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'2+1' Chinese Business Students' Methods of Case-study Group Discussion in British University Seminars

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate how a group of Chinese business students understood the nature and the purpose of the instruction techniques they were exposed to in Britain, and the attitudes the students, Chinese lecturers in China and British lecturers in Britain held towards seminar discussions. The study also investigated how and to what extent students' prior learning experiences predisposed them to certain attitudes towards seminar discussions.

The student participants in this study undertook Part I of their degree programme at a Chinese university for two years before transferring to Britain to study for one year, graduating with a British Bachelors Degree in International Business. Data was gathered from classroom observations, follow-up and exploratory interviews, and a questionnaire survey to discover more about the students' learning experiences in Part I in China, and from classroom observations, audio-recordings, and follow-up and exploratory interviews to investigate the same group of students' learning experiences in Part II in Britain. A ranking task and interviews were used to identify the preferences of Chinese students, British lecturers, and Chinese lecturers from China in terms of specific group discussion methods. The study identified three discussion methods used by students in British seminars: these have been termed 'spiral', 'exploratory' and 'individual' methods. The Chinese students tended to use the 'spiral' method, repeatedly bringing the discussion back to the question provided by the seminar tutor, whereas the non-Chinese students tended to use the 'exploratory' method, reformulating each other's opinions and building on them by bringing in new information. When discussing within Chinese-only groups, the

Chinese students used the 'individual' method whereby a group leader took responsibility for the outcomes of the discussion and the other members did not build upon each other's contributions. Chinese and non-Chinese students sometimes misunderstood each others' intentions, but were not likely to notice that miscommunication had occurred. The ranking task and the follow-up interviews revealed that the British lecturers preferred the 'exploratory' discussion method, whereas Chinese lecturers from China and Chinese students preferred the 'spiral' method. The British lecturers were found to adopt a constructivist approach to group discussion tasks, seeing them as a means by which students could obtain professional experience. They treated Business and Management knowledge as divergent and 'soft'. Chinese lecturers and students, on the other hand, were found to perceive group discussion as a kind of assessment and were keen to find 'correct' answers to case study problems, treating Business and Management as convergent and hard disciplines which offered judgements on good practice. The Chinese lecturers in Part I of the programme organised group discussion so that students could exchange answers and check their accuracy, and, perhaps because of this, in Part I the students learnt in an exam-oriented way, strategically dividing up their tasks and working individually on their own task portions in order to find an acceptable answer as quickly as possible. These students were found to continue to employ these strategies during group work after they had transferred to the British component of their degree programme.

The study has made a theoretical contribution to knowledge concerning the cultural influences on students' classroom interactional practices. The findings from the study have implications for the teaching of intercultural business communication, and the

enhancement of students' learning experiences in international business programmes, in business English programmes in China, and whilst learning within groups.

Contents

List of abbreviations

B	British student participating in group discussion recording
BLI	British lecturer participating in interviews
BLO	British lecturer participating in classroom observation and follow-up interviews in Britain
BLR	British lecturers participating in the ranking task
C	Chinese student participating in group discussion recording
CBIC	Chinese business lecturer participating in interviews in China
CEIC	Chinese English lecturer participating in interviews in China
CEL	Chinese lecturer on English Listening participating in classroom observation and follow-up interviews
CEW	Chinese lecturer on English Writing participating in classroom observation and follow-up interviews
CLR	Chinese lecturers participating in the ranking task
CM	Chinese lecturer on Management participating in classroom observation and follow-up interviews
CSIC	Chinese student participating in interviews in China
CSIB	Chinese student participating in interviews in Britain
CSIS	Chinese student participating in interviews about seminars
CSPC	Chinese student participating in the group presentation in China
CSR	Chinese students participating in the ranking task
Cy	Greek Cypriot student participating in group discussion recording
ESP	English for specific purposes
F	French student participating in group discussion recording
I	Indian student participating in group discussion recording
M	Master of Business Administration
N	Nigerian student participating in group discussion recording
P	Polish student participating in group discussion recording

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

As business has become more international during the last decades, Chinese and British business education is also undergoing a process of internationalisation (Edwards *et al.* 2010). Many Chinese students want the opportunity to study in the West[1]. Chinese graduates who have received both Chinese and Western higher education are particularly welcomed by employers in China (Liu 2011; Chen 2010; Xu 2010), and many Chinese students choose to study Business and Management subjects in British universities because of their successful internationalisation of Business and Management degree programmes (Edwards *et al.* 2010). In 2010-2011 946,400 Chinese students were pursuing degrees abroad, and 236,600 were studying Business and Management (Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China 2011). In 2010/2011 British universities recruited over 180,000 students learning Business and Management subjects (HESA 2012); this number was considerably higher than those for other subjects (see Figure 1.1).

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[1] In this thesis, 'the West' and 'Western countries' are used to refer to the countries with Anglo-Saxon culture such as Britain, America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. 'Western lecturers' are those with an educational and teaching background in those countries. 'Western' students are those from Western and European countries.

Figure 1. 1 All HE students by subject area and level of study 2010/2011 (HESA 2012)

Table 1.1 summarises the different classes of degrees attained by Chinese, British and international students in Britain (note that statistics were not available for exactly the same years). The table shows that Chinese students in British higher education are less likely than British and other international students to obtain first class or upper-second-class degrees (good degrees). Iannelli and Huang (2013) report that this pattern of poor achievement has remained constant or become worse over time. They also report that Chinese students studying Business and Management are less likely to achieve good degrees than Chinese students studying Computer Science, Engineering, Social Science, Humanities, or Science.

	Chinese students (Innelli & Huang 2013:12)			Erasmus[2] (HEFCE 2009)	All international students (HESA 2012)	British (HESA 2012)
Year	1998/2001	2004/2005	2008/2009	2003/2004	2010/2011	2010/2011
First-class	5	7	7	15	14.4	15.7
Upper-second	24	25	7	60	39.6	50
Lower-second	50	44	43	N/A	34.3	27.9
Third	14	18	21	N/A	11.7	6.4

Table 1. 1 Percentages of first degree qualifiers by class of degree and nationality

The Chinese students' relatively low level of attainment does not necessarily mean that they are less capable than students from other countries, although scholars such as Pilcher *et al*. (2012) point out that Chinese learners in Western countries are no longer just from the 'first-rank' of government scholarship winners but also from many 'other ranks' with a diversified range of academic abilities (2012:308). For example, international partnership two-site degree schemes such as '2+1' and '2+2' schemes enable many students from families who are financially well-placed to study in Western universities. However because only one or two years of the degree is spent in Western universities, students lack detailed familiarity with patterns of teaching and learning. Over the last two decades, many two-site partnerships have been set up to prepare Chinese students to pursue Western degrees. In China the students learn both subject knowledge and English language and study skills so that they can better adjust to study in Western universities and maximise the learning benefit. These programmes require Chinese and Western teaching staff to understand cultures of learning, disciplinary cultures, and the implications of specific pedagogical techniques in the two countries. In order to encourage this type of

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[2] Erasmus which was introduced in 1987 is a European Union's educational exchange programme for Higher Education students, teachers and institutions. It encourages students and staff mobility for work and study, and promotes trans-national co-operation projects among universities across Europe (http://www.britishcouncil.org/erasmus-about-erasmus.htm).

partnership programme, since 2007 Chinese Ministry of Education has founded nine overseas training centres—semi-independent International Schools—in collaboration with prestigious Chinese universities to run two-site degree programmes with Western universities. Many other Chinese universities also establish partnerships with Western universities and run two-site degree programmes to prepare lecturers and students to pursue Western degrees (Liu 2011).

'2+1' programmes have become one of the favourite choices of Chinese students seeking Western degrees. These programmes consist of two parts: Part I in a Chinese university and Part II in a Western university. The study period is much shorter than that of students who apply to Western universities individually (who usually take more than four years to graduate). Usually '2+1' students transfer from a Chinese university to a Western university within three years i.e. spending two years in China and one year abroad, after which they are awarded a Western degree. Investigating such programmes offers an opportunity to track students' learning experience in China and explore how this influences their classroom learning in the West.

It has to be made clear that there are also other types of partnership degree programmes such as '3+1' or '2+2' programmes which lead to the dual award of a Chinese university degree and a foreign university degree. Students on these programmes are not likely to receive special preparation for their study abroad; instead during the two or three years in Chinese universities they study alongside students enrolled on a standard Chinese four-year undergraduate degree programme.

In this light, it would not be surprising if Chinese students in Britain participating in the two-site degrees expect to be taught and assessed in Britain according to approaches which differ from those that are valued by the British education system. This at least is a strong possibility which can be empirically examined.

At the level of differences in behaviour related to 'cultures of learning', studies have revealed that there are differing approaches to teaching and learning. For example Chinese teachers and lecturers give priority to whole-class needs and emphasise the connections of the individuals to the class (Jin & Cortazzi 1998) and usually strictly control the classes (Xie 2010; Mao 2010; Zheng 2008). Chinese students have been found to prefer a 'passive' style of learning (Auken *et al*. 2009; Rodrigues 2005). One of the most common observations is that Chinese students remain silent and refuse to participate in Western classroom discussion (Wen & Clement 2003; Kim 2006; Xie 2010; Zhang & Head 2010; Deng 2010).

The present study aims to contribute to studies in the area of cultural influence on students' learning by examining closely the behaviour of Chinese students of Business and Management in group discussions in British university seminars; more specifically, it examines how observed differences in participation patterns between Chinese and other L1 and L2 English speakers are related to culturally-based conceptions of appropriate behaviour in one specific genre, case-study discussions. Case-study discussions usually focus on business cases and students in groups have to collectively search for an analysis and/or solution to a specific problem in a given case (Zhao 1996; Zheng 2008); they are based on systematic understanding of

managerial situations and the employment of certain analytical tools and models (Lundberg *et al*. 2001). Case studies are a frequently used teaching technique in British business education.

1.2 Research objectives

This study investigates how a group of Chinese '2+1' business undergraduates learnt with their English-speaking peers via small group discussions in British seminars. The study focuses on their group discussion methods at the time when they first arrived in a British university. Although it does not directly focus on Chinese students' cross-cultural adjustments over an extended period of time, it may nevertheless contribute to our understanding of such adjustments.

The study has three research objectives:

Objective 1: to identify how and to what extent students' prior learning experiences may have predisposed them to have certain attitudes towards seminar discussions.

Objective 2: to investigate how Chinese students understand the nature and the purpose of the instruction techniques they are exposed to in Britain.

Objective 3: to investigate students' and lecturers' attitudes towards the use of case-studies and methods of conducting group discussion of case-studies.

1.3 The necessity and significance of the study

1.3.1 Enhancing students' classroom learning experience in internationalised contexts

Education internationalisation helps to develop students' capacity for life-long learning and facilitate personal development through 'cultural synergy' (Jin & Cortazzi 1993; Cortazzi & Jin 2013). Both students and teachers can broaden their horizons by "interchang(ing) learning about cultural perspectives on learning and related concepts and values, from equitable positions" (Cortazzi & Jin 2013:100-101).

In order to improve students' classroom learning experiences in internationalised education, many studies in Western literature appear to focus on the 'cognitive' and 'affective' domains (Hutchinson & Waters 1987; Merriam & Caffarella 1991). Zhao and Bourne (2011), for example, investigated the academic adaptation of international students in Western universities, and identified gaps in academic expectations, and academic identity conflicts. Many other studies have examined the preference of students from different cultural backgrounds for particular teaching pedagogies such as lectures, classroom presentations, individual research projects, group projects, case studies and classroom discussion (Rodrigues 2005; Liu 2008; Wang 2012; Frambach *et al*. 2013). What are missing from the literature are discourse-based studies of interaction in specific learning events. These can reveal orientations towards learning through interaction.

There are a small number of empirical studies written in Chinese about the way

students who will transfer to partner universities in foreign countries learn English in China (Wang & Meng 2009; Wang 2010; Zhang & Jing 2011; Wang 2011). What is missing from this literature is any discussion about teaching and learning in subject classes, and in particular about patterns of interaction in subject classrooms in relation to learning outcomes.

This study intends to bridge these gaps in the literature by investigating Chinese business students' classroom learning behaviour in Chinese and British university classrooms, and attempting to interpret their behaviour from a cultural perspective. It is hoped that the findings will be of use to Chinese and British lecturers involved in the preparation and teaching of Chinese business students and will enable them to enhance students' classroom learning experiences in Britain. The findings should also be of more general value, because "there is an array of knowledge, insights and applications" which can be drawn from Chinese students' classroom learning experiences (Jin & Cortazzi 2011:3).

1.3.2 Improving Business English language teaching in China

This study is significant for Business English language teaching in China, both in terms of content and pedagogy. Business degree programmes provided by Chinese universities usually include classes in general English, which is taught in the first two years, and Business English, which is taught in the third year to prepare students for their professional lives. Training in business English is increasingly demanded by employers in China because of the prevalence of international trade (Xiong & Jie 2008; Peng 2011; Feng 2011; Qian 2011; Hou 2010). However, Chinese business

English lecturers tend not to have had academic or professional experience relating to Business and Management, and are therefore unsure about the way the English language is used in target business situations. Chi (2010) claims that Business English courses in Chinese universities are usually easy to pass, perhaps because Chinese Business English lecturers are unsure how to assess academic and professional language skills (Xiong & Jie 2008; Peng 2011). Business English textbooks in China tend to over-emphasise professional vocabulary and expressions, and to provide only very basic information about business communication and non-verbal communication (Chi 2010). They do not seem to provide tasks and activities relating to relevant occupational or academic situations (West 1994). For this reason exploratory studies, such as the present one, are necessary and important for improving Business English course design and teaching. By focusing on student participants' oral English discourse in a particular genre, the case-study group discussion in an academic context, the present study may be able to contribute to Chinese lecturers' understanding of the purposes and uses of Business English.

1.3.3 Improving the efficiency of learning within groups

Many scholars in Britain regard group work as an effective pedagogy in terms of improving students' attainment and attitudes towards learning (Woods *et al*. 2011), because it is presumed that students 'learn to learn' through discussion (Tan Bee Tin 2003:241; Glaton & Hargreaves 2009:1). It has to be acknowledged, however, that in different cultures of learning (Cortazzi & Jin 1996) there are different views regarding the usefulness of group discussion for learning. Some of these views will be discussed

more fully in Chapter 2. This study therefore aims to contribute to our understanding of the ways in which students from different cultures of learning discuss with each other in an intercultural learning context. It will also investigate cases where participants misunderstand each other's intentions, and will consider how such misunderstandings can be resolved in order to improve mutual learning within groups. The study is relevant to the development of Chinese business students' intercultural learning skills, and may thus indirectly facilitate the process of internationalisation in China.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 explains how this study developed in response to what has been written, in English and Chinese, regarding expected classroom group discussion behaviour, students' and lecturers' attitudes towards group discussion, and students' classroom group discussion behaviour. Chapter 2 establishes a theoretical framework for examining the cultural influences on Chinese students' classroom interactional practices in China and Britain. The chapter also identifies possible factors that might influence case-study group discussion; these are drawn together in a cultural model in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, I explore the specific cultural factors which might influence students' case-study group discussion: contextual factors in higher education, the disciplinary culture of business education, the application of the case method, and learner autonomy. By the end of this chapter five research questions will have been generated.

In Chapter 4, I elaborate on the methods employed in this study and the rationale for selecting these methods. In the first section, I explain the three stages of the research design. In the second section, I explain the data collection procedures of the first two stages. In the third section, I discuss the methodological issues of my research design in terms of the nature of the study, the ethnographic research perspective, the researcher's role, the mixed methods strategy and triangulation.

Chapters 5 to 7 report on my findings, with reference to the three research objectives stated in section 1.2. Chapter 5 discusses how and to what extent students' prior learning experiences may have predisposed students to have certain attitudes towards seminar discussions (the first research objective). The chapter thus explores the topic of the influence of 'culture of learning' (Bourdieu 1984; Maton 2008) as 'habitus' in the light of data relating to students' experience in China and following their exposure to a completely new learning environment in Britain.

Chapter 5 provides an orientation to the discussion in Chapter 6, which is about how Chinese students understand the nature and the purpose of the instruction techniques they are exposed to in Britain (the second research objective). Chapter 6 examines a set of case-study discussions, which are transcribed and coded to yield insights into three patterns of discussion methods and differing underlying assumptions concerning the activity of case-study discussions.

The descriptive analysis of discourse in Chapter 6 opens up further insights explored in detail in Chapter 7, which is concerned with students' and lecturers' attitudes towards group discussion, and in particular, methods of group discussion (the third

research objective).

In the last chapter, I evaluate the whole study in terms of the three research objectives and the five research questions, and providing a conclusive theoretical framework. I also discuss the limitations of the study and its implications for teaching in higher education and teaching intercultural business communication. Some suggestions for improving the teaching of the '2+1' programme and recommendations for follow-up studies are proposed.

Chapter 2 Group discussion in British and Chinese classrooms

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how this study developed in response to what has been written, in English and Chinese, regarding expected classroom group discussion behaviour, students' and lecturers' attitudes towards group discussion, and students' classroom group discussion behaviour. Section 2.2 reviews the three major types of group discussion that occur in British classrooms (section 2.2.1) and explores the type of group discussion British lecturers expect (section 2.2.2) and students' discussion behaviour (section 2.2.3). It then discusses British business lecturers' attitudes towards group discussion (section 2.2.4). Section 2.3 considers Chinese lecturers' expectations regarding discussion behaviour, Chinese students' actual discussion behaviour in Chinese classrooms, and their attitudes towards group discussion in Western classrooms. Underlying this discussion is the assumption that students will mirror the discourse modelled by their teachers/lecturers (Webb *et al*. 2006) because students' knowledge of group discussion is obtained through a continuous process, grounded in experience, through consistent patterns of transaction (Kolb 1984).

The three areas this literature review intends to cover could be roughly mapped onto three learning domains: cognitive, affective and behavioural (Hutchinson & Waters 1987; Merriam & Caffarella 1991). In this chapter, lecturers' and students' preferences and understanding of the usefulness of group discussion for learning purposes are reviewed in terms of their 'attitudes' consisting of both cognitive and

affective dimensions keyed to expected patterns of behaviour.

It has to be pointed out that this part of the literature review is about classroom group discussion in general rather than case-study group discussion. Presumably students' experiences of learning through discussion in other contexts will influence the way they discuss cases when learning through the case method, and vice versa.

2.2 Group discussion in British classrooms

2.2.1 Types of group discussion in British classrooms

Group discussion, especially dialogue-like discussion (Bakhtin 1986; Alexander 2005) is often considered to be an important teaching and learning technique, at least in the Western literature (Rojas-Drummond & Mercer 2004; Goswami & Bryant 2007; Kyriacou & Issitt 2008; Alexander 2005; Hart & Risley 1995; Mercer 2012). The amount and quality of 'dialogue' (as defined by Bakhtin, 1986) that children experience at home (Hart & Risley 1995) and in schools (Mercer 2012) is believed to be one of the best predictors of their eventual academic attainment. Group discussion is a part of the British school curriculum, as recommended, for example, in the Plowden report (1967) (Wegerif *et al.* 2005). There have been worries that learning is suppressed when less able students are placed in groups with more capable students, because this allows the skilled students to do the work ("the free-rider effect"[3], Armstrong 2012:2431). This effect is not, however, the focus of my

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[3] 'Free riding' is initially an economic term referring to the phenomenon that people benefit from resources, goods, benefits, or services without paying for the cost of the benefit (Sloman 2006). However in group discussion in educational contexts, it implies that free-riders do not benefit from the learning opportunities presented because of their unwillingness to participate (Armstrong 2012).

literature review.

Discussion can occur within a variety of learning activities in British schools and universities, including during whole class teaching, student- or teacher-led group work, and one-to-one tutorials (Alexander 2005). In universities, discussion is one of the major activities in seminar classes, where students are expected to negotiate opinions with peers (Trinder 2013) (the British higher education system will be discussed in Chapter 3). One of the teaching objectives of small group discussion is to improve learner autonomy—the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec 1981:3) in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluating learning based on intrinsic motivation (Dickinson 1993). In this sense, discussion is regarded as a student-centred approach which, according to Jones (2007), entails that 'students work in pairs or groups' (ibid:40). This requires motivation, and the ability to learn autonomously. An important purpose of the approach is to develop a 'can-do' attitude in students (ibid:1).

The Western tradition also considers spoken discussion as a vital instrument in human cognition, involving Socratic dialogue—the subtle questioning of students by their teachers and peers—as a means of helping students to develop ideas and opinions (Basturkmen 1995; Kim 2002). In British universities, seminar group discussion takes place in many disciplines, including English language teaching (Rixon 2012; Waring 2002a, 2002b), business and management (Holman 2000), and the natural sciences (Alexopoulou & Driver 1996). The 39 seminar group discussion recordings collected for the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus come

from Medicine, Health Care, Law, Mathematics, Statistics, History and Philosophy[4]. In the BASE seminars, students usually "held the floor … leading discussion, and expressing their own viewpoints or solutions to problems" (Nesi 2001:288).

The British literature on language for teaching and learning often refers to three styles of group discussion: 'disputational talk', 'cumulative talk' and 'exploratory talk' (Fisher 1993; Mercer 1995; 2002; Tan Bee Tin 2003). It has to be pointed out, however, that the three styles of talk cannot neatly and separately code all types of interactive speech in the classroom, but only suggest three embedded "social models of thinking" (Mercer 1995:104). The following review will describe the major linguistic features of the three styles of talk and discuss views towards their usefulness for learning. The British literature discussing 'good' discussion behaviour is often set within secondary rather than tertiary education, probably because school children need more scaffolding from teachers, and because group discussion skills are perceived to be basic academic skills (Mercer 1995). Therefore the real talk excerpts referred to in this section are all between school children. University students' discussion behaviour will be discussed in section 2.2.3.

Participants in 'disputational talk' usually express disagreement and make individualised decisions (Mercer 1995). For example in Excerpt 2.1, two schoolboys are dealing with a piece of mathematics software in turns to try and find the coordinates of a lost object in a grid. The two speakers claim to have won when they hit upon the object in their turn (Wegerif & Mercer 1997). They treat interaction as a

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[4] BASE Corpus holdings spreadsheet, available online at:
http://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directory/art-design/british-academic-spoken-english-corpus-base/contents/

'competitive game' and 'try to win' the game. They are motivated by the "desire to defend or to promote the interests of the speaker" (Wegerif & Mercer 1997:54) rather than "attempting to build on the other's ideas" (Fisher 1993:250). Therefore this type of discussion is not considered to be beneficial for collective learning although the speakers could learn from each other's mistakes (Mercer 1995; Barnes & Todd, 1995; Bennett & Cass 1989; Wegerif & Scrimshaw 1997).

1	Stuart: I'm getting fed up with this. Where's mine, five.
2	Len: You have just done eight fives going away (reads from screen) 'you are getting close', 'getting close'. You have done it, you have just done it, dickhead, you have just done it – look!
3	Stuart: That's not my one.
4	Len: That was. That was mine, that was yours.
5	Stuart: Look I'll prove it.
6	Len: Look I've done that one, you have done that one. No you have done that one.

Excerpt 2. 1 An example of 'disputational talk' from Wegerif and Mercer (1997:54)

In 'cumulative talk', speakers usually "build positively but uncritically on what the other has said" (Mercer 1995:104). They repeat, confirm and elaborate each others' opinion in order to construct a joint understanding (Mercer 1995). For example, in Excerpt 2.2 the two school children confirm and validate each other's statements explicitly, by saying 'that's it', or implicitly, by repeating them (line 11). They ask each other questions (lines 1, 13 and 15) and make suggestions (lines 2 and 10). There is one disagreement (line 14), but they do not challenge each other nor feel the need to justify their opinions. This type of talk does not have a direct effect on learning because the reasoning process is invisible, according to Mercer (1995) and Wegerif and Mercer (1997).

| 1 | Katie: Okay, so right then. What shall we write? |
| 2 | Anne: We can have something like those autograph columns and things like that and items, |

	messages.
3	Katie: Inside these covers. (pause) Our fun-filled …
4	Anne: That's it!
5	Kate: Something…
6	Anne: Something like that!
7	Katie: Yeah.
8	Anne: Inside this fabulous fun-filled covers are – how can we have a fun-filled cover? Let met try.
9	Katie: Inside these (long pause)…
10	Anne: Hah huh (laughs). You should happy on this. Fantabuloso (laughs).
11	Katie: Inside these, inside these fant, inside these fun-filled, no inside these covers these fantastic these brilliant…
12	Anne: Brilliant…
13	Katie: Is it brilliant?
14	Anne: No.
15	Katie: No. Fantast fantabuloso, shall we put that?
16	Anne: Yeah (says something inaudible) fantabluloso.
17	Katie: Fan-tab-u-lo-so.
18	Anne: Loso. Fantabuloso.
19	Katie: Fantabuloso oso.
20	Anne: Fantabuloso ho!

Excerpt 2. 2 An example of cumulative discussion from Mercer (1995:101)

In 'exploratory' talk, speakers engage critically and constructively with each others' ideas. Statements and suggestions are jointly considered via challenging and counter-challenging, justifying, testing hypotheses and offering alternative hypotheses (Mercer 1995). According to Fisher (1993), 'exploratory talk' is a desirable type of talk because it "offers a potential for learning not obvious in the other two types (i.e. 'disputational talk' and 'cumulative talk')" (1993:255) because "knowledge is made more publicly accountable and reasoning is more visible in the talk" (Mercer 1995:104). For example in Excerpt 2.3, line 4, Graham acknowledges Tess's idea and also explains his understanding. In lines 5 and 6, Tess and Suzie disagree with each other. To deal with the disagreement, Graham in line 7 further explains his understanding and seeks agreement (line 7). Graham's behaviour is considered by Mercer (2012) to be critical and constructive.

