which makes it easy to follow. Braun & Clarke (2006) also outline a 6-phase step-by-step guide for coding and analysis. Adopting these guidelines, considering the purpose of the present study and the available resources such as time, skills and the accessibility to the participants and sites, this study has taken the following steps to conduct the data analysis.

The first step was to establish codes and their matched data segments. This included: becoming fully familiar with all of the data, locating initial codes, adding new codes by comparing later instances with previous coded segments, ensuring all data are coded, and generating as many codes as possible. Next was to identify initial themes. This included: sorting the codes into themes, organizing the coded data segments within the identified themes, and labeling each theme with a tentative name. The third step was to develop final themes. This included: reviewing each theme and its matched codes and segments, validating each theme in relation to the entire data, refining the themes by

combining, separating and discarding, and categorizing the themes into different levels. This step involved a reiterative process of checking data and finalizing themes. The final step was to describe and interpret themes. This included: describing the essence of each theme as supported by vivid and concrete narrative, threading the themes together to form a comprehensive picture, interpreting the picture, and making a valid argument regarding how the findings answer the research questions.

### **Facing the Challenge: Researcher's Bias and the Trustworthiness of the Study**

Guba & Lincoln (2002) establish four criteria for the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, which are “analogues to the traditional rationalist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity” (p. 365). Their four criteria were adopted to assess the present study. For its credibility (data should represent the investigated phenomenon), the interview questions should consistently focus on the topics which are relevant to the research goal, and the transcripts should be as accurate as possible. For its transferability (findings can be transferred from one context to other contexts), the sampling strategy should be effective in selecting participants with rich information, and a thick description of the meaning in a context should be provided. For its dependability (findings should be stable), the process from coding data to identifying themes and interpreting findings should be checked repeatedly and systematically. For its confirmability (findings should be truly grounded in data), researcher's bias and interest should be constantly reflected, and each finding can be traced back from the data analysis to the original data.

It is the researcher's bias in the last criteria that needs to be addressed here. Many social scientists have recognized that the qualitative interview is a social practice

involving interaction and relationship between researchers and participants, and researchers' bias, motives and feelings unavoidably influence the result of the interview study (Fontana & Frey, 2008). Guba & Lincoln (2002) admit that the researcher's values, intuitions and perspectives are not only inevitable but also critical in qualitative research. Nevertheless, they argue that to ensure its trustworthiness, it is important to "establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of the condition of inquiry and not of the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer" (p. 376). Thus, they suggest adoption of a systematic self-reflective practice to expose values, assumptions and prejudice.

Later work by Kvale (2009) further elaborates Guba & Lincoln's (2002) view. Kvale's metaphor of researchers as travelers vividly illustrates their role in constructing interview knowledge. As she sees it, researchers wander into participants' lived worlds, encourage them to reveal their stories, feelings and opinions, and then unfold, reconstruct and interpret the revelation. She thus asserts that interview knowledge is built on the researcher's "pre-judices (literally pre-judgments)" (Kvale, 2009, p. 242). While Guba & Lincoln (2002) claim that researcher objectivity is impossible and one should be aware of one's own prejudice, Kvale (2009) insists that being "sensitive about one's prejudices, one's subjectivity, involves a reflexive objectivity" (p. 242).

Following Guba & Lincoln (2002) and Kvale (2009), in the present study I have made efforts to discern or control my bias through a constant reflection on personal experiences. As a Chinese-Canadian, who actually grew up and received a full education in China, I have great advantages in doing the present study. I am familiar with the culture and language and, most critical, I also share certain feelings and experiences with

the participants regarding interaction with Westerners. As Fontana and Frey indicate, understanding the language and culture may avoid becoming “vulnerable to added layers of meanings, biases, and interpretations, and...disastrous misunderstandings (Freeman, 1983)” (Fontana and Frey, 2008, p. 131). However, I clearly recognized the dilemma: My experience may greatly help me to design, conduct and analyze the interviews, but it could also exert a biasing influence on the process and the findings.

Thus it was important to be aware of my expectations of the participants’ Othering practice. In designing the interview questions, I studiously avoided suggestive questions as might be directed by my own expectations. During interview sessions, while sometimes empathizing with the participants, I paid special attention to the wording, and ensured my opinions and feelings would not impose on or mislead them. When translating text segments from Chinese to English which would serve as examples for my interpretations, I carefully verified the translation for its true reflection of the data’s original nature. In doing the data analysis, an inductive approach was taken to prevent using pre-set themes to direct coding the data. Furthermore, as mentioned above, my identity as an overseas Chinese provided me a good opportunity to build a close rapport with the participants and gain access to more detailed and comprehensive information. Nonetheless, I had to keep telling myself not to take a stance as an ingroup member, and, as Fontana & Frey (2008) warn us, not to “become a spokesperson for the group studied” (p. 132). In a word, self-critical reflectivity on my past experience and prejudice played an important role to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

## Chapter 4 Data Analysis: The Main Themes

Using the tool of thematic analysis, this chapter presents and analyses the main themes and the subthemes identified from the data. Just as the term the Other connotes rich meanings (Papadopoulos, 2002), the data analysis of this present study indicates a complex nature of the Western Other for the participants. It should be noted that as defined in Chapter 2, the term Westerners refers to the European colonisers (Said, 1979), or people from the West, Western European and North American countries, representing the ideology and culture based on bourgeois values or the idea of modernization (Bonnett, 2004; N. Wang, 1997). This study finds that the participants presented a slightly different concept of Westerners. They clearly indicated that Westerners were people from developed European and North American countries, but also implied that they were equivalent to Caucasians. Moreover, Westerners and foreigners were often used interchangeably. Following the participants' concept of Westerners, the data analysis initially identified 33 codes and their matched data segments. These codes were sorted into 12 initial themes, which were then crystallized into three main themes: difference, distance, and defensiveness.<sup>1</sup> The three themes represent three building blocks in constructing the Western Other.

Analysis of these main themes and subthemes will use many interview excerpts. To protect the participants' anonymity, in this study, all participants have been given pseudonyms.<sup>2</sup> A key perspective of this analysis is that it intends to discover the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix III: Table of Themes and Codes.

<sup>2</sup> The Ethics of this research has been approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board. See Appendix III: Certificate of Ethics Approval.

changing nature of participants' views of Westerners – when, in what context and how images of Westerners as the Other are activated and presented. As indicated in the data, like many other Chinese, these participants in the past encountered Westerners only at a distance. However, different from many others, they came to interact with Westerners in actual face to face communication, some in very close relationships. Their common experiences suggest a shifting perspective in a changing society.

### **Difference**

The data clearly reveal that comparison and differentiation are main components of the participants' intercultural experiences. Searching for difference naturally and unconsciously played a crucial role in identifying Westerners as the Other. In a word, difference generates Otherness. The participants talked about the differences from many aspects, which can be generalized as the following: biological, cultural, and individual difference. As their contacts with Westerners evolved, their focus on these differences shifted a certain degree from the biological to the cultural, from the group to the individual.

#### **Westerners as biological Other.**

##### ***They looked so different at that time.***

All of the participants described their strong awareness of Westerners' physical appearance in their initial encounters. The described initial contacts were mostly street encounters, but some took place in other specific contexts. For example, one participant could not forget her first close look at a Westerner in her work place. Another participant remembered his first foreign English teacher in the University. In their recollection of those early encounters, for all participants, the most salient part was the deep image of

Westerners' exotic features, including skin color, color of eyes, texture of hair, size of nose, body height, shape and smell.

I was very shocked with disbelief....In this world, there were even some people who looked totally different from us. Although I had seen those Westerners on TV or in pictures before, they seemed very far away from me. When he was really standing beside me, oh, what did I feel? His skin, his smell, and his gestures were completely different. (Aima)

At the first sight of him, I was so surprised to see his face. He had a Westerners' beard which looked so thick. But his face made me feel that he was so cute and lovely. His hair was all curly, oh, just like a doll's head displayed in the store. He just looked like a doll. Oh, I realized I actually saw a real Westerner, a real foreigner. That feeling is, oh, I felt somewhat surprised, but also a bit nervous. (Nanxi)

For Aima, her first encounter with a Westerner was a shocking experience, and she could not believe what she saw. But for Nanxi, besides surprise and nervousness, she also experienced curiosity and appreciation.

Apparently, the participants' first reaction to Westerners' biological features was mostly exciting, though a couple of participants showed their uneasiness with some outlandish features: "Westerners always have some kind of smell". (Maike) "They are very hairy. They have hair on their arms, and I can't stand that". (Anqi) Nonetheless, the participants, including those who felt uncomfortable with certain external features, all confessed that the distinctiveness of the physical appearance signified something rare, fresh, interesting, and thus precious. As Anzhu stated, "It was very rare to see a

Westerner in our little town at that time. A thing is precious when it is rare.” According to the participants, Westerners’ striking looks always made them react, and created a sensation in the public.

The participants’ reactions to the rarely seen Westerners included the following behaviours: Saying hello to them loudly, following them to have a better look, contriving ways to interact with them (such as asking for a favour to have a picture taken together), practicing English for a few minutes, or peeking secretly again and again. For Anqi, seeing a Westerner occurred rarely a few years back. “That was my first time [to see a foreigner], when I had just come from the countryside [to Beijing city], and I did not want to miss the opportunity to look at them carefully”. Anzhu candidly described how he tried to get a closer look at a Westerner five years ago in his hometown, a small town in central China:

When leaving [a restaurant] after lunch, I saw an American who had a big beard. Of course, I didn’t know he was an American at that time. He carried a backpack, walking very fast. I felt very excited and automatically followed him.

Unfortunately I lost him in the crowd. However, on the way home in the afternoon, I spotted another one, a small man, who was entering a supermarket. I certainly wanted to look at him again. I really wanted to see a foreigner. It was not that easy to find a foreigner in our town. So I got there [where the Westerner was buying things], and pretended to purchase something too. Of course, I didn’t actually buy anything.

Participants’ descriptions of their early contacts showed that their intense fascination with physical differences was the common factor which often made

Westerners a spectacle in the public sphere. They emphasized that their gazing at Westerners was an innocent and very intuitive reaction towards something beyond their life experiences. *Curiosity* is the word most participants used to understand the phenomenon of Westerner as a spectacle to the Chinese. As Jie explained, staring at a blond-haired and blue eyed foreigner was normal and justifiable:

[Looking at a Westerner] is just due to curiosity, nothing else. Imagine you have arrived at a very remote place where people have never seen a real foreigner in their whole life. When they suddenly encounter a person with blond hair and blue eyes, they must be very curious and involuntarily take a good look at him/her. I don't think they have any other intentions. It is just as simple as that. In fact, I myself came from the countryside. I met foreigners when I first came to this city. Um, of course I wanted to look at them, since they indeed looked so different from me. They had blond hair, white skin ... But I didn't have any other thoughts about them. I just wanted to see them. Uh ha, so foreigners looked like this.

Jie's view expresses a natural reaction to a person's appearance being outside the normal range of our extremely complex unconscious faculty of recognizing someone. On top of curiosity, some participants added that different-looking foreigners are the source of excitement or amusement. As Wen said, "For many Chinese, it is fun to watch foreigners. The Chinese like to entertain themselves as a bystander. Nevertheless, I think it has nothing to do with hostility."

From the description by all participants, there is no sign of fear or hostility towards Westerners in their initial encounters. Instead, curiosity and excitement dominate their feelings and behaviours. While seeing Westerners as a source of entertainment may

not be true for all of the participants, it is evident that Westerners have been viewed as objects. The exotic features may be beautiful or admirable, as described by some participants, but they are objects for observing. As such, curiosity does not lead to seeking understanding of Westerners but to entertaining themselves by putting Westerners in the spotlight, rendering an unequal relationship.

*They look not so different after all.*

What the participants talked about to that point was their initial visual contacts with Westerners. The present study finds that frequent contact with Westerners changed the way the participants described the biological difference. Since the number of Westerners has increased immensely these past years, the participants felt strongly that the public generally was no longer overwhelmed when encountering Westerners, especially in downtown areas. Having witnessed numerous Western travellers in and out of the city, taxi driver Shan asserted that Westerners definitely look different, but “who cares about their looks, it is not 20 years ago”. Likewise, most participants stressed that Westerners’ exotic features gradually became trivial in their eyes. Aima pointed out that for her the traditional racial markers had lost function, since people could change their physical appearances as they wished:

Looking different is really not important to me. Nowadays there are so many Chinese girls who make themselves look like Westerners, eyes, eyebrows, and hair, etc....And Western girls like to put on Chinese *qipao*.<sup>3</sup> They look like Chinese, beautiful.

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<sup>3</sup> A kind of Chinese traditional dress.

Closely interacting with Westerners on a daily basis makes the external difference often invisible. After four years working in an international school, Zhuli said: “Their white skin and beautiful blue eyes were once so peculiar to me, but now I don’t see them at all, absolutely not at all”. Similarly, Nanxi, who once was stunned in astonishment by a Westerner’s face, found that physical appearance was no longer salient in distinguishing Westerners from the Chinese:

I see Westerners every day. In my eyes, they are not Westerners, they are my colleagues.... They used to look totally different from us, but now I don’t think we look that much different after all. When you get used to them, their biological features are not special any more. There are no Westerners, no Chinese, just a whole bunch of people.