1	Suzie: D9 now, that's a bit complicated it's got to be
2	Graham: A line like that, a line like that and it ain't got a line with that
3	Tess: It's got to be that one
4	Graham: It's going to be that **don't you think**? **Because** look all the rest have got a line like that and like that, I think it's going to be that **because** …
5	Tess: I think it's number 6
6	Suzie: No I think it's number 1
7	Graham: Wait no, we've got number 6, wait stop, **do you agree** that it's number 1? **Because** look that one there is blank, that one there has got them, that one there has to be number 1, **because** that is the one like that. Yes. **Do you agree**? (Tess nods in agreement)
8	Suzie: D9 number 1 (Suzie writes '1')

Excerpt 2. 3 Three Children doing the Raven's test (Mercer 2012:24) (Emphases are Mercer's)

The relationships between the three types of talk in terms of collaboration is depicted in Figure 2.1, a continuum I have generated from the discussion above. 'Exploratory talk' is usually considered to be a 'good' kind of discussion behaviour in the British literature. It contains visible reasoning which enables ideas to emerge and be negotiated and constructed (Mercer 2000). This function of "idea development" (Basturkmen 2002:240) reflects a kind of cognitive development in which concepts are first learned through social interaction and then internalised (Vygotsky 1978). Thus group discussion in Western university classrooms is expected to be a collective exploration in which opinion "changes as a result of responses" (Margetson 1991:45). 'Disputational talk', on the other hand simply opposes, and therefore is not considered to facilitate collaborative learning (Mercer 1995). Judgements of 'good' discussion behaviour in the British literature are based on Kolb's theory that learning is a holistic knowledge creation process requiring the resolution of conflicts through dialogue (Kolb 1984).

| Invisible reasoning | | Visible reasoning |
| Invisible potential for learning | | Visible potential for learning |

Disputational talk	Cumulative talk	Exploratory talk
Constantly show disagreement; Defend oneself; Promote one's own interest.	Build positively but uncritically on others' contribution; Ask questions and make suggestions; Construct joint understanding.	Critically challenge and counter-challenge each other's contribution; Opinions are jointly considered.

Figure 2. 1 A continuum of styles of talk generated from the literature in terms of speaker behaviour, visibility of reasoning, and potential for learning (Mercer 1995; Wegerif & Mercer 1997)

2.2.2 The 'exploratory' group discussion expected by British lecturers

British teachers and lecturers are encouraged to organise exploratory dialogue-based group discussion in which "thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward" (Mercer & Littleton 2007:66-67) by critically evaluating and constructively building upon other's opinions and providing reasons and alternative ideas or understandings (Dawes *et al.* 2000). The main purpose of such discussion is to promote students' awareness of its use as a tool for thinking (Littleton & Mercer 2013; Reznitskaya *et al.* 2009; Alexander 2005). In Britain there are programmes, such as 'Thinking-together', led by the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge (http://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk/), which train teachers and lecturers to develop students' exploratory discussion skills.

The British literature acknowledges that traits of exploratory dialogue-based talk exist in classroom talk worldwide (Mercer & Littleton 2007; Alexander 2001), although cultures shape teachers' and students' expectations of the ways exploratory talk should be used as a tool for teaching and learning (Mercer & Littleton 2007; Alexander 2001) and the extent to which students are engaged in extended sequences to elicit opinions and discuss errors and misunderstandings (Alexander

2001). For example, Alexander (2001) found that Indian classrooms produced repetitive *I-R* (initiation-response) exchanges during rote learning, although the reasons for this were unclear. Indian teachers have been found to avoid extended dialogue which explicitly requires students to "articulate, reflect upon and modify their own understanding" (Mercer & Littleton 2007:67). British teachers, on the other hand, usually "emphasise participation" which Alexander (2001:8) perceives to be a good thing, even if it is achieved "at the expense of … thematic continuity" (Alexander ibid:8). The question of whether successful students or lecturers make use of extended dialogue in group discussion is not well researched, although acknowledged by the literature to be 'interesting and provocative' (Mercer & Littleton 2007:67), as it potentially contributes to research into the ways that teachers can encourage students to learn through discussion (Mercer & Littleton ibid).

Students and teachers participating in Cambridge University's 'Thinking-together' programme to facilitate 'exploratory talk' are provided with a set of ground-rules for discussion, listed below. The three rules create extended dialogue in exploratory talk.

(1) Questions should be structured so as to provoke thoughtful answers

(2) Answers should provoke further questions and are seen as the building blocks of dialogue rather than its terminal points

(3) Individual teacher-student and student-student exchanges are chained into coherent lines of enquiry rather than left stranded and disconnected

(Alexander 2004:32)

One of the strategies discussed in the literature to encourage students to contribute

to extended dialogue is to offer models in whole-class teaching. Student interaction in small group discussions is then expected to mirror the teachers' behaviour (Webb *et al.* 2006). In Western cultures of learning, asking questions is believed to be a means of developing deeper understanding of learning content (Jin & Cortazzi 1998). To be specific, the teacher asks 'why' questions which encourage students to take extended turns to express their thoughts (Dawes 2007; Alexander 2001). Teachers hold back demonstrations or explanations and ask students to comment on each others' views (Dawes 2007). In such a discussion, students hold the floor for extended periods of time (Murphy *et al.* 2009).

The schoolteacher in Excerpt 2.4 is leading a discussion about energy. The teacher picks up Josh, Emma and Cameron's points (lines 3, 5 and 7), repeats or reformulates them, and returns them back to students in order to elicit further explanation, thus facilitating the students' expression of their reasoning.

1	Teacher: Right, let me repeat what Kevin said. Hands down for a minute, you'll get arm ache. Kevin said the person in a hot place would have more energy than somebody in a cold place, because the sun makes Vitamin D. all right that's one idea. Let's hold that idea in our heads. Josh?
2	Josh: Um I actually think it's the opposite of what Kevin said, because the sun's rays um, its just um that its colder, um so they'd be getting the same energy from the sun, but they wouldn't feel the same effect.
3	Teacher: That's a good point, so they'll get the same energy from the sun but they wont' feel the same effect. Yes?
4	Emma: I'm not sure if this is right but um, say in a place like Africa, they have quite a few trees, and they kind of give us energy; but in this place like the Arctic, they don't have any trees.
5	Teacher: They don't have any trees, we've got lots of ideas coming out.
6	Cameron: It's to do with the atmosphere, in a hotter country there's a more dense atmosphere which takes up some of the um, energy, so they get as much as thinner atmosphere in Antarctic or in the Artic.
7	Teacher: OK so the atmosphere makes a difference. Right, let's see if we can take some of those ideas, and try and come up with an explanation.

Excerpt 2. 4 Talking about energy (2): year 7 (Mercer 2012:16)

In more traditional classroom interaction, on the other hand, teachers ask questions at a low cognitive level designed to funnel students' responses towards a required answer (Mercer 2012; Smith *et al.* 2004). Excerpt 2.5 exemplifies traditional low-cognitive classroom interaction (Mercer 2012) in which the teacher compares the answers of students to his/her prepared content (see lines 7 and 13). This kind of interaction is thought to occur in schools and universities in many countries, for example in Britain (Mercer 2012), the Chinese mainland (Xie 2012) and Hong Kong (Jackson 2001) (The Chinese approach to conducting group discussion will be discussed in Section 2.3.1).

1	Teacher: Do you remember the electric bell?
2	Students: Yes! [in chorus]
3	Teacher: OK! Did any of you notice, did any of you actually hold onto the bell after it had…been working? What did you notice?
4	Suzanne: Vibration
5	Teacher: Well, the arm vibrated, yes. Sound. What else did you notice?
6	Tom: It was loud.
7	Teacher: That's not quite what I'm getting at. Remember the bell. There's the bell [holding up a bell in front of the class]. You did the experiment. If you held onto this bit here where the wires were [indicating], did you notice anything there?
8	Jason: There were sparks there.
9	Teacher: Heat, did you notice some heat?
10	Jason: There were sparks from there.
11	Teacher: There were?
12	Jason: Sparks.
13	Teacher: There were some sparks, yes. Let's just ignore the sparks a minute…some heat. There was a little bit of heat there with that one.

Excerpt 2. 5 Talking about energy (1), year 7 (Mercer 2012:8)

2.2.3 Group discussion behaviour of Western students

Empirical studies examining naturally occurring discussion in Western university seminars have identified the primary goal of discussion participation as "developing understanding" which of course requires "maintaining relationships" as well (Waring

2002b:456) in order to make mutual understanding fruitful (Tracy 1997). The goal of developing understanding is usually realised by developing others' contributions.

Western university students, in seminar discussion, seem likely to develop the prior speaker's contribution by reformulating (see Excerpt 2.6) perhaps signalled by the words 'you are saying/arguing/suggesting' (Waring 2002b:457), extending (see Excerpt 2.7) perhaps signalled by the words 'so…', 'in other words', 'it's like' and 'for example' (Waring 2002b:464), and 'jargonising' (see Excerpt 2.8) by extending an idea to a professional or academic area (Waring 2002b). Excerpts 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 are from Waring's (2002b) study of seminar group discussions by TESOL postgraduates in an American university. In Excerpt 2.6, line 5, Ellen reformulates what Tamar says in line 1 starting with "so you're saying". In line 6, Tamar clearly states her position. According to Waring (2002b), Ellen's behaviour pushes an interpretation of Tamar's position which she might not have originally intended.

1	Tamar: … But she's not talking about um not their proficiency in reading. She's comparing reading proficiency. They were given reading proficiency test, and got the reading proficiency scores.
2	Prof: Yeah.
3	Kelly: Right, but the
4	Tamar: so if we say that
5	Ellen: so you're saying like their oral proficiency is the same?
6	Tamar: I guess language proficiency. …

Excerpt 2. 6 Seminar discussion on TESOL in an American university (Waring 2002b:459, transcription markings removed)

In Excerpt 2.7, Kelly extends Ellen's opinion by using the linguistic form of 'so …' to demonstrate her understanding. In Excerpt 2.8, Tamar uses a technical expression of 'the oral base' to jargonise 'language proficiency', roughly alluded to by Libby, so that they construct a shared understanding.

1	Ellen: Mhm like the sort of the corporate glass ceiling? This was their linguistic ceiling they couldn't rise up to where the schemata was
2	Kelly: so they couldn't use their schemata because they didn't have the proficiency to to say to

Excerpt 2. 7 Seminar discussion on TESOL in an American university (Waring 2002b:465, transcription markings removed)

1	Libby: … that L1 readers begin as L1 speakers whereas L2 readers do not necessarily begin as L2 speakers or have a a great proficiency
2	Tamar: the oral base
3	Libby: yeah yeah yeah

Excerpt 2. 8 Seminar discussion on TESOL in an American university (Waring 2002b:472, transcription markings removed)

Western students also challenge each other using concession tactics (Li & Nesi 2004), as exemplified by Excerpt 2.9 (The utterances preceding line 77 were not provided in the original paper). The discussion topic is 'how much privacy should the mass media allow a celebrity to enjoy, even if their conduct is immoral?'. It seems that in line 77 Jon follows-up a preceding speaker's contribution by referring to actors' hobbies, with Ed's agreement. In line 79, Angie seems to concede what Jon says and initiates a new-subtopic about a film star in order to challenge Jon's opinion (Li & Nesi ibid). Like reformulating, extending and jargonising, concession also helps to develop the discussion topic (Li & Nesi ibid) and facilitates and verbalises exploration (Basturkmen 1995; 2002; Waring 2002a; 2002b; Margetson 1991). According to Waring (2002b), such discussion behaviour is visible evidence of the pursuit, in the academy, of "clarity, precision, specificity, explicitness, thoroughness, synthesis and … rigor" (Waring 2002b:476). This is in contrast to 'disputational talk' (Mercer 1995) which only assesses what the prior speaker has said.

77	Jon: well even an actor might start as a hobby and then eventually
78	Ed: yeah
79	Angie: yeah but if you take a job up as a film star. if you go to the Oscars. you're gonna have to that's another

Excerpt 2. 9 Student – student interaction in Li & Nesi's (2004:20) study

In addition to the micro-level of linguistic forms, there are also studies investigating the linguistic features of natural seminar group discussion at the macro-level: through turn-taking (Micheau & Billmyer 1987) and the IRF (initiation-response-follow-up) structure (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975; Basturkmen 1995; 2002), to show how students make contributions fit into a 'cohesive overall framework' by 'ratifying' or 'giving credit' before refuting others (Micheau & Billmyer 1987:93). In a recent study by Basturkmen (1995; 2002) British business students in a university seminar discussion tended to follow up the preceding utterance by repeating, acknowledging, reformulating, and adding new information so as to bring about new sub-topics. Such behaviour leads to the production of many extended turns of Response as Initiation (*R/I*) and Follow-up as Initiation (*F/I*)[5] (Basturkmen 1995; 2002) which construct a complicated IRF exchange structure of *I-R-F(n)-F/I(n) -R/I(n)* (Basturkmen 1995; 2002). In Excerpt 2.10 the students are discussing how a dry cleaning business could keep its competitive edge in the market. Jo initiates the topic of 'technology' and elicits others' opinions. Lee offers her opinion in line 2. Jo follows up and jargonises his question by referring to 'competitive advantage'. Also in line 5, Pat follows-up Lee's opinion by linking real-life examples to 'technology'. This effort of Pat pushes Lee to the position that technology is not highly important for customers. Through this exchange, the students create 'new knowledge' by using

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[5] *R/I* and *F/I* are optional and extended turns in which a speaker develop the previous turn in order to develop the discussion further; they can be followed by *R* or *R/I* turns. (There is more discussion about the optional and extended turns in Chapter 4.)

their knowledge of the language (Barron 2002:305). On the basis of her analysis Basturkmen argues that English for academic purposes teaching should include the skills of "modifying and refining ideas in light of feedback from interlocutors" (Basturkmen 2002:240).

1	Jo: The previous group seem to have more stress on the technology importance than yourselves didn't you feel that as a factor	I
2	Lee: I think I think it's irrelevant you don't need it you don't buy a TV on the basis of technology I don't think you buy dry cleaning on of the technology I think you need to keep up with it because if they get well down their competitors can use it against them but I don't think it's important as a mechanism for gaining market share or maintaining market share	R
3	Jo: So what's their competitive advantage	F/I
4	Lee: Quality the service they provide and the people they employ how they provide the service at the front end of the business	R
5	Pat: I thought one of the main criteria for customers selecting a dry cleaner was the professional care of their clothes and how stain free they were when they came back so even though the customer may not be interested in technology surely it's critical that these people should be interested in technology	F/I
6	Lee: I didn't say they shouldn't be interested in it I said I didn't think it was something as highly important as something to give out to the customers	R

Excerpt 2. 10 An exchange in a British university seminar on business (Basturkmen 2002:237-238)

Basuturkmen's (1995; 2002) finding that British university students produce many extended turns in seminar discussion is backed up by the findings of Li and Nesi's (2004) study, an experiment with a group of three British students and a group of three Chinese students studying in a British university. The British group discussed in English and the Chinese group in Chinese. The experiment found that the British group produced more turns than the Chinese group, within the same period of time, and was more likely than the Chinese group to acknowledge and reformulate preceding utterances and bring about new sub-topics. On the other hand, the Chinese group tended to criticise the preceding utterance by contributing new information and opinions. The British group's discussion behaviour is exemplified by Excerpts 2.11 from Li and Nesi's (2004) study. The three students are discussing the

privacy the mass media should allow a celebrity to enjoy, the same topic as in Excerpt 2.9. In line 8, Angie proposes her negative opinion about 'writing about the royal family'. Her opinion is developed by Jon to a 'right to privacy' and extended to every walk of life in line 9. This expansion leads to Angie's further distinction between theoretical 'rights' and real-life practice in line 10. Both utterances in lines 9 and 10 are *R/I* turns which are not mere responses to the preceding utterance but add new information and elicit further acknowledgement.

8	Angie: I think it is really bad to write about the royal family and stuff	I
9	Jon: yeah exactly. I think they should have right to privacy. Whatever they do for a living. Whether they be on TV or being a singer or something else	R/I
10	Angie: they do have a right to it. But I think they can't expect it. Because in society like…	R/I

Excerpt 2. 11 Student – student interaction in Li & Nesi's (2004:18) study

The extended turns of *R/I* and *F/I* function to deepen the speakers' mutual understanding of the current sub-topic and to push forward the discussion, because participants constantly contribute new information, opinions, and understanding to the previous utterance (Li & Nesi 2004). This is reminiscent of Waring's study (2002a). Excerpt 2.12 is from Waring's data. Kelly expresses her understanding before she clearly states her problem. This single turn reflects the effort of expressing one's "maximal understanding" and delaying explicit admission of 'noncomprehension' in academic group discussion (Waring 2002a:1727).

> Kelly: and what Hudson is suggesting is that the ceiling isn't a just a linguistic ceiling it's a linguistic and psycho linguistic I think he said ceiling erm and that by by running the study he's trying to prove that I'm having trouble putting this part in words I had it before maybe someone can help me but it's you know the second component ceiling

Excerpt 2. 12 A student's contribution to a graduate seminar on TESOL in an American university (Waring 2002a:1716, transcription markings removed)

The research findings at both the micro- and macro-levels of discussion discourse in Western classrooms support the idea that Western students tend to 'cumulatively' (Mercer 1995:104) extend the discussion process (Murphy *et al.* 2009) in order to collectively explore new knowledge (Mercer & Littleton 2007). The student participants in the research reviewed seemed to be process-oriented (Nunan 1999). Although the findings do not lead to judgements about particular discussion behaviour (Li & Nesi 2004), the fact that extended dialogue repeatedly occurs in these studies suggests the importance of expanded exchange elements in British seminar discussion discourse: participants are responsible for giving a "full linguistic response" (Basturkmen1995:159) to an initiating turn no matter whether it contains questions or not. By 'full linguistic response', Basturkmen means an answer which is not merely an acknowledgement but is also a further effort to formulate or expand, the kind of critical and constructive behaviour required of 'exploratory talk' (Mercer 1995) to "develop understanding" (Waring 2002b:456). It has to be emphasised that it is the Western classroom context in which 'exploratory' group discussion behaviour is identified as being appropriate and beneficial. It remains unclear whether it is regarded in the same light by students and teachers from non-Western cultures of learning.

Western students' seminar discussion discourse, according to the discussion above, could find a position on a continuum of interactive spoken discourse (see Figure 2.2), extending the framework suggested by Cook (1989). Cook (1989) in fact briefly refers to seminar discussion discourse as falling somewhere between formal spoken discourse and conversation. According to the findings of the literature reviewed in

this section, seminar discourse would be located on the right side of the continuum approaching conversation discourse, with the purpose of prolonging the exchange so as to develop further understanding between participants.

2.2.4 Case-study group discussion and British business lecturers' attitudes

Case-study group discussion in British business education refers to a kind of business learning pedagogy in which more than two students work together, centring on a business case. In this context, lecturers become facilitators and coordinators (Boyce 1993; Piotrowski 1982). Case-study group discussion is one of the approaches to a business teaching technique called 'the case method'—a highly interactive pedagogy that involves a collective search for an analysis and/or solution to a specific problem in a given case (Zhao 1996; Zheng 2008) based on systematic understanding of managerial situations and the employment of certain analytical tools and models (Lundberg *et al*. 2001). Scholars such as Foran (1993), Currie and Tempest (2008) and Jackson (2003) recognise the nature of case-study group discussion as exploratory (Mercer & Littleton 2007; Alexander 2001), and perceive it as the heart of the case method because, if students acquire the necessary exploratory discussion skills, it can be an effective way of challenging and negotiating ideas and solutions.

To be specific, group discussion requires both lecturers and students to deal with questions and situations they cannot anticipate (Grosse 1988; Boyd 1991), and to

demonstrate more active and critical learning and more skills in questioning strategies than they would need in order to take part in lectures (Liu 2008; Mercer & Littleton 2007; Jackson 2001; Christensen 1991a; Erskine *et al*. 1998; Welty 1989).

According to British business lecturers, 'good' case-study group discussion involves students in "conversation and collaboration … rather than hierarchy and competition" (Currie & Tempest 2008:49). It has to be pointed out, however, that the usefulness of case-study group discussion is not acknowledged by all British lecturers. According to Kutnick *et al*. (2007) and Galton and Williamson (1992), some lecturers decide to organise group work only when they think the students are becoming bored and need a change (Kutnick *et al*. 2007; Galton & Williamson 1992).

The literature also suggests that not all British students prefer exploration in group discussion. For example, a group of British business students in Rippin *et al*.'s (2002) study reported that they preferred the problems and solutions to be explicitly identified in the materials or by their lecturers. Perhaps this preference accorded with these students' prior learning experiences, which might have attached emphasis to "assessment driven … approaches to learning" (Grisoni 2002:41). The students' response is understandable, as it inevitably takes more effort to discover problems and solutions by oneself. International students may respond to case studies in the same way as the British students in Rippin *et al*.'s (2002) study, and struggle to adapt to the conventions of exploratory group discussion.

British lecturers do not always assess case-study group discussion (Ambrosini *et al*. 2009; Pfeffer & Fong 2002), but assessment-oriented teaching and learning

approaches do exist in British universities, perhaps as a result of increasing class sizes, increased student diversity, and course standardisation (Booth *et al*. 2011). According to Waddell and McChlery (2009), assessment driven approaches create a gap between curricula and assessment. The literature does not suggest that assessment actually impedes learning, but the concern is that if discussion is assessed business students might attach too much emphasis to the final outcome rather than the learning process, as did the students in Rippin *et al.'*s (2002) study.

2.3 Group discussion and Chinese learners

2.3.1 Types of group discussion and the expected discussion behaviour in Chinese classrooms

The Chinese culture of learning emphasises learning through internal dialogue (which is usually referred to as *Fan Xing 反省*) rather than oral interaction with others (Chen 2010; Wang 2010). 'Discussion (讨论)' is not a well-discussed topic in the Chinese literature, although there have been studies of group discussion activities in general English learning, business English, and medicine. Case-study group discussion in business education has not been covered in studies by Chinese lecturers from China, and because of this gap in the literature, the review in this section not only considers business education but also education in a range of other disciplines.

Three types of group discussion for use in classroom teaching and learning are repeatedly described in the Chinese literature: strictly-controlled whole-class discussion (Xie 2010; Mao 2010; Zheng 2008), loosely-controlled small group

discussion (Deng 2010; Chen 1998; Xiong & Jie 2008; Peng 2011; Feng 2011; Qian 2011), and a combination of small group discussion and free debate between two groups (Xiong & Jie 2008; Peng 2011; Feng 2011; Qian 2011; Hou 2010). Discussion activities are usually integrated into whole-class lecturing, the major form of teaching in Chinese universities (Xiong & Jie 2008). A division into lectures and seminars is not very common in Chinese universities (Ji 2004) (the Chinese higher education system will be discussed in Chapter 3).

Whole-classroom discussion happens between a lecturer and an individual student or the whole class; it is not strictly equal to the small group discussion which is the focus of this study, as this often only involves students. I discuss whole-class discussion interaction in my literature review because in China it remains a major teaching technique for various subjects (Zhao *et al*. 2003; Ji 2004) and is repeatedly investigated in empirical research papers and reported in position papers (non-research papers which discuss opinions/positions, and report on personal experiences and reflections). Because whole-class discussion is the dominant form of classroom interactional practice, and is so strongly institutionalised, it is likely that students' small group discussion behaviour would mirror the interaction in whole-class discussion in certain key respects (Webb *et al*. 2006).

In whole-class discussion, Chinese lecturers tend to make judgements about whether students have reproduced the textbook content correctly (see Excerpt 2.13) and the relevance of student-initiated ideas to the teaching agenda (see Excerpt 2.14). This behaviour has been identified in empirical studies, for example Xie (2010), and is

reported repeatedly in position papers (Mao 2010; Zheng 2008). In Excerpt 2.13 from Xie (2010), for example, the lecturer is leading a discussion about 'who is the leader in your family', in preparation for reading a text 'Chinese Women – Yesterday and Today'. In lines 3 and 5, student Xie proposes him/herself as the leader in the family. The lecturer turns down Xie's answer (line 6) because it is not provided in the content of the text. In line 8, the lecturer accepts and reformulates Wang's answer that his/her parents discuss everything together.

1	Lecturer: And … Now please tell me and I also want to know in your family who is the leader.
2	SS: Father. Mother.
3	Xie: Me
4	Lecturer: You. Xie, please tell me in your family who is the leader.
5	Xie: Wo (me).
6	Lecturer: Now, sit down please because because your answer is far from my imagination and also expectation. And now Wang.
7	Wang: Generally if if they need something … TA MEN SHANGLIANG ZHE BAN (they make a joint decision).
8	Lecturer: Generally speaking, or in general, in your family there are two leaders. And all the time they can make a good discussion with each other about your family affairs. Right? Such as your family business, or the property, or which university you choose, right? Which city you will settle down, right? So your parents make a good decision or discussion.
9	Wang: Yeah.

Excerpt 2. 13 lecturer-student interaction in Xie's (2010:14-15) study (transcription markings removed, annotation added)

In Excerpt 2.14 (from Xie 2010), the lecturer decides upon the relevance of student-initiated ideas to her teaching agenda. The students attempt to make sense of the expression '8,888 times' in a text. In line 8, for example, Hasi contributes number '6' as a lucky number in Chinese culture and also expands on this idea in relation to fish. However, in line 9, the lecturer turns down Hasi's idea of auspicious wishes because it 'has nothing to do with figures' and therefore is off-topic (Xie 2010). This is in contrast to practice in British classrooms, where teachers often choose "to

engage students at the expense of thematic continuity" (Alexander 2005:8).

1	Lecturer: Look here "I suggest you take advantage of living in China and go to lectures, movies, and plays '8,888 times'".
2	An unidentified student: Does she really mean that he should practise 8,888 times?
3	Li: No, just made a joke.
4	Lecturer: Well, it's a kind of exaggeration. But why 8,888?
5	Li: Just mean that they are so many.
6	Lecturer: Why not 9,999? But why 8?
7	Li: 8 is a good number. 8 is a good number. Or we say a lucky number. OK?
8	Hasi: 6 is also lucky. 6. Well in Chinese 6, 8 and 9 they are all lucky numbers. OK. Fish is also lucky. NIAN NIAN YOU YU (there is a surplus every year).
9	Lecturer: Um but is has nothing to do with figures.

Excerpt 2. 14 lecturer-student interaction in Xie's (2010:17-18) study (transcription markings removed, annotation added)

In whole-class discussion, Chinese lecturers are also apt to take over the ideas put forward by students, elaborate on them (see line 8, Excerpt 2.15 for example), and judge their correctness according to the teaching content (Xie 2010). Students' complete expressions of their own opinions are not encouraged, as many Chinese position papers report (Wang 2010; Deng 2010; Luo 2010; Zheng 2007; Ji 2006). For example, in Excerpt 2.15 (from Xie 2010), the lecturer seeks opinions about the bus system in China (line 1). The question she asked sounds as if it is open-ended. However, in line 2, she rejects a student's opinion that the Chinese bus system is complicated and proposes another opinion that the Chinese bus system is convenient because this accords with the view expressed in the text she is using with the students (Xie 2010).

1	Lecturer: and what about the bus system in China?
2	An unidentified student: Complicated.
3	Lecturer: Complicated? Convenient.
4	All students: Yes
5	Hasi: Yes, convenient than America.

| 6 | Lecturer: Yes. So wherever you go you can take buses. Right? |

Excerpt 2. 15 lecturer-student interaction in Xie's (2010:16) study (transcription markings removed, annotation added)

In Jin and Cortazzi's empirical study (1998), students' contributions are also judged and corrected in Chinese school classrooms. The Chinese school teachers in Jin and Cortazzi's study offered judgements immediately, directly and explicitly by saying "No, that's wrong" (Jin & Cortazzi 1998:745). Jin and Cortazzi identified a correction cycle in which Chinese school teachers repeatedly used the *I-R-F* exchange by turning to different students asking: "Is he right?", "What is the mistake? Can you correct it?", "Can you expand on what she said?", "Make a comment on the validity of the last statement." (1998:745). In such a cycle, students become practised in listening to the previous speaker very carefully, predicting the teacher's questions, evaluating the preceding speaker's opinion, and repeating the teacher's comments (Jin & Cortazzi 1998).

According to the empirical studies reported in the literature, the tightly-controlled teacher-student interaction in Chinese classrooms consists of complicated IRF structures in which the students' contributions are picked up and processed in extended turns. The expectation of this seems to prompt students to reproduce the teaching and learning content correctly (Mao 2010; Zheng 2008) rather than to become engaged in prolonged exchanges to elicit opinions and discuss misunderstandings (Alexander 2001). This type of talk is different from the 'exploratory talk' discussed in the British literature in which students' contributions are jointly considered via challenge and counter-challenge, justifications, the testing of hypotheses and the offering of alternative hypotheses (Mercer 1995). What is not

evidenced in Chinese classrooms is voluntary, critical and constructive interaction between students.

2.3.2 The expected discussion behaviour in Chinese classrooms

It is possible that the tightly-controlled types of classroom interaction identified by, for example, Xie's (2010) empirical study result in contributions from a greater number of students, especially in cases where students are reluctant to talk (Wen & Clement 2003) or have low levels of autonomy (Gieve & Clark 2005). Moreover, some Chinese teachers and lecturers choose to adopt this 'lecturing' approach, to classroom interaction, because they feel constrained by the small number of teaching hours allocated to their modules (Mao 2010; Zheng 2008) (this may be a mistaken assumption, because it is not necessarily true that engaging students in prolonged exchanges actually requires more time, as Brandes and Ginnis (1996) point out). However, some Chinese position papers (e.g. Rao 2002) do propose as useful a dialogue-based teaching and learning approach in which lecturers incorporate the students' replies into further questions and hand over the control of classroom interaction to students. Lecturers such as Xie (2010) and Rao (2002) think that this approach ensures a safe interactive atmosphere by creating a free sharing environment where any contributions from students are accepted; in this environment, students are expected to develop their autonomy automatically (Rao 2002). This is different from British lecturers' usage of group discussion to improve learner autonomy by encouraging students to negotiate opinions with peers (a further discussion of learner autonomy in the Chinese context will be given in

Chapter 3).

It would appear that the Chinese lecturers in Xie's (2010) study attach more importance to the lecturer's role in student group discussion than most British lecturers do, but a teaching approach in which students are led by the teacher or lecturer does not necessarily exclude student-centredness, and in cases where students are not autonomous or sufficiently confident, there is always a balance to strike between letting students have a share of participation via teacher-led activities and leading the students towards whatever is necessary to achieve student centredness (Jones 2007). Xie (2010) believes that the dialogue-based teaching approach is student-centred because lecturers can identify "where students are, what they know, and how they have come to that understanding" (Xie ibid:19).

Many Chinese business English lecturers use small group discussion to simulate professional communication activities (Xiong & Jie 2008; Peng 2011; Feng 2011; Qian 2011; Hou 2010). A salient example of such activities are international business negotiations and meetings, major professional business practices for Chinese companies, requiring skills in English for Specific Purposes (Li 2008; Zhao *et al*. 203). For example, Hou's position paper (2010) reported his organisation of a 30-minute case-study group discussion, with a student leader for each group. The discussion consisted of three steps: (1) 15 minutes of small group discussion about one sub-topic to develop arguments for the whole class discussion; (2) 10 minutes of idea exchange within groups, where students were not allowed to raise questions but were expected to take notes; (3) 15 minutes of free discussion and debate within

groups. Hou (2010) explains that by following these three steps he intended to encourage students to defend their position and refute the ideas of others - a kind of 'disputational talk' style (Mercer 1995; Wegerif & Mercer 1997). It remains unclear, however, how Hou's (2010) students actually discussed when they were in their groups.

Accounts by a number of Chinese English lecturers (e.g. Hou 2010; Deng 2010) imply an English language teaching strategy that encourages students with low levels of English to stick to their own answers in discussion, and not adapt their arguments in response to others. That is to say, the discussion process that they encourage is not divergent because the students are not encouraged to negotiate opinions. The teaching approach of encouraging students to defend their position and refute the ideas of others conveys a message to students that business negotiation is competitive. In this context, it is worth noting that while this is the prevailing perception held by outsiders, empirical studies of professional business discourse and business negotiations in Western contexts (Spencer-Oatey 2000; Louhiala-Salminen 2002; Vuorela 2005; Fells 2010; Bhatia & Bremner 2012) find that in fact these professional discourses are generally guided by rapport management and a general principle of creating and maintaining lasting relationships. This suggests that a teaching approach based exclusively on a 'competition' model of discourse would not prepare Chinese students for the real demands of discourse in international business.

A second area where cultural expectations are seen to play a determining role is in the structuring of discussions. Chinese lecturers tend to nominate group leaders who

assume the role of the lecturer, assigning tasks to members, controlling the sequence of speakers by nomination, monitoring progress, and facilitating information synthesis (Peng 2011; Deng 2010). Some lecturers adopt the strategy of sole-leadership in a hierarchical group structure (e.g. Peng 2011) in which one student with good academic performance is nominated to lead the group discussion and take responsibility for orally reporting the discussion result to the lecturer. Some other lecturers (e.g. Hou 2010) adopt the strategy of team-leadership in which every student has one or two chances to lead group discussion during the term; the leadership rotates, as may happen in the British business world. Through this rotation every student is supposed to have the chance to experience the self-taught method of learning through teaching him/herself and others. This conduct is indicative of the hierarchical structure of groups within professional business organisations in China. Once a leader has been chosen, he/she has the power to control the group members and takes responsibility for decisions. It remains unclear in the literature how student leaders control the small group discussion interaction; for example, whether they imitate their lecturers' whole-class discussion leading behaviour by requiring group members to reproduce correctly the textbook content, or whether they judge the relevance of the ideas other students propose.

2.3.3 Chinese students' discussion behaviour and perception of 'good' discussion

Empirical studies suggest that Chinese students' small group discussion behaviour in Chinese classrooms mirrors the behaviour and the expectations communicated by their Chinese teachers and lecturers (Webb *et al*. 2006). Chen and Hird (2006)

compared the discussion behaviour of Chinese students in two group discussion sessions (with a time interval of six months) during English classes in a Chinese university, and investigated the participants' perceptions of 'good' discussion behaviour. The discussion questions were from a textbook. The students perceived 'good' small group discussion behaviour as reproducing the textbook content and examples to support their opinions. One student in the study thought she had given a better performance in the first round discussion and attributed this to the detailed nature of the examples provided by the textbook (Chen & Hird ibid). She said in an interview: "…half a year ago … I learned a lot about the topic and I could use many of them in my discussion. But at the second time … I also read the text several times but I still found it was difficult to use the ideas. … I think there are also many examples in the text but they are not in detail. In each example, there are only several sentences. And when I tried to remember what I have learned and say it in my own words, I had less to say" (Chen & Hird ibid:98). In a study conducted by Frambach *et al*. (2013), a group of Hong Kong students at a Hong Kong university was also found to reproduce textbook content in their discussions. The students explained in interviews that when they were first engaged in small group discussion in the classroom they tended to repeat factual knowledge from the lecturers, and depended on lecturers as a 'source of knowledge' (Frambach *et al.* ibid:13). Their lecturers were found to conduct tightly-controlled whole-class discussion, and Frambach *et al.* suggest that this was perhaps the reason why the students mirrored their lecturers' behaviour.

In contrast to this, some of the Chinese students in Chen and Hird's (2006) study reported that logically connecting the ideas of the others in a spontaneous and

natural way was 'good' discussion behaviour, although opinions varied on the exact nature of this 'natural' communication. For example, one student thought good discussion behaviour was "feeling free to talk" and logically 'connect' the ideas of the others rather than "referring to a prepared draft" (Chen & Hird:99-100). Another student seemed to perceive a good discussion as having an active 'atmosphere' in which group members were 'braver' and talked in a "natural way" (ibid:100). The students disliked the discussion practice of "just thinking about what to say next and … (paying) little attention to what others said" (Chen & Hird:100). However, It is unclear what the students meant when they said that they logically 'connected' to the ideas of the others (ibid:100). It was possible that they understood 'collaboration' to mean 'connecting' the content of the various contributions regardless of the dynamics of discussion. If this interpretation is correct, Chinese students' perceptions of 'good' discussion behaviour is reminiscent of the way Chinese lecturers behave when they judge the relevance of student-initiated ideas in terms of how well it matches the teaching content.

The Chinese business students in Gram *et al*.'s (2013) study were found to perceive the skill of 'convincing' as beneficial; these students thought they "should learn to respect others' ideas" but "insist on … (their) own opinion(s) if …(…)…… sure it would be helpful to … (their) project" (ibid:766). This recalls the behaviour of the Chinese students in Li and Nesi's (2004) group discussion experiment who criticised the preceding speaker's opinion, as Excerpt 2.16 exemplifies.

| 1 | Sun: celebrity actor actress. I think as a celebrity indeed it's meaningless to talk about privacy. a celebrity like an actor or actress. it is a full time profession. that is to say whenever you are on or off the stage you are in such a role. what's more the | I |

	money you receive is just for your sacrifice that you've made for this role. it's the payment for this kind of labor you've made. you yourself is just for the mass media to watch. your performance on the stage is for other people to watch other people get pleasure from watching. your life off the stage has inevitably been dedicated to the public. I think so that the celebrity. before being a celebrity you should have had this kind of mental preparation. private life is impossible I mean one hundred percent	
2	Zhang: no Sun Jue what you have said may be true. as a celebrity just can't escape from this situation. but it doesn't mean that this kind of thing must be right. a celebrity. we take someone like a footballer as an example. he as a celebrity he is famous because he is a footballer not because he. say. dates girls in the bar or for sort of immoral reasons which makes him famous. you.	R/I

Excerpt 2. 16 Student – student interaction in the study of Li and Nesi (2004:16-17, translated into English in the original paper)

In line 1, a Chinese student, Sun, initiates the group discussion by offering the comment that a celebrity has to be prepared that his/her private life may be dedicated to the public. In line 2, Zhang directly objects to Sun's idea by saying 'No' and evaluates Sun's idea by offering an example. Such discussion behaviour might be perceived by the Chinese students as being active and possibly 'good' because Li and Nesi encouraged them to actively participate in their discussion. One Chinese student in Li and Nesi's (2004) study complained in the interview that another student made most of the points he wanted to say before he had had a chance to mention them himself (ibid:25). Similarly, when they found their performance would be assessed, the Hong Kong students in Frambach *et al*.'s (2013) study also overcame their anxiety about contributing to group discussions and "became keen to participate, debate, and challenge their partners" (ibid:15).

The studies of Li and Nesi (2004) and Frambach *et al*. (2013) looked at Chinese students' discussion behaviour in Western or Hong Kong classrooms. The students' learning experiences with group discussion in Chinese universities remain unclear, because of a lack of studies in this area. Nevertheless, studies of Chinese educational

practices taken in conjunction with studies of Chinese students studying in the West permit certain tentative generalisations to be made.

It seems clear that Chinese students' discussion behaviour is influenced by their previous educational experience in China. For example, a group of Chinese business students in Wang's (2012) study said that when they were initially involved in British seminar group discussion they communicated indirectly because of their concerns about "being laughed at when making a wrong or valueless statement" which would make the discussion off-topic, and therefore "waste(d) other students' time" (ibid:527). This seems to relate to the way, according to Zhao *et al*. (2003), Chinese teachers and lecturers make overt assessments about the value and the quantity of students' contributions to discussion. Even though assessment procedures were not described in the study by Frambach *et al.* (2013), their influence was explicitly expressed by students. For example one student said "(we) are just fighting to talk, because the more you talk supposedly the higher the mark you get" (Frambach *et al*. ibid:15).

Chinese students' competitive discussion behaviour may also be attributed to their family's expectations and the social culture, as Chinese lecturers such as Li (2008), Li (2005) and Ma (2009) have pointed out. A Hong Kong student in Frambach *et al*.'s (2013) study explicitly explained that it was a general condition that Hong Kong students, teachers and parents "stress on … grades, exam results and performance" (Frambach *et al*. ibid:15). Learning in a competitive environment does encourage students to "work harder" but it does not encourage them to collaborate with others

(Gram *et al*. 2013:767-768).

A problem that is repeatedly reported in the Chinese literature is that some students refuse to participate in group discussion and disregard other group members' contributions (Deng 2010; Xiong & Jie 2008; Peng 2011), even if the lecturers had explained the application and organised tightly-controlled whole-class discussion as a lead-in activity before the discussion. Detail is lacking on the type of discussion the students refuse to participate in, or on how the group members actually interact with each other; whether the group contains mixed ability students; or whether the group discussion is assessed. The problem may be due to the fact that the Chinese education system and business education in China have been undergoing a process of change (Zhao *et al*. 2003; Ji 2004) and both lecturers and students are still not used to the group discussion method. This unfamiliarity with group discussion is reminiscent of the situation reported by Jackson (2001), who found that the Hong Kong students in her study had developed a comfortable habit of passive learning in the Hong Kong school system, and consequently did not consider questions for the whole class as invitations to speak.

Chinese students studying in Britain are expected to be able to discuss in an exploratory way, to deepen mutual understanding of the current sub-topic (Li & Nesi 2004) in the manner recommended by Mercer (2000), Margetson (1991), Reznitskaya *et al*. (2009), Littleton & Mercer (2013), Dawes (2007), Alexander (2001) and Murphy *et al*. (2009). Excerpt 2.17 indicates the exploratory discussion approach of three Chinese students studying in a British university, reported by Li & Nesi (2004). The

complete exchange is not offered in the original paper. In line 6, Lu argues that

celebrities do not intend to make paparazzi news because most of the money they

make from the news is earned by the TV station. Sun agrees with Lu's opinion. Lu

follows up Sun's opinion and in line 9 proposes another reason why celebrities do not

intend this (paparazzi news has negative effects on celebrities). Lu's utterance in line

9 functions as an initiation (*F/I* turn) eliciting the other participants'

acknowledgement. It is worth noting that in another part of this interaction, the

same Chinese students were also found to discuss competitively (see Excerpt 2.16).

6	Lu: but this money this money has nothing to do with these celebrities celebrities themselves. This money is kind of going into the wallet of the TV station. It doesn't mean it doesn't mean that to get this sum of money celebrities should give give their private life to the TV station and show it to others through the TV station	F/I
7	Zhang: he	R
8	Sun: although he is not willing to but he can't	F
9	Lu: however this kind of paparazzi news generally speaking won't have much positive effect on the celebrity but will have many negative effects	F/I

Excerpt 2. 17 Student – student interaction in the study by Li and Nesi (2004:20, translated into English in the original paper)

To summarise this section, Chinese students have been reported to perceive a 'good'

group discussion as reproducing the textbook content and criticising others' opinions,

probably because group discussion is often assessed in Chinese classrooms (Chen &

Hird 2006; Frambach *et al*. 2013). However there is still a lack of research into how

they interact in mixed group discussions containing non-Chinese students in British

university seminars, and how they interpret these interactions. The need to fill this

research gap is of particular interest to this study.

2.3.4 Chinese students' attitudes towards group discussion in Western learning contexts

Studies of Chinese students' adjustment to British seminar group discussions (Gieve & Clark 2005; Liu 2008; Wang 2012; Gram *et al*. 2013) have found that Chinese students gradually recognise the value of group discussion as a learning technique (Liu 2008; Gram *et al*. 2013). Liu (2008), a lecturer in marketing in a British university, investigated three groups of Chinese postgraduates (in 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006) to discover their perceptions of business teaching and learning methods (formal lectures, academic reading, case-study group discussion, group presentations, brain storming and role play). The data-gathering methods were a questionnaire survey and two focus group discussions. All the students had obtained first degrees in China or Taiwan. The survey asked participants to rate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning methods on a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 being very ineffective and 5 very effective. The students gave higher than expected ratings for case-study group discussion (37.5% rated it as very effective and 39.58% as effective). According to the students, "(case-study group discussion) really helps to illustrate the main aspect of the module … to link theories with real life situations … (and to) develop an eye for detail as well as logical thinking" and therefore inspired their learning (Liu ibid:38). The students thought case-study group discussion "offer(ed) a very good opportunity … to share views and exchange opinions"; "the method could help cultivate team spirit by giving to and taking from others" (Liu ibid:37). Another group of Chinese students in Gram *et al*.'s (2013) study also held a positive attitude towards case-study group discussion because the experience of participating enabled them to

recognise a business learning process. Chinese students in British seminar group discussions have been found to recognise that there is "no right or wrong answer" (Wang 2012:259) and that the learning process can lead to 'innovation' (Gram *et al.* 2013:769). The Chinese students in a British university investigated by Gieve and Clark (2005) practised English by seizing opportunities to interact orally in groups.

Of course, some Chinese students in British universities rate case-study group discussion as ineffective. Liu (2008:37) found that some Chinese group members were very "reluctant … to contribute". The students in Liu's study reported that two major causes of this reluctance were their lack of proficiency in English, and their fears "about saying the wrong things" (Liu ibid:37). According to Esteban and Cañado (2004), "case studies are generally aimed at students with at least an upper-intermediate proficiency in the language" (ibid:138).

Studies such as Sham (2001) and Cathcart *et al.* (2006) have indicated that some Chinese students have a different view of discussion to that of British lecturers who expect collaborative learning (Mercer 1995). For example, in Cathcart *et al.*'s (2006) study a group of Chinese students expressed appreciation of group discussion because they expected 'friendships' (ibid:15) which would lead to "help from … (Western) group mates" (ibid:16). The Chinese business students in Cathcart *et al.*'s (ibid) study emphasised the importance of a group leader, ideally a British student, to guide them. It was unclear whether the Chinese business students were already familiar with group discussion methods, but empirical studies (e.g. Woodrow & Sham 2001) report that Chinese learners are not usually taught to discuss in groups in

Chinese schools. The Chinese pupils in Jin and Cortazzi's study (1998) doubted the usefulness of pair discussion when Western teachers used pair work with them. The students asked each other "Why does the teacher want us to talk together? She can't listen to all of us talking at once. How can I learn by talking to my friend? He only knows what I know. I may learn his mistakes. I want to listen to the teacher – she knows more" (Jin & Cortazzi ibid:744). In Woodrow and Sham's (2001) survey, a group of Chinese pupils (aged between 13 to 16) from China studying in a British school used the words 'embarrassed', 'nervous' and 'feeling ill' to describe their feeling when a teacher asked them to discuss in a group (Woodrow & Sham ibid:391). On the other hand, their British peers reported feeling 'quite relaxed', 'alright', 'fine', 'happy' about group discussion (Woodrow & Sham ibid:391).

Compared to Western students, Chinese students seem to be less likely to rate classroom discussion techniques as important after being exposed to Western university seminars for a certain period of time (Auken *et al*. 2009; Rodrigues 2005). In Auken *et al*.'s (2009) study, a group of Chinese student participants who studied in China with an American curriculum and American lecturers perceived the fundamental business skills of "technical preparation, ability to identify a business problem, and ability to develop solutions to business problems" to be more important than their sister students in America (Auken *et al*. ibid:222). The Chinese students attached less importance to group discussion than the American students did (Auken *et al*. ibid:222). It remained unclear in the study how the American lecturers used the group discussion approach with the Chinese and American students and how the students studied through this approach.

Similar results were obtained by Rodrigues (2005) who surveyed the preferences for ten teaching and learning techniques of a group of Chinese and a group of American business students from an American university. Rodrigues (ibid) categorised case studies, individual research projects, group projects and classroom discussion as active techniques and lectures, reading textbooks, guest speakers' lectures, video shows in class, classroom student presentations and computerised assignments as passive techniques. In the survey, students were asked to rate the importance of the techniques on a Likert scale of 5 (1=not important, 5=very important). The results suggested that Chinese students attached less importance to classroom discussion than the American students, although differences were not significant (Rodrigues ibid). The Chinese students' average rating for classroom discussion was 2.90, while the American students' average rating was 3.09 (Rodrigues ibid).

The literature suggests that Chinese students' perceptions of the teacher's role influence their attitude towards group discussion. A group of Chinese university students in Turner's (2006) study was found to attach much importance to teachers' support in their study. One student reported that "there (is) no bad student, just a bad teacher because every student … (can) learn. … They didn't learn … (because) the teacher (had) some problems, they (could) not teach the student well" (Turner ibid:8). The students thought tutors in China "help(ed) them greatly" because they told them "what they should do and how to do it" whereas they had to do "a kind of self-teaching" in Britain because British lecturers "only gave … guidance" (Turner ibid:7).

The understanding of the nature of Business and Management also seems to influence Chinese students' attitudes towards group discussion as a business learning approach. After studying with Western lecturers on a United Nations Development Programme, a group of Chinese managers perceived group discussion to be "a waste of time" (Branine 2005:463). They preferred topics that required the use of systematic or step-by-step methods to "the expression of individual opinions", and they did not think that developing people-oriented and problem-solving issues "was … within the remit of their managerial roles" (ibid:462). Management development was not seen to be an 'achievement' in their career development (ibid:467). Schneider's and De Meyer's (1991) study also found that, in case studies, a group of Far East Asian MBA students recommended massive investment in computer technology as a solution to business and management problems. According to Schneider and De Meyer, the students relied more heavily on "technology, rules and rituals" than students from Western countries. Chapter 3 will further discuss Chinese learners' understanding of the nature of Business and Management.

To sum up this section, Chinese students' attitudes towards group discussion in Western business learning contexts is a complicated issue, and the literature contains some contradictory findings: some Chinese students have been found to be positive about group discussion and others have been found to be negative about it. A literature gap which is of interest to this study concerns the styles of discussion interaction the students hold positive/negative attitudes towards. Previous contradictory findings might be due to the influence of their learning experiences in

China, their perception of the teacher's role, their understanding of the nature of business and management as a discipline, and individual differences. The relevance of this to the present study is clear; attitudes towards group discussion as a learning tool, which may have diverse origins, need to be borne in mind as factors which would influence Chinese students' group discussion methods in Western university seminars.

2.4 Conclusion

2.4.1 Summary

Studies of classroom group discussion in Britain and in China suggest that the same instruction tool can often be employed in rather different approaches, leading to different learning processes. In British case-study group discussion, students are expected to move from understanding factual information to exploring cases and critically inquiring into the possible consequences of the proposed actions. Students have to reflect, modify and refine their ideas in light of feedback from other group members. The eventual learning outcome of group discussion is to improve learner autonomy. Western students seem to have a 'process-oriented' perception of group discussion. They tend to acknowledge each other's ideas to expand mutual understanding. In Chinese group discussion, on the other hand, students are encouraged to stick to their own answers in discussion without adapting their arguments in response to others. Importance is attached to the ability to clearly express one's opinion and find the 'correct' answer. Chinese students seem to have a 'goal-oriented' perception of group discussion. They convince each other about their

own opinions without building on each other's contribution.

Overall, Chinese business students have rather different prior learning experiences and conceptions of what activities promote learning, suggesting that it might be difficult for them to adjust to the requirements of British university business programmes.

An area which remains under-researched in the literature is the extent to which, after transferring to Western universities, Chinese students continue to discuss in the manner they have been used to, or whether they change their discussion method. This study will consider whether Chinese students avoid producing extended dialogue in British group discussion, and whether there is any miscomprehension between Chinese and non-Chinese students. These questions are acknowledged in the literature to be 'interesting and provocative' (Mercer & Littleton 2007:67), with implications for the ways that teachers can encourage students to learn through discussion (Mercer & Littleton ibid).

2.4.2 A theoretical framework of cultural influence of students' classroom interactional practices in China and Britain

The literature review in Chapter 2 indicates that attitudes to knowledge and to learning, disciplinary culture, and expectations of how learning is demonstrated form a culture of learning. All three factors shape classroom interactional practices in China. These factors are maintained as part of the 'dispositions' or 'tendencies' (Bourdieu 1994; Maton 2008) in the minds of students translated to a completely

new learning environment, as illustrated by Figure 2.3.

A culture of learning in China
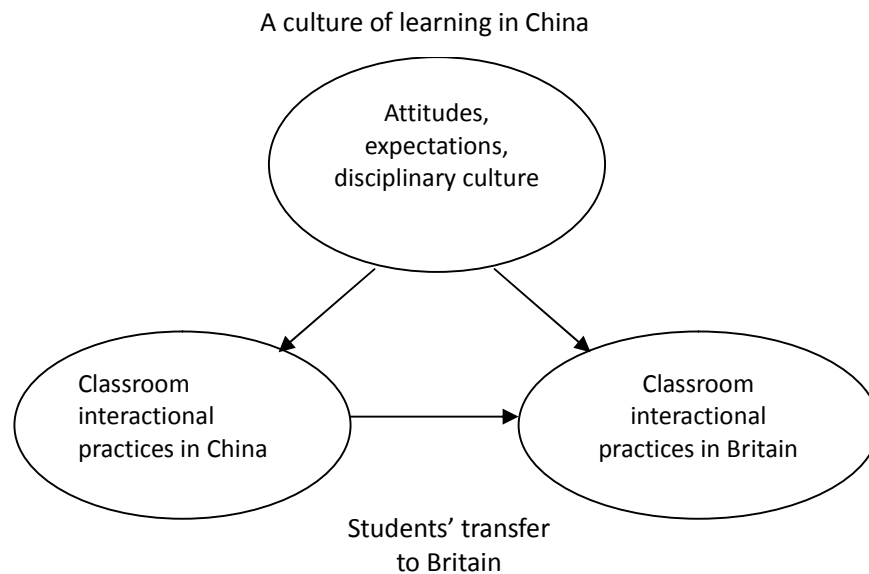
Figure 2. 3 The influence of a culture of learning in China on Chinese students' classroom interactional practices in China and in Britain

The students' learning experiences in the Chinese university seem to systematically order and structur their 'habitus' which according to Maton (2008) is a "property of social agents (whether individuals, groups or institutions)" (Maton ibid:51). One's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practices (Maton ibid). According to Maton (ibid) practice results from relations between one's dispositions (habitus) and one's position in a field (capital), within the current state of play of that social arena (field) (see Figure 2.4).

$$[(habitus)(capital)]+field=practice$$

Figure 2. 4 Habitus (Maton 2008:51)

As suggested by the British and Chinese literature, students' learning processes in group discussion are influenced by various factors such as contextual factors in the higher education system, and the expectation of learner autonomy, leadership, and critical thinking. Business students' case-study group discussion behaviour, to be

specific, will be influenced by the disciplinary culture of Business and Management and the application of the case method teaching in business education in the two countries. Chapter 3 will discuss culturally-based factors affecting students' group discussion behaviour and use the discussion to construct a more detailed model.