Greeting Westerners every day in a coffee shop, Jiang found that all of the Westerners were just his ordinary customers like the Chinese. For him, the biggest difference was not their skin color or size of nose but their smile – Westerners often gave him smiley faces while Chinese customers seemed more serious. As described by all participants, what they have now perceived in Westerners goes far beyond the biological appearance.

The perception of Westerners indeed has changed so dramatically that all of the participants could not believe what they had done in their initial encounters with Westerners. Keli sighed with deep emotion:

We have been doing Reform and Opening for 30 years, I must say that our life has been changed a lot. In 1983, in Beijing, my wife and I went to Beijing. We happened to see a few Western foreigners, ah, they looked bizarre. Our eyes could

not move away from them. But now when thinking back then, how could we feel that way? Right? So silly, so ridiculous!

As with Keli, the participants implied that this change of perception is deeply associated with a profound change of social context. They pointed out that China is changing and developing fast, thus attracting and receiving more and more Westerners, which fundamentally changed the way they interacted with Westerners.

Keli's changed perception also suggests first assumptions being contested. As described before, Westerners' unusual external features exude a mysterious character which lures people unconsciously to ascribe to them a completely different nature. However, as manifest in the data, when participants were able to see other details beyond physical appearance, their imagination or belief of something never before experienced broke down, and then they started to learn how to see something else. For the participants, the actual experience helps them to realize that Westerners' different appearance is just a variation of human physical characteristics. A couple of participants described how they reflected and rejected a common belief in fundamental racial differences based on outward physical differences.

I am now feeling that there is no significant difference between races. Some people may still think white people are very different from yellow people. But in my opinion, more and more people now find that the difference is getting smaller and smaller. There are indeed some differences, but they are too little to be worth mentioning. (Danna)

As Sufei concluded, "In a word, Western foreigners are not aliens, and even if they were, I feel that these aliens are still people even if from another planet". Recognizing

Westerners as human beings is the key to challenge the view of fundamental racial difference.

Frequent encounters and interactions have shifted the participants' focus away from external physical differences. This does not mean that the participants had no awareness of other differences in the first place. In fact, their seeing Westerners as a biological Other signifies that this Other represents a wholly different existent being, characterized by a faraway place, lifestyle, food, and of course, language. The shift of focus made cultural difference become salient, as Tong emphasized,

[Comparing to cultural difference], physical difference is secondary. As interacting with more and more Westerners, you feel that language, ways of thinking, and other cultural elements, this kind of stuff is more important, and thus you easily neglect the physical characteristics.

As will be seen in the next discussion, this shift also indicates that though outward physical difference often strikes people first, cultural difference exhibits a more profound impact on people's perception of the Other.

#### **Westerners as cultural Other.**

The data reveals that perceived cultural difference was the fundamental factor that generated Otherness towards Westerners. Interestingly, the participant's discursive construction of cultural difference is not just about how those noticeable customs and observable behaviours differ but also about how different ways of dealing with problems have affected their lives. The present study finds that the participants were very sensitive to certain different Western customs and behaviours, most noticeably food, manners, language and problem solving.

*They eat differently.*

Food is a lively and marvellous symbol of culture. The Chinese idiom “people view food as heaven” manifests how important food is. The significance of food in Chinese minds shows through their traditional greeting: Have you eaten yet (Z. Xu, 2009)? Thus it is not surprising that what Westerners eat becomes a focal point when distinguishing Westerners. The participants’ accounts of their experiences and feelings to do with Western food bring concrete meaning to the otherwise abstract concept of cultural difference.

As the participants indicated, while nowadays Western food from various countries could be found in their real lives, they still had very limited exposure to it. As Jie pointed out, “In China, Western-style food is not popularized yet. For many Chinese, it is still a kind of luxury consumption.” Some participants had a tentative try in a restaurant or at a Westerners’ home, but others had never tasted Western cuisine yet. As such, the participants unavoidably created a stereotype of Western food, which may be a way to satisfy their imagination.

For me, Chinese food tastes better, really. Because, let me tell you my experience with Western food. During my internship for the hotel management, I had to deal with Western food frequently. My impression was that it was either raw or half cooked, never fully cooked. Therefore, I do feel more comfortable with Chinese food. (Jie)

Do Westerners never eat *mantou*?<sup>4</sup> Do they only eat bread? I think that we

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<sup>4</sup> Traditional Chinese bread made from wheat flour.

Chinese eat mantou and rice, and they Westerners eat bread, right? Western food looks a bit dry... But some Western dishes look quite good... such as steak, what do they call it? Medium well? Sounds very interesting and romantic.... (Anqi)

I am not very interested in Western food which mainly features bread and sweets. We should not eat too many sweets, you know. But Italian noodles may be ok because I like noodles... A colleague of mine often went to visit a Western teacher. He said, "What did the foreign teacher eat every day? Mashed potato, every day!...Oh heavens, why did he eat that stuff every day? I could not stand it". (Wen)

[Western food] is very different from Chinese food....I used to have a neighbour who was an American teacher. His wife... liked to cook. It looked like she usually took lots of trouble to make that kind of dish, their traditional dishes, Western dishes. After she made them, she would bring me some. She might think [I would like to eat it] because she had spent lots of time making it, and it was their favourite food. But when I got the food, I felt, really, I was not used to it at all....However, I could not refuse their kindness... But that kind of food, I could hardly accept it. (Fei)

These descriptions vividly demonstrated that the participants held a relatively reserved or negative attitude toward Western food. While some participants showed certain interest in Western food, most felt that it was exotic, and sometimes bizarre or inedible.

These descriptions also indicated that the participants took pride in their Chinese food, which was further reinforced by the belief that Westerners would like Chinese food. In the interaction with Westerners, introducing Chinese food to them was a happy thing

to do. For instance, Maike often received his French business partners in Chinese restaurants, “because they love our seafood”. As another example, after trying different kinds of Western cuisine with her Canadian friend, Lan asserted that Chinese cuisine tasted the best and her friend liked Chinese food more than his own home cuisine. Furthermore, some participants even assumed that many Westerners liked to stay in China partly because Chinese food was attractive – it is delicious with rich variety and yet very economical.

The preference towards one’s own food and prejudice against foreign food is typical of an ethnocentric attitude. People grow up in a certain cultural environment and learn to like their own food, which becomes an important part of their daily life. The familiar ingredients, smell and taste are naturally taken as normal, right, or best, and of course as a standard against which to measure the unfamiliar and strange ones. What people eat is an essential part of their lifestyle and thus plays an indispensable role in differentiating peoples. However, there is no sign which suggests that the participants’ bias towards Western food is directed against Westerners. While ascribing Western food to Westerners’ identity, the participants clearly recognized that Chinese food was also accepted and appreciated by many Westerners whom they had encountered.

***They speak differently.***

The interview data has demonstrated that language difference was the most frequently mentioned aspect when participants tried to differentiate Westerners from themselves. The present study investigates people’s daily intercultural interactions, in which language difference naturally creates barriers between peoples. It is difficult to share meanings and experiences for people who do not speak the same language.

According to the data, the participants usually associated Westerners with English, although a couple of participants mentioned that not every Westerner could speak good English. The participants' attitude towards English suggests that it has become a double-edged sword: On the one hand generating Otherness against Westerners, and on the other hand making them a welcome Other.

It is apparent that English was not strange at all to the participants. Instead, they had various levels of English proficiency, demonstrating a positive attitude and strong interest towards learning English. Most participants emphasized that English was the main medium for interaction with Westerners in China, no matter who they were – colleagues, customers, business partners, neighbours, or strangers on the street. Moreover, their enthusiasm revealed that being able to speak that language was a matter of great pride, the key to get access to Westerners – to help, serve, work with, and make friends with them. Some also pointed out that going abroad may be one of the strongest motivations for learning English.

Nowadays, more and more Chinese wish to go abroad, either to work or to study.

There are even more Chinese who want to travel around the world. Therefore English is very important since it is the most popular language in the world. (Jie)

For the participants, English had a practical value, providing advantages and opportunities. Their interest in English reflects a world phenomenon. As we know, English has grown into a common language of the world,<sup>5</sup> dominating “in the area of

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<sup>5</sup> According to Jandt (2007), one fourth of the world's population is familiar with English. “English is the native language in 12 countries, and an official or semi-official language in 33 others. Its study is required or popular in at least 56 other countries” (p.140).

science, technology, commerce, tourism, diplomacy, and pop culture” (Jandt, 2007). It is in this context that Westerners, being associated with English, have been perceived as useful or a helpful Other in the eyes of the participants.

The participants admitted that it was a common thing to practice oral English with Westerners within their encounters, even for those who had very little English. A couple of participants also talked about the popularity of Westerners among parents who wished their children could speak proper English. Thus, Westerners who spoke English were in demand and any of them could become a potential target for practicing. Sufei recalled:

My initial motivation was very clear. That was to let my child practice oral English. My intention was very specific. I frequently took her to places like the English Corner at universities [to speak to Westerners]. What’s more, if we have any chances [of meeting Westerners], no matter where, I would encourage her to speak to them as much as she could.

She further pointed out that many Chinese English learners were still doing the same thing as she did a couple of years ago, seizing opportunities for the sole purpose of oral practice. As another example, Anzhu confessed that in his early interactions he only treated Westerners as a tool to practice English:

At the beginning, I looked at them through a very strange lens. Really, I just approached them for practicing English. That is to say, for me, they were machines which I could use to improve my oral English. They were just English speakers....As I could see, they were tools. The only thing I could see in them was that they spoke English. Very strange! When having a talk with them, I never

thought of talking about something in my real life....All we had was a mechanical conversation...

Anzhu's "mechanical conversation", intended solely as a purposeful exercise, later seemed very strange even to himself.

Apparently, while the participants in their early encounters all held this limited image of Westerners only as English speakers, they started to change their view when having more interactions with Westerners, and when real communication took the place of ritual practice. Anzhu's account may be a perfect portrayal of the change. He remembered that after a number of tryouts for practicing English with Westerners, he approached a group of Canadians in the same fashion. But after spending a day together, all of a sudden he started to chat with them like friends:

At that moment, we really talked about something in our real lives. I also began some topics that I often talked of with fellow Chinese. This time, I really felt I was communicating with them instead of just practicing English.

As with Anzhu, many participants mentioned that frequent contact has made them recognize the Westerners as real concrete people, thus communication had happened beyond language.

However, the participants all reported that communicating by means of a foreign language, especially for those whose proficiency level is low, could be very stressful. As a result, the frustration with the language difference generated Otherness. The participants expressed their complex feelings about speaking English with Westerners, as accurately concluded by Jiang: "If we speak Chinese, it will be convenient for me; but if we speak English, it will be good for me to practice my English". To a great extent, the

participants all wished that Westerners could speak Chinese because it was more comfortable and meant less pressure.

For most participants, speaking English with Westerners was often accompanied by anxiety, uneasiness and misunderstanding. Many shared Lan's experience: "Though I have learned English for so many years, there are still lots of barriers. [Speaking English] would make me nervous [when meeting foreigners]". Anqi had very limited English and she often ran into an embarrassing situation:

They at most can use a few simple greeting words, and that's all. You know, it is always busy at 5 in the afternoon. Oh, no! Sometimes, they came at that time, they didn't understand, and it was really troublesome. I feel, there was a long line [for bread], they didn't understand, I had to gesture with plastic bags to help them. Even Wen, an English major student, often needed to search for words: "Sometimes I can't express what I want to say". The most unpleasant thing was friction generated by the difference of language. Keli believed that using foreign languages brought lots of trouble or misunderstanding in his business negotiation. He had to ask repeatedly: "Is this what he said? Really like this? Really, really like this?"

The interview data further revealed that when encountering a Westerner, the participants would naturally greet or start a conversation with them in English, even for those who had very little English. This subconscious process was described by Nanxi:

If you don't know this person very well, then generally speaking, it may be decided by a habitual thinking pattern. English words will jump out of your mouth right away, as if you need to speak English at that moment.

Nanxi's description indicated that she chose to speak English because she did not expect Westerners to speak Chinese.

The participants had seen that some Westerners were eager to learn Chinese when living or working in China. A couple of participants also mentioned that they had met one Westerner who could speak pretty good Chinese. But, apparently, many experienced that very few Westerners could speak or carry on daily conversations in Chinese.

His Chinese, I basically can't understand what he says. I have to listen with lots of patience. He thinks his Chinese is pretty good, but it is definitely not true.

Nevertheless, his Chinese may be the best among those I have met....I would rather he talked to me in English than in Chinese. (Lan)

Also, as described by most participants, a little Chinese from a Westerner will be enough to make them open their mouths: You can speak Chinese?

That day, we had a business meeting together. When the meeting finished, he said "thank you very much" in Chinese. As soon as I heard this, I said "you know Chinese"! He said "yes". But, he reacted very slowly when speaking Chinese. In our business talk, I would prefer not to speak Chinese with him. (Tong)

Interestingly, Fei pointed out that speaking English was a way to offer hospitality, or a way to acknowledge people from somewhere else. He agreed with what the principal at his school once said: "We don't require our Western teachers to learn Chinese and to speak Chinese. They are now in China. Our China is a big country. To demonstrate our hospitality, we should speak English with them." This hospitable gesture may imply that Westerners should not be asked to speak Chinese because it is a hard language to learn.