Before the discussion of the cultural influence, it has to be pointed out here that my study abstracts from factors which relate to individuals, such as their language proficiency skills profile, their preferred learning style and their motivation. Each of these will affect participation in classroom events, but detailed investigation of them would entail a different set of methodologies, going well beyond what can be encompassed in this thesis.

Chapter 3 Cultural factors affecting Chinese students' behaviour in case-study group discussion

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses cultural and contextual differences between British and Chinese universities. Chinese students' case-study group discussion methods when they first arrive in a British university are inevitably influenced by their previous learning experiences in China: to be specific, Chinese lecturers' teaching approaches and attitudes towards case-study group discussion, the disciplinary culture of Business and Management in Chinese universities, and the wider context of beliefs and practices within the Chinese higher education system. These are treated in reverse order in sections 3.2 to 3.4, beginning with the wider educational context. Within each of these three sections, beliefs and practices in UK higher education are presented before the corresponding sub-section dealing with China.

Attention is then paid to two specific areas of contrast in cultures of learning: beliefs and practices in relation to learner autonomy and to the question of 'leadership' in classroom activities.

This chapter also identifies the relationship between cultures of learning, the case method and group discussion, and leads to the construction of a theoretical framework of factors affecting students' case-study group discussion behaviour.

3.2 Contextual factors in higher education

The contextual factor here refers to the macro-environment of the higher education systems in Britain and China, which differ in terms of overall teaching objectives, teaching methods and assessment. As suggested in Chapter 2, the differences at this level deeply affect lecturers' usage of group discussion, students' discussion behaviour and the attitudes towards it.

3.2.1 The British higher education system

According to the British government (British Council, 2011) British higher education intends to develop each student's 'independence' and a 'can-do' attitude in students in the manner that employers look for—skills of thinking for oneself and taking responsibility, being creative, analytical, and autonomous with only limited tutorial guidance (QAA 2009). A key element in the realisation of these aims is the wide use of discussion; this occurs within a variety of learning activities in British classrooms including whole class lecturing, but particularly in tutorial and seminar groups which create an individualised learning context (Rudduck 1978; Kaplan & Miller 1983). The teaching materials and documentation, including specific learning and teaching objectives, forms of assessment and topics for lectures and seminars, are delivered to the students at the beginning of the course, and many lecturers assign coursework well in advance of the submission date, so that students have the freedom either to follow the lecturers' instructional pace or learn on their own. Many British universities adopt online teaching systems such as Moodle, a virtual learning environment (VLE) where lecturers can post their teaching materials and interact

with students. Teachers take on the role of facilitator. Many of the students' achievements are monitored through continuous assessment through written coursework, although they may also be summatively assessed by means of a paper examination.

British higher education encourages students to monitor and record their achievements (Dearing Report 1997) by describing their experiences, reflecting on their feelings, and evaluating, analysing, and planning for their personal, educational and career development (Gibbs 1988; Higher Education Academy 2010). This is in accordance with the process of Personal Development Planning (PDP) (Burgess 2004; Nesi & Gardner 2012). Employers are also likely to test applicants' reflective skills during the graduate recruitment process in order to "differentiate between apparently equally well qualified graduates" (Nesi 2008:1).

British undergraduate programmes generally last for three years and lead to a Bachelor's degree with a classification ranging from first class honours, upper second class honours, lower second class honours, third-class honours, to ordinary degree.

3.2.2 The Chinese higher education system

Undergraduate programmes provided by Chinese universities generally last for four years. Students are generally taught in lectures during the first three years and engage in graduate internships, dissertation writing, and job hunting in the final year. Students are normally offered optional topics in the third and fourth year. As pointed out in Chapter 2, whole-class lecturing is still the major form of teaching in Chinese

universities (Xiong & Jie 2008).

Student centredness has been claimed as a guiding theory in Chinese higher education (Gao 2008) although the Chinese literature reflects varying degrees of understanding of it. Many Chinese teachers and lecturers claim to use active and student-centred instruction methods in an attempt to promote more active learning (Qu 2008). For example they choose to convey knowledge which they think students need, rather than strictly following the textbook (Chen 1998; Zheng 2008; Deng 2010; Xie 2010; Mao 2010). This behaviour is exemplified by the English lecturer in Xie's (2010) study who prompted students to reproduce the teaching and learning content correctly rather than engaging students in prolonged exchanges to elicit opinions and discuss misunderstandings. Less importance seems to be attached to academic or research skills in Chinese universities (Ji 2006). As discussed in section 3.2.1, British universities aim to facilitate student-initiated learning and stimulate independence (Bloom 1956; Armstrong 2012). This is usually referred to in the literature as student centredness (Jones 2007). Comparatively, the Chinese teaching approach suggests a rather narrow understanding of student centredness because the lecturers decide all the learning content in advance, and teach about the processes of acquisition, application and evaluation, rather than encouraging students to use these skills in class. This difference may be due to the fact that lecturers in China do not receive much training; they teach according to how they were taught when they were students. In turn, Chinese lecturers' perceptions of student centredness are likely to influence Chinese students' perceptions of the concept.

Undoubtedly, many Chinese students who have received a traditional Chinese education perform very well in maths, physics, and biology in international competitions (Tao *et al*. 1996). Their success may be due to diverse factors. Tao and his colleagues from a Chinese middle school report that they organise special small classes, also called 'interest groups' for those who perform well in their studies, in order to prepare them for international competitions as a team (Tao *et al*. 1996). Experienced teachers provide extra classes for these students at the weekends and during the holidays, helping them to search for different solutions to problems using both deductive (from theory to practice) and inductive (from practice to theory) approaches (Tao *et al*. 1996). These selected students are also encouraged to exchange ideas, question and challenge each other without worrying about losing 'face' (Tao *et al*. 1996). The literature suggests that this approach to discussion is becoming accepted by some Chinese teachers although traditionally there are no opportunities for discussion in the ordinary school classroom. Learning like this, in interest groups, is reserved for a few special students, and is not offered to the other students.

The methods and assessment practices for optional courses provided on degree programmes in Chinese universities are often more flexible and student-centred than those for compulsory courses. This may be because optional courses are often set up by individual lecturers who have comparatively more freedom than compulsory course lecturers to design their syllabi and assessment tasks, choosing from various pedagogical methods according to the students' preferences. Although some degree programmes give fewer credits for optional modules, 67.27 percent of the 500

business students from Nankai University responding to a survey by Zhang *et al*. (2011) intended to take optional modules, possibly because the optional modules gave them the opportunity to learn what they liked in the way they liked. The survey conducted by Zhang *et al*. (2011) indicates that perhaps not only the 'good' students but many 'other' Chinese students might have the potential to learn well from more loosely controlled, interest-driven, and free discussion of the kind described by Tao *et al*. (1996).

Compared to the British degree classification system, all students who gain a passing score in Chinese universities will gain the same bachelor's degree (Iannelli & Huang 2013), although students with better academic achievements have more opportunities to apply for funding to cover part of their tuition fees or additional awards. When issuing certificates approving students' overseas study, the Chinese Embassy does not specify their scores but the degree obtained and the institution attended (Embassy of China in Britain 2010).

3.3 The disciplinary culture of business education

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 will discuss the British and Chinese higher education systems and business education in particular, as these differ considerably in terms of educational objectives.

3.3.1 British business education

Business education in Britain started in the 1940s (Ivory *et al*. 2006). The first two

British business schools—the London University School of Business and the Manchester Business School—were founded in the 1960s (Rippin *et al.* 2002) when 'the Manchester Experiment' was undertaken. The business teaching practice at that time was rooted in learning-by-doing; and the students were given projects to complete, "allowing the application of newly learnt techniques or knowledge to the solution of real-time business problems" (Wilson 1996:142).

Holman (2000) proposed five axioms—epistemological, pedagogical, organisational, social, and management—to examine the purpose, nature and value of British business education.

- The epistemological axiom is about the assumed nature of knowledge in business education.
- The pedagogical axiom is about the underlying learning processes, learning outcomes, and teaching methods.
- The organisational axiom refers to the administration of business education in the higher education system.
- The social axiom refers to the perceived role of business education in society.
- The management axiom refers to professional management practice. (Holman 2000:197-198)

In these five axioms Holman (2000) identified four business education models followed by British business education: 'academic liberalism', 'experiential vocationalism', 'experiential liberalism' and 'the experiential/critical school'.

The academic liberalism model pursues objective theoretical knowledge, and perceives the ideal learning process as acquiring convergent 'scientifically verified bodies of managerial knowledge" (Holman 2000:203), similar to the Chinese perception of business knowledge (Ivory *et al.* 2006; Perriton & Reynolds 2004; Le

2010). According to this model the ideal manager is a management scientist. Proper knowledge and reasoning skills are considered to be vital for educating a successful manager.

The experiential vocationalism model tends to describe real professional management action. The purpose of this model is to develop managerial autonomy by enhancing students' management competency in terms of systematic thinking, emotional intelligence, and skills in influence and negotiation which are often assessed in the professional world (Robinson *et al*. 2007).

Experiential liberalism model takes a practice perspective on management and is based on criticism of the academic liberalism model in which students passively accept theoretical knowledge which has little practical relevance. Students are expected to learn from experience (Pfeffer & Fong 2002; Holman 2000; Mahajan 2012; Waddell & McChlery 2009; Piercy & Caldwell 2011). The experiential liberalism model encourages learners to learn from experience and engage in reflection and reconceptualisation. Typical teaching methods apply learning styles analysis and group learning. This approach reflects the fact that British organisational structures have become flatter and less bureaucratic, requiring the managerial participation of all members (Rugman & Collinson 2009).

The experiential/critical school also emphasises a practical approach to management and pursues emancipation of managers and other employees. It takes a critical

management perspective[6] and encourages learners to be 'reflexive' about their knowledge and action (Holman 2000:208). It pursues a consistent purpose of 'preparation for business' as described in the Subject Benchmark Statement, with the aim to develop "specific knowledge and skills … (and encourage) positive and critical attitudes towards change and enterprise, so as to reflect the dynamism and vibrancy of the business environment" (QAA 2007:2).

The models of experiential vocationalism and experiential liberalism are influenced by Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning which perceives learning as a continuous 'process' grounded in experience rather than 'outcomes' (Kolb 1984:26-27); and perceives knowledge as being constantly (re)created rather than an entity to be acquired[7] (Qu 2008; Colliver 2000). Accordingly, theories and models cannot be counted as knowledge unless they are employed, transmitted, critically reflected on and evaluated by learners.

Kolb (1984) identifies 'convergent' and 'divergent' knowledge which is closely related to the business discipline. 'Convergent knowledge' offers facts and principles for the judgement of right or wrong answers; 'divergent knowledge' is about experience and creativity without right or wrong answers (Kolb 1984). It seems that people who perceive knowledge as convergent learn it in a result-directed way, whereas people

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[6] Critical management education challenges the idea that management is a disinterested technical process. It perceives management as a social and economic practice (Perriton 2007; Perriton & Raynolds 2004).

[7] Kolb's experiential learning theory has six assumptions:
 Learning is a process not outcome.
 Learning is driven by experience.
 Learning requires the resolution of conflicts through dialogue
 Learning is a holistic process.
 Learning involves transaction between the person and the environment.
 Learning creates knowledge. (Kolb 1984:25-38)

who perceive knowledge as divergent learn it in a process-oriented way.

In language learning and teaching, 'convergent' and 'divergent' are also used to describe two types of open tasks. A 'convergent task' "requires students to agree on a solution to a problem" (Ellis 2003:90). A 'divergent task' consists of negotiation work in which students take different viewpoints on an issue and have to "defend their position and refute their partner's" (Ellis 2003:90).

Modern British business education tends to develop the divergent knowledge (Hudson 1983; Kolb 1984) of soft and applied management skills (Ivory *et al*. 2006; Perriton & Reynolds 2004) and life-long management (Huang 2005; Lundberg 1993; QAA [The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education] 2007). Intuition or insightfulness, a result of learning from experience (Kolb 1984) is also perceived to be necessary in professional business practice (Davis & Hogarth 1992). British business education involves students in a wider range of integrated activities including small group discussion, oral presentations, the consultation of authentic business sources and assignment writing in a variety of genres (Currie & & Tempest 2008; Rippin *et al*. 2002; Ballantine & Larres 2004; Lundberg 1993). Nearly one third of the British lecturers in business enter the academy later in life, having previously worked in industry (Ivory *et al*. 2006; Bryson *et al*. 2007), and they often refer to their personal experiences in industry as a means of introducing students to professional life. Business degree course content and assessment schemes are often developed in close collaboration with relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) with a view to preparing students for their professional working life. Some of

the learning activities are thus intended to simulate the real business world and the professional working environment, at least to some extent.

British business students are increasingly expected to possess flexible, adaptable, and self-organising learning skills (Gammie *et al*. 2002; QAA 2007) because uncertainty plays a major role in professional business (Davis & Hogarth 1992; French & Grey 1996), and this requires managerial capability to manage change. Young people in Britain often work or volunteer at home or abroad before starting college or university, and the British government takes a very positive view of the gap year as a means of developing work, learning and life skills, and discovering how the business world operates[8]. Many British university students are also employed in commerce or industry during their degree programmes so that their business lecturers are able to draw on their work experiences.

3.3.2 Chinese business education

Since China's entry into the World Trade Organisation in 2001, enterprises in China have begun to want business graduates who have acquired a global mindset, cultural sensitivity, and Western management notions (Zhao *et al*. 2003; Ji 2004; Shu & Jing 2010; Le 2010). At present there are three main types of enterprise within the territory of China: enterprises with an element of foreign investment (such as joint ventures), state-owned enterprises, and enterprises which are privately owned by Chinese people. Since the opening up of China and the implementation of reform in 1979, the state-owned and privately owned enterprises have experienced many

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[8] See, for example, the advice on planning a gap year at: www.direct.gov.uk.

internal and external managerial problems because there is no local business and management theory in China (Zhao *et al*. 2003). They are eager to refer to Western conduct; Western managerial theory and experience is highly likely to be adopted (Zhao *et al*. 2003; Ji 2004).

Business education developed late in modern China (Newell 1999), starting with the implementation of the opening up and reform policy in 1979. Before then China implemented a planned economy and enterprises did not have any business and management practice as this was all overseen by government. For a long time after 1979 business education was not offered by colleges and universities as part of a degree education but was offered by vocational polytechnics teaching functional components of commodity trade and circulation, banking, stock, insurance, tax, and accounting (Zheng & Lv 2011; Niu 2007). These kinds of knowledge are not related to management but are hard and science-based 'techniques' (Branine 2005:461) and 'guidelines' (Branine 2005:465), as pointed out by Ivory *et al*. (2006), Perriton and Reynolds (2004), and Branine (2005). During the last two decades, business has become the overarching discipline within which trade, engineering technology, and management science are studied (Ji *et al*. 2004). As with business lecturers in Japan and Germany, Chinese business lecturers tend to consider the MBA (Master of Business Administration) as the 'real' business education (Gong *et al*. 2008:75) because it teaches implicit knowledge and soft skills of 'managerial thinking' (Lundberg *et al*. 2001) (see section 3.1), problem-solving (Lundberg 1993; Currie & Tempest 2008), and communication (Esteban & Cañado 2004). MBA students are in-service and usually already hold positions in companies; they aim to top up their

managerial knowledge and skills through MBA study (Gong *et al.* 2008). In recent years, however, Chinese business teaching at undergraduate levels has gradually started to take a more critical management education perspective, emphasising business ethics and social responsibility (Zhao *et al.* 2003; Ji 2004; Shu & Jing 2010; Le 2010).

Most business students are encouraged to choose their subject by their parents (Zhu 2009; Chen 2007) and do not have any prior business knowledge because Chinese schools only offer Marxist Politics and Economics rather than business-related courses (Yang 2004; Iannelli & Huang 2013). There is some evidence that Chinese business students show indifference to business as a discipline (Yang 2004; Yang 2008; Chen 2007); a survey conducted by Zhang *et al.* (2011) (see section 3.2.2) identified business students planning to take an additional academic subject and to study for professional license examinations, because they felt that the business education they were receiving at university was not an adequate preparation for their future careers.

Many Chinese university business lecturers are well-qualified academically with Masters or PhD degrees, but they are not likely to have had any professional business experience (Ji 2006; Gu & Guo 2005). Their lack of experience prevents them from helping business students develop the independent analytical thinking skills that employers require (Zimmerman & Fey 2001). The literature seems to indicate that the lecturers intend to teach their students what they consider to be 'good' or 'successful' professional practice (Gong *et al.* 2008; He & Sun 2005; Wang *et al.* 2012). This may be because they perceive their students to be passive learners who will not

be required to be creative in their future professional careers (Gu & Guo 2005). It may also be possible that they have a different understanding of criticality and creativity, or how to teach these skills (Cortazzi & Jin 2013).

3.4 The application of the case method in Britain and China

The examination of business cases as a form of pedagogy originated from the Harvard Business School in 1908 following its successful application in the Harvard Law School (Rippin *et al*. 2002; Booth *et al*. 2001; Currie & Tempest 2008). The case method has become one of the main teaching techniques in business degree programmes worldwide (Hall & Sung 2009; Currie & Tempest 2008; Foster & Carboni 2008; Jackson 2002; Zhao *et al*. 2003; Ji 2004). There exists huge diversity in the application of case method in business education in different countries because of different cultures of learning (Zhao *et al*. 2003), but students are usually expected to identify problems, threats or opportunities and propose appropriate solutions (Currie & Tempest 2008).

3.4.1 The application of the case method in British business education

The nature of the case method used in British business education is highly interactive and communicative, involving a collective search for an analysis and/or solution to the specific problem of a case (Zhao 1996; Zheng 2008). This requires systematic understanding of managerial situations and the employment of certain analytical tools and models (Lundberg *et al*. 2001). Case-study group discussion is usually considered to be the heart of the case method (Foran 1993; Currie & Tempest 2008;

Jackson 2003) because ideas and solutions can be justified through challenge and negotiation in the discussion (Basturkmen 2002). The case method is also considered to enhance discussion in the service of thinking (Christensen 1991; Lundberg 1993; Lundberg *et al.* 2001) as it entails appreciation and understanding of the case situation, the identification of the goals of the case, analysis of the situation and the choice of appropriate analytical tools, and negotiation of an action plan (Christensen 1991; Lundberg 1993). Such thought processes are recognised by business lecturers as 'managerial' thinking skills (Lundberg *et al.* 2001:460).

The case method approach is able to enhance skills transferability from the classroom to the professional workplace, depending on the "similarity of the contexts" (Gibbs *et al.* 1994:5). British lecturers often try to make use of students' cultural and learning backgrounds and personal traits (Woods *et al.* 2011) and expect their students to see the complexity and ambiguity of the cases when making strategic decisions (Rippin *et al.* 2002). There is 'no one right answer' to a managerial problem (Ambrosini *et al.* 2009:64); strategic decisions can only be forecasted and justified, because each case is unique in terms of context and time and would not reoccur identically in professional practice (Wang 2013b).

The case method is frequently used in British business education (Nesi & Gardner 2012), as can be seen from the genre families of business students' written assignments in the BAWE (British Academic Written English) corpus[9] (see Table 3.1).

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[9] The BAWE corpus contains students' written assignments in four disciplinary groups (Arts and Humanities, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences). Nesi and Gardner (2012) identified a total of 13 genre families and grouped them into five social functional categories: demonstrating knowledge and understanding, developing powers of independent reasoning, building research skills, preparing for professional practice, and writing for oneself and others.

Nesi and Gardner (2012) identify 11 genre families[10] in 146 pieces of business student writing in the BAWE corpus. The Case Study ranks the second most frequent type of business assignment (22.8%), following essays (36%).

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Table 3. 1 Business genre families grouped by social functions, adapted from Nesi and Gardner (2012:36)

If students are motivated and confident about learning using the case method, several British lecturers (Lundberg 1993; Lundberg *et al.* 2001; Esteban & Cañado 2004) have recommended using a three-step case method approaches: obtaining familiarity, analysis and action planning. When following this 'good' approach to the case method, students are expected to actively involve themselves in group discussions in order to improve their skills in managerial thinking, decision making, and action taking.

Step one: obtaining familiarity

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[10] See http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/BAWE/contents/Pages/contents.aspx

In this step, students are free to search for more information about the case, out of class (Esteban & Cañado 2004) in order to become familiar with the general situation (Lundberg 1993). They have to recognise any indication in the factual information that something is not as they think it should be (Lundberg 1993) and be clear about the multiple goals of the case which are not always publicly stated in each major entity in the case situation (Lundberg 1993). Ideally, identification of goals requires small group work and 'role play' in which students could work together by adopting multiple perspectives, as Esteban and Cañado (2004) point out.

Step two: analysis

'Analysis' in the case method refers to a process of acquiring a systematic understanding of the case situation by applying appropriate ideas, models, and theories to the facts of the situation (Lundberg 1993; Lundberg *et al*. 2001) in order to identify, or to be more precise, forecast the mismatch between goals and practice (Lundberg *et al*. 2001). According to Lundberg (1993), Currie and Tempest (2008), and Ballantine and Larres (2004), doing analysis involves cycling back and forth between information and ideas/models.

Analysis requires students to choose appropriate analytical tools in order to discover the key linkages in the situation, such as the immediate and direct causes. Usually, choosing appropriate analytical tools is considered to be a methodology issue; the analytical tools are method sources from which a student "derives a governing concept or a manner of working" (Bizup 2008:76). The process of analysis can be undertaken through a range of formats such as individual study, pair work, group

work, or whole-class discussion led by a student or a lecturer (Ballantine & Larres 2004).

Step three: action planning

This step is to propose solutions or interventions by modifying the already known actions, inquiring into the possible consequences of the proposed actions, and specifying a plan of implementation (Lundberg 1993:138-142). Generally this step will lead to the writing-up of a report which analyses the case study, summarises the actions the students have agreed on to solve the problems, and explains the reasons for these actions (Esteban & Cañado 2004). Nesi and Gardner (2012) describe these functions in their discussion of business case study reports in the BAWE corpus.

According to Holman (2000), the 'good' use of the case method is consistent with experiential learning, emphasised by British business education. Students progress from step one to step three in order to obtain professional experience (Lundberg *et al*. 2001). The procedure of a 'good' use of the case method requires higher learner autonomy and proficient learning skills in Business and Management. The literature does not discuss, however, how British lecturers would use the case method with non-Western students embarking on study in Western countries if they were unfamiliar with the case method and group discussion.

3.4.2 The application of the case method in Chinese business education

The modern Harvard case method was imported from America to mainland China[11]

in around 1992 when Chinese universities started to offer MBA programmes (Yan

2009; Zhao *et al*. 2003). Since 2005, the Harvard Business School has offered

case-method training courses for Chinese lecturers and has had a great influence on

the Chinese case method (Zhao *et al*. 2003). However the Chinese literature suggests

that Chinese lecturers and students with non-Western cultural backgrounds are

highly likely to understand and perform the case method rather differently from

Western lecturers and students.

Chinese business lecturers always use cases about Chinese business situations,

companies and joint venture enterprises[12] (Wang *et al*. 2012; Luo 2010; Zheng 2008;

Li 2005). Two types of local Chinese case studies are repeatedly mentioned in the

literature—'decision-forcing' and 'illustrative' case studies. The decision-forcing case

studies raise problems explicitly and offer students the information they need in

order to make strategic decisions. The illustrative case studies are usually 'good'

examples which describe a complete decision-making process for students to

evaluate. In 1997, Guanghua School of Management at Beijing University launched a

national database of 'Chinese local case studies'. In 1999, Guanghua School of

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[11] All the Chinese references are from a database called 中国知网 which contains 41,727,374 Chinese journal papers, 1,414,271 master dissertations and 180,126 doctoral theses by the May of 2012. The quality of the journals varies although there is no official classification in terms of quality. Beijing University and *Zhong Guo Zhi Wang* co-published *A guide to the core Chinese periodicals* in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2011. It is well accepted within Chinese academia that the listed Chinese journals contain papers of higher quality. The website of *Zhong Guo Zhi* Wang offers a searching option within the listed core periodicals in the electronic journals navigation. It has to be pointed out that Chinese literature is indirect, implicit, and ambiguous in general therefore I made my argument more tentative in the review with the Chinese business teaching literature than with the English literature.

[12] See for example: http://hhbs.hhu.edu.cn/infomation/info2detail.aspx?id=55, a case writing competition within the Business School at Hohai University.

Management published *Cases for enterprise management teaching in China* and *The instruction manual: Cases for enterprise management teaching in China,* containing teaching notes and suggestions for teaching, relevant theories, and model answers (Wang *et al*. 2012). Students are not intended to have access to the manual or the model answers. In 2007, the China Management Case-Sharing Centre was founded to coordinate the sharing of Chinese local case studies amongst MBA schools all over China, and to organise an annual national competition for case studies and teaching notes[13]. This encouragement to create teaching notes for local cases indicates that the Harvard case method is still new to many Chinese business lecturers, and that they still need teaching guidance (Wang *et al*. 2012). It is unlikely that many of them learnt with the case method themselves when they were university students.

According to Wang *et al*. (2012), Qian (2011), Deng (2010) and Hou (2010), Chinese business lecturers perceive using 'good' examples in a deductive manner to be a 'good' use of the case method approach, illustrating how management theories are applied in professional decision-making processes. The predominance of this approach is illustrated by the fact that although the second annual competition in 2011 encouraged the creation of decision-forcing case studies, 70 percent of the entries were illustrative rather than decision-forcing (Wang *et al*. 2012). According to Zheng (2008), Chinese business lecturers seem to avoid cases which force decision-making, because these are often long and complex. Theory teaching is thought to be most efficient when case materials are short and invite the application of theories (Li 2005; Luo 2010), as required by the national competition for case

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[13] see http://www.cmcc-dut.cn/index.php?action-viewnews-itemid-72

studies. In their own teaching Li (2005) and Luo (2010) often rewrite case materials to make the theories more explicit and facilitate their students' study of theoretical knowledge outside class.

For the present study, it is important to understand Chinese lecturers' expectations of the case method approach, as this indirectly shapes the perceptions of 2+1 students prior to their study overseas. The literature suggests that the case method in Chinese business classrooms is used as a source of insight into businesses (Zhang 2009; Zhang 2006) rather than as a form of pedagogy (Rippin *et al*. 2002; Booth *et al*. 2001; Currie & Tempest 2008). Compared with Western lecturers who take on the role of professional experts, Chinese lecturers tend to act as academic experts by distancing themselves and their students from the cases, analysing what a company or its manager *should* do rather than what they *could* do, and arriving at their own pre-planned conclusions (Ji 2006; Zheng 2007; Luo 2010; Deng 2010). Business knowledge is thus perceived to be convergent, and to offer facts and principles for the judgement of right or wrong answers. Less importance is attached to the professional business skills of data processing, communication, and strategic problem-solving, according to Ji (2006) and Luo (2010). The case-study group discussion is therefore not considered to be at the core of the learning experience (Gong *et al*. 2008; He & Sun 2005; Wang *et al*. 2012). Students are encouraged to recognise and appreciate the strategies employed in cases from an academic perspective, as lecturers tend to do, although it remains unclear how the students undertake this evaluation, and guidance on how to analyse case situations and their causes and effects is generally missing from the literature (Zhang 2009; Zhang 2006)

and online study skills information (Zhang 2007). Of course this might simply be due to the fact that students receive this kind of training during their subject lectures (Zhang 2007).

Many lecturers on undergraduate programmes still doubt the efficiency of the case method as a means of achieving their major teaching target of helping students to construct a comprehensive business knowledge framework (Zhao *et al*. 2003; Ji 2006; Luo 2010). They attach much less importance to soft skills such as 'managerial thinking' (Lundberg *et al*. 2001), problem-solving (Lundberg 1993; Currie & Tempest 2008), and communication (Esteban & Cañado 2004). This suggests that on the one hand Chinese business lecturers expect active cognitive learning, while on the other hand they seem to fall into the trap of 'cultural stereotyping' (Gu 2012:213), thinking that Chinese students are passive.

The studies I have discussed above indicate that the traditional systematic and theoretical approach of telling students what to do and how to do it is still very much in evidence in the practice element of classroom teaching. That said, Chinese business programmes are keen to borrow business and management training techniques such as lab-based sand table models[14], enterprise resources planning (ERP) software (Li 2008), and the recruiting tool of leaderless group discussion[15]. They are interested in learning about these techniques, but not in using them to

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[14] Sand table models are used to display simulated enterprises' internal and external property and visualise strategic business combats. The purpose of employing this technique is to facilitate business students' understanding of teaching content and internal individual systematic thinking (Li 2008).

[15] Leaderless group discussion as a recruiting instrument of human resource departments originated in North America (Li 2008; Feng 2009).

simulate practical features of professional business practice (Rippin *et al.* 2002; Lundberg *et al.* 2001: Booth *et al*. 2001).

3.5 Learner autonomy

3.5.1 Learner autonomy and critical thinking in Britain

Learner autonomy is an important factor in the case method approach. The term generally refers to the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec 1981:3) in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluating learning based on intrinsic motivation (Dickinson 1993). It is about the attitude of students, their ability to take responsibility for their own learning, and their ability to take ownership of the learning process which traditionally belongs to the teacher (Littlewood 1999).

Within the language learning area, Nunan (1997) proposes five levels of learner autonomy in relation to teaching content and the learning process (see Table 3.2). From level 1 to 5, teaching tasks evolve from designing the learning goal and materials to encouraging students to create their own learning goals. Correspondingly, students are expected to improve from identifying the purpose of pedagogical tasks to becoming autonomous researchers. Of course, at each level students have to think critically and reflectively. The levels are indicative of the degree of learner autonomy in cognitive learning in general.

Table 3. 2 Levels of implementation of autonomy (Nunan 1997:195)

At level 2 'students are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer'. Nunan recognises the goals in terms of language knowledge and students choosing to learn what they need. Nunan's goals can be mapped on to the progressive learning goals which are emphasised in business education, which progress from understanding, to application and finally to critical evaluation (Lundberg 1993).

Business lecturers have a range of teaching goals for students' cognitive learning when using the case method. According to Lundberg (1993) students are expected to progress from understanding factual information to exploring cases, identifying the company's professional goals and proposing solutions in order to obtain professional experience. As suggested by Nunan's levels of implementation of autonomy, when students' autonomy is low they are encouraged to become aware of the pedagogical goals of the case method, through lectures or through group discussion with assigned roles. As the students' autonomy grows, they are encouraged to progress autonomously to explore cases in more loosely-controlled group discussion.

Figure 3.1 summarises a range of expectations of learner autonomy regarding teaching approaches, the roles of lecturers, and discussion formats. The teaching approaches of the case method are reported by Ballantine and Larres (2004). This continuum could be interpreted as indicative of a high expectation of learner autonomy as an eventual learning outcome.

Figure 3. 1 Approaches to case method in classroom considering students' learner autonomy
(adapted from Ballantine & Larres 2004:173)

Critical thinking is one of the skills associated with academic discussion and the notion of learner autonomy. In the West the term can be taken to mean a variety of things (Hang 2011; Tian 2008) although Bloom's cognitive taxonomy of educational objectives (Bloom *et al*. 1956) has had a major impact on critical thinking development (Tian 2008). Bloom's (1956) cognitive taxonomy identifies four levels of learning: knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis/synthesis/evaluation. Bloom thought that the first two objectives had been especially emphasised in western traditional education at the expense of later ones (Anderson & Krathwohl 2001; Krathwohl 2002; Nesi & Gardner 2012; QAA 2001; 2008). According to Bock (1983), Booker (2007) and Groves (2013), Bloom wanted teachers to create a learning environment that was less concerned with facts and more concerned with problem solving, independent and critical thinking, thus encouraging learning through

creativity (Gardner 1989; Jin & Cortazzi 1998; 2013). It is not clear how Chinese

lecturers and students perceive these objectives. Reichenbach (2001) and Tian (2008)

argue that the fulfilment of each objective of Bloom's taxonomy requires students'

critical thinking (see Table 3.3) facilitated by lecturers' questioning strategies or

self-questioning.

Bloom's taxonomy further explained by Reichenbach (2001:20)	Evident critical thinking skills at each stage, with specific reference to writing
Acquiring knowledge or information	Identifying the topic, the issue, the assumptions, the main points, and the conclusions in an argument
Comprehending or understanding what you read and hear	Relating new knowledge to those already knows
Applying what you understand to given situations	Applying knowledge to real situations, paraphrase
Analysing the information that you understand	Identifying sub-topics and the relationships in between, making arguments
Synthesising and creatively using what you understand and have analysed	Producing original thing based on a range of information
Critically evaluating what you understand and have analysed or created	Examining the logic between evidence and conclusions

Table 3. 3 Reichenbach's opinion about the required critical thinking skills in the six stages of
Bloom's taxonomy

Critical thinking, according to Hammer (2011) and Moore (2011), is different across

disciplines since it is central to disciplinary epistemology (Johns 2007). Hang (2011)

reports that his Australian business teaching staff informants thought that, especially

in case learning, the decision-making and problem-solving process requires and

enhances students' critical thinking skills. Jackson (2002:257) claims that these skills

"are vital for success in international business and are increasingly being demanded

by recruiters".

In the BAWE corpus the development of critical thinking and independent reasoning

is also found to be evident in almost all types of assignments across the disciplines,

including Business and Management (Nesi & Gardner 2012).

3.5.2 Learner autonomy in China

As discussed in section 2.3, while some Chinese lecturers do use small group discussion to help promote learner autonomy in a limited sense, in general in the West there is a stronger awareness of the centrality of discussion in terms of the social construction of knowledge, as affirmed in the notion of 'exploratory talk' (Mercer 1995). Chinese education generally emphasises a progression from comprehension to evaluation through internal dialogue (Chen 2010; Wang 2010). This internal dialogue is known as *Fan Xing* (反省) (Lau 1979).

In the Chinese literature, the term for learner autonomy is usually discussed as *Zi Zhu Xue Xi* (自主学习), and it is thought to require planning, self-management, self-adjustment, self-assessment, and self-evaluation. Yan (2008), an English lecturer, identifies a commonly recommended *Zi Zhu Xue Xi* procedure for students to follow:

- Set long-term learning targets considering requirements and deficiencies
- Choose appropriate learning materials and strategies
- Control progress
- Make timely adjustments and reflect
- Set evaluation criteria (Yan 2008: 179)

The recommended procedure suggests that *Zi Zhu Xue Xi* is a separate process from classroom learning; the lecturer's role as a knowledge provider is not challenged. Yan's procedure is similar to a teaching procedure, and it is possible that lecturers and students equate the process of learning with the process of teaching. One traditional Chinese teaching technique asks students to act as teachers and teach the class what they have prepared. A learning by teaching approach (*Lernen durch Lehren*)

exists in foreign language teaching in Germany (Grzega & Schoner 2008).

Chinese education emphasises the teachers' role of "*Jiao Shu Yu Ren* (教书育人)—teaching books and cultivating people" (Hui 2005:7) and 'conveying moral discipline, instructing one's life and career and answering questions' (师者，传道授业解惑者)[16]. Chinese teachers usually 'teach by holding hands' (Gardner 2001:2). It is believed that theoretical knowledge lays the foundation of creativity (Gardner 1989; Jin & Cortazzi 1998; 2013). It seems that Chinese teachers tend to place the teacher at the centre of the learning process.

Chinese lecturers also tend to think that students can automatically develop and improve their autonomy if they are in a "secure, unthreatened and non-defensive" learning environment (Rao 2002:88). A study by Spiro *et al*. (2012) gives further evidence of a gap between the minimalist view of learner autonomy this entails and the view that autonomy is a prerequisite for independent thought. In this study, a group of international students, including Chinese, were found to perceive independent learning as learning without the tutor's intervention, whereas their British teachers considered it to be the 'capacity to critique authority and to respond creatively and originally to tasks' (2012:615).

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[16] This is from an essay called *On the teacher* (师说) written by Han Yu in the year of 802AD, Tang Dynasty. This essay has had a far-reaching effect on teaching notions and practice in China.

3.6 Leadership and group discussion

3.6.1 Leadership and group discussion in British classrooms

Leadership skills are very commonly taught in British business programmes, to help students learn how to coordinate efforts, provide feedback, manage conflict, encourage participation and facilitate team decisions (Hess 2007). In the modern British business world, managerial decisions are often made collectively by teams, and everyone is thought to have leadership potential (Schyns *et al*. 2011). In British business schools, solo leadership is therefore thought to be less needed than team leadership, as described by Belbin (1993), where every group member plays a complementary role, the leadership rotates, and a manager/coordinator ensures the involvement of all the team members in decision-making. British business education widely uses the Belbin Team Role Theory and Test to help business students recognise their own personal qualities and adopt appropriate group roles (Bryant & Albring 2006; Gammie *et al*. 2002).

Team leadership skills are taught in British/Western programmes via the academic activity of group work and discussion. In small group discussion, students have been found to cooperatively extend each others' previous contributions in order to expand "shared understanding" (Li & Nesi 2004:25) and introduce new sub-topics. These interactive patterns and skills in group discussion are consistent with the features of team leadership. It can be assumed that British lecturers prefer this team leadership behaviour in small group discussions about case studies.

3.6.2 Leadership and group discussion in Chinese classrooms

As discussed in section 2.3, Chinese students tend to discuss in a hierarchical group structure under solo-leadership. Traditionally the Chinese believe that a good scholar can become an official, a misinterpretation of Confucius who said '学而优则仕', meaning that one can apply knowledge in practice as long as one understands it (Yu 2010). In traditional Chinese education, the students with good academic performance are more likely to be the leaders of the class, organising out-of-class activities, managing class affairs, and reporting to teachers. Chinese school students with poor academic performance receive fewer opportunities in and out of the classroom (Zhao *et al*. 2009) although teachers actively employ various interactive teaching techniques which do not have a set form.

There is now a new trend in Chinese business education towards taking care of each student's development. This can be achieved by developing students' team leadership skills via leaderless group discussion, for example. This change may be because the organisational structure in China is becoming flatter as more Chinese enterprises cooperate with foreign enterprises. According to Guo *et al*. (2012) business lecturers organise leaderless group discussion in the classroom in exactly the same way as in recruiting events in China, i.e. by preparing topics independently, extending personal opinions one by one, raising different opinions (freely debating), and reaching agreement. Likewise, as a way of developing students' cognitive understanding and critical thinking, many business lecturers teach debating skills in a competitive framework with the goal of finding the right answer, in contrast to

collaborative explorative knowledge construction.

3.7 Conclusion

3.7.1 A cultural model of factors affecting students' case-study group discussion methods

The cultural and contextual factors discussed in this chapter could be considered as part of a 'culture of learning' (Cortazzi & Jin 1996) within which case-study group discussion is practised. The knowledge and performance of case-study group discussion relates to these cultural and contextual factors. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) define 'cultures of learning' in language teaching and applied linguistics as follows:

> "By the term 'cultures of learning' we mean that much behaviour in language classrooms is set within taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach or learn, whether and how to ask questions, what textbooks are for, and how language teaching relates to broader issues of the nature and purpose of education" (Cortazzi & Jin 1996:169).

Just as Hofstede (1980; 2001) believes that culture affects people's ideas, values, attitudes, and normative or expected behaviour, Cortazzi and Jin's (1996) definition of cultures of learning suggests that it shapes teachers' and students' perception of learning, the roles they play, learning approaches and study skills, and classroom performance. In other words, it influences not only learners' learning performance but also their choice of learning methods. A culture of learning shares these defining features with the notion of small culture, defined as "a dynamic, ongoing group process" (Holliday 1999:248), although cultures of learning are not as locally

determined as small cultures.

Figure 3.2 displays in schematic form the influence of the five cultural factors discussed in this chapter on Chinese students' case-study group discussion methods when they arrive in British universities. This model will help in the interpretation of Chinese students' group discussion methods in British seminars.
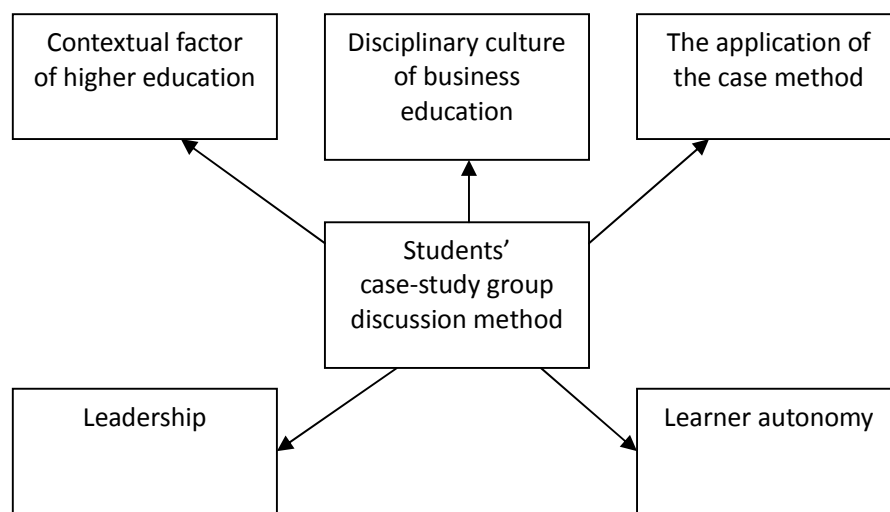
Figure 3. 2 A cultural model of factors affecting students' case-study group discussion methods

3.7.2 Research questions

The literature review in Chapter 3 suggests that the success of teaching and learning techniques within a certain context depends on a particular culture of learning. There exists a "shared culture of norms, perceptions and ideas" (Heather & Barnett 2012:170) in Chinese/Confucian and Anglo-Saxon cultures of learning. However there is also misunderstanding and confusion between the two cultures of learning because of complex and variable perceptions and approaches, as suggested in

Chapters 2 and 3. Learners who perfect learning techniques and strategies for success in one culture of learning might find that these techniques and strategies are either effective or ineffective in another culture of learning, depending on the similarities between the two cultures and the learners' approaches to these techniques. In an international education context, problems arising from the persistence of values and behaviour from a different culture of learning will result in misunderstandings and confusion, which will affect international students' performance. Nevertheless misunderstandings, if students are made aware of them, offer opportunities not only for adjustment and adaptation but also for reflection on their learning process, possibly leading to personal cognitive development.

The first objective is concerned with identifying how and to what extent students' prior learning experiences may have predisposed students to have certain attitudes towards seminar discussions. Answers to this will be sought using classroom observation and interviews with both students and lecturers, as detailed in the methodology chapter which follows. The first objective is achieved by addressing research questions RQ1 and RQ2, presented below, which focus respectively on the preparation students receive when in China, and on the initial expectations aroused by commencement of study in Britain.

> RQ1 What were the students' learning experiences in the Chinese university? To be specific:
>> RQ1a What group discussion skills did Chinese lecturers think that the students would need in British classrooms?
>> RQ1b What were the students' learning priorities?
>> RQ1c What learning strategies did the students employ?
>> RQ1d How did the students evaluate the preparation they were offered in China?
>
> RQ2 When the students arrived in the British university, what did they expect of

seminars?

Also relevant here, with its specific focus on attitudes towards group discussions, is RQ3:

> RQ3 What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers and Chinese students?
>> RQ3a What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers?
>> RQ3b What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to Chinese students?

The second objective is to investigate how Chinese students understand the nature and the purpose of the instruction techniques they are exposed to in Britain. The 'laboratory' in which this will be examined is a set of case-study discussions, which will be coded to yield insights into patterns of participation and differing underlying assumptions concerning the activity. Making explicit what these patterns are gives rise to RQ4, which will be addressed in Chapter 6.

> RQ4 What do patterns of participation in case-study discussions in British seminars reveal about the methods employed by Chinese students, and how do these differ from other non-native speakers of English?

The third objective is concerned with the exploration of students' and lecturers' attitudes towards methods of group discussion of case-studies revealed by the exploration of RQ5. The methods of group discussion identified through the use of descriptive and interpretive detail in Chapter 6 are built on in Chapter 7 which explores attitudes towards these methods.

> RQ5 What discussion methods uncovered by the study did Chinese students, British lecturers and Chinese lecturers from China prefer?

It should be noted that RQs 1, 2 and 3 are underpinned by the unifying construct of

'cultures of learning' which is the backdrop to Chapter 5. Together, the answers to these three research questions provide an orientation to data from the case-study discussions (Chapter 6). The descriptive analysis of discourse then opens up further insights explored in detail in Chapter 7.

Table 3.4 is a summary of the five research questions of the study.

RQ1	What were the students' learning experiences in the Chinese university? To be specific: RQ1a What group discussion skills did Chinese lecturers think that the students would need in British classrooms? RQ1b What were the students' learning priorities? RQ1c What learning strategies did the students employ? RQ1d How did the students evaluate the preparation they were offered in China?
RQ2	When the students arrived in the British university, what did they expect of seminars?
RQ3	What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers and Chinese students? RQ3a What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers? RQ3b What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to Chinese students?
RQ4	What do patterns of participation in case-study discussions in British seminars reveal about the methods employed by Chinese students, and how do these differ from other non-native speakers of English?
RQ5	What discussion methods uncovered by the study did Chinese students, British lecturers and Chinese lecturers from China prefer?

Table 3. 4 Research questions

Chapter 4 Research methods

In the first part of this chapter I will discuss some methodological issues relating to my research design. In the second part, I will explain my research design, providing justifications for the design and the choice of data collection instruments along the way. Finally, the study will be accounted for in terms of procedure, data collection, and data analysis.

4.1 Methodological issues

4.1.1 Research paradigm and triangulation

This study was a combination of exploration and investigation dealing with 'what', 'how', and 'why' types of research questions (Cohen *et al.* 2011). The research questions could not be answered sufficiently by drawing on a single qualitative method (which generally explores a problem and reasons) or a quantitative method (which generally indicates the extent of a problem), but by both types of data. The nature of this study lent itself from the outset to a qualitative-quantitative approach and triangulation strategies.

Small group discussions of case-studies can be differently construed in different cultures. A case-study discussion for another group of cultural users becomes in effect a different activity with a different purpose and different mediational strategies—the methods of group discussion which themselves are affected by people's attitudes, understanding and perceptions of the activity and its goal

(Wertsch 1998). This is because the adjustment involves dynamic interaction between students and the learning environment; students are influenced by this environment and also create their own environments. Adjustment processes should be viewed in terms of people's attitudes, understanding, and perceptions, and these are intangible forms of knowledge. The study was in a phenomenological tradition, exploring "the individual's perceptions and meaning of a phenomenon or experience" (Merten 1998:169). The qualitative paradigm offered the best hope of capturing that. Tick-box responses would be reductionist and would prove frustrating to those asked to express the complexities of their attitudes, understanding and perceptions in such pre-determined ways (Skyrme 2008). For this reason the study made extensive use of interviews with both students and lecturers. On the other hand, this study needed quantifiable responses to the investigation of the importance attached to study priorities and preferences concerning group discussion methods, the range of which could be predicted and measured through the survey method. In addition this study has chosen an extended IRF model to analyse the transcribed group discussion. This yields quantitative data of the numbers of turn types and facilitates the identification of discourse patterns. The recorded interactions are also used to elicit reflection by participants, where speakers give an interpretation of their behaviour and of the situation.

The study therefore used mixed research methods, combining a questionnaire survey, non-participant observation, recording and interview accounts (detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the data collection methods will be discussed in section 4.3). Therefore triangulation was employed. Triangulation refers to the use of

more than one method of data collection to investigate the same issue or phenomenon (Cohen *et al*. 2011). The purpose was to provide a deeper understanding of the research findings (Cohen *et al*. 2011). Triangulation was used when I interpreted recorded discussion patterns using IRF analysis and compared them with the speakers' own direct interpretation of what was going on in the discussions. In this way an 'emic' perspective is obtained which can enter into dialogue with my 'etic' perspective. Triangulation was also employed to compare the students' responses in interviews and the audio-recorded data, with reference to RQ1a, RQ1c and RQ4 (see section 4.3.2), and my own observations and the follow-up interviews (see section 4.3.2). Triangulation helps to ensure the validity of the research in terms of the depth, richness, and scope of the data collected.

4.1.2 An ethnographic research perspective

This study adopted a quasi-ethnographic research perspective but should not be considered as a full ethnography.

The origin of ethnography lies in 19th century Western anthropology, where "an ethnography (the core of anthropological work) was a descriptive account of a community or culture (by travellers and missionaries)" (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007:1). Over time, anthropologists developed their fieldwork skills, integrating "both first-hand empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organization and culture" (2007:1).

In the 20th century, anthropological ethnographic research spread across the

disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and human geography. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) describe ethnographic researchers as collecting data by "participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts—in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (2007:3). The analysis of data is a qualitative interpretation through insider's eyes.

The usefulness of ethnographic research in educational research is its extended engagement in the setting, investigated and explored through insiders' eyes (Dörnyei 2007). In this way, an 'emic' perspective is acquired. Ethnographic research is also valued in applied linguistics studies mainly because it enables researchers to observe and investigate the relationships between social practice and language learning (Dörnyei 2007). Gardner (2008:3) points out that linguistic approaches to discourse should be supplemented by ethnographic approaches, to explore the evidence with reference to "the intention of those who produced it and the purposes it is intended to serve".

For practical reasons this study collected data at several critical time slots, rather than observing classroom teaching and learning practice continuously over an extended period of time.

The quasi-insider perspective adopted in this study was a challenging one, and required me to consider my own "etic issues, frame of reference, cultural bias" (Stake

1998:32). The next section discusses my approach.

4.1.3 The researcher's roles

In this study I played the roles of an observer and an interpreter.

Insider and outsider views are discussed by Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) with reference to ESP course design. "Outsiders are not stakeholders" (Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998:131). Being an outsider, a researcher may have a more objective attitude towards learners' needs. Insiders, on the other hand, "will have a feel for the situation but can be too close and involved, or lack expertise" (Dudley-Evans & St. John 1998:131).

In this study, I was an insider because I myself am a Chinese student in Britain. I have experienced the difficulties and challenges of 'culture shock', like my research subjects. This insider/emic view has rarely been adopted in studies by British or Chinese lecturers. However I also intended to "maintain a polite distance" (Michelle 2009:303) from my research subjects in order to "cultivate rapport, not friendship; understanding, not identification" (Michelle 2009:303). This quasi-insider view enabled this study to deduce the emic meanings of the participants and also ensured consideration of the perceptions of different stakeholders involved in the '2+1' programme. However I had to bear in mind that my 'emic' knowledge of the participants might influence my 'etic' hypotheses and interpretations.

This study intended to seek "different and even contradictory views" (Stake 1995:12)

about the understanding of students' behaviour and perceptions, in order to generate in-depth understanding. It took into consideration the perspectives of '2+1' Chinese students and graduates, Chinese lecturers from the Chinese institution, British lecturers from the British institution, and Chinese visiting scholars in the British institution.

The empirical studies I reviewed in Chapters 2-3 suggest that researchers' perceptions influence their interpretations and findings. For example Wang (2012) seemed to be rather positive about discussion behaviour entailing the brave expression of opposing ideas, although actually this is not the preferred behaviour in Western educational or professional contexts. He also seemed to presume, without obtaining evidence, that the students held a positive attitude towards their integration in Britain. Liu (2008) probably misunderstood his research participants' views concerning 'activeness' and 'critical thinking' and he did not explain the ways in which certain teaching and learning techniques might be considered more active than others.

When analysing the data, I constantly reminded myself to be patient, reflective, and willing to consider other points of view, in order to make vigorous interpretations. The vital technique of interpretation requires logical and critical thinking. I tried to maintain my independent interpretation rather than being influenced by my research participants. I was especially aware of possible misunderstandings between my participants and myself when I was translating the interview data from Chinese to English.

4.1.4 Issues with generalisation

The study considered the issue of generalising in response to repeated behaviour, problems or responses. Some incidents in my data only occurred in specific situations, however, so I considered whether similar incidents would regularly occur in similar situations. Moreover, when I was analysing Chinese students' discussion styles I not only looked for possible misunderstandings with the Western students but also considered whether the Western students demonstrated similar discussion styles to the Chinese students. The process of striving for generalizations involves constant reconsideration of what constitutes similar interactional behaviour in response to the same perceived goal.

4.1.5 Ethics

I was ethically sensitive in doing my research. When I transcribed the recordings, I used a coded identifier for each informant and for each piece of transcription. I also anonymised any names mentioned by the speakers in the interviews or seminar group discussions.

One week before I conducted my data collection, I offered my subjects the Informed Consent Forms and invited them to join my research. If they agreed to take part in my research, I would ask them to sign the form. If they agreed to take part in my interviews or seminar group discussion recordings, I would confirm this again. Although I would not always be able to obtain formal written consent from all the students before I observed classes, I only took notes when I observed these classes,

and the students' normal learning experience was not compromised in any way. I did not record personal information during observation sessions.

The student participants regarded me as a peer rather than as an authority figure, and did not feel obliged to take part if I invited them to do so.

My research was ethically approved by the University Applied Research Committee (UARC) before I conducted my data collection processes (see Appendix 1 for the ethics approval form).