As many participants indicated, it was difficult for Westerners to learn Chinese since it is very different from other language systems. This belief about the uniqueness of Chinese language may emit a sense of national pride which marks Westerners as outsiders. Any educated Chinese will know that the Chinese written language has had its unified written form since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B. C. The unification of the written language encourages a strong sense of cultural unity (Ford, 2010). The Chinese language, both pictographic and symbolic, with an ideographically written system, is very different from phonetically written languages (Fairbank, 1979). This factor alone makes the Chinese language comparatively harder to learn. Therefore, the assumption of the distinctiveness of the Chinese language and the image of very few Westerners being able to speak basic Chinese may reinforce the unspoken belief that Westerners cannot speak Chinese well.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Westerners who spoke good Chinese subtly changed participants' views. Among the participants, Sufei is one of few who met a Westerner who could speak fluent Chinese. In Sufei's eyes, this American teacher was not a complete foreigner. She talked about her with full emotion:

[I don't feel she is a foreigner] because she knows Chinese, and speaks the language very well, and [she has] absolutely pure Chinese. She is a language genius.... Thus we can have very profound communication and a close relationship. For instance, celebrating Chinese traditional holidays or doing some activities together with her, I sense that kind of closeness like family. Therefore, I feel so lucky to know her.

Sharing similar feelings and thoughts, a couple of other participants also expressed that they emotionally accepted and appreciated the Westerners who were capable of

communicating with the locals in Chinese. As Shan proudly praised his American friend, “he is an old China hand”. Being able to speak the local language may be a key to transform a Westerner from an outsider into an insider (Hatton, 2009).

*They have different manners.*

Every society has developed its social or cultural norms, which are composed of a “cognitive, moral or aesthetic map of the world” (Bauman, 1995, p. 1). “The norm for a society is the most common and generally most acceptable pattern of values, attitudes, and behaviour” (Adler, 2002, p. 17). A newcomer to a society will definitely display non-common features, usually odd, sometimes unfavoured or even prohibited. A small detail in a newcomer’s action cannot escape the eyes of people native to that society. The present study finds that Westerners’ manners were one of the foci of the participants. Most interesting, in their eyes, Westerners’ manners were not odd or unfavoured but attractive and highly appreciated.

The participants stressed that they were very impressed by Westerners’ politeness and friendly personalities. As they saw it, generally speaking, Westerners were more generous than the Chinese in terms of giving their smile, gratitude, and respect to people whom they do not know. Lan deeply felt that the Westerner’s smile touched her heart. “They often smile. We Chinese usually don’t smile like that. Unlike the Chinese, they always smile. The image of their smile is deeply engraved in my mind.” For the participants who worked in service industries, Westerners’ manners were especially noticeable.

I feel those Westerners are very nice and never show how important they are. On the contrary, my fellow Chinese often treat me like a servant. Westerners don’t

think that way. When they come, they are always happy to speak to me and teach me English. Though I can't pronounce properly, they still don't mind. That's really nice. (Anqi)

In fact, you can see [the difference between Westerners and the Chinese] from a very trivial thing. Uh, when guests walk past our front desk, we will say hello to them. To the Chinese, we say [in Chinese] "hello", "good morning" or "good evening". To foreigners, we say [in English] "hello", "good morning" or "good evening". Our foreign guests would turn their head to us and give us their greetings. However, the Chinese, though a small portion of them would answer us or nod their heads, most of them, uh, as if they didn't hear or see anything, and just walked straight away. (Jie)

Both Anqi and Jie demonstrated their deep appreciation of Western customers' attitudes.

As another example, interacting with a number of international trade partners, Maiké was so fascinated by the image of Western gentlemen. He expressed his admiration for all of the Western men he has met. "What I strongly feel is that they are real gentlemen. I heard some people talked about Western gentlemen before. What did gentleman mean? I had no idea before I met them. They have very good manners". He conceded that the Chinese often lack the true character of a gentleman, which must have taken many years to evolve.

Being struck by Westerners' polite behaviour, the participants went further and self-criticized the Chinese. They expressed great concern about the general quality of the nation. Many felt ashamed of certain frequent poor manners and rude behaviour in the Chinese public sphere, such as spitting, littering, or cutting in line. In their eyes, the

Chinese as a whole were not as civilized as Westerners since manners were a symbol of a person's general quality and a society's level of civilization. As Tong said, "They grew up in an environment, an atmosphere of highly civilized society, so that they behaved much better than my fellow countrymen". Some participants expressed their dream of improving Chinese people's quality through good education. Believing Westerners had a good education, Wen often asked, "Are there too many Chinese to get good education?" Keli stressed that it would be a long term goal to improve Chinese people's quality through education since the level of development and living standards in China were still relatively low. "If people are not well fed and clothed, who will care about such things as manners and behaviours"?

Witnessing Westerners' good manners, the participants, none of whom had ever been in a Western country, envisaged a highly developed and civilized society. This attitude of appreciation and acceptance is the opposite of ethnocentrism. It signifies a common humanity underlying different cultures: There is some common understanding of good manners and of beautiful things. Furthermore, this self-criticism gives off a strong nationalistic sense – wishing China to become a highly civilized society. That Westerners were identified as a different Other by their manners suggests that this Other is a good example to learn from.

***They deal with things differently.***

Besides manners, the participants also described many other Westerners' behaviors that do not fit into their map of norms. The list is long and detailed. We may tentatively label those identified under the umbrella *problem solving*, which means that those noticed behaviors reflect the way of dealing with various problems in real life

situations. The interview data reveals that the participants stressed cultural difference when experiencing surprise or frustration in dealing with Westerners. This is in line with Hall's (1976) observation. But the participants went through the shock of contrast with two different attitudes. Often, when the participants were not comfortable with the situation, they did view the different behaviors as conflictual. In these cases, they expressed a negative attitude: Westerners brought their way to handle things to China, and their way was a problem. However, the opposite was also true: often there was a positive recognition. In these cases, the participants showed their interest and appreciation: the Westerners' way was good.

Most participants reported that frustration in intercultural encounters brought about Otherness since Westerners' behaviors were hard to explain from the participants' own logic of life. For example, Maike found himself often in an embarrassing situation since his business partners always insisted on paying for their own meals. "When we have dinner with them, we always have to go Dutch. We want to pay for the dinner, but they never agreed". Maike definitely felt frustrated since hosting a dinner for guests is such a common Chinese practice in business relationship building. This Western way made him feel that Westerners were very calculating with money, and that he could not develop a closer relationship with them as he does with his fellow Chinese.

Similarly, Nanxi deeply felt: "Many things that we think are ok to do are not acceptable to them". She would never forget her first serious confrontation with a Western colleague who accused her of irresponsibility for her student. She described this shocking experience: One day, she was leading a few grade 5-6 students to decorate the classroom for the coming Chinese cultural festival. The children were very excited to

help their teacher. In order to put the character *Fu*, fortune, on the wall up a bit higher, a student decided to stand on a chair. A Western teacher happened to see the child standing on the chair. He took the child down immediately, and then came straight to question her, furiously asking if she knew how to be a teacher, and claimed that he would file a complaint with the principal. Nancy could not believe what she heard. All of a sudden she felt nervous, frightened and totally lost, as if thrown into a foreign land. What's wrong with letting a 10 year old stand on a solid chair to help in the classroom in her teacher's presence? Nancy appreciated that the Western colleague later on came to explain things to her, but said that she had to be very careful to avoid such situations since "Westerners often brought their ways of doing things to China".

For some participants, some Westerners' insistence on their own way suggests that they either had little knowledge of or refused to acknowledge the Chinese way. Tong had received many Western customers who came to do banking or other related business. Unpleasant things happened sometimes because some Westerners did not know the rules and tried to force their own way

I once met an American who had a big temper. He made me really angry since he took so much of our time and we were very busy. I told him why we could not do what he asked for. We didn't find excuses to refuse him but to insist on following the rules. However, he was still trying, and could not accept any way except his. I had no other way, therefore I walked away.... He asked to see our manager. Even our manager did not dare not to obey the rule, the country's law. I had to tell him again that this was the rule. (Tong)

The unspoken rules were even harder for Westerners to understand and follow. Sufei once tried to interfere in her Canadian friend's pursuing a married Chinese girl. She was very upset because of his ignorance of Chinese tradition:

I was not pleased since he brought his Western concept to deal with life here in China. He said to me that the girl was divorcing her husband. What he assumed was that if that was the case, then it was legal to have an affair with her. He said that no matter what had happened to her before and he liked her anyway....Once I seriously explained to him the social reality, and warned him to stop the relationship since it might lead to serious unexpected consequences. But he was yearning endlessly.

Sufei was amazed to see that he had no awareness of Chinese customs. "He did not know how deep the water is here".

As another example, Lan met an Australian who was living in China and hoping to marry a Chinese woman one day. She was trying to help him to get access to Chinese girls. However, she felt very disturbed when he showed his attitude towards family and parents.

He did not like the Chinese customs of marriage. He said, "Why do I have to give money to and look after her parents if I marry her? I don't even need to look after my own parents, why hers?" I felt very offended by his words....If you marry a Chinese girl, then it is your responsibility to look after her parents, right? For our Chinese, there is no question. For instance, if I marry him, his parents are my parents. It is normal for me to take care of his parents, right? (Lan)

Keli was not used to Westerners' separation of business and private life. He liked to talk about business when having informal meetings with business partners. However, this never worked with Westerners.

Interacting with Westerners, making friends is one thing, doing business is another thing. For instance, when we are having a drink or dinner with Westerners, it is impossible to talk about business. But we Chinese are not used to this format. The Chinese do so much business at the banquet table. We may not have any result after having negotiated for a whole day, but there may be a major breakthrough if we are happy while drinking together. This is our Chinese way, which they'll never be able to understand and practice. (Keli)

Thus, the perception of the Western way as a problem in China conveys an unspoken assumption: the best way to handle things in China is the Chinese way, the benchmark to distinguish outsiders. In the participants' minds, Western civilization is highly developed, so the Western way was not necessarily unbelievable, inhuman or downgraded, but just does not fit into the Chinese society. They could not identify what the Western way was, but only asserted that it did not work. This negative view of the Western way usually occurred when some friction or conflict was involved, making difference tangible – annoying or even intolerable.

However, when differences did not lead to an unpleasant or conflictual situation, the Western way could be appreciated. Though the participants also went through the shock of contrast, the contrast of behaviors helped them to be aware of something interesting, valuable and worthy of learning. It was common for the participants to find

the good part in Western ways. After a few embarrassments from being late, Shan was definitely aware of Westerners' concept of time:

When we are supposed to meet at 10 o'clock, if I am late, the Westerners will show their displeasure on their face. Sometimes they mutter when I am late. These Westerners are very strict with their time. If the time is set, then that's it. For example, if I take them somewhere for a business meeting at 9 in the morning, and we arrive early at 8:30, then they will not go into the meeting room until 9....They are never late. We Chinese do not have this sense of time.

Though feeling abashed, Shan showed his interest in Westerners' sense of time.

As another example, Maike really liked the way his Western partners addressed him by his name. It made him feel equal and relaxed.

At work, Chinese colleagues will not address you by your name but by your title....But they are different. They just directly address you by your name. This reminds me of a foreign movie I saw years ago. In the movie, even little children called adults by their names, such as "Tom", or whatever. At that time, I noticed this custom and discussed it with my friends. We all felt it was fantastic. For us, on the contrary, if we called an adult by his/her name, we would be considered rude. (Maike)

Similarly, Anzhu felt a removal of power distance in his experience of interaction with a few senior Westerners.

What I strongly feel is, in China, it is impossible for a 60 year old to become a friend of a 10 year old, or 20 year old. Impossible! They even cannot have a conversation. Old people usually sort of look down on young people. But

Westerners are different. For example, I am 20 years old. I have some contacts with Westerners of 60 years old and we are good friends. One of them even became my very close friend with whom I can talk about everything. (Anzhu)

Maiké and Anzhu not only recognized certain different Western ways but also enjoyed being part of those practices.

Furthermore, Westerners' communication style – direct, open, and say what you mean – impressed many participants. In their experience, the Chinese are more constrained and do not reveal their feelings and opinions directly. As Wen stated, “I find that it is much easier to communicate with Westerners. If they have an issue with you, they will tell you face to face”. As another example, Lan first felt very embarrassed when a Westerner told her that he liked her and asked if he could be her boyfriend soon after they met.

I was very surprised to hear what he said, very surprised. I didn't know how to answer. Finally I found an excuse and told him that I already had a boyfriend.

Then he said that he didn't mind and he could wait. He even asked where he was in the queue. (Lan)

Though embarrassed and shocked, Lan appreciated this kind of directness. “It is this direct expression and humor that moved me”. In her opinion, a Chinese man was often too indirect and reserved in terms of expressing feelings and affections. Therefore, in this aspect, “the Chinese should learn from Westerners”.

This positive attitude towards Western difference was found everywhere in the data, which sent a strong message that some differences might be highly appreciated. Though Westerners were perceived as the opposite Other when there was a clash between

ways of solving problems, in many situations they were accepted as a complementary Other. The participants' self-criticism and willingness to learn from the Western Other indicates that in their eyes the gap between cultural values is not insurmountable.

Based on individual characteristics, the participants' perceptions of the Western way of living may not necessarily be accurate, but were full of life. The participants all admitted that they have had more or less exposure to Western cultures through media, such as books, movies, TV or the Internet, but those images about Western cultures were usually far too abstract and remote. It is their personal experience – real pain, deep frustration and genuine interest – that brings them the awareness of self and the Other. This concrete, lively discursive construction of the Western Other signifies that culture is not an abstract, external, and separated part of people but is encompassed in their lived experience. As Hall tells us (1976), understanding this nature of culture is critical to understanding how people construct the cultural Other and live through the shock of contrast and difference.