4.2 Research sample background

This study investigates a specific '2+1' undergraduate business degree programme in which students study for two years in a semi-independent International School at a Chinese university in a well developed region of China (Part I of the programme), and study for another year in a British business school (Part II of the programme). On successful completion of their third year of study, students are awarded a Bachelor degree in International Business. The 2+1 students in my study spent two years in China from 2009 to 2011 and a final year (2011-2012) in Britain. As it is explained in Chapter 1, this '2+1' degree was chosen because the lecturers from the British institution reported that they had difficulty conducting seminars with the Chinese students on this programme and that the students had difficulty obtaining second or first-class degrees. The students on the programme come from well-developed provinces in the coastal area of China, as do a large proportion of the Chinese undergraduates who apply individually to study abroad. This section provides factual

information about the teaching and learning situations of Part I and II of the '2+1' programme in terms of teaching staff, course design, methods of assessment, and the learning environment. The information was collected from lecturers and students.

Students entering the '2+1' programme are 18 to 19 year old middle school graduates. To enter Part I of the programme these students are required to have either a College Entrance Exam score which would enable them to enrol at a medium-ranking Chinese university, or an English language test score equivalent to IELTS 5.0. During Part I they stay in fixed groups containing only students who are aiming to apply to the British business school.

At the time the data was collected, the two-year Part I programme in China was delivered by 20 Chinese lecturers and three British teachers (two teaching subject modules and one teaching an English module). All the business lecturers were from the International Business Department, Accounting and Management Department and Statistics Department of the Chinese university. Sometimes in the middle of a term one or two business lecturers left and other lecturers took over their work. Most of them taught half in Chinese and half in English.

The majority of the English teaching staff were full-time lecturers in the Chinese institution. All of them had experience of IELTS training in private training centres.

The programme offered students intensive English language training and subject classes. Students received about 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per week, divided between IELTS preparation (15 hours), Business English (4 hours) and

business theory (6 hours) (see Table 4.1). This left little time for independent learning outside class. Individual lecturers created syllabi and followed them as they chose. The lecturers adopted different teaching methods.

Year	Year 1		Year 2	
Term	1st term	2nd term	3rd term	4th term
English modules	Integrated English skills (9hours/week)		Integrated English skills (9h/w)	
	English listening (4h/w)		Business English speaking (2h/w)	
	Fundamental English writing (2h/w)		Business English writing (2h/w)	
	Business English speaking (2h/w)		Business English-Chinese translation (2h/w)	
	English reading (2h/w)			
Business modules	Statistics (3h/w)	International business environment (3h/w)	Management (3h/w)	Financial investment (3h/w)
	Economics (3h/w)	Human resource management (3h/w)	Organisational behaviour (3h/w)	Marketing (3h/w)
				Fundamental computing skills (3h/w)

Table 4. 1   Modules arranged for four terms on the Part I programme

There were around 120 students on the programme when I visited the institution in May 2010. They learnt in fixed classes containing around 40 students and were able to establish stable relationships with their peers. The programme had a high drop-out rate in both Year One and Year Two, mainly because students lost interest in the programme, not because they failed the course.

The assessment was by paper examination (60 percent of the final score) and the lecturers' judgements of classroom behaviour (40 percent of the final score). During the interviews, however, some lecturers implied that students who simply attended every class would be awarded full marks for classroom behaviour.

The Business theory examinations were designed to check the students' understanding of theoretical knowledge. They took the form of multiple choice, true-false questions, and brief definitions of terms and theories. In some

examinations students were presented with a scenario or open-ended question; however the answer to this question only accounted for 20 percent of the total score. Both students and lecturers understood that marks were given for every relevant theoretical point the students mentioned rather than how well they analysed the case.

The examinations seemed to be designed to check whether the majority of the students had acquired a basic understanding of the subject rather than to differentiate between students at different levels of ability. This was in accordance with the general practice in Chinese universities, where all students are expected to reach a required standard, but do not benefit from receiving higher marks unless they compete for scholarship funding. The Chinese institution I observed did not offer scholarships. Nevertheless, it is possible that the students' learning objectives might have been influenced by the examination.

Admission to Part II of the programme in Britain requires successful completion of Part I and an English language proficiency score equivalent to IELTS 6.5. Many of the students only attained the equivalent of IELTS 5.5 and had to attend a pre-sessional English language course. In Part II in Britain, students studied alongside students enrolled on a standard British three-year degree programme.

This programme was first launched in 2007, and in 2011, 120 students were enrolled in the Chinese institution and around 80 students transferred to the British institution.

Several British lecturers were engaged in the teaching of each module and were led by a module leader who took responsibility for designing the syllabus and coordinating progress.

In the British university, the students had to study three mandatory modules (International Business, Business Strategy, and Advanced English for Business and Management) and three optional modules chosen from dozens of options.

The students received five hours of lectures and six hours of seminars every week, leaving a great deal of time for independent learning outside the classroom; the advanced English for Business and Management module was allocated one session per week and the other modules were allocated two sessions, one lecture and one seminar. Students chose their seminar time slots by themselves, without lecturer intervention. There were around 100 students in each lecture and around 25 students in each seminar. Small group discussion focusing on case studies was used extensively in seminars, and students were required to find and critically analyse authentic sources relating to these cases.

The Chinese students studied with students learning different business and management related subjects, from different countries in Europe, Africa and Asia. Some of these non-Chinese students were also on two-site partnership degree programmes. Table 4.2 shows student information for the two mandatory subject modules of international business and business strategy, provided by the undergraduate administration of the British institution. 'Overseas' students were those from countries outside Europe. An overwhelming number of the Chinese

students taking the two modules were on the "2+1" programme.

	International Business module	Business Strategy module
Overseas (outside Europe)	136	150
British and European	155	204

Table 4. 2 Student information on two mandatory modules in Part II

The students were assessed continuously through individual and group written assignments, oral group presentations and paper examinations. There was no direct assessment of seminar discussion performance although the learning outcomes of the classroom discussion may have affected their performance in oral presentations and written assignments. The examination questions were all open-ended and without any word length restrictions. In 2011-2012 the students had to complete a total number of 12 assignments, an average of two assignments for each module. Usually the word requirement was 2,000 to 3,000 words. The lecturers would give detailed feedback in a formative manner, but the total marks for the assignments made up about 60 to 70 percent of the final grade, and thus had a big effect on the students' final degree classification. Most of the assignments were reports on case studies, and the students were provided with written case materials. However it was always necessary for the students to search for additional factual information from other sources.

Reproduced below are five questions for a group assignment on Business Strategy (Figure 4.1). The students had to choose one case study taken from a textbook and critically analyse it, utilising a number of relevant management theories, models and concepts. Compared with the assignments in China which only emphasised

understanding of theoretical knowledge, the British assignment explicitly required students to use their theoretical knowledge to analyse and evaluate the case situation.

1. Critically evaluate the organisation's pattern of strategic development at the time of the case study to its current position. 2. Critically evaluate the organisations resources and competences and use these to indicate the possible sources of competitive advantages. 3. Using appropriate models, evaluate the external business environment in which the organisation operates. 4. Carry out a strategic group analysis for the industry/ies that your firm is engaged in and identify the important strategic characteristics that differentiate organisations in the industry/ies. 5. The case invites the development of a longer-term strategy for the organisation's development. What recommendations could be made for long-term strategy development of the organisation?

Figure 4. 1 An assignment on Business Strategy in Part II

The students were required to submit a case study report of 2,500 words, and also had to give an oral presentation about the case study. Students within the same group received different scores according to their individual performances.

Students were advised to form work groups of five to six members, and in order to finish the assignment, each group had to meet together several times outside class to discuss academic issues, monitor progress, and rehearse. Each group member was required to fill in a form evaluating the work undertaken in order to monitor each other's engagement. The requirements of group work suggest the importance of the group discussion process for the quality of the final written report and the oral presentation.

Figure 4.2 reproduces the detailed assessment criteria stated in the course description. There was no strict requirement about language and style; emphasis was

placed on students' high level of cognitive learning ability.

> Your seminar presentations together with the report will be assessed against the following criteria:
> 10%: Presentation skills (to include pace of delivery; eye contact; use of appropriate support resources and handouts; professional appearance; lay-out of slides; utilisation of PowerPoint, etc.);
> 20%: The use of relevant academic references and examples;
> 60%: Accurate answers to the questions provided, with well-supported arguments and clear conclusions (the written report will form part of this mark);
> 10%: The ability to discuss further questions raised by the audience.

Figure 4. 2 Assessment criteria for marking the group assignment in Part II

According to the teaching and learning information provided for the '2+1' programme, it seems that the major difference between Part I and Part II is that the students in Part I are required to absorb taught knowledge in a tightly-controlled environment, whereas in Part II in Britain they are facilitated to learn through a range of activities, with learner autonomy as an eventual goal.

4.3 Data collection methods

This section discusses the four types of data collection methods used in the study: classroom observation, recording, interviews and questionnaire surveys.

4.3.1 Classroom observation and recording

In this study classroom observation was used to collect first-hand information about a natural setting (Williams 1988; Johns & Dudley-Evans 1991). This was achieved by observing what was really going on, rather than by listening to what people said about it (Creswell 2003; Denscombe 2007). Classroom observation in the study was a

preliminary activity to acquaint myself with classroom procedures and participant relationships because I needed this background information in order to decide what to record and who to interview. Parts of the three research questions RQ1, RQ3 and RQ4 required preliminary classroom observation which needed to be complemented by interview data sources.

The methodology of classroom observation concerns the insider/outsider view discussed in section 4.1.3. If an observer acts as a participant, he/she is entitled to a role in the observed activity. If an observer acts as a non-participant, he/she makes every effort not to impinge on the context. This study chose non-participant classroom observation to deduce etic understanding about the research subjects' learning context. Non-participant observation allows a researcher more freedom to withdraw from the observed activities and to adopt different and opposing perspectives (Kelliny 1994). However the 'observer's paradox' (Labov 1972:209) unavoidably disturbs routine transactions in the classroom. Prolonged observation can overcome this problem, because presumably the disturbance is only temporary. I overtly observed the same classes in the British institution several times before I started to record student discussion. The students became familiar with me and behaved in their customary manner. The time constraints of the discussion task also made it more likely that they would ignore my presence.

Audio-recording was necessary to find out students' group discussion methods because of the complex nature of oral interaction. Self-reported information of the kind used in Wang (2012) and Frambach *et al.*'s (2013) studies was felt to be

inadequate because the informants might not recall the exact contexts and details of their interactions.

4.3.2 Interviews

Two types of interviews were conducted for this study: follow-up interviews after classroom observation and separate rounds of exploratory interviews.

The follow-up interviews were reflective, and used semi-structured or structured questions generated after considering what I had observed and recorded in the classroom. For example I conducted follow-up interviews with specific Chinese student participants after observing and recording their group discussions, to enquire about their interpretation of the interaction. The follow-up interviews triangulated the students' responses with my observations and the audio-recorded data, to address RQ1a, RQ1c and RQ4.

The exploratory interviews used semi-structured prompting questions, encouraging respondents to discuss and raise any further unexpected issues. The questions were generated after reviewing the literature with reference to this topic. The exploratory interviews addressed RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ2 and RQ3.

It is necessary to distinguish talk-aloud and think-aloud interviews here. Talk-aloud interviews ask participants to report on the information needed to complete a task they are engaged in and the logic of undertaking a task; think-aloud interviews ask participants to report what they are/were thinking and feeling when arriving at

answers to a question (Singleton & Straits 2002). In think-aloud interviews, participants verbalise their thought process either concurrently or retrospectively. The report is not contemporaneous with the problem solution process. The interviews of this study were think-aloud interviews.

4.3.3 Questionnaire

Questionnaire surveys are usually used as a quantitative research method to investigate problems and the reasons why people think or behave as they do (Cohen *et al*. 2011). This study employed a questionnaire survey to investigate 2+1 students' attitudes towards learning priorities in Part I of their programme in China, and the learning strategies they used in the Chinese institute (RQ1b and RQ1c). The questionnaire survey was necessary here because it helped investigate the general situation relating to RQ1b and RQ1c as part of the culture of learning in the Chinese institute. Of course, the questionnaire survey was limited as a means of providing information about how exactly the students learnt, their purposes and their strategies. Therefore it needed to be triangulated with information gathered from the interviews.

1. What do you think was the purpose of the Chinese programme? For each of the following choose a number from 1 (=not at all important) to 5 (=very important).	1	2	3	4	5
1.1 To gain a good IELTS score					
1.2 To develop English communication skills					
1.3 To develop academic English skills					
1.4 To develop fundamental knowledge of business					
2. At the Chinese university, how often do you do each of the following? Choose a number from 1 (=never) to 5 (=very often).	1	2	3	4	5
2.1 Reading online business comments in Chinese					
2.2 Using translation tools					
2.3 Using a dictionary					

2.4 Using the library					
2.5 Practicing English with peers					
2.6 Preparing work to give to the group leader					
2.7 Choosing to be the leader of the group					

Table 4. 3 Questionnaire

Table 4.3 is a sample of the questionnaire which consisted of two parts (see Appendix 2 for a complete version). The students had to choose from 1 (=not at all important) to 5 (=very important). The first part was designed to investigate students' attitudes towards learning priorities on Part I in China. The learning priorities were to gain a good IELTS score, to develop English communication skills, to develop academic English skills, and to develop fundamental knowledge of business. The second part of the questionnaire was to investigate the preferences of students regarding seven learning strategies—reading online business comments in Chinese, using translation tools, using a dictionary, using the library, practising English with peers, preparing work to give to the group leader, and choosing to be the leader of the group. The first four strategies were about students' skills of seeking help; the last three strategies related to group work. I was conscious of a flaw in the questionnaire surveys used by Rodrigues (2005) and Auken *et al*. (2009) in that they did not provide explanations of the terminology they used. The questionnaire avoided using terminology. Participants were asked to indicate how often they used these strategies in Part I by choosing from 1 (=never) to 5 (=very often).

I had deduced these learning objectives and strategies from classroom observations and the interviews with the students and the Chinese lecturers in China. The questionnaire was devised after I had collected and analysed the observations and interviews.

4.4 Research design

This section explains my plan of data collection in relation to the five research questions. It explains the rationale for my choice of data collection methods regarding each research question and my design of the observation protocols and interview questions. It also explains how the collected information could answer the research questions. The exact procedure of data collection will be explained in section 4.5.

4.4.1 Research management

The study consisted of four steps. Table 4.4 indicates how the research questions relate to each of these. All the research questions are chronologically arranged in Table 4.4 except RQ1d which was a phase of Step A but was addressed when the 2+1 students had transferred to the British university.

Steps	Research questions
Step A To investigate the Chinese students' learning experiences in the Chinese university.	RQ1 What were the students' learning experiences in the Chinese university? To be specific: RQ1a What group discussion skills did Chinese lecturers think that the students would need in British classrooms? RQ1b What were the students' learning priorities? RQ1c What learning strategies did the students employ? RQ1d How do the students evaluate the preparation they were offered in China?
Step B To investigate the perceptions of students and lecturers in the British university regarding group discussion.	RQ2 When the students arrived in the British university, what did they expect of seminars? RQ3 What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers and Chinese students? RQ3a What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers? RQ3b What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to Chinese students?

Step C	RQ4 What do patterns of participation in case-study discussions in
To investigate the patterns of	British seminars reveal about the methods employed by Chinese
participation in case-study	students, and how do these differ from other non-native speakers of
discussions.	English?
Step D	RQ5 What discussion methods uncovered by the study did Chinese
To compare the attitudes of Chinese	students, British lecturers and Chinese lecturers from China prefer?
students, Chinese lecturers from	
China and British lecturers regarding	
group discussion.	

Table 4. 4 Four research steps and the research questions they will deal with

Table 4.5 provides further information about the chronology of data collection and

the methods, participants, and purposes with reference to my research questions.

Steps	Time	Methods	Participants	Purposes	RQ(s) regarded	Notes
A	5.2011	Classroom observation	Lecturers	To identify the teaching techniques or strategies which underlie the lecturers' perceptions of students' future group discussion skill needs in British classrooms.	RQ1a	
			Students	To collect information about the students' learning strategies.	RQ1c	
		Follow-up interviews	Lecturers	To identify the teaching techniques or strategies which underlie the lecturers' perceptions of students' group discussion skill needs in British classrooms.	RQ1a	
			Students	To investigate the students' learning strategies.	RQ1c	
		Exploratory interviews	Lecturers	To investigate lecturers' perceptions of the group discussion skills the students would need in British classrooms.	RQ1a	
			Students	To investigate the degree of importance students attached to specific learning content and skills.	RQ1b	
		Questionnaire survey	Students	To investigate the students' learning priorities and the frequency of the students' usage of the learning strategies.	RQ1b RQ1c	
B	9.2011	Exploratory interviews	Students	To investigate the students' expectations of seminars.	RQ2	
	10.2011	Exploratory interviews	Students	To investigate the students' perceptions of the purpose of group discussion.	RQ3b	Conducted during March

						and April in 2012 (see section 4.5.5)
	10-12.2011	Classroom observation	Lecturers	To identify the teaching techniques or strategies which underlie the lecturers' perceptions of the purpose of group discussion	RQ3a	
	11.2011	Exploratory interviews	Lecturers	To investigate British lecturers' perceptions of the purpose of group discussion.	RQ3a	
C	12.2011-3.2012	Classroom observation and recording	Students	To collect factual information about specific groups. To collect the students' group discussion discourse.	RQ4	
		Follow-up interviews	Students	To investigate specific students' interpretations of their recorded discussion behaviour.	RQ4	
D	5.2012	A ranking task and follow-up interviews	Students Chinese lecturers from China British lecturers	To investigate the participants' preferences for the group discussion methods uncovered by the study.	RQ5	

Table 4. 5 The chronology of data collection for the four steps

4.4.2 Step A

The purpose of Step A was to investigate the '2+1' students' learning experiences in China. It was designed to answer the secondary questions of RQ1. Three data collection methods were selected, non-participant classroom observation, interviews and a survey. Their links to the research questions are demonstrated in an evaluation crosswalk in Table 4.6.

Research questions for Step A	Data collection methods			
	Classroom observation	Interviews		Survey
		Follow-up	Exploratory	
RQ1a What group discussion skills did Chinese lecturers think that the students would need in British classrooms?	X	X	X	
RQ1b What were the students' learning priorities?			X	X
RQ1c What learning strategies did the students employ?	X	X	X	X
RQ1d How do the students evaluate the preparation they were offered in China?			X	

Table 4. 6 Detailed research questions and the data collection methods for Stage A

The data relating to RQ1a was designed to be collected via the triangulation of classroom observation and follow-up interviews. The purpose of the classroom observation was to identify the teaching techniques or strategies which underlie the lecturer's perception of students' group discussion skill needs in British classrooms.

Table 4.7 is the observation protocol for RQ1a and RQIc. In order to collect information for RQ1a and RQ1c, the protocol was concerned with the skills the Chinese lecturers intended their Chinese students to acquire and how the students sought help and worked together in classrooms.

Lecturer (code):	Subject:
Teaching language:	The number of students:
Teaching techniques	Students' learning strategies
Questions/tasks: Materials: Skills trained:	How do the students seek help? How do the students work together?

Table 4. 7 Classroom observation protocol regarding RQ1a and RQ1c

The follow-up reflective interviews asked the lecturers about the purposes of specific teaching techniques. This triangulation strategy is in contrast to the methods adopted by Wang (2012) and Frambach *et al*. (2013), who investigated participants' perceptions as expressed in self-reports. In these studies the participants' descriptions of their behaviour were not checked against other information sources.

A separate round of exploratory interviews also asked the lecturers about their perceptions of the group discussion skills the students would need in British classrooms. Table 4.8 lists the interview prompts used in the interviews. The questions enquired about students' communication skills needs in general in order to explore the importance the lecturer interviewees attached to group discussion skills.

What kind of study skills do you think the Chinese students will need when studying in Britain?
What do you think are the communication skills your students most need when they are studying in the Chinese university?
What do you think are the communication skills your students most need when they are studying in the British university?
What kinds of communication skills do you want students to acquire while they are at the Chinese university?
Do you use lectures, seminars, tutorials etc? Can you briefly describe your approach?

Table 4. 8 Exploratory interview prompt questions with Chinese lecturers regarding RQ1a

RQ1b investigated the degree of importance students attached to specific learning

content and skills. Classroom observation is not suitable for this purpose; exploratory interviews were used to generate the learning priority items and their importance was subsequently measured via a questionnaire survey (see section 4.3.3 and 4.5.3). The prompting questions for the exploratory interviews regarding RQ1b are provided in Table 4.9:

Why did you choose this partnership degree programme?
What are your learning priorities when you are studying here in China? Why?

Table 4. 9 Exploratory interview prompt questions with Chinese students regarding RQ1b

Students' learning strategies (RQ1c) were investigated through classroom observation (see Table 4.7 for the observation protocol), follow-up interviews, exploratory interviews, and the questionnaire survey. The purpose of classroom observation and exploratory interviews was to collect information about the students' learning strategies. The follow-up interviews offered an opportunity to discuss with participants the strategies they had been observed to use in class. The questionnaire survey investigated the frequency of the students' usage of the learning strategies (see Table 4.3 in section 4.3.3 for the questionnaire sample). Table 4.10 lists the prompting questions for the exploratory interviews with the Chinese students.

What kinds of learning strategies do you usually use to study English and your subjects? Can you give me examples?
What kinds of learning activities are you usually involved in? What learning strategies do you and/or your partners adopt during the activities? Why?

Table 4. 10 Exploratory interview prompt questions with Chinese students regarding RQ1c

Students' evaluations of Part I (RQ1d) were investigated through exploratory interviews which were scheduled at least four weeks after the students had begun

taking part in British seminars. The two prompting questions are provided in Table 4.11:

Was the English course you took during the first two years of university study in China helpful to your study in Britain? What was useful? What was not useful?
Was the subject course you took during the first two years of university study in China helpful to your study in Britain? What was useful? What was not useful?

Table 4. 11 Exploratory interview prompt questions with Chinese students regarding RQ1d

4.4.3 Step B

The purpose of Step B was to investigate perceptions about group discussion of students and lecturers in Part II. It was designed to answer RQ2 and the two secondary questions of RQ5. Classroom observation and exploratory interviews were selected (Table 4.12).

Research questions for Step B	Data collection methods	
	Classroom observation	Exploratory interviews
RQ2 When they arrive, what do the students expect of seminars?		X
RQ5a What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers?	X	X
RQ5b What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to Chinese students?		X

Table 4. 12 Detailed research questions and the data collection methods for Step B

Exploratory interviews with the '2+1' students were scheduled for when they had just arrived in Britain, to discover their expectations of seminars (RQ2). Table 4.13 lists the prompting questions for the interviews.

What did you expect the programme to be like before you came here, in terms of a) what you were going to be taught, and b) how you were going to be taught?

What did you expect of seminars in the British university?
What kinds of seminars do you like, in terms of size, student interaction, lecturer's role, etc?

Table 4. 13 Exploratory interview prompt questions with Chinese students regarding RQ2

A second round of exploratory interviews was scheduled at least four weeks after the students had begun taking part in British seminars, to find out about their perceptions of the purpose of group discussion (RQ3b). Table 4.14 contains the prompting question for the interviews.

What discussion skills do you think are required in order to participate in seminar group discussion in Britain?

Table 4. 14 Exploratory interview prompt question with Chinese students regarding RQ5b

British lecturers' perceptions of the purpose of group discussion (RQ3a) were investigated through classroom observation and exploratory interviews. As in the Chinese classrooms, the purpose of the classroom observation in Britain was to identify the teaching techniques or strategies which underlay the lecturers' perceptions of the purposes of group discussion. The data obtained were compared with the data about student perceptions of the purpose of group discussion. Table 4.15 is the observation protocol.

Lecturer (code):	Module:
Teaching techniques:	
Questions/tasks: Materials: Requirements:	

Table 4. 15 Classroom observation protocol regarding RQ5a

Table 4.16 lists the prompting questions used in the exploratory interviews with the British lecturers.

What is the purpose of group discussion?
What communication skills do you think group discussion requires?
What communication skills do you think Chinese students need in order to participate in seminar group discussion?
Can you describe a task assigned for seminar discussion? What is the purpose of the task? What are the expected approaches to fulfil the task?

Table 4. 16 Exploratory interview prompt questions with Chinese students regarding RQ5a

4.4.4 Step C

Step C was designed to investigate the patterns of participation in case-study discussions (RQ4). It was scheduled to take place after the audio-recording and follow-up interviews had been completed. Three data collection methods were selected: non-participant classroom observation, audio-recording and follow-up interviews. Their links to the research questions are demonstrated in an evaluation crosswalk in Table 4.17.

Research question for Step C	Data collection methods			
	Classroom observation	Audio recording	Interviews	
			Follow-up	Exploratory
RQ3 What do patterns of participation in case-study discussions in British seminars reveal about the methods employed by Chinese students, and how do these differ from other non-native speakers of English?	X	X	X	

Table 4. 17 Detailed research questions and the data collection methods for Step C

The purpose of the classroom observation was to collect factual information about specific groups in terms of numbers of group members, nationalities, discussion topics, and whether the discussion topics were provided in advance. Table 4.18 is the classroom observation protocol for Step C.

Basic information	Lecturer (code): Module:
	The number of students:
Topic and requirements	Discussion topic/question/case:
	Materials:
	Lecturer's requirements of group discussion:
Students behaviour	Members of the observed group:
	Notes:

Table 4. 18 Classroom observation protocol regarding RQ5a

The audio-recordings of student interaction in small group discussions of case studies took place after at least four seminar observations. These were transcribed and coded using an extended version of IRF (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975) to show the local discourse function of turns at talk. A full explanation of the coding system is contained in section 4.6.

The follow-up interviews used why- questions to enquire about the specific students' interpretations of their discussion behaviour in the recordings.

4.4.5 Step D

Step D was an investigation designed to compare the attitudes of Chinese students, Chinese lecturers from China and British lecturers about group discussion (RQ5). This investigation recruited participants who already had experience of small group discussion in Britain. Chinese lecturers and students in China without this kind of experience were not included. The investigation included a ranking task and follow-up interviews (Table 4.19).

Research questions for Step D	Data collection methods	
	A ranking task	Follow-up interview
RQ4 What discussion methods uncovered by the study did Chinese students, British lecturers and Chinese lecturers from China prefer?	X	X

Table 4. 19 Detailed research questions and the data collection methods for Step D

The ranking task chose three excerpts from the original transcripts of small group discussions I had recorded. The three excerpts represent three different discussion styles: 'spiral', 'exploratory', and 'individual' (the research findings are summarised in Chapter 6 section 6.2). The three excerpts were printed on three papers and shown to individual participants in their office or an empty classroom. Participants were asked to rank the interactions in the three excerpts according to how well they thought they facilitated the acquisition of content knowledge.

A follow-up interview was conducted immediately after a participant ranked the three interaction styles. The participants were asked to explain their ranking choices and to consider the purpose of seminar discussion in general. The prompting questions used in the interviews are listed in Table 4.20.

Which approach (as illustrated by the three excerpts) is best to learn business content?
What is your understanding of the ideal seminar group discussion?

Table 4. 20 Exploratory interview prompt questions with British lecturers regarding RQ4

4.5 Data collection and analysis

4.5.1 Step A: classroom observation and follow-up interviews

The classroom observation and follow-up interviews for Step A were designed to

collect data for RQ1a and RQ1c.

I visited the Chinese institution for four weeks during May 2011. I was only permitted to observe five classes. I was not allowed to audio-record the observed classes but only take notes. I selected five classes randomly two days before my observation; all the classes were for second-year students. Table 4.21 summarises the observed classes and provides the codes for the classes and the lecturers.

Class code	Class name	Lecturer code
Class A	English writing	CEW1
Class B	English listening	CEL1
Class C	Management	CM1
Class D	Management	CM2
Class E	Marketing	CM3

Table 4. 21 The five classes I observed in the Chinese institution

Only two lecturers agreed to participate in follow-up interviews. I asked them to explain their reasons for using specific teaching techniques. All the interviews with lecturers were conducted via the instant communication software Tencent QQ. This was suggested by the participants because they did not have office hours (usually they left the campus after teaching).

4.5.2 Step A: exploratory interviews

Exploratory interviews were arranged to investigate all the secondary questions of RQ1, 1a to 1d.

Initially I had planned to interview, by convenience sampling, 10 second-year students, five Chinese business English lecturers and five subject lecturers. However

most of the students and lecturers were too busy preparing for the final exam. Finally, three students (CSIC1-3), three Chinese business lecturers (CBIC1-3), and three Chinese English lecturers (CEIC1-3) agreed to participate in the interviews via QQ. The five lecturers whose classes were observed were not recruited because they might have been tempted to defend and justify the particular teaching methods I had observed in their classes. First-year students were not recruited because I intended to carry on my investigations with the same group of students after they had transferred to Britain.

The students were asked about their learning priorities, the study skills they wanted to acquire, and their understanding of the case method. Like the interviews with the Chinese lecturers, the term '小组讨论 (group discussion)' was also not used in the interviews because it was not often used in the classroom.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese. All were transcribed and loaded to Nvivo 9.0. I asked my Chinese colleagues to check the accuracy and appropriateness of the translations of the excerpts from the interviews that I have included in this thesis.

Data collection for RQ1d will be explained in section 4.5.5, as it took place outside the chronological order for Step A (see section 4.4.1).

4.5.3 Step A: questionnaire

The questionnaire survey in Step A was designed to collect data for RQ1b-c. Initially I planned to administer the survey when I visited the Chinese institute. However, I had

to change my plan for the questionnaire survey because the students were not willing to take part, being concerned that the results would influence their application to the British institution. I therefore administered the survey at the British institution in September 2011 when the students had just started their final year study. They had much more interest in participating once they had arrived in Britain.

The questionnaire survey was conducted at the end of a lecture which contained 38 '2+1' students. Thirty-four pieces of valid feedback were received. Four students did not seem to like the Likert scale and rated all the items as 'four' on the scale of five. I decided to discard these four pieces of feedback.

4.5.4 Step B: classroom observation

The classroom observation in Step B was designed to collect data for RQ3a.

From October to December 2011 I consistently observed six seminar classes led by six lecturers (BLO1-6) for 7 weeks; three on International Business and three on Business Strategy. A total of 15 seminar classes were observed. Each lasted for about 60 minutes and contained an element of small group discussion.

4.5.5 Step B: exploratory interviews

The exploratory interviews in Step B were designed to collect data for RQ2 and RQ3a-b.

In September 2011 when the students were selecting their preferred seminar time

slots I interviewed 12 volunteer students about the seminar interaction they expected to take place (RQ2). The student participants were coded as CSIS1-12.

During November 2011 I interviewed six British lecturers (BLI1-6) who taught International Business and Business Strategy, two mandatory modules. They were asked about their perceptions of the nature of seminar interaction, the purpose of group discussion, and the group discussion skills students needed (RQ3a).

From March to April 2012 I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 volunteer students (CSIB1-12) who had by then been in Part II of the programme for around six months; most of their seminars had finished when the interviews were conducted. They were asked to reflect on their learning experiences in seminars and explain their perceptions of the purposes of group discussion (RQ3b). They were also asked to evaluate the usefulness of the English and subject courses offered by the Chinese institution (RQ1d).

The timing of this second round of interviews was later than planned because I needed time to prepare the classroom observation, recordings, and follow-up interviews and reflect on their outcomes, referring back to the literature.

4.5.6 Step C: classroom observation, recording and follow-up interviews

The classroom observation, recording and follow-up interviews in Step C were designed to collect information for RQ4.

Between December 2011 and March 2012 I audio-recorded 10 naturally formed

small group discussions in 10 subject seminars, including seven mixed group discussions (groups 1 to 7) and three homogeneous Chinese group discussions (groups 8 to 10). The quality of the group 7 recording was not good and was not used for analysis. Table 4.22 summarises the information about the nine pieces of recording. The mixed groups discussed in English and the Chinese groups discussed in Chinese. The Chinese groups were all with the same lecturer who allowed them to discuss in their L1. Within three days of the recordings I interviewed the Chinese student participants about their interpretation of their discussion behaviour.

Group	Questions/Tasks	Case material	Length (minutes)	Members (Code)
1	PESTEL analysis of a company/industry of the students' choice	Freely-chosen case topic	26	3 Chinese (C1-3) 1 French (F1) 1 Indian (I1)
2	Strategic group analysis of Dutch Polytechnics	Written case study handout	35	2 Chinese (C1-2) 1 British (B1) 2 French (F1-2) 1 Nigerian (N1)
3	Strategic group analysis of a company/industry of the students' choice	Freely-chosen case topic	33	2 Chinese (C1-2) 3 French (F1-3) 1 Polish (P1)
4	Critically evaluate Google's resources and competence using the VRIO model	Written case study handout	30	3 Chinese (C1-3) 1 French (F1)
5	Should government be the sixth force in Porter's five forces model? Using Porter's 5 forces framework, show how each of these developments has influenced competition in the fixed line telecom industry. Use the 5 forces framework to discuss why the tobacco industry is so profitable.	Lecturer assigned discussion questions	29	4 Chinese (C1-4) 1 Greek Cypriot (Cy1)
6	Using Porter's 5 forces framework, show how each of these developments has influenced competition in the fixed line telecom industry. Use the 5 forces framework to discuss	Lecturer assigned discussion questions	33	3 Chinese (C1-3) 1 French (F1)

	why the tobacco industry is so profitable.			
8	What are the features of Chinese business culture? How do they influence foreign investment ventures?	Lecturer assigned discussion questions	24	4 Chinese (C1-4)
9			22	6 Chinese (C1-6)
10			20	4 Chinese (C1-4)

Table 4. 22 A summary of small group discussion topics, length, and group member information

I asked permission of the seminar lecturers and students in my observed seminars one week before the recordings. In one seminar, I chose to record one group which contained roughly the same number of '2+1' and non-Chinese students. I was present in these seminar classrooms as usual, observing the whole seminar and moving to sit by the side of the recorded group when small group discussion started. The students also had to move to sit in groups when the discussion sessions started.

I intended to use the IRF model to analyse how the Chinese and non-Chinese participants responded sequentially (further explanation about the IRF analysis will be given in section 4.6). I uploaded all the recordings to Nvivo 9.0; this allowed me to directly code the recordings (see Appendix 3) so that I would not lose any audio-information which might be important for IRF coding.

I transcribed the recording clips which I decided to cite in this thesis. I did not add any punctuation to the transcripts in order to allow for possible alternative interpretations of the speakers' intentions. However I added punctuation to the interview transcriptions because the analysis of these focused on the reported content, rather than the discourse itself. Table 4.23 lists the transcription conventions which follow the transcription protocols of the BASE corpus (www.coventry.ac.uk/base). Back channelling (vocal feedback by a listener to indicate

that he or she is paying attention) was not transcribed.

=	Interruption
=XXX= =XXX=	Speech happens simultaneously
- -	Pause equals more than 3 seconds
?	Inaudible
erm	Long filler noise
er	Short filler noise
↗	Rising tone

Table 4. 23 Transcription conventions for audio-recording

4.5.7 Step D: a ranking task and the follow-up interviews

The ranking task and the follow-up interviews in Step D were designed to collect data for RQ5. This section explains the ranking task and the follow-up interviews in terms of the material used in the task, the participants, the sampling policy, and the procedure. It also describes a pilot study. The material used in the task was from my transcription of the recorded case-study group discussion in seminars in the British university. Step D was designed after I had already collected and analysed the recorded case-study group discussion and the follow-up interviews. In the following section about 'the material and the task' I will mention part of the findings in order to justify my selection of the material.

The material and the task

The three excerpts used in this ranking task represent three discussion styles uncovered by the study: 'spiral' (represented by Excerpt I), 'exploratory' (represented by Excerpt II), and 'individual' (represented by Excerpt III) (see Chapter 6 section 6.3). In the 'spiral' method, speakers keep returning to the initial discussion question and

prevent the topic from developing. In the 'exploratory' method, speakers reinforce and add to previous statements in order to create new knowledge. In the 'individual' method, the initiator of a topic takes responsibility for offering explanations and the other group members are not likely to build upon the initiator's contribution.

The three excerpts that were given to the participants are reproduced below. The nationalities of the students in the excerpts were disguised by using the codes A, B, C, and D so that participants in this investigation would not be influenced by this information. In order to make it easier to read, I added punctuation in the three excerpts. Task instructions were delivered orally. None of the participants knew about my overall research purpose. They were not aware that I was trying to investigate the adjustment of '2+1' Chinese business students to British university seminar group discussion.

Excerpt I

A: How do you think?

B: I also agree with you. Erm we should make the sixth force of the government because I have three reasons. And the first is the government policy can be a main entry of the exist barrier to many companies. And the second reason is the government sometimes er they has a role of customer. They will buy some goods um to some um companies. Also they can be a supplier. They also can offer some goods. And the last reason is the government policies can help or restrict some supplies er ?[17] to add potential entrance the heavier and situations. Erm so I think the government has a very strong power. So I think they can become the force, the sixth force.

D: Erm.

A: How about you?

C: I think maybe I am the only one who doesn't agree it. Um I think the government can be a strong powerful in the six forces. But it's not necessary cos now under the globalisation, um the government should give a how to say um freedom control - - (3 minutes) to the market.

A: Yes.

---

[17] The question mark is a transcript convention indicating the inaudible words. This footnote was on the experiment handout.

C: And then, but to in some industries just like making weapons or very (A: like) very how to say um very important industry government they can control but not all they can control. So I don't think it's necessary to put the government into the five forces.

A: And you?

D: Erm I think this model should be expanded include the government because government always uses the different kind the way of the control the er profit of the firm, tax, export and import, interest rate of bank, loan and vary of currency. Erm and the government always want to keep the balance of the stock market and real estate market. So I think government is a very important role in the economic. So I think it should be listed.

Excerpt II

A: Erm, anybody anything? What do you think?

B: Ah? I think, oh, um, since we've been provided um with the cooperation with the universities like providing MBA and all, if we.

A: But can we provide MBA?

B: No, some of the polytechnics provided MAB in some cases in cooperation with universities in the UK. So I think.

A: I think.

B: So I think we can be more academic rather than regional cos they would have to. We still be able to offer the same services but to other people.

A: So you mean that diversify?

B: Yeah, cos you see a polytechnic just offers um like what kind of education.

A: Yeah, but I think polytechnics are like for people are not academic skilled but they more like practical in nature which could say they are not smart. But it's stupid to say that so. But our customers.

B: OK, I know in our region that because we were not making.

A: It looks like a niche market. Haha. OK, erm you got a point because we already have this. Our plan is to do this strategic alliance with universities so that we offer MBA. Anybody object?

Excerpt III

A: Say something. Hurry up. We want to listen to your opinion.

B: Oh, please.

C: I don't even know what he (the tutor) was talking about. I don't quite understand.

B: Just say something.

A: It's just about the influence of culture on manufacture.

B: So it's about *Guanxi*. This can be counted as one factor.

A: Relationships?

B: There is a special research about *Guanxi* in China. Just write it in Chinese.

A: Can power distance be another factor?

B: I know that.

A: China is a country with high power distance.

C: Power is centralized. It should be right.

A: And it's hard for the subordinates to pass their opinions to the superiors.

Participants and the sampling policy

Three groups of participants took part in the main investigation: six British business lecturers (BLR1-6), six Chinese business lecturers who were visiting scholars in Britain (CLR1-6), and six Chinese business undergraduates (CSR1-6).

I chose my participants to represent three major types of stakeholders on the two-site degree programme. The six British business lecturers taught on the final stage of the programme; they had not participated in the previous interviews. The six Chinese business lecturers represented the Chinese lecturers from China. They were visiting scholars from four different Chinese universities and had already observed and participated in small group discussion in business seminars in the British institution. All the British and Chinese lecturers had a minimum of three years' teaching experience in business and management-related subjects.

The six Chinese student participants were chosen because they had completed the two-site programme. Three of them were enrolled on Business-related Masters programmes; the other three were seeking employment. None of the students had participated in the previous stages of my study and they were not the speakers in the excerpts that they were asked to rank.

Procedure

The 18 participants undertook the task separately but under the same conditions. Their comments were audio-recorded. Sessions lasted for an average of 30 minutes.

Each participant was given five minutes to read and rank the excerpts. After that, I asked each participant to explain their reasons for their ranking and prompted them to say what they thought would be the ideal way for students to interact in small group discussion.

I did not use a structured interview schedule; however I did prompt the participants when necessary, to elicit as much commentary as possible. For example, I might ask them what they perceived to be the differences between the types of interaction in the excerpts, whether they thought a particular interaction was a good way to learn, and what they perceived to be the purpose of small group discussion. I spoke to the Chinese participants in Chinese, and the British participants in English.

A pilot

I piloted this experiment with a British business lecturer. I provided her with the questions that were discussed in the three excerpts (listed below). I gave her these questions because I thought they would help her to understand what the students were talking about in the excerpts.

Excerpt I: Should government (i.e. political forces) be counted as the sixth force of Porter's five forces model?

Excerpt II: Do a strategic group analysis with Dutch polytechnics and think about the developing direction of polytechnics. What are the obstacles to development? How can we overcome them?

Excerpt III: What are the main features of Chinese business culture? How do they

influence the international business enterprises in China?

The lecturer ranked Excerpt II as the best one followed by I and III. Although the lecturer was certain about this ranking and commented on the excerpts extensively, she mainly focused on the purpose of the questions, as can be seen from Excerpt 4.1:

> This is a two-way process. To learn this kind of module here, this kind of business subject you need to have discussion for the viewpoint of students for example where did they come from, their home country. If they are coming from China or African country their government's political influence on the first part of five forces will be different from our side in the UK. … We try to give examples based on an international firm which all students are familiar with. For example Apple. Everybody knows. If you call a company in China, you have a company called Li Ning. Nobody knows. It's very popular in your country but not globally present. … Again we are looking at a specific industry the Dutch education market. So again students will come up with a lot of points. They can reflect on what they are looking at etc. So some will have different ideas whether we could move up to the more academic side or polytechnic side because education is becoming globalised.

Excerpt 4. 1 A pilot study of the investigation

In this excerpt, the lecturer repeatedly explained the learning situation, and the reason for using specific case companies. She tended to comment on the excerpts from a business lecturer's perspective. This information was not exactly what I required because rather than evaluating the module and the original discussion tasks I wanted her to evaluate *the success of the students' interaction in terms of the learning outcome*. Having considered the pilot data, I decided not to provide participants in my main investigation with the questions the students had been asked to discuss.

4.5.8 A summary of the research participants

Table 4.24 summarises all the participants in the data collection methods of the four research steps. The participants or observed classes were only coded when I needed to refer to them specifically when reporting the data.

Steps	Time	Methods	Participants	Codes
A	5.2011	Classroom observation	5 lecturers	CEW1, CEL1, CM1, CM2, CM3
			5 classes of students	The classes were coded as A, B, C, D, E.
		Follow-up interviews	2 lecturers	CM1, CM2
			Students	n/a
		Exploratory interviews	6 lecturers	CEIC1-3, CBIC1-3
			3 students	CSIC1-3
		Questionnaire survey	38 students	n/a
B	9.2011	Exploratory interviews	12 Students	CSIS1-12
	10.2011	Exploratory interviews	12 students	CSIB1-12
	10-12.2011	Classroom observation	15 seminars	The lecturers were coded as BLO1-6.
	11.2011	Exploratory interviews	6 lecturers	BLI1-6
C	12.2011-3.2012	Classroom observation and recording	10 classes	Group1-10
		Follow-up interviews	10 groups	See Table 4.22
D	5.2012	A ranking task and follow-up interviews	6 students	CSR1-6
			6 Chinese lecturers from China	CLR1-6
			6 British lecturers	BLR1-6

Table 4. 24 Research participants and the codes

4.6 Audio-recording data analysis: IRF analysis

The audio-recording data analysis is intended to answer RQ4 What do patterns of participation in case-study discussions in British seminars reveal about the methods

employed by Chinese students, and how do these differ from other non-native speakers of English?

4.6.1 Nature of the recorded discussion

It is necessary to explain the types of informal discourse, because they help to explain the nature of the recorded discussion and therefore facilitate the analysis.

Conversation as an informal discourse type has the following features:

- It is not primarily necessitated by a practical task.
- Any unequal power of participants is partially suspended.
- The number of participants is small.
- Turns are quite short.
- Talk is primarily for the participants and not for an outside audience (Cook 1989:51)

These features indicate that conversation is unpredictable in terms of content and also may lack structure (Cook 1989) because participants are likely to be in equal power positions, although the knowledge of participants' social status will not be totally forgotten (Cook 1989).

Cook finds that there is no clear boundary between conversation and the other discussion types and therefore he demonstrates their relationships in a kind of continuum (see Figure 2.2 in section 2.2.3).

Formal spoken discourse happens in "pragmatic encounters" (Eggins & Slade 1997:49) where speakers talk for specific purposes. Speakers tend to negotiate to achieve exchange closure. Conversation, on the other hand, takes place in casual situations in

which speakers are motivated to keep exchanges going for as long as possible (Eggins & Slade 1997) in order to establish or maintain social relationships, for example. Pedagogical discourse, which the original IRF model describes, is located at the left side of the continuum approaching formal spoken discourse. Pedagogical discourse often involves a lecturer and students who are in unequal power positions. The purpose of pedagogical discourse is to achieve exchange closure.

Seminar discourse does not fit the definition of conversation or pedagogical discourse because it is unusual in that it involves student-student interaction. Often a seminar discussion centres on a task or a question. Students are supposed to contribute equally. Therefore I think seminar discourse is located at the right side of the continuum approaching conversation discourse; Cook (1989) only briefly mentions that seminar discussion discourse falls between formal spoken discourse and conversation. Like casual conversation, which intends to keep the exchange going for as long as possible, the purpose of seminar discussions is also to prolong the exchange. This enables students to explore further understanding.

Casual conversation is complicated because the participants play both of the roles of speakers and of listeners/interpreters. A conversation requires ongoing interpretation and reaction about meaning; some ambiguity is therefore unavoidable. It is never entirely certain what speakers really mean until it is over, through retrospection i.e. checking with the participants. Some studies analysing IRF turns (Li & Nesi 2004; Du-Babcock 2003; Chen & Hird 2006) did not triangulate conversational analyses with follow-up interviews, thus compromising the reliability of their

findings.

4.6.2 The choice of the analytical tool

The tools for analysing casual conversational discourse include conversation analysis, speech act theory and the IRF model. The first two tools focus on social interaction in terms of politeness, directness/indirectness, adjacency pairs, and turn-taking. They create data-specific descriptive categories but could not offer an overarching descriptive framework. IRF analysis, on the other hand, is a structuralist-functionalist approach to analysing conversation. Eggins and Slade (1997) regard this approach as belonging to the Birmingham School because it was developed by a group of scholars from Birmingham University.

I chose the IRF (initiation, response, follow-up) model to describe the structure of interaction in the recorded small group discussions. IRF analysis requires the identification of the 'predictability' and 'interactive functions' (Coulthard 1985:126-127) of each type of turn. 'Predictability' indicates "what is to be expected sequentially" (Basturkmen 1995:43); the interactive functions indicate how the speakers manipulate the interaction and topics (see section 4.6.2 for discussion of the 'predictability' and interactive functions of each type of turn). Therefore the IRF model is suitable for investigations, such as mine, of speakers' discussion methods and the perceptions of the purpose of group discussion. It also creates the possibility of comparison of the structures of Chinese and non-Chinese students' discourse (Li & Nesi 2004). In the literature, some studies (Chen & Hird 2006; Wang 2012; Frambach *et al*. 2013) only interviewed students about their perceptions of the most

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appropriate discussion method(s). A problem with such methods was that the students as participants of classroom group discussion might not really be clear about their discussion method(s) (Seedhouse & Almutairi 2009). They might not recall the exact circumstances of the discussion they participated in.

The IRF model was initially generated from formal and structured teacher-student interaction in the classroom, and the speakers were English native speakers. In this study it was difficult to identify the nature of a few turns in the recordings. Developing insights into different discussion methods rests on understanding speakers' intentions, and it is for this reason that functional encoding of utterances as well as self-reflection by speakers was used to supplement IRF analysis.

The recordings were double coded. The initial coding identified the nature of the turns within the IRF model (see section 4.6.2). The secondary coding identified the interactive function of each turn (see section 4.6.3). In the case of turns which were hard to define in terms of their interactive functions, follow-up interviews were conducted with the turn takers to enquire about their purposes and their interpretation of the situation.

The follow-up interviews conducted a short time after the recordings were made are necessary to this study because the functions of a few turns made by Chinese students are hard to define. The interviews facilitate the reliability of the initial IRF coding.

The IRF model is not clear about whether the interactive functions should be decided

by what a speaker means or how a listener interprets it; a basic difference between the approaches of Austin and Searle concerned the method of assigning illocutionary force. For Austin, illocutionary force is "the successful realisation of the speaker's intention"; for Searle, it is "a product of the listener's interpretation" (Coulthard 1985:22). The application of the IRF model in the literature suggests that both approaches are right and the choice depends on the research purpose of examining speakers' intentions or listeners' interpretation.

In Excerpt 4.2, the interviewer seemed to ask the politician a genuine question about ideas of achieving a target. The question predicts a response about a plan to achieve it. He or she might also express a kind of evaluation of the goal and therefore predicts a response containing more information about the target. The politician's utterance might be a mere response to the interviewer's question or function as eliciting more explanation from the interviewer. It is possible that there is misunderstanding between the interviewer and the politician about each other's intention. Francis and Hunston (1992) define the exchange in Excerpt 4.2 as I-R because the interviewer said the politician answered his/her question.

Interviewer: How do you intend to achieve this?
Politician: That's a very interesting question.

Excerpt 4. 2 An example adapted from Francis and Hunston (1992:142)

As it is stated in section 2.4, my research concerns possible misunderstandings of others' intentions between Chinese and non-Chinese students in group discussions. Therefore my study intends to examine specific turns by investigating speakers'

intentions and interpretations of the interactive situation.

The interviews which followed up on my IRF analysis (see section 4.3.2) were think-aloud interviews. Think-aloud protocols run a slight risk of modifying thought processes, although they may reveal some of the participants' underlying thought processes. My study did not aim to identify differences between what the students really intended to do in the discussion and how they explained their discussion behaviour in the interviews.

In the follow-up interviews, specific clips were played back to relevant Chinese participants to check their interpretation of the situation. All the participants in the follow-up interviews were asked to leave their contact details so that I could collect further responses if necessary.

Two other major tools are used to analyse casual conversation: conversation analysis and speech act theory. They focus on social interaction in terms of politeness, directness/indirectness, adjacency pairs, and turn-taking. They create data-specific descriptive categories but cannot offer an overall descriptive framework. These methods are referred to in my IRF analysis.

4.6.3 Initial coding of IRF structure

The purpose of the IRF coding is to identify and compare the numbers of each type of turn made by the '2+1' students and their non-Chinese peers. It is also important to identify all the turns which are hard to define so that they can be further processed

in the secondary coding with the help of follow-up interview data.

This section introduces the IRF model in terms of its levels and components.

The IRF model describes discourse structure at the levels of act, move, exchange and transaction (This study focuses on the move and exchange levels). One or more acts combine to make up a move which is the "minimal contribution" a speaker can make to an exchange (Coulthard 1985:125). The contribution and opportunity of a speaker in a talk is called a turn, and contains one or more than one move. The exchange structure is the basic discourse unit of conversation because it involves at least two participants. It captures the "sequencing of turns in talk" (Eggins & Slade 1997:44).

In the IRF model, the 'act' has an "interactive function" (Coulthard 1985:126-127) rather than a discourse function (Coulthard 1985; Coulthard & Brazil 1979, 1992). For example the category of 'elicit' includes 'request', 'ask', 'entreat', 'beg' and 'enquire' (Coulthard 1985:126), and the category of 'inform' includes 'promise', 'prediction' and 'statement' (Coulthard & Brazil 1992:65). 'Elicit' and 'inform' are interactive functions requesting or providing information. They are directly associated with the broad purposes of interaction.

One of the key concepts of the IRF model is 'predictability' (Coulthard 1985:24). It underlies what the speakers expect sequentially (Basturkmen 1995) and how they manipulate the interaction and topics. The IRF model presumes that speakers control the content (see Criterion 1) and intonation (see Criterion 2) of their produced turns to indicate the 'predictability' (Coulthard 1985).

Criterion 1: The element generates constraints which amount to a prediction that a particular element will follow

Criterion 2: A preceding element predicts the occurrence of the element in question

(Coulthard 1985:24)

The IRF model consists of six types of turns: *I* (initiation), *R* (response), *F* (follow-up), *R/I* (response as initiation), *F/I* (follow-up as initiation) and *Ix* (failed initiation). I have added the last of these to the model for the purposes of this study. Table 4.25 summarises the definitions, predictability, and interactive functions of the six types of turns for the initial coding process. The following paragraphs explain this table in detail.