### **Westerners as Others.**

The participants' accounts of cultural difference suggest that they focussed on and stressed differences at a collective level. Group difference is their key to interpret cultural difference presuming that all group members share the same culture. In their intercultural interaction, the participants often saw each Westerner as a member of Western society and his every act and move as being imprinted with Western cultural traits. This simplistic collective categorization consistently appeared in the data. The participants often constructed generalizations about Westerners on the basis of encounters with individuals in their real life. The generalization was in the form of inductive description:

beginning with description of *his/her* behaviour and ending with conclusion about *their* behaviour. Therefore, the participants usually clustered all Westerners into a group.

Westerners are the collective Other because of cultural difference.

However, the participants also stressed how they realized that there was a big variation among Westerners as they got to interact with more of them. They organized their understanding of Westerners using different categories, such as: good or bad Westerners, Westerners of higher or lower educational level, Westerners from different countries or regions, Westerners of different professions, ages or genders, and Westerners in China and outside of China, etc. These categorizations indicate that the image of Westerners has gone beyond the cultural Other as a group. Most participants came to realize that not all of the Westerners have good manners, good education or lots of money. For example, Aima said she had caught sight of her Australian neighbour spitting in the neighbourhood more than once, acting just like some Chinese. Anzhu also pointed out that he had encountered a few Westerners who were not honest, one even destroyed a teaching contract with him unilaterally at the last minute. Having interacted with Westerners from different educational backgrounds and from different countries, Keli kept reminding his employees that, just as with Chinese, Westerners varied in their *suzhi*, which means a person's general quality or capability in both intellectual and ethical dimensions.

Most important, the participants recognized that Westerners are individuals of different characters and personalities. Nanxi's experience is also good to illustrate this point. Having experienced various frictions with her Western colleagues, she admitted that cultural difference had caused difficulties, and so she remained very cautious to

prevent conflicts from those unknown Western ways of doing things. However, she discovered that the leading cause for some conflicts was individual personality, as she found it was much easier to work with some Westerners than with others.

There are some similarities behind cultures, and we all share a big cultural background. It is true that when I started to work in this school, I needed to explore Western culture as I had to face Westerners every day. As time went by, I gradually came to understand some Western cultures. Therefore, sometimes, the unpleasant situation is not the result of cultural difference but the difference of personalities. (Nanxi)

Sharing similar thinking, most participants implied that, as their reactions became less abrupt, and they could observe more fully the patterns of Western behaviour, their minds became able to interpret Westerners' actions from within their own culture, thus including the actors as individuals. So, in the eyes of the participants, Westerners became not all the same but real concrete individuals who each had his/her own character and personality. Some were even seen not as a Westerner. As Sufei concluded:

I think each Westerner I have met is a unique individual. When recalling the details of our interaction, I really found each of them was very interesting.

Sometimes, I don't categorize them as foreigners. Ah, we often say foreigners are just like such and such. But now I consider s/he is her/himself as an individual. It is just as simple as that. That is my real thought.

The participants' accounts suggest that with the richness and diversity of individual Westerners being recognized, group difference may recede into the background, and the Othering practice based on group membership, such as culture

(Western culture vs. Chinese culture), race (white vs. yellow), or country (Western countries vs. China) may dwindle. Each Westerner became perceived as different from all Others. In fact, the participants all claimed that, after all, Westerners were not so different from the Chinese. Shan's observation is simple but down to earth: "As I now can see, if you are nice to them, then they will be nice to you. People everywhere are the same." Anzhu also gave an illuminating comment with regard to commonality: "Many problems we have when dealing with Westerners are also our problems when communicating with our fellow country people". From the Other to Others, Westerners have been included in a big *us*, standing on the common ground of the Chinese self.

### **Distance**

The interview data reveal that a sense of distance is another key building block of constructing Westerners as the Other. The participants' feeling of distance involved both physical and psychological factors. Geographic distance played an important role in setting a boundary between the Chinese and Westerners. Also, this geographical factor further created emotional distance which became a significant barrier in developing social relationships. Both senses of distance, intertwining with each other, have a critical influence on the participants' perception of Westerners as outsiders.

#### **Westerners as foreigners.**

The participants frequently referred to Westerners as *waiguoren*, meaning people from *waiguo*, countries outside of China. In their minds, there was a deep-rooted idea that China, as an imagined material body, marked off the Other who crossed the borderline. "I think it is the geographical place they reside in that defines foreigners". (Nanxi) "If s/he is not from China, then, a foreigner". (Shan) "[Foreigners] are defined from the

perspective of citizenship, but... overseas Chinese, we can't say that they are foreigners". (Jie) The Chinese and foreigners thus become opposites. Apparently, the participants' notion of foreigner is largely defined in a geographical sense: Where are you from? Or more precisely: Where are you or your ancestors originally from.

*Waiguo.*

Among the participants, only a couple of them had recently been in other nearby Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea and Cambodia, and none had ever visited Western countries. For most participants, waiguo was mysterious, interesting and full of wonder, yet usually far beyond their reach. As such, some participants expressed a strong desire to visit or study abroad and truly experience faraway lands.

I really want to go to visit [other countries], but sometimes feel that it is hard to fulfill my dream... I wish I could see countries such as Australia, and places like Vancouver, where the Winter Olympics just took place. I wish I could see lots of things there, what kind of ice they skate on, what the sand [on the beach] looks like, and so on. (Anqi)

Like Anqi, most participants implied that to cross the border and visit other countries would be a long journey and a rare lifetime experience. From a distance, everything in waiguo seemed different.

Besides, many participants reported that before their close interactions with Westerners, they had formed a certain image of Western countries through various media sources which presented Western societies as being highly developed and civilized, especially materially rich. Thus, they came to interact with Westerners with an imaginative fascination for the waiguo. For example, Tong admitted that he used to view

Western countries as a symbol of fortune and civilization, and looked up to Westerners with respect and admiration.

A while ago, I learned about the West through my university's textbooks and many other books, most of which were translations from abroad. We Chinese specially admired Western countries. They had advantages in economy, technology, and even in the humanities. (Tong)

Tong further pointed out that to this day his view of Western countries has been changing. Like Tong, many participants mentioned that the image of waiguo was becoming richer as they got to know more Westerners. Nevertheless, in their minds, waiguo still remained remote, both exotic and desirable. The geographic distance enhances the perceived difference between Western and Chinese lifestyles.

*Waiguoren as a title.*

As a form of address for Westerners, waiguoren is infused with the sense of geographical distance and an attitude towards people from outside faraway lands. The participants explained that people were attached to the land where they were born, grew up and educated. So they asserted that Westerners, with their upbringing from other societies, could not fully integrate into the Chinese society. Anzhu was acquainted with many Westerners, some of them had been based in China for quite a few years, but none became a Chinese citizen. He believed that Westerners would not be able to learn to think as native Chinese do.

The most important aspect to me is thought, or ways of thinking....If an American grows up in United States, though he may have Chinese citizenship and legally have become a Chinese citizen, I still feel that we would not think the same way

when dealing with problems. So I would not regard her/him as Chinese, because I don't think s/he would be able to think in a Chinese way. (Anzhu)

Some participants also proposed that, while the Chinese would have difficulty identifying Western residents as members of Chinese society, Westerners themselves would also have a hard time adjusting to Chinese society or would not even want to identify with the Chinese. As Sufei pointed out,

I especially feel that, for Westerners who moved to China after spending half of their life time [in their homeland], cultural identification would forever be an unsolved puzzle. They would not perceive this as the place they really belonged to. They might have a strong sense of being a stranger in a foreign land.

Apparently, while the participants' perception of foreigner is largely associated with the inquiry of where you are from, it deeply reflects an old assumption that cultures are linked to soil, a particular place, and characterized by "an expectation of roots, of a stable territorialized existence" (Clifford, 1988, p. 388). Even though people or their ancestors have moved to a new land, their roots are perceived still firmly embedded in the soil of their hometown. Furthermore, in the case of Westerners in China, their physical appearance attached them to the outside world. The participants admitted that it would be a challenge for them, as well as for the public, to accept Western residents as part of the Chinese, since this external feature instantly indicated that they were originally from somewhere else. As Maïke stated, "If a person looks like s/he comes from other countries, no matter how fluent and how beautiful her/his Chinese is, I will still feel the distance, as if there is a big gap between us". The participants unconsciously assumed that, as the natives in their land, they looked the same, shared the same cultural tradition,

and had the right to decide who outsiders were. The idea of the close tie between land, culture and ethnicity nurtures the attitude of nativism. As Kristeva (1991) asserts, attitudes towards foreigners have been dictated mainly by the assumption of soil and blood.

Thus, when addressing Westerners as foreigners, the participants already implicitly drew a line between us and them. Their notion of foreigners can be seen as an expression of discrimination and exclusion (Sarup, 1996). However, the participants asserted that foreigner was just a title and did not connote any derogatory meaning. They argued that if they did not know which country a Westerner came from and what her/his name was, then the word foreigner became handy, like a title. As Anqi asserted:

I don't think waiguoren is a negative word. I just don't know their countries and names. What else can you call them besides waiguoren? Right?...I won't use it in front of them. If I do, I am sure they will feel excluded. But honestly I have never had that kind of intention. I never discriminated against them because they came from other countries.

By the same token, many recounted that when they got to know some Westerners, they would identify them as a colleague, a friend, or simply by using their names. As Jiang explained, using the word foreigner suggested a sense of awe and distance since Westerners were usually too far to reach. But, he further emphasized that once he had real contact with some Westerners, he did not use foreigner to refer to them, and sometimes he even forgot that they were foreigners.

The participants also mentioned that there was another similar title for Western foreigners, *laowai*, literally old outsider. As a matter of fact, some participants often used

this term in the interview. Fei thought that the term grew naturally out of the way the Chinese use their language:

The Chinese like to add a prefix to a title. They come from *waiguo*, then we add *lao* before *wai*, and call them *laowai*. As time goes by, people have found that it flows smoothly and thus it became popular.

Some found that once Westerners understood the usage of *laowai*, they accepted it, and even addressed themselves as *laowai*.<sup>6</sup>

In a word, from the perspective of the participants, *foreigner* was a normal, general and neutral term to distinguish a group of people from outside of China. The expression is an instinctive reaction to people from an unknown faraway land. Though addressing Westerners as foreigners automatically puts them in an outsider position, it is fair to say that most participants did not express any negative opinion against Westerners' staying and living in their communities. The participants' accounts reveal that geographical distance was an important factor in imagining and defining Westerners as the Other, especially when lacking communication or real contact.

### **Westerners as strangers.**

As described above, the participants' notion of *foreigner* is associated with the sense of geographical distance: foreigners usually live far away and outside. For the participants, even when Westerners lived close and within, the sense of geographical distance still remained. However, the data also demonstrates that Westerners who lived within Chinese society had somewhat altered the participants' sense of physical distance with Westerners. In their eyes, Westerners in China were temporary residents. They come

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<sup>6</sup> Lao in usage often implies honoured and respectful.

today and might stay longer, but do not belong here. Even for those participants who had close relationships with some Westerners, they rarely considered those Westerners as part of their social networks. Fundamentally, Westerners were just passers-by in their lives.

This image of Westerners is similar to the *stranger* defined by Simmel (1908/1971), “the person who comes today and stays tomorrow – the potential wanderer” (p. 143). Simmel (1908/1971) further characterizes strangers as a special group of individuals which embodies a paradoxical nature: as they are moving from outside to inside, they are both far from and close to us, and they are both outsiders and participants in our society at the same time. Feeling the tension between nearness and distance was just what the participants have experienced in their close interaction with Westerners. Westerners were regarded as special, important and honoured, but they were also seen as vulnerable and disadvantaged, all simply because they were from other countries.

***Special visitors.***

Most participants showed strong interest in getting to know about Western society through their personal interactions. Thus, the geographic distance made Westerners attractive and special visitors since they were valuable sources of firsthand, detailed and concrete information which revealed the myth of a faraway land. In other words, Westerners provided a unique window to peek into the outside world. For example, Jie often sought opportunities to have a conversation with his hotel guests, from which he has learned about many countries.

You see, some foreign visitors have stayed in our hotel for a while. We see them every day, and greet them every day. Sometimes when they are free, we would love to sit down with them and have a chat. After a while, you will find that it is a

pleasure to chat with them, since you learn so many things about their countries.

We rarely have a chance to go abroad. Through them, we get to know some lively details about other places in the world, such as, what is their local environment?

And what do people's work and life look like there? (Jie)

The vivid personal accounts of life in Western countries were fresh and real. As Maike also said, he really enjoyed picking up many factors, such as: What was the living standard? Did children have lots of freedom in the classroom? How much did it cost for French perfume in France?

Many participants also reflected that these interactions had a significant effect on their perception of the Western world. For some, the image has changed. In Aima's case, the direct interaction with many Westerners, in particular studying English with an Australian teacher, helped her to have a closer look at Western societies. She said: "I used to think that the Western land was covered in gold, but I don't think this way anymore". Emma eventually stopped planning to go abroad to make a living but was still willing to go to visit. For some, they came to see certain aspects which were not available through the various media. For instance, Anzhu learned something new about American politics:

[My American friend] talked about the U.S. government. He said that the China he learned about from his government was completely different from the China he saw after he came to China....He also said that the Americans were having their brains washed. Therefore Americans always assumed that it was right for the US to declare a war against other countries, no matter which country it was.... For example, he said that many Americans believed that the Iraq War was a war of

justice which would protect human rights and offer help to Iraqi people. It was not an invasion for the American national interests. I was really shocked by this revelation of the US society.

Thus, as reflected in the interview data, the participants showed genuine interest in learning about outside peoples' life and culture. Their assumption of the Western Other is changing and becoming colorful as they learned more about it from direct contact. Westerners as strangers bring something valuable to these Chinese. In Simmel's (1908/1971) words, strangers import new qualities into the host society. This phenomenon implies that while distance constructs outsiders, it also opens up the possibility to discover and redefine the Other, thus to shorten the distance, reduce bias and enhance understanding.

***Important people.***

According to the data, Western visitors were also very often perceived as important people. The participants indicated that, though there were a lot more Westerners than before, for most Chinese they were still in the distance, high up and unattainable. Westerners' presence in fact created a divide between people who could get access to them and who could not. If a Chinese person was able to get closer to Westerners, talking to them, working with them, or providing service to them, etc, then s/he might feel honoured and privileged.

My friends said that I was happy every day. I asked them "why not". It is true.

Besides, I have good opportunities to communicate with many foreigners, and this makes me feel good. Maybe you would never be able to see so many foreigners in your whole life, right? I feel great! (Anqi)

In our first year of working in the school, all of the Chinese staff would no doubt feel, what can I say, feel as if we were more special than other Chinese because we work with Westerners. ... We feel honoured and lucky, thinking that we are connecting to the international world. (Zhuli)

Those accounts suggest that the participants had granted Westerners a status of being very important people. Thus, meeting the important Westerners also made the participants themselves feel special and important.

But many emphasized that the feeling of being special only lasted for a certain time, and diminished as frequent interaction with Westerners became routine. While they no longer felt special, people around them were often very curious about their interacting with Westerners and cast admiring glances at them.

In China, honestly, in my circle of friends, if I tell them I have known a few Westerners, they will be very jealous. Many people don't have the opportunity to have a job like mine, thus they have no way to come into contact with Westerners. (Maike)

That statement demonstrates that lacking of direct communication created an imaginative position for Westerners in the minds of those Chinese.

***Honourable guests.***

Most participants also expressed their pleasure in showing hospitality to Westerners. In their eyes, generally speaking, any Westerners in China, whether travellers, students, customers, or colleagues and neighbours, were all honoured guests and welcome to China. Some participants indicated that Westerners needed to be taken care of since they were from afar and not familiar with the environment. For example, Jie

reported that he did not intend to treat Westerners differently, but thought that Westerners would need extra help, and it was his responsibility to be a warm host for foreign guests.

To Jie, foreigners and *waiguo keren* (foreigner guests) are synonyms.

Nowadays we can see lots of foreigners who enjoy strolling on the street.

Sometimes, I can see they need help. Then I would like to offer a helping hand.

After all, they are in a foreign land, and especially, the language can be a big barrier, so I should do my best to help them. Helping them will demonstrate that we Chinese are warm, hospitable and friendly. (Jie)

Jie's words suggest that he treated every Westerner he encountered as his guest, even if this Westerner was a stranger in the street.

***Vulnerable newcomers.***

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that sympathy is another common feeling that the participants have felt towards Westerners, especially towards those who were temporarily working and living in China. Many participants assumed that Western expatriates, as newcomers to the country, did not have a home, relatives or even friends there, thus it must be not easy for them to be living in China. As Sufei stated, "I am the local resident, that is to say, my home is here. On the contrary, they reside as a visitor, thus they are people at a disadvantage". Some participants showed deep concern about what Westerners would face, such as feeling lonely, lacking a sense of security, having trouble with understanding rules or regulations, or being taken advantage of by some Chinese. For example, Shan knew that it was not uncommon for Westerners to be charged unfairly since they do not know how to bargain as do the locals. He criticized this kind of behaviour:

You can't treat laowai like this, you know. They may make more money than you, but their money is theirs. They came to China, it is not easy. They have traveled a long way to get here, and that was already hard enough for them.

It is thus clear that as strangers in the new location, though being seen as forever foreigners, Westerners were often highly appreciated and honoured, warmly received and genuinely cared for. They were not regarded as part of participants' families or social networks, but were acknowledged as an important or hard-to-neglect figure, which added special color to the participants' social lives. As Westerners moved from outside to inside, while the distance remained, the participants unconsciously tried to cross the boundary.

#### **Westerners as friends.**

Interaction with Western foreigners involved relationship building. The participants expressed that they were willing to build closer relationships with Westerners. In their descriptions, various relationships were touched upon, such as business, work (colleagues), marriage, and friends. Friendship was the most focused and common aspect for all of the participants. They believed that Westerners could become their friends, and some reported that they already had Western friends. However, the participants stressed that it was the emotional distance that made the process of friendship building more challenging. As Zhuli stated, "It is definitely easier to make friends with Chinese than with Westerners, since we are emotionally closer and natural to each other". The frequently used word *waiguo pengyou*, foreign friends, suggests an ambiguous image between foreigners and friends.

The participants emphasized that this emotional distance was associated with the difficulty of communication with Westerners. It was commonly agreed that lack of common cultural background or life experience contributed greatly to their difficulty of communication. The participants admitted that they did not have much knowledge about Westerners, and also assumed that Westerners did not know much about China and the Chinese. Thus, the feeling of unfamiliarity gave them little idea about what to expect. This sense could become so overwhelming that it discouraged communication altogether. For example, after a 4-year frequent contact with Westerners at work, Tong still found that conversation with Westerners was just a formality:

Even now, I feel the distance still exists. When we compatriots have conversation together, oh, no matter in what situation, formal or informal, we may pour out anything deep in our hearts, happiness, anger, sadness and joy, since we profoundly know our emotions and customs. However, when communicating with Westerners, we only interact on the surface, as if following instructions from a book. We say May I, Can I, How do you do, and How are you, which is nothing but basic formality. It is very hard to reach their emotional world.

The participants also stressed that the language barrier had prevented communication with Westerners from going deeper. In most participants' view, to build a closer relationship, people should be able to share their values and attitudes, and discuss many fundamental social and life issues that interest both of them. However, most participants found out that it was very difficult to touch upon those topics and express them properly in English.

Sometimes, there are things I can't express clearly. I don't know how to initiate the topics at a deeper level. As friends, we may talk about the basic necessities of daily life, such as food, clothes, housing and transportation. But that is not enough. Friends usually will go further to discuss some profound issues. I have never been able to touch those issues with a Westerner....This is very difficult. If we can't communicate at that level, then we have no way to become real friends. (Danna)

Furthermore, the participants stressed that actual interaction time at a personal level was another critical factor for better communication with Westerners. For most of the participants, they were basically involved in business-type relationships with Westerners. No matter how often they saw or interacted with Westerners, the chance to communicate at a personal level was rare. For instance, Jiang only met Westerners at the coffee shop where he worked. For him, Westerners came and left only as customers. Though he had become familiar with many Western customers' faces, and engaged in much conversation with them when providing service, he could not get to know them further. As another example, Maike dealt with his international trade partners regularly. However, he realized that for Westerners, business was business, and private life was private life. "They don't talk about feelings with us". Fundamentally, Westerners had not yet become part of those participants' social networks. As Tom said, Westerners indeed only took a very trivial part in Chinese people's lives.

A few participants, who had had a chance to interact with Westerners at a personal level, implied that it would still take more time, effort, and courage to be able to communicate well and make friends with Westerners. Like the others, these participants also experienced this existing emotional distance. However, their frequent interaction at a

personal level helped them in overcoming the barriers. For example, Nanxi remembered the feeling of distance in her initial interactions. Uncomfortable and uneasy, they always reminded her that she was having a dialogue with the unknown West. But, as she spent more time with her Western colleagues, she saw a transformation in the nature of her intercultural communication: from a Chinese with a Westerner, to a human being with a human being. She claimed that if we truly face a Westerner, there was no cultural or language gap that we could not bridge. Her friendship with an American colleague best illustrated her point:

My English was really bad at the beginning. When I talked to her, ah, I had to draw on a piece of paper or do something else to make myself understood. Then she would tell me what she understood I was trying to say, and how she would say it. Our exchange started from using very basic and simple language. It was a slow process....[2 years later] When she was leaving the school, she told me that my English was getting better....She only needed to hear the first half of my sentence then she would know what I wanted to say next. That is to say, we could feel the true connection between us [even though we still had a language problem].

Nanxi's feeling of "true connection" was a result of a genuine personal interaction and long time effort.

Apparently, that emotional distance varied in degree with the quality and frequency of the interaction. While some participants might still feel the emotional disconnect, others found the distance with some Westerners getting smaller or even negligible. No matter how they felt, the participants all believed that the basic principle of making friends was the same. As Fei said,

In fact, [making friends with Westerners] is just like making friends with Chinese. I may have problems with some Chinese individuals and can't be close friends with them. This is the same with Westerners. When you are interacting with someone, what you first look into is what kind of person s/he is.

Fei's comment also points to an individuals' character as an important factor. Those participants who had developed closer relationships with some Westerners stressed that they had no problem in trusting some Westerners because they were nice people. They also claimed that they felt very close to their best Western friends, just as close as to their best Chinese friends.

It is thus apparent that the participants did not intend to keep their distance from Westerners. However, as Hanvey (1976) suggests, to emotionally accept people from other cultures requires a high level of cross cultural awareness, which is developed largely on the basis of good knowledge, mindful enquiry, and most important, a lived experience in other cultures. As most of the participants were not well equipped with knowledge of Western cultures, and none of them ever had a lived experience in Western countries, their emotional distance from Westerners was unavoidable.

### **Defensiveness (Defending Chinese face)**

The interview data demonstrates that the participants were very sensitive to Westerners' attitudes towards China. They felt compelled to project a good image of China, and were extremely defensive to any Westerners' criticism. The participants' accounts suggest that Westerners signified a potential threat to their collective confidence and self-esteem. Thus, defending Chinese face – to maintain or create a positive image of

China and retain dignity as Chinese – has become a third main factor in activating the participants' Othering attitude.

**Westerners as special audience.**

The participants were very concerned about how Westerners perceived China. Their accounts often exuded a strong identification with China, manifest in their associating individual self-esteem with China's positive image or accomplishments. Many mentioned that they used to look up to Westerners because of China's past backwardness, but that this was no longer the case. They proudly claimed that they felt equal to Westerners due to China's rapid development. For example, Tong expressed emotionally how the progress of the country, the city and people's lives had enhanced his self-esteem when dealing with Westerners:

In the past, they were rich and powerful, and we were far behind them. I specially felt we were somewhat [inferior], and thus I really respected, even worshipped them. But now our country is becoming stronger and stronger. They come to our country, and no matter what they do, business or visiting, they are our guests, and we are all equal.

Though getting more confident, the participants still could not conceal their worry about being looked down upon by Westerners. They were all acutely aware that China was still a developing country and there was a lot to do to catch up. Some also believed that Westerners did not know China and often held a distorted image of China. Keli asserted that Westerners had a very poor impression of China. "They have bias in their heart. So when they come to China, they focus on the problematic and ignore the good".

Being anxious to influence and improve Westerners' perceptions of China, participants felt obliged to present China in the best possible light to Westerners. Most talked about how they were conscious of their own behaviour in front of Westerners. For instance, Maiké thought that he was representing China each time he had a business talk with Westerners:

Speaking to them is quite different from speaking to the Chinese. When I sit down to talk with a Chinese person like you, I feel at ease and make myself comfortable. However, if I talk with them, I have to project a good image of our country, right? Whenever I have a business talk with a Western customer, I feel like I represent China. I can't let them look down upon our country and our Chinese.

Some participants revealed how they worried about China's image when other Chinese behaved disgracefully in front of Westerners' eyes. For instance, Wen was very embarrassed when a street beggar asked for money from her Western guest:

We came across a beggar when taking our guest for a tour in the market. The beggar begged for money from our guest. The worst thing was that the beggar even complained to us that the foreigner should give him more money. Oh, I felt very bad. His behaviour really damaged the image of our Chinese. Ah, it was a shame!

In addition, some participants reported that they had seen many Chinese voluntarily give priority to Westerners, such as better service and extra help. But they showed their understanding. In their opinion, the special treatment of Westerners suggested a strong desire held by many Chinese to help to build China's international image – as a friendly, welcoming and peaceful China. Aima's experience provided a

good example. She described how her Western friend had received special service in the post office. Her friend's express mail was returned from its destination with a broken envelope. The post office staff not only apologized for the damage but also re-sent the mail without charge. To Aima it was impossible for an ordinary Chinese person to have this kind of service.

Being a Chinese, sometimes I felt very uncomfortable when I saw this kind of special treatment. We are all human beings, so why be so nice and generous to Westerners? ... Why wouldn't you treat your fellow Chinese that same way? However, I can see that the whole country and its people are thirsting for being understood by people from outside. (Aima)

Furthermore, the participants were eager to project China's positive image through promoting the Chinese language and culture. Many reported that they were very happy to see that their Western guests got to know more about China and have a good impression and memory of China. Aima's Chinese massage clinic had received a number of Westerners. She was proud of being a messenger to disseminate the knowledge and practice of Chinese medicine to Westerners. "Chinese medicine is really mysterious but attractive to foreigners". Also, having been a volunteer a few times to receive Western visitors, Wen revealed her wish:

I am very interested in teaching Chinese as a second language. In fact, I really want to make a little contribution, not a big one, at least to do something to let people from other countries have a better understanding of China.

As reflected in most participants' accounts, the Chinese language and culture was a key source of national pride, and thus sharing it was a great way to bridge China and the West.

### **Westerners as offensive Other.**

The participants' defence of Chinese face was also manifest in their sensitivity to Westerners' attitude towards the Chinese and China. The present study finds that Westerners' negative attitudes, especially the perceived sense of superiority and the blunt criticism of China, triggered intense emotional reactions. The concern about Chinese dignity and the fear of losing national face motivated the participants to confront some Westerners with anger. Westerners who were unfriendly and hostile to China were regarded as an unwelcome Other.

First of all, the Othering attitude against Westerners was often activated when the participants became aware of Westerners' sense of superiority. For most participants, it was not uncommon to find that Westerners, or precisely speaking, white people from the West, feel superior to people of other races or those from developing countries. The participants emphasized that although their self-esteem had been tremendously enhanced because of China's recent achievements, they still felt that Westerners had a tendency to feel privileged and look down on the Chinese. Zhuli pointed out that almost every Westerner she met had such a sense of superiority, which was sometimes expressed very subtly, even unconsciously. One of the examples she provided was about an American colleague's conversation with his students:

He asked the students, "Which teachers do you respect more, Western teachers or Chinese teachers?" The students answered, "The same".... He was first shocked, then he asked the same question again assuming that the students did not understand the question at the first time.... The students answered him again, "The same". This time he realized that the students did understand his question.

So he quickly covered his embarrassment by praising the students and ending with this comment, “in fact, no matter Western teachers or Chinese teachers,... they are all equal and deserve the same respect”. But, you know, that he asked this kind of question already implied that he himself actually believed that Western teachers were superior to Chinese teachers.

Like Zhuli, most participants described how they detected Westerners’ sense of superiority in various contexts. In situations of conflict, the feeling of being disturbed by the Westerner’s sense of superiority was stronger and more emotional. For example, Tong occasionally met Western customers who were picky about the banking rules in China and revealed an arrogant attitude towards him and his colleagues. At that moment, he would feel his national self-esteem terribly threatened. Fred also talked about his Western colleagues’ sense of superiority as being a source of conflict:

They put themselves in a very important position. They never looked at us, their Chinese colleagues, with equal eyes.... When they are feeling self-important, they only considered their Westerner colleagues’ interest first,...which has caused lots of troubles.

It should be noted that most participants emphasized that they did not have many conflicts with Westerners since there were hardly any interests involved in their relationships. After all, Westerners were not really part of their social networks. Besides, they all tried to avoid any conflict when dealing with Westerners.

However, most of the participants had faced a conflictual situation usually caused by a Westerner’s direct display of their dissatisfaction with China, such as complaining about living conditions, criticizing Chinese people’s behaviours or condemning Chinese

government and its policy. The participants stressed that those negative comments made them very uncomfortable and especially hurt their self-esteem as Chinese. For instance, Lan talked about her encounter with an American who was teaching in China:

His comment on China was really radical. He had said lots of bad things about China. But I don't understand why he looked at China that way. If China is such a miserable place, why do you still work, even permanently reside in China? Since he kept saying that China was not good, I just disliked him, and I didn't want to listen to him anymore.

Lan turned her back on the American. Some participants did the same thing when facing a similar situation. But some could not help arguing. Anzhu's reaction may be quite extreme:

[When the Australian criticized everything in China], I really treated her with disdain. Then I tried so hard to explain to her. I said that what she had perceived was not the China in reality.....Once I had a big fight with her.... I had no way to convince her and I felt a real anger. I almost could not control myself from giving her a slap on the face. Of course, I didn't do it, that's only a thought.... After the dispute, we were still friends. Then we went to eat together. But when touching this topic, we argued furiously again.

Anzhu's account vividly demonstrates how Westerners' criticism transformed a foreign friend into an annoying outsider.

While most participants regarded the radical criticism of China as prejudiced, disrespectful, and thus unbearable, two participants, Danna and Sufei, expressed their tolerance of Westerners' criticism. Danna admitted that she instantly felt very upset when

confronting such complaints from Westerners. Nevertheless, she reasoned that it was normal for them to show their discontent with China because they had not grown up in China and would not be able to understand. As for Sufei, it was hard to listen to Westerners' harsh attack on China, but she commented that if we did not treat Westerners as foreigners, we might find some of their criticism reasonable. Sufei's comment clearly points to the fact that people are more sensitive to outsiders' criticism.

Regarding Westerners' embedded sense of superiority, some participants stressed that it was also reinforced by the Chinese blind worship of Westerners and the West. As Sufei stated:

White people may have their sense of superiority all over the globe. However, in China, their sense of superiority is also associated with Chinese people's attitude. Using our local word, *guan*, which means spoil, we cultivated this superiority by spoiling them.

These participants pointed out that many Chinese adored Westerners because they assumed that every Westerner was rich and well-educated. In addition, Westerners from English-speaking countries, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, were especially at a premium, since lots of Chinese were learning English and they believed that native speakers could help them to speak fluent English.

These participants further confessed that they all had been through this kind of worship stage so that they deeply understood the phenomenon. They emphasized that the worship and the English fever had made many Westerners in China feel special and privileged. Furthermore, some Westerners even took advantage of those Chinese who were desperate to find a native speaker of English or those who were dreaming to go

abroad, such as by charging a very high price for a very low quality of English lesson, or having improper relationships with young Chinese women. For example, Anzhu felt terribly upset each time he saw the privileged Westerners favoured by the Chinese:

Many Chinese make a fetish of speaking English. When encountering a laowai, or a foreigner who says “I am American”, in the street, they, both men and women, all will give this foreigner a green light, saying “you go ahead”. I have accompanied many laowai in public places, and people always let us go first. Even when laowai shows misconduct, such as having an affair, people are ok with it. So many privileges have been given to Westerners that they feel superior to us....They can do things in China without ethical constraints.... As far as I know, many laowai...spent lots of time with young Chinese women, in and out of hotel rooms. Very disgusting!

There is no doubt that Westerners’ perceived sense of superiority and privilege usually triggers and strengthens the participants’ Othering attitude. As noted before, no matter how Westerners were treated – visitors, guests, or friends, their outsider’s status was deep in the minds of the participants. However, biased or arrogant Westerners definitely have been put into another category: the unwelcome Other.

Apparently, the participants’ resentful attitude towards some Westerners was a result of their actual intercultural experience. Most admitted that their government’s propaganda, or media reports, did have a certain impact on them and the public. For example, some participants mentioned that when they heard about conflict between China and a Western country, or about Western media’s misrepresentation of China, they would be definitely irritated. However, they stressed that the politics between the governments

of China and of Western countries was remote from their lives as ordinary citizens and thus would not affect their daily interactions with Westerners.

Suppose a foreign country is in dispute with China, or doing something bad to China, when I then encounter a Westerner who just happens to come from that country, I would promptly relate that unpleasant event to this person ....But, you know, this conflict between countries actually has nothing to do with ordinary people. You can't bring those national issues to interfere in our daily lives. (Fei)

Sometimes, negative Western media coverage of China, with Westerners being nasty to the Chinese, would definitely make me angry. At that moment, my nationalistic feeling would be very strong.... But, after interacting with so many Westerners, I feel those reports from newspaper or television are relatively remote from me. My nationalistic feeling is just a temporary emotional reaction. (Zhuli)

Both Fei and Zhuli emphasized that their negative reaction towards some Westerners or Westerners at large evoked by certain foreign affair events was a temporary act. When reason had overcome emotion, they consciously rejected their negative attitude.

While admitting the social media or official propaganda may have an impact on the public, some participants claimed that they believed instead what they had seen and what they had experienced.

There may be some Chinese who are influenced by media propaganda and thus have some biased impressions of people from certain countries. But I don't think it is the case with me. After you actually communicate with Westerners, you will know what kind of persons they are, and your impression of them can't be imposed by the media. (Danna)

I don't think propaganda from the media has any effect on me. That is high-ranking politicians' business. They have their way to consider the relationship with Westerners. But, as ordinary people, we are busy with our lives and work every day. My experience made me realized that we and Westerners [who stay here] have the same starting point, and don't have any fundamental conflict of interest.... So it is not necessary to list them as the Other. There is no sense to treat them such and such because of their past conduct to China. (Nanxi)

Direct interactions help Danna to distinguish the Westerners she interacted with from the Westerners as portrayed by the media. Similarly, Nanxi's intercultural experience encouraged her to identify with those ordinary Westerners she encountered.

Moreover, a couple of participants slightly touched on the topic of the impact of the historical memory – the invasions by Western powers in China's modern history,<sup>7</sup> but they thought that this period of history was fading from their memory, and claimed that they did not have any victim complex. As they saw it, it was normal to have some conflict with Westerners especially in business partnerships. They would feel irritated or angry when Westerners exhibited arrogance and contempt. However, this feeling had a very weak link with the past. As Keli stated, "I pay little attention to past events. Those things have long passed. When doing business with Westerners, you will not be able to do it well if you live in the shadow of the past". The city where the interviews were conducted was once occupied by Germany.<sup>8</sup> However, Keli was sure that the locals had

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<sup>7</sup> What really does affect the participants is the history of the Japanese invasion (1937-1945). However, the Chinese Othering practice towards Japanese is beyond the scope of the present study.

<sup>8</sup> The city was a German colonial concession during 1898-1914. For more, see Steinmetz (2007).

no bad feelings about Germans. Instead, they respected them for their serious attitudes toward work and life. Therefore, as the participants implied, their Othering attitudes were mainly activated by negative attitudes of Westerners in real life.

**Westerners as supportive Other.**

Although sometimes bothered by Westerners' sense of superiority, the participants came to realize that they had met some Westerners who did love China. They frankly demonstrated their contentment when Westerners displayed a positive attitude towards China. This included holding a good impression of China, having great interest in Chinese culture and language, understanding China's status quo, and showing genuine care about Chinese people and their lives. For instance, Nanxi showed her good feelings towards some Westerners who were so eager to learn about Chinese culture. Once a Western teacher consulted her to choose for him a Chinese name. She then patiently explained to him how Chinese names were related to the language and customs, until the teacher left with satisfaction. "I felt so happy since he was so willing to understand how to get a good name from the perspective of Chinese culture". Similarly, Sufei was very impressed by a middle-aged American's appreciation of Chinese culture and life:

It is hard to believe that he was able quickly to accept Chinese culture and enjoy the Chinese lifestyle at his age. I really see that he did not accept the culture superficially, but emotionally. He came to live permanently in China because he was deeply in love with China.

As another example, Lan gave high credit to a Canadian who understood China and promoted China's good image:

He is very friendly to China. As you know, there was a riot in Xinjiang a little while ago.<sup>9</sup> People around him in Canada all condemned the Chinese government for its bad record of human rights. He then tried hard to explain to those people that what they heard might not be what actually happened, and that the Chinese government was doing its best. As such, he has been always helping China to build a good image.

The participants indicated that those Westerners' positive attitudes revealed their respect for China and their love of Chinese people. In return, the participants showed their deep appreciation of and respect for those Westerners. It is apparent that Westerners' genuine acceptance of China is one of the key factors in deconstructing the boundary between Westerners and the participants. The Westerners who love and support China were most welcome and could be regarded as being on our side.

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<sup>9</sup> It took place in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, on July 5<sup>th</sup> of 2009.

## Chapter 5 Discussion: The Findings

As presented in the previous chapter, the three main themes, difference, distance, and defending Chinese face, together form a comprehensive picture of the participants' common perception of their Othering practices. Following the analysis, this chapter further discusses the findings, and addresses how the findings answer the research questions and contribute to our understanding of the Chinese construction of the Western Other. As discussed in Chapter 2, researchers have given full focus to official /intellectual elites' Occidentalism, and defined the Western Other as a negative term which denotes an oppositional entity and a source of conflict (e.g. Callahan, 2006; Conceison, 2004; Dikötter, 1992; Fairbank, 1979; Ford, 2010; Gries, 2007; Guo, 2004). The present research shifts the attention to ordinary Chinese people. Its key findings suggest that the Chinese public has its own way of perceiving and presenting the Western Other, and this Other connotes a wider meaning than simply oppositional and conflictual.

This study asks three research questions regarding how the intercultural experiences of ordinary Chinese people reveal their construction of Westerners as the Other. Drawn from the data analysis, four findings have contributed to answering these questions: First, the participants attributed these three factors – the shock of difference, the sense of distance, and the fear of losing face were the main factors – to the activation of their Othering practice. Second, the participants as independent actors were fully capable of constructing the Western Other based on their real experience. Third, the participants developed complex images of Westerners, resulting from on-going processes in which the Western Other was constantly activated, deconstructed and reconstructed. Finally, the participants demonstrated both inclusive and exclusive attitudes towards the

Western Other. These findings inform our understanding of the way that ordinary Chinese perceive, and present, the Western Other in contemporary China.

### **Factors that generated Otherness**

The data analysis has described in detail how the three factors – difference, distance and defensiveness – generated the participants' Otherness towards Westerners. Perceiving difference was a fundamental building block in constructing the Western Other. In the literature review, the Chinese official/intellectual Occidentalism emphasized essential differences to distinguish foreigners/Westerners from the Chinese (e.g. Dikötter, 1992; B, Xu, 1998; Guo, 2004). The discourse of a racialized Other underscores a belief that there is an original diversity of races founded on biological heredity and that biologically different human groups are fundamentally unequal or hierarchically organized (Dikötter, 1992). The discourse of a cultural Other has focused on fundamentally different Chinese values and tradition (B, Xu, 1998; Guo, 2004). But the participants' discussion of differences has a different source. They perceived differences when experiencing shock, surprise or frustration in real life. Thus, when they talked about biological differences, they stressed how the appearance of the Westerners created a sensation, and how this sensation faded away with more interaction. And, their discursive construction of cultural difference was about how different ways of living have affected their lives and how their continuing intercultural experiences have influenced their views of Western ways. Their descriptions of differences are full of life and beyond the narrow focus on essential differences.

Emphasizing group differences and distancing other groups are closely related. According to the literature, the group differences constructed by official/intellectual

discourse have brought about prejudice, separation, and exclusion between the Chinese and foreigners /Westerners (e.g. Fairbank, 1979; Dikötter, 1992; Food, 2010).

Differences generate Otherness, and lead to distancing other groups. Following the data analysis, the participants' sense of distance was indeed largely caused by the differences they had experienced based on geography, lifestyles and languages. However, they did not show any intention to distance Westerners because of the differences. Their descriptions emphasized that the feeling of distance itself created Otherness in Westerners. Moreover, they also expressed a strong desire to reduce the distance and build close relationships with Westerners.

The last factor, defensiveness, explained how the Western threat to the Chinese self-esteem generated Otherness. As noted in the literature, the official/intellectual narrative of the Western threat to China's security and image has been promoted over time and deeply influences Chinese people's perception of the West as a major enemy and bully (e.g. Renwick & Cao, 1999; Callahan, 2006; Z. Wang, 2008). This mainstream top-down view is supplemented by Gries' (2004) bottom-up face nationalism theory, which proposes that the Chinese public is not influenced solely by the elites, but has genuine emotion in demanding respect for China and recapture of recognition of her international status from the West. Pointing to the Chinese memory of the history of humiliation and hatred for the West's aggression, both views explain the public's nationalistic sentiment beginning in the 1990s in the same fashion: Any new foreign affairs events that are perceived as insults, slights or damage to China's face would stimulate resentment towards Westerners.

This study finds that the participants tended to show their nationalistic emotions toward Westerners. However, their accounts reveal that these emotions were reactions to some Westerners' negative attitudes or criticism in face-to-face confrontations, which created real frustration and anger. Also, there was no sign that those reactions had any connection with historical memory. While admitting that the media might stimulate certain sentiments in relation to some foreign affairs events, the participants asserted that those events did not interfere with their views of the Westerners whom they have encountered and thus of Western people in general.

### **Participants as independent actors**

As demonstrated in the above description of the three factors, the participants have actively constructed the Western Other based on their experiences. Of course, it is difficult to identify, and thus to eliminate, the influence that the official/intellectual Occidentalism might have exerted on the participants. However, this finding speaks some truth in the new reality. As stated in Chapter 2, the relationship between the Chinese public and Westerners continues to undergo fundamental change. This transition was definitely manifest in the participants' rich accounts. Being able to communicate face to face, the participants observed and perceived Westerners through their own judgement and emotions. Compared to the mass anti-Western expression driven by political conflicts, the participants' construction of Western Other was often motivated by their genuine interest in identifying and getting to know Westerners.

Following the analysis, we find that the participants discursively emphasized that they believed what they saw and trusted what they felt. They clearly expressed that their actual, personal experience was the major factor helping them to define Westerners. For

most, the Westerners with whom they came to interact were more concrete, complex, and multi-dimensional than those appearing in the media or official propaganda. The participants' attitude towards official media suggests a strong sense of separating the politics of foreign affairs from ordinary people's daily lives.

The analysis also demonstrates that the participants' descriptions and views of Westerners were mostly drawn from experiences with each individual Westerner who had touched their daily lives. Even an incidental street encounter might signify an important transitional point in a participant's perception of Westerners. From never seeing a Westerner in the flesh, to initially looking at Westerners from a distance, and presently to interacting with them closely, the participants portrayed Westerners in various manners. In the public sphere, or in personal interactions, Westerners' acts – frowns and smiles, comments and attitudes – were all within the participant's full awareness and interpretation. Westerners were the Other, but this Other was no longer pure imagination, nor was it an imposed image.

Furthermore, as the analysis reveals, what motivated the participants to construct the Western Other was not any ingrained xenophobia or simple-minded resentment, but a strong desire to know the Other and to uphold a positive image of the Self. It has been persuasively argued that the purpose of constructing the Other is for the Self (Poo, 2007). Jukaraïen (1999) further states, "Otherness is fundamentally treated as one-directionally relational to the self, i.e. something (interesting, useful, necessary) *to and for* 'us' [italics are original], something significant only in relation to ourselves, and from our perspective" (p. 88). While acknowledging the self-interest in constructing the Other, it is important to question further the nature of this self-interest. Focusing on ordinary Chinese people, this

study finds that the participants have shown their own interests, preferences and agendas in a process of defining the Western Other. What most interested them was to figure out who this Other was and how to have themselves understood. This motivation enabled them to establish the Western Other without the negative political implications, in which Otherness only signifies opposition, separation, hatred or resentment.

### **Constructing the Other as a flexible process**

Concerning the third research question, this study found that constructing the Western Other was embedded in the lively processes of intercultural exchange. From early distant encounters to current close interactions through various relationships, the initial alienated and mysterious Westerner has been greatly demystified. In other words, through a continuing interaction with Westerners, the participants have portrayed rich, varied and changing images of Westerners. This finding provides insights to understanding the Othering practice as an on-going process in which the Other gets activated, produced and modified.

The data analysis tells us that the participants' Othering practice was a reflection of the changing social context. There was a strong indication that mass movement of people across borders – one symbol of current globalization – has been striking China, so that Chinese society is increasingly becoming international and multicultural. Meeting foreigners or Westerners is no longer a privilege for social elites but has become normal practice for ordinary people. This social change, coupled with China's economic progress, has created a new cultural ethos which inspired the participants to embrace the world with enthusiasm, and to deal with Westerners openly, freely and equally. Thus, the new

cultural ethos has become one of the fundamental driving forces determining the contemporary social context of constructing the Western Other.

With this new cultural atmosphere were evident specific critical contact conditions now involved in the process of the encounters. First of all, the images of Westerners in early encounters were gradually transformed as actual interactions went on. For instance, we can see that Westerners as a racial Other, once predominant in the eyes of the participants, diminished when the image of a cultural Other became salient. We also see a shift from viewing Westerners as members of Other human groups to recognizing them as Other unique individuals. Moreover, the images generated in happy, pleasant situations were often quite opposite to those produced in confrontational situations. When Westerners' behaviour was in conflict with Chinese cultural rules, or when Westerners' arrogance and prejudice were perceived, the participants promptly identified Westerners as an annoying and unwelcome Other.

Furthermore, the quantity and quality of communication at a personal level may determine if a Westerner was a distant foreigner, an interesting visitor, or a close, trusted foreign friend. Having a deeper association with a Westerner through work or other activities opened a door for the participant to view the Westerner in a sympathetic way. Finally, a specific encounter or a specific Westerner had a significant influence on a participant's view. Although one unpleasant encounter or getting to know one individual Westerner well may not have changed a participant's attitude towards Westerners at large, each unforgettable experience no doubt added a new perspective towards understanding Westerners. Thus, various contact conditions acted individually or together to produce and change the images of Westerners. Different images brought to life during these

encounters suggest the importance of the question: Under what circumstances are Westerners constructed as various kinds of Other?

### **The Western Other: included or excluded?**

The perceived multi-faceted Western Other implies that the participants' Othering practice involved both exclusive and inclusive aspects. On one hand, their construction of the Westerner Other was based foremost on their sense of racial, cultural or national groupings. This sense of community functions unconsciously to distinguish Westerners from the Chinese, and further often stubbornly denied the possibility of Westerners' integration into Chinese society. This suggests that racism as well as nativism was an indispensable part of the participants' Othering practice. On the other hand, however, while granting Westerners a foreigner status, the participants also revealed very positive attitudes, indicating that Westerners could be accepted, appreciated and included.

The participants' concept of the Other is consistent with the common thesis: In a traditional and less differentiated society, defining the Other is largely based on the boundary set by culture, ethnicity or nationality (Rawls & David, 2006). As China continues its journey from a traditional and homogeneous society to a modern and multicultural society,<sup>1</sup> people's belief in the nation's homogeneity and uniformity still

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<sup>1</sup>The Constitution of People's Republic China explicitly states that the Chinese nation is a unified nation with many ethnic groups (Constitution of People's Republic of China, 1982). Historians also point out that China has been a culturally diversified nation for a long time (e.g. Fairbank & Goldman, 1998). As Parekh (2000) posits, every culture is always subject to change, inevitably affected by other cultures, and inherently diversified. Here, describing Chinese society as homogeneous means only that all those ethnic 56 groups, including Han Chinese, are indigenous to the defined nation.

has a strong hold, thus seeing Westerners as an essential Other is still dominant in the general public. However, the participants' accounts suggest that the boundary based on essentialist difference was eroding. When the intercultural relationship deepened and the experience expanded, the view of Westerners as an essential Other was challenged. In their intercultural communication at a personal level, when a good relationship was desired, the participants' primary concern was about what kind of person the Westerner was. As individual personalities and character became salient, the mysterious image of Westerners faded away, and thus participants were able to discriminate and attribute to them a positive or a negative value. The shift of attention from the abstract Other to concrete Others provides huge potential to include people from other cultural/ethnic groups. However, this does not mean that the imaginative essential difference has vanished from sight for the participants, but rather points to some moments when the essential difference became blurred, unimportant, or even non-existent.

The challenge to the notion of the Other as an internal or fixed given was also manifest in participants' complex attitudes towards Western foreigners. Exclusion happened especially when unpleasant or conflictual situations occurred. Westerners' behaviour or criticism could easily incite anger and reinforce their outsider's status. But confrontation was not the main characteristic of the interaction between the participants and Westerners. Very often, Westerners were distinguished as important visitors, honoured guests, or friends with the word *foreign* as a prefix. Though not being seen as insiders in those cases, Westerners were not discriminated against and excluded.

Having a high regard for Westerners, the participants expressed their inclusive attitude in various ways. Westerners' different cultural customs and behaviours were

sometimes greatly appreciated for their ethical or aesthetic value. This appreciation was accompanied by a strong desire for learning. In day to day interaction, what interested the participants most was not so much Western technology and material lifestyle as Westerners' manners and other interesting ways of dealing with people. It is amazing to see how much the participants were aware of the positive side of Westerners and eager to improve themselves.

In addition to appreciation and interest in learning, the participants' hospitality usually outweighed their hostility to Westerners. They welcomed Westerners – offering help, showing interest and sympathy, and hoping to become friends. They believed that Westerners could be just as trustworthy as their fellow countrymen, and could be part of them, respecting and supporting China and Chinese people. Most important, the participants strived to offer hospitality and build their own positive image, which indicates that they believed Chinese culture could be shared and appreciated, and that Chinese people could be understood and trusted by the Western Other.

In sum, through their interactions with Westerners, the participants were aware of difference while discovering similarity, felt distance while trying to build close relationships, and demanded dignity and respect from Westerners while recognizing many of them were good friends of China. All these phenomena suggest that real contact situations create great opportunities for people to learn from the shock of contrast and differences and to enhance thinking and understanding (Hall, 1959, 1976). These phenomena also support the hypothesis of Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Miller, 2002), which proposes that a deeper association between people from different cultures will decrease bias and change attitudes.

Furthermore, these phenomena imply that in the eyes of the participants, the gap between Western foreigners and the Chinese clearly existed but was not insurmountable. Swinging between exclusion and inclusion, the participants held complex attitudes towards Westerners, full of contradiction. As Papadopoulos (2002) reminds us, the Other and the Self is a unity of contradiction – the Other can be both oppositional and supplemental to the Self.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

The present study examines ordinary Chinese people's private expressions of Otherness towards Westerners. Its findings demonstrate that the participants' Othering practice is full of particular characteristics, presenting an interesting picture of Westerners. The first part of this concluding chapter discusses how these findings contribute to our understanding of the Chinese construction of the Western Other, and how this understanding yields important practical implications. Thereafter it reflects on the strengths and limitations of the study, and follow up by addressing the possibilities for future research.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this study lies in its exploration of an under-researched area. As discussed in Chapter 2, while scholars in political science, Chinese history, and cultural studies are aware of ordinary Chinese people's Othering practice against Westerners, their discussions place great importance on the official/intellectual Occidentalism, and some assume and emphasize its impact on ordinary people. By way of contrary, this study has tried to search for the meanings of ordinary people's Othering practice through carefully listening to their perspectives and passions.

Our first finding is that the participants defined Westerners mainly through their own identified difference from Westerners, the sense of distance, and the perceived attitudes of Westerners towards China. This finding reveals that the emotions evoked in real contact situations, such as shock, surprise, anxiety, frustration, or anger, play a critical role in participants' Othering practice. Related to this, the second finding suggests that the participants, as independent actors, were fully capable of formulating a concept

of Western Other based on their actual experiences. This finding challenges the prevailing belief that only the official and intellectual elites are the actors in constructing the Western Other, and that ordinary people's attitudes and perceptions are a simple reflection of official propaganda and trickle down from social elites' discourses (Dikötter, 1992; Renwick & Cao, 1999; Conceison, 2004; Guo, 2004; Callahan, 2006; Z. Wang, 2008; Ford, 2010). Thus both findings here call for particular attention to and recognition of ordinary people's interests, emotions, and judgments in the process of constructing the Western Other.

The third finding shows that the participants' construction of the Western Other was a fluid process and a product of communicative practice in certain social/cultural contexts. It provides a particular insight into the changing nature of the Western Other as a constructed entity. As the social and contact conditions changed, the Western Other was activated, de-constructed, produced or modified, presenting a complex and controversial figure. This image goes far beyond the mere political and fundamentally negative and fixed construct, arising from the study of the official/intellectual Occidentalism. This finding points to a theoretical implication that constructing the Western Other is essentially an act of intercultural communication, and we can only understand it thoroughly through investigating the process of interactions in various contexts, no matter at which level the interactions take place – between institutions or between individuals.

The last finding reveals that though a negative, exclusive Othering practice did exist, a positive, inclusive Othering practice was also dynamic in the participants' intercultural encounters. Frequency of contact and depth of communication led the participants to demystify Westerners, to deal with them as individual Others, and to

search for common humanity, thus consciously or unconsciously to question the essentialist concept of the Other. This finding supports the experimental conclusions drawn from the research of Intergroup Contact Theory, which posits that the boundary between social groups can be de-constructed through a process called decategorization, recognizing each person as a unique individual instead of a member of a group (Miller, 2002), or a process called recategorization, acknowledging the common identity of people from different groups (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Both involve removing an emphasis on fundamental differences between groups by including the Other in a larger we-group.

In addition, the last finding portrays the participants in a positive Othering practice clearly associated with their desire to understand Westerners. This helps to explain that constructing the Other and understanding the Other are overlapping processes. When constructing the Western Other is no longer a simple narcissistic and imaginative practice of pure subjectivity, it then can be transformed into understanding the Other, which, as L. Zhang (1998) claims, is “an act of always trying to listen to the voice of the other person, to engage that person in a concrete situation, and thus an act with profound moral implications” (p. 6). Thus the positive Othering practice disputes the claim of the Other as a purely negative concept. The dual nature of Othering practice underlines the theoretical importance of a wider understanding of the concept of the Other – a unity of oppositional and complementary, and exclusive and inclusive.

Therefore, the study widens and deepens our view of the Chinese construction of the Western Other. This new understanding has practical implications, particularly at the present time when more and more Chinese people are put in the situation where they

must meet, live and engage with actual Western Others. The findings may raise the Chinese public's awareness of their attitudes and behaviors when interacting with Westerners. Also, as is known, China, as an emerging economy, is becoming an important participant in the global village (Kurlantizick, 2007). As China is getting more connected to the outside world, through trade and economic activity, there is a greater interest in knowing more about China and the Chinese people and culture on the part of Westerners (Fishman, 2005; Lam & Graham, 2007). The findings will help Westerners to understand the Chinese perceptions in the fast-changing society, so to be more sensitive to their perspectives, interests and emotions. Thereby Westerners can develop a basis for managing concrete situations in interacting with the Chinese. Most important, the findings encourage wider and deeper contacts between the Chinese and Westerners. In the practice of organizational communication, this study can be developed into a course module, which may be used in intercultural communication training programs. In addition, through internet media, the module can reach more people, facilitating dialogues between the Chinese and Westerners.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The main strength of this study lies in its empirical investigation of the perspectives of ordinary Chinese individuals. It focuses on how they discursively identify Westerners. Instead of imposing the concept of the Western Other on the participants, the study allowed its meaning to be explored only through the raw data. Another strength is that the primary interest of the study is not to collect general opinions or arguments but to venture deeply into the participants' intercultural experiences, from which to uncover their unconscious, deeper emotions and attitudes. Moreover, the study is able to capture

the changing perceptions and perspectives by putting together a range of idiosyncratic past and present experiences.

There are some limitations of the study. First, triangulation is seen as a useful way to test the findings of qualitative research (Baxter & Babbie 2004). But this study lacks a thorough triangulated check due to shortage of time and difficulty in revisiting the participants. Ideally, it would have conducted a researcher-participant form of triangulation, verifying the data with the participants and assessing whether the themes captured their experiences. In addition, neither did it involve other researchers to check and assess the original recorded data and codes, which are all in Chinese. The second limitation is that the findings of this study, generated by purposive sampling in a small population from a specific region, may not represent the public in the whole of China. Instead, the findings, presented in great detail, bear heuristic value – people must use their own judgment to transfer the findings from one context to other contexts. Third, while the study tried to include participants of different age groups, it was not able to recruit any more senior individuals (50 years old and up) who had had real contact with Westerners. Such senior individuals' perspectives might have further contributed to our understanding of the Chinese Othering practice.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The results of this study could be complemented through further interviews with a focus on a specific demographic, such as senior individuals of 50 years and above in the same area, or individuals living in other cities in different regions of Mainland China. Chinese of 50 years of age and above have more experience of growing up in an isolated China and may have greater familiarity with China's modern history. The possible

differences in their perception of the West would be a good supplement to this research. Similarly, for people who live in small cities or less developed regions, where Westerners are not common, their intercultural experiences may reveal different perspectives. It would also be interesting to compare experiences of people who have direct contact with Westerners with those who have none. Through comparison, we may have a better understanding of the impact of direct contact on changing attitudes.

Furthermore, future research might extend to examine Western expatriates' or visitors' experiences of Otherness in China. Comparing the Chinese perspective with that of Westerners would provide a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon of Chinese Othering practice. Finally, while the present study focuses on the Othering practice towards Westerners, another recurring theme in the data is hard to ignore: The participants unconsciously revealed their Othering practice towards foreigners other than Westerners. Most frequently mentioned were black people and people from a couple of other Asian countries, such as Japan and Korea. For the participants, black people's physical appearance was even more unfamiliar and mysterious. On the contrary, in the eyes of most participants, Japanese and Korean looked like the Chinese, but were culturally very different from the Chinese. Exploring how the Chinese construct various foreign Others may further enhance our understanding of their constructing the Western Other.

### **Concluding thoughts**

With this study coming to the end, each participant's face flashes before my mind showing her/his strong support and interest in this project. Some participants then asked directly: What was this project for? Who would listen to us? Would Westerners be

interested in our thoughts about them? For whoever might read this study, I believe it has carefully recorded and interpreted the participants' thoughts of Westerners. Their individual experiences together reflect a common perspective at a particular time period and in a particular place in China. The findings will make sense to those involved Chinese participants, but also bear a heuristic value: While we continue to be puzzled by the question of the Other, we are gaining better understanding of it when we put ourselves in a real contact situation. Clearly, actual contact may not necessarily reduce bias, and sometimes even generates conflict. However, this is the most effective way for people to see the true face of the Other. People will learn from their experiences, pain or joy, as long as they are willing to engage in genuine communication. While acknowledging the impossibility of completely avoiding imagining or categorizing the Other in any intercultural encounter, I am in agreement with L. Zhang (1998) who asserts, "Once the Other is understood as so real and concrete an existence as my neighbour, then differences between the Self and the Other are put in perspective" ( p. 26).

## Appendix I: Interview Guide\*

### Tee-Up:

- Introduce myself to the participant and try to build the right atmosphere for the interview. Have a few minutes of informal conversation about some topics that might be of interest to the participant based on her/his age, gender or other personal information.
- Describe what the interview will be about: “This interview will take about an hour or so. I am very interested in how people like you think of Westerners. I will have about 10 questions for you. They are basically about your experience with Westerners. I would love to hear your stories and opinions.”
- Ask the participant if s/he has any questions and concerns about the interview.
- Ask the participant to sign an informed consent form and assure her/him the purpose of signing the form is to protect the rights of human participants in the study. Two copies will be prepared. Tell the participant that one copy is for her/him to keep and the other one is for me.
- Verify if the participant had some real direct encounters with Westerners:  
 “Have you ever had direct encounters with Westerners?” [Yes, No]  
 “To participate in this interview, you should have had a few times of face- to- face communication with Westerners.” [Yes, No]  
 If the potential participant is not qualified (either of the answers is No), make sure s/he feels comfortable to leave without actually being interviewed.

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\*The format of this guide is adapted from an interview protocol provided by Baxter & Babbie (2004, pp. 331-332).

- Ask the participant to fill out a sheet regarding her/his background.
- Tell the participant it is necessary for me to use a digital recording machine to record the interview for two reasons. One is that I can pay full attention to what s/he has said. The other is that I can listen to the recording later on to prepare a transcription. Tell the participant that his/her identity will not be released and it will also not be related to any of the information s/he provides.

**Interview questions:**

- Tell me about your first experience with Westerners.
- Tell me about your most recent experience with Westerners.
- Can you give an example of your positive experience with Westerners?
- Have you had any conflict with Westerners? Can you give me an example of your negative experience with them? What would you describe as the cause of this conflict?
- Describe one or more Westerners who have had some impact in your life.
- Which language do you use to communicate with a Westerner? Why do you use that language? What language do you prefer?
- When you work or deal with a Westerner, would you trust and treat him/her as your fellow country man? Can a Westerner be your close friend?
- Have you met a Westerner who speaks fluent Chinese and has lived in China for a long period? Is she or he a part of the community?
- What is the most influential channel that influences your knowledge of Westerners, direct contact, or indirect contact with them, i.e. through news, art forms (novels, movies, dramas, documentaries, paintings, etc.), history books, government policy,

or discussion with colleagues and friends?

- What else can you tell me about your experiences with Westerners?

### Appendix II: Participants Demographic Information

Name	Self-assigned pseudonym	Sex	Ethnic Group	Date

1. How old are you?

- a. 18-30 yrs      b. 31-40 yrs      c. 41-50 yrs      d. 51 yrs and up

2. What is your educational level?

- a. High school      b. Undergraduate      c. Master      d. Ph. D      E. Other

3. What is your annual income level?

- a. Under ¥ 10,000      b. ¥ 10,000 – 20,000      c. ¥ 20,000 – 50,000  
d. ¥ 50,000 – 100,000      e. More than ¥ 100,000

4. Are you originally from Qingdao?

- a. Yes      b. No

**If the answer is No**, please answer the following questions:

You are originally from \_\_\_\_\_. You have been living in Qingdao for \_\_\_\_\_ years.

5. How often do you interact with Westerners?

- a. Occasionally      b. Less than once a week      c. Once or More a week  
e. Everyday

6. Have you traveled or worked in a Western country?

- a. Yes      b. No

**If the answer is Yes**, please answer the following question:

I have traveled or worked in a Western country or \_\_\_\_\_ (days / weeks / months / years).

Appendix III: Table of Themes and Codes

Theme	Sub-theme		Code
Difference	Biological	They look different	Westerners' appearance
			Reactions to the appearance
	Cultural	They eat differently	Descriptions of Western food
			Attitudes towards Western food
			Westerners and Chinese food
		They speak differently	Practicing English with Westerners
			Communicating through English
			Westerners and Chinese Language
	They have different manners	Descriptions of Westerners' manners	
		Attitudes towards Western manners	
	They deal with things differently	Frustration with Western ways of doing things in China	
		Learning Western ways	
	Individual	There is a big variation among Westerners	Personality
Quality			
Westerners as human beings			
Distance	They are foreigners	Definition of foreigners	
		Waiguo	
		Waiguoren (or laowai) as a title	
		Westerners' status	
	They are strangers	Special visitors	
		Important people	
		Honorable guests	
		Vulnerable newcomers	
	They are foreign friends	Barriers in making friend with Westerners	
		Conditions of making friend with Westerners	
		Attitudes towards building friendship with Westerners	
	Defensiveness	They are a special audience	Projecting China's image
Westerners' knowledge of China			
They are offensive		Sense of superiority	
		Criticism of China	
		Reactions to Westerners' negative attitude	
They are supportive		Westerners' love of China	
		Reactions to Westerners' positive attitude	

## Appendix III: Certificate of Ethics Approval

File Number: 05-09-19

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 07/10/2009



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Service de subventions de recherche et déontologie      Research Grants and Ethics Services

### Ethics Approval Notice Social Science and Humanities REB

#### Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Peruvemba	Jaya	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Ying Tang	Birks	Arts / Communication	Student Researcher

**File Number:** 05-09-19

**Type of Project:** Master's Thesis

**Title:** Encounters with Westerners: Understanding Chinese Construction of the Western Other

<u>Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</u>	<u>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</u>	<u>Approval Type</u>
07/10/2009	07/09/2010	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

#### Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A

File Number: 05-09-19

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 07/10/2009



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Service de subventions de recherche et déontologie      Research Grants and Ethics Services

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:  
[http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application\\_dwn.asp](http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp)

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:  
[http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application\\_dwn.asp](http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp)

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5841 or by e-mail at: [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca).

**Signature:**

Sheena Sumarah  
 Assistant to the Director  
 For Barbara Graves, Chair of the  
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