Turn	Definition	Predictability (Coulthard & Brazil 1992:71)		Interactive functions (The exact meaning of each function is explained in Table 4.26)
		Predicted	**Predicting**	
Ix (failed initiation)	An initiating turn without response	No	No	inform, direct, elicit
I (initiation)	Causes others to participate in an exchange	No	Yes	'inform, direct an action, elicit' (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975)
R (response)	Makes a response to an *I* turn	Yes	No	'acknowledge, react/reply, inform' (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975)
F (follow-up)	Receives information	No	No	'acknowledge' (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975)
R/I (response as initiation)	Responds to the preceding utterance and initiates the following utterance	Yes	Yes	'challenge, evaluate, inform' (Coulthard & Brazil 1979) 'develop the topic, reformulate' (Li & Nesi 2004)
F/I (follow-up as initiation)	Follows up the preceding utterance and initiates the following utterance	No	Yes	'evaluate, inform' (Hoey 1993) 'develop the topic, reformulate' (Li & Nesi 2004)

Table 4. 25 The IRF model and rules

The initial IRF model was developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) from pedagogic exchanges and consists of Initiation (*I*), Response (*R*) and Feedback (*F*). The initiation turn contains opening moves; the response turn contains answering moves; the follow-up turn contains feedback moves. A new exchange may start when a new elicit/direct/inform is initiated (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). Sinclair *et al*. (1972) propose three major classes of exchange: eliciting, directing and informing.

Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) attempted to extend the model into a variety of discourses taking place outside the classroom and adjusted the terminology of the Opening, Answering and Follow-up moves (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975) to Eliciting, Informing, and Acknowledging. They also renamed the Feedback turn as Follow-up. In casual conversation outside the classroom, Follow-up turns only contain acknowledging move(s) (Coulthard & Montgomery 1981). Table 4.26 summarises the adjustment of the terminology.

Sinclair & Coulthard (1975)		Coulthard & Montgomery (1981)	
Turn	**Move**	**Turn**	**Move**
Initiation	Opening	Initiation	Eliciting
Response	Answering	Response	Informing
Feedback	Feedback	Follow-up	Acknowledging

Table 4. 26 The adjustment of the terminology of the IRF model in its development

Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) identify the interactive functions of the turns in casual conversation (see Figure 4.4). There is an assumption that *eliciting leads to*

informing, and informing leads to acknowledging.

Figure 4. 3 Moves and turns (Coulthard & Montgomery 1981:43)

An *I* turn is not predicted by the preceding turn but it constrains the following utterance. An *I* turn sets up an expectation and the following moves are classified according to this expectation (Basturkmen 1995). An *R* turn follows an *I* turn but it does not constrain the following utterance. An exchange is recognised as "consisting minimally of two structural elements, always *I* and *R*" (Coulthard & Brazil 1992:72). An *F* turn is optional; it is neither predicting nor predicted.

The IRF model also contains two extended exchange elements: Response as Initiation (*R/I*) (initially discussed by Coulthard and Brazil 1979) and Follow-up as Initiation (*F/I*) (initially discussed by Hoey 1993).

R/I turns develop the topic introduced in the initiation turn (Li & Nesi 2004); they can be followed by *R* or *R/I* turns.

F/I turns reformulate the previous turn or develop the discussion further (Li & Nesi 2004); they can be followed by *R* or *R/I* turns.

In ideal interactive student discussion discourse, the initiating moves result in initiating turns (Basturkmen 1995) because they are always followed by a sort of response or reaction. If a turn contains elicit/direct/inform moves and appears to

initiate but is not responded to (i.e. a predicted element is missing), it makes an incomplete exchange (Francis & Hunston 1992). I will code the moves at initiating position in an incomplete exchange as *Ix*. This move is not an initiating turn because it does not contribute to a complete exchange.

Many studies applying the IRF analysis have found a few but not many incomplete exchanges. Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) offer an example of an incomplete exchange made by a tourist guide.

> Guide (conducting party round cathedral): Salisbury is the English cathedral with the
>
> tallest spire …   (Coulthard & Montgomery 1981:126)

It appears that this tourist guide made an informing move and could be counted as an *I* turn. However it was not part of a "conversation" in which participants have an obligation to show "evidence that they are taking part" (Francis & Hunston 1992:147). The tourist guide gives a monologue and does not predict an utterance to follow.

Incomplete exchanges also occur in pedagogical discourse. Basturkmen (1995) finds that Turkish lecturers in seminar classes make a few informing moves in initiating position which contain extensive information input and which are not followed by response moves. She names this type of discourse as a mini-lecture.

Incomplete exchanges seem to be not so important for those studies investigating conversation structures for training purposes (Basturkmen 1995; Li & Nesi 2004). Basturkmen considers the mini-lecture as out of the central discussion of a seminar class and therefore filters out this kind of monologue in her IRF analysis. Li and Nesi's

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(2004) experimental design intended to avoid the occurrence of *Ix* by choosing participants who were close friends and by reminding them that interaction was welcomed. My study, however, is interested in the possible incomplete exchanges in my data and the underlying implications of this.

4.6.4 Secondary coding of interactive functions

The ultimate purpose of the secondary coding was to identify the interactive function of each turn which underlies the turn taker's discussion purpose (Coulthard 1985). A total of 11 codes were generated and grouped into positive, negative and neutral interactive functions (see Table 4.27). The codes were generated from the integration of the literature review findings, my own findings regarding the expectations of group discussion skills by British lecturers and '2+1' students (discussed in Chapter 5), and from the follow-up interviews with the speakers. I concentrated, however, on investigating the behaviour of the Chinese rather than the non-Chinese students.

Positive interactive functions	Acknowledge	Showing agreement or support for the information/opinions of others.
	Develop	Adding new information or theoretical/professional terms to develop the discussion.
	Elicit	Initiating an exchange by asking questions or giving information/opinions in order to elicit other's comment and opinion; Eliciting other's comment and opinion by asking questions.
	Reply	Responding to eliciting action by offering information or opinions.
	Reformulate	Stating understanding of other's information/opinion without adding new information or theoretical/professional terms to develop the discussion.
Negative interactive functions	Command	Directing others' action.
	Inform	Explaining a fact or an opinion without the expectation of comments from others.
	Reject	Dismissing the opinion of a preceding speaker by asking a question or offering a different answer or opinion.
	Repeat	Restating one's own opinion/fact.
Neutral interactive functions	Concession	Conceding by repeating other's contributions and showing agreement (followed by a Challenge or Inform).
	Challenge	Doubting the correctness of information or challenging an opinion.

Table 4. 27 Positive and negative interactive functions used for the secondary coding

In the interviews with the British lecturers I identified a constructivist perspective on small group discussion (see section 5.2.2). These lecturers expected students to move from exchanging information or opinions to constructing new knowledge, and this meant that the turns containing information and opinions should not be solely concerned with passing on information but should also be concerned with eliciting others' comments, evaluation and development. My analysis aimed to distinguish between those interactive acts which encouraged the development of dialogue with others, and those which were motivated by the opposite tendency. Functions regarded as positive were those which facilitated group discussion; functions regarded as negative were those which inhibited development by bringing the discussion topic back to the initial discussion questions.

Chapter 5 Cultural influence on students' attitudes towards group discussion

This chapter addresses research objective 1 by identifying how and to what extent students' prior learning experiences may have predisposed them to have certain attitudes towards seminar discussions. The corresponding research questions are: RQ1: What were the students' learning experiences in the Chinese university? RQ2: When the students arrived in the British university, what did they expect of seminars? RQ3: What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers and Chinese students?

5.1 Chinese students' learning experiences in the Chinese university

5.1.1 Lecturers' perceptions about students' group discussion skills needs in Britain

This section addresses RQ1a: What group discussion skills did lecturers think that the students would need in British classrooms?

According to my classroom observation, the Chinese English lecturers strictly control their students, asking them to reproduce the teaching content, checking their understanding, and recommending examination-taking skills. They emphasise the acquisition of vocabulary; an underlying assumption is that students can produce acceptable coursework if they acquire enough vocabulary. Plenty of sentence examples are given to students to observe and imitate. The teaching content and method suggest that the emphasis is placed on the basic four English skills rather

than on discussion skills. The lecturers seem to convey a message to the students that their main need is the ability to express themselves clearly in English. This accords with what the literature suggests; Chinese business English lecturers develop students' discussion skills by encouraging them to stick to their own answers without adapting their arguments in response to others.

One Chinese English lecturer (CEIC1) in an interview acknowledged that the '2+1' students in Britain would need to participate in small group discussion. She perceived the appropriate discussion behaviour to be listening to others carefully and expressing opinions bravely (see Excerpt 5.1). However she thought that this discussion skill was such a natural one that the students would not have any problems with it.

CEIC1 thought that 'group collaboration' was a universal concept. She and another Chinese English lecturer, CEIC3, both expressed the view that the '2+1' students were good at dealing with interpersonal relationships, and therefore did not need any communication skills training.

> CEIC1: The students will need to discuss with English-speaking students in Britain. They need to be brave to express themselves, try to understand and collaborate with others. I mean they need to discuss everything with the group therefore they could obtain help from each other. … We did not intend to give them practice with this aspect because *collaboration and group discussion is a rather natural behaviour*[18]. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 1

Although CEIC1 acknowledged the fact that the students needed to participate in mixed group discussion in Britain, she seemed to understand 'classroom

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[18] The emphases in the excerpts are mine.

participation' as synonymous with 'self expression' (see Excerpt 5.2).

CEIC1: It's a good teaching method. It could activate the classroom atmosphere and make abstract theories concrete and observable. It could also encourage students' participation which is needed in current Chinese higher education. You know students do not need to express themselves in university classes in China. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 2

Another English lecturer (CEIC3) thought that the students would need help when they studied in Britain, and that building close ties with British lecturers would be a positive strategy which would be effective as a means of enlisting their support (see Excerpt 5.3).

According to CEIC3 her students established close relationships with Chinese lecturers by talking with them about personal issues. She assumed that the students' interpersonal skills which enabled them to talk uninhibitedly to lecturers in China would also be effective with British lecturers. In order to encourage the students' employment of these skills, she actively responded to the students with answers and advice.

CEIC3: Compared with the students enrolled by the Chinese university, this group of students were very skilful at closing their distance with teachers and actively seeking the teachers' support. They were smart and good at dealing with relationships with others. They were not afraid of teachers. They chat with us like friends asking questions about our careers, hobbies, and even family so that it is quite natural for us to help them with their studies. I appreciate this and am willing to help them after class. It might be because of their confidence in certain aspects, maybe because of their prosperous family background. I hope they could make use of their advantage by being brave in Britain and discussing their study plans with tutors. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 3

Data from the classroom observation of the subject classes in China indicates that,

like the English lecturers, the business lecturers also adopted a results-driven teaching approach. They repeated focal theoretical points and wrote them on the blackboard. The students reacted by highlighting key words in their textbooks and taking notes, and in some cases checking with the lecturers that the content they were learning was important.

The Business lecturers analysed and evaluated many real professional examples to convey knowledge, and only asked 'what' questions to check understanding of terminology and the recognition of the strategies employed in the examples. This approach reflects what the literature review in Chapter 3 suggests: the case method is used as a source of insights about business rather than as a form of pedagogy. This deprives students of the opportunity to critically examine case situations.

An observed Business class (class D) consisted of 10-minute oral group presentations about corporate social responsibility, using as a case study a company the students themselves had chosen; the task was assigned to a group of four students one week in advance.

The students provided factual information about how a Chinese pharmaceutical company practised its social responsibility. One student introduced the case, and each of the other three students presented some aspect of the company's practice. The student audience seemed to enjoy the presentation as a 'performance' (Jin & Cortazzi 1998:744) of already known theoretical knowledge. It is possible that the student audience found it an absorbing and internalising learning process.

At the end of the presentation, the lecturer (CM2) did not ask or invite questions from the audience but briefly commented on the usefulness of the case method as a teaching and learning technique, as a means of explaining and judging professional practice and enhancing understanding of theoretical knowledge. In a follow-up interview, CM2 acknowledged the presentation group's success in exemplifying theoretical knowledge through the use of examples. He said he wanted to improve the students' ability to express themselves clearly in English (see Excerpt 5.4).

CM2: After practice doing oral presentations, they will not be nervous when speaking in front of the class. They have to learn how to clearly and correctly convey their meaning to the audience in English. The presentation is very common in British education and in the professional world. I can see their attempt to apply what they have learnt in the last class to the evaluation of real professional practice. Their case exactly exemplified this knowledge. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 4

In another observed business class (class C), lecturer CM1 organised small group discussion to analyse a successful advertising marketing tactic. She clearly told the students that the group discussion activity offered the students an opportunity to exchange answers and check the correctness of each other's answers before she would nominate individual students to report their answers to her. The message conveyed to the students seems to be that group discussion activity is goal-oriented, and the purpose of group discussion is to monitor peer progress.

The Chinese teachers and lecturers' organisation of whole-class discussion suggests that they intended to provide their students with the opportunity to accurately reproduce teaching and learning content. In an interview CBIC2, a business lecturer, acknowledged that the students had to discuss in small groups in Britain; however he

did not know what group discussion skills would be required of them (see Excerpt 5.5). He thought it would waste time to organise small group discussions in Chinese classrooms because the students and he had never received training about how to discuss. He thought theoretical knowledge could compensate for any English language problems the students might have in Britain.

CBIC2: ***I don't think they could learn much through discussion.*** I know how they discuss, like what I did when I was a student. ***Guess the correct answer. Share opinions. Depend on good students.*** … They may have to do group work in Britain. It requires very good English skills. But I believe if they acquire solid subject knowledge they could understand each other better and offer better opinions. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 5</div>

CBIC3, another business lecturer, acknowledged that Chinese lecturers and teachers were not yet familiar with case study group discussion, and needed training (see Excerpt 5.6). CBIC3 emphasised the lecturer's role in group discussion, indicating that he expected active cognitive learning; on the other hand he seemed to fall into the trap of 'cultural stereotyping' (Gu 2012: 213), thinking that Chinese students are passive, as the literature review suggests (see section 3.2.1).

CBIC3: The case method in China is the 'chicken ribs' which are tasteless to eat but wasteful to throw away, really. Neither lecturers or students are familiar with the case discussion technique. I still believe that ***teacher-student interaction*** and the lecturer's conclusion and feedback are vital in case-study discussion. The cases should be typical so that students can ***observe how theories are used to inform and to judge practice.*** (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 6</div>

CBIC3 seemed to perceive the soft and implicit managerial skills of analysing and solving problems as by-products of discussion rather than their central point.

Another business lecturer, CBIC1, made the point that solid fundamental knowledge may facilitate the students' understanding of the learning content in Britain even if they have English language problems (see Excerpt 5.7). CBIC1 also seemed to think that theoretical knowledge would not vary much across countries.

CBIC1: Theoretical knowledge is very important for their study in Britain. No matter how the teaching and learning techniques change, they need to refer to specific points of theoretical knowledge and explain why. If they really understand it, they will not have much problem with subject learning. A clear and correct reference to theoretical knowledge can ensure a passing score in examinations and writing assignments. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 7

CBIC1 implied that British lecturers would judge students' case reports according to the number and correctness of theoretical points they referred to. His understanding is in contrast to what the literature suggests about British business assignments, where students are expected to critically apply knowledge to real situations (Reichenbach 2001; Nesi & Gardner 2012) (see section 3.5.1). This lack of attention to applied management and 'soft skills' may impede Chinese business students in their attempts to achieve good degree results in Britain.

5.1.2 Students' learning priorities

This section addresses RQ1b: What were the students' learning priorities?

The student interviewees in Part I expressed great interest in business as an academic subject, in contrast to the indifferent attitude of Chinese business students towards business as a discipline reported by Yang (2004, 2008) and Chen (2007) (see section

3.3.2).

However, the students seemed to learn in a tightly controlled and exam-oriented way in China. In the interviews conducted in China, the students said they only expected to obtain passing scores on their subject courses. They regarded IELTS preparation as their highest priority. When transferring to Britain, the students seemed to change their attitudes towards IELTS; they held varied views about the preparation for IELTS and some did not approve of the preparation offered by the Chinese institution. In the student interviews conducted in Britain, the students said that they felt using English in a real environment was rather different from taking IELTS. This is further evidence of the narrowly exam-oriented approach towards the development of English skills.

The survey findings and the interviews suggested that the course design and requirements of the Chinese institution did not distinguish between high-achieving and low-achieving students. The students were interested in the subjects they studied, but did not attach much importance to acquiring business knowledge (see Table 5.1).

Learning priorities	Mean	Std. Deviation
Improving general spoken English	4.32	.806
Improving academic English skills	4.09	.830
Preparing for IELTS	3.97	1.243
Acquiring more business knowledge	3.76	.987

Table 5. 1 Students' learning priorities in Part I of the '2+1' programme (N=34)

5.1.3 Students' learning strategies

This section addresses RQ1c: What learning strategies did the students employ?

One student interviewee (CSIC2) reported an exam-oriented learning strategy of predicting the key knowledge points (see Excerpt 5.8). His comment reflects the way that the students' learning strategies were influenced by the way they were taught and assessed.

CSIC2: You see we had textbooks and we only need to listen to the lecturers trying to figure out important knowledge points. The exams were very easy. The exams in the second year asked us to illustrate and explain certain theories by referring to good examples. Any example would be fine. ***The important thing is you have to draw on the right knowledge points***. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 8

The student interviewees (CSIC1-3) also reported that rather than using library resources (including e-resources) they preferred learning about business issues from blogs, personal websites, and online encyclopaedias written in Chinese. The Chinese institution did not in fact have its own library, and depended on the library of the Chinese university it was attached to. All the interviewees reported that when they prepared for presentations and writing tasks they often made use of text taken from Chinese websites and processed it through an online translation tool. These interview findings concur with the questionnaire responses (see Table 5.2), which indicate heavy use of internet resources of various kinds.

Learning strategies	Never/seldom (percentage)	Often/very often (percentage)	Mean
Seeking help[19]			
Reading online business comments in Chinese	11.7	70.6	4.00
Using translation tools	11.7	67.7	3.85
Using a dictionary[20]	14.7	50	3.65
Using the library	35.3	23.5	2.74
Group work strategies			
Practicing English with peers	47.1	8.8	2.50
Preparing work to give to the group leader	8.8	64.7	3.82
Choosing to be the group leader	14.7	38.2	3.38

Table 5. 2 Frequency of learning strategies in Part I of the programme (N=34)

The questionnaire responses indicated that far more respondents used the strategy of preparing work and giving it to a group leader, rather than choosing to be the group leader themselves. A similar group work strategy was also reported in the interviews with the students after they had transferred to Britain. They often divided up a task and each worked individually on an individual component, both in China and in Britain. The students seemed to prefer to follow rather than to take responsibility for group output. They may have regarded group discussion as primarily an assessment component and were afraid of making mistakes. However British lecturers on Part II of the '2+1' programme do not assess students' discussion contributions.

This group work strategy suggests a hierarchical group structure. It accords with Hu and Grove's (1999) description of the decision-making process in Chinese institutions where "the leader listens to the opinions of many people, then makes a decision that

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[19] The two main categories of learning strategies were not offered in the questionnaire.

[20] The word 'dictionary' in Chinese (字典) refers specifically to dictionaries in book form, so e-dictionary use was counted as a 'translation tool'.

takes all opinions into account" (1999:96). Hu and Grove think that Chinese group members typically have more input (rather than output) in the decision-making process than do American group members.

In the interviews conducted in China, the students were also asked about their understanding of the pedagogical case method. Only CSIC1 identified its purpose to be to solve the problems of real companies (see Excerpt 5.9). She thought that written case studies contained all the information she needed to identify and solve the problems.

There was no indication that CSIC1 linked the case method to discussion; instead, she seemed to understand it as an individual learning method.

> CSIC1: I think the case method is to read the written case studies in the textbooks and answer the questions. It's about real companies and problem-solving. We can apply our knowledge through this method. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 9

CSIC3 understood the case method as the use of theories to evaluate professional practice. She did not recognise the value of discussion and wanted feedback from her lecturers instead (see Excerpt 5.10).

> CSIC3: Sometimes the lecturers asked us to read the case materials in the textbook and answer the questions. I usually read the questions first. Then I looked for answers in the case, of course by ***referring to theories so that I could judge whether the practice described was correct.*** Usually ***it was like doing English reading comprehension exercises.*** However there were a few times when I had prepared for the case studies but the lecturer did not ask us to do them. Therefore I had to ask for answers because I did not have the teacher's book. Gradually I just left those exercises unless they asked us to do them. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 10

CSIC3 tended to do the case study exercises in the manner of an English comprehension test, by reading the questions first and then searching for answers in the text. This reading strategy is unlike the case study process recommended by Lundberg (1993) which starts by gaining familiarity with the situation and progresses to diagnose the potential problems.

5.1.4 Students' evaluation of Part I

This section addresses RQ1d: How did the students evaluate the preparation they were offered in China?

All the students acknowledged that the Chinese institution offered good preparation in terms of their general English skills. However after they started their final-year study in Britain they noticed that they had been misled about study skills in China.

CSIB13 reported that his Chinese lecturers in Part I told him that British lecturers appreciated 'innovativeness' (see Excerpt 5.11); however his British lecturers told him not to be innovative. He could not recall what exactly his Chinese lecturers said about 'innovativeness', or the situation when his British lecturers and he discussed it. It is possible that his Chinese lecturers had wanted to convey the importance of critical thinking which leads to innovation.

> CSIB13: I think the course in China misled us about the requirements or expectations in Britain. Problems usually occurred when I tried to apply what I was taught by the Chinese lecturers. For example, I was told that British lecturers prefer innovativeness. You know, Chinese always understand 'innovativeness' as doing and saying things that people never did or said before. However, my British lecturers told me 'no'. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 11

CSIB4 especially pointed out that a spirit of teamwork was not fostered in Part I of the '2+1' programme (see Excerpt 5.12). CSIB4 reflected on his group learning experiences in China and said that his Chinese peers often divided up a task and worked individually; this is consistent with the findings from the interviews and questionnaire survey with the students. CSIB4 clearly stated that this approach saved time but prevented students from learning from each other. He perceived team spirit as helping each other. He did not say how he interpreted collaboration during discussion. Maybe he thought group discussion was natural and that he did not have any problem with it.

CSIB4: No one told me about team spirit in China. I heard about it for the first time here. We did group work in China; however each member took responsibility for one part. Actually we also adopted the same approach sometimes when doing group work here. It saves time but does not require teamwork. British teachers always emphasise team spirit when they assign group work. I agree with them very much. I often help others with their part of the work. Actually I am not helping them but the whole group. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 12

CSIB5 implied in the interview that Part I did not develop learner autonomy or study skills because students were left with very little time to manage their own studies (see Excerpt 5.13).

CSIB5: Our courses were arranged very tightly. We did not have much free time in general or time for self-study. So we felt bewildered when we arrived in Britain. We did not know what to study and how to study. There was so much free time which was really beyond our imagination. We understood that we were expected to organise our own study but we were not used to doing this. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 13

Some students also reflected on the course design of Part I of the '2+1' programme.

CSIB9 stated that the IELTS preparation and subject teaching did not facilitate but conflicted with each other (see Excerpt 5.14). CSIB9 implied that they used to learn in an exam/result-directed way because of the teaching objectives of Part I.

CSIB9: The subject and language courses even conflicted with each other because we had to prepare for IELTS thus didn't have enough time to learn subject knowledge. Some of our classmates who had obtained a good enough IELTS score didn't care about subject learning because the subject exams used to be very easy to pass. This was the general learning situation in China. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 14

CSIB11 reported that he noticed that the knowledge learnt in Britain might not be useful in China (see Excerpt 5.15). However it seemed he adopted a 'constructivist' viewpoint with his learning. He believed that his international learning experiences 'open(ed) a window' for him, implying that the experiences facilitated his reflective thinking. He recognised his British learning experiences as a part of his life-long learning process and recognised the value of exploration.

CSIB11: One day when I was discussing with my father about the business and management strategies I learnt in Britain, my father who runs a factory told me that they were useless in China. I complained: "so why do you pay me to study here?" After a period of time, *__I gradually realised the value of my experience. It opens a window for me. British lecturers cannot tell us all the differences between China and Britain because it can never be completed. It is me who will explore them in the future, when I take over my father's business.__* (translated)

Excerpt 5. 15

5.1.5 Summary

RQ1a What group discussion skills did lecturers think that the students would need in British classrooms?

Based on the interviews, neither the English nor the business lecturers from the Chinese institution were sure about the discussion skills required in British seminar groups; they did not recognise the value of group discussion for the pedagogical case method. It is reasonable to infer that guided by such perceptions of group discussion they may prevent the students from developing a full range of group discussion skills.

Some business lecturers organised small group discussion activities in the classroom in a goal-oriented way; they expected the students to monitor peer progress and help each other to check their answers. Some lecturers thought this approach was a waste of time because many students guessed the correct answers or depended on other more proficient students to tell them the answers. The lecturers thought theoretical knowledge could compensate for any English language problems the students might have in Britain.

The English lecturers on the other hand perceived group discussion as a natural skill which did not deserve special training. They expected students to practise the four skills (reading writing, listening and speaking) so that they could express themselves clearly during discussion.

RQ1b What were the students' learning priorities?

The students' learning priority was to improve their English skills rather than their subject knowledge, although they said they were interested in business as a discipline. When learning in China, the students regarded their learning priority as preparing for IELTS. After transferring to Britain, they attached more importance to

oral English skills. It can be interpreted that they were used to being taught and learning in a tightly controlled and exam-oriented environment. They expected training in oral English and, to be more specific, communication skills.

RQ1c What learning strategies did the students employ?

When engaged in group work the students usually divided up the task, worked individually and gave their answers to the group leader. Very few of them chose to be the group leader. Perhaps this was because they preferred to follow rather than to take responsibility for group output, or perhaps this was because they were afraid of making mistakes. Perhaps they perceived group discussion as assessment. The Chinese institution did not distinguish between high-achieving and low-achieving students, so they may have felt that group leadership brought no personal benefit.

Like their Chinese lecturers, the students perceived the case method as an individual learning technique without recognising the pedagogical value of the method. They recognised the case method as a means of practising the application of theories to professional practice.

RQ1d How did the students evaluate the preparation they were offered in China?

The students appreciated the general English skills preparation they received in Part I of the programme. However, they discovered that the study skills taught in Part I led to misunderstanding about the requirements of Part II, such as 'critical thinking', 'group work' and 'learner autonomy'. That is to say, after transferring to Britain the

students may have had more difficulties with study skills than English language skills.

5.2 Perceptions about group discussion of students and lecturers in Part II

5.2.1 Students' expectations of seminar interaction when they arrive in Britain

This section addresses RQ2: When the students arrived in the British university, what did they expect of seminars?

The interviewees' comments about their expectations of seminar interaction tended to focus on the lecturer's role and the size of discussion groups. This tendency suggests that these are the two key factors influencing students' participation in seminar discussion.

CSIS1 expected there to be student-teacher interaction in seminars (see Excerpt 5.16). He expected British lecturers to use questioning strategies to prompt the students' thinking, and it seems that he expected to acquire these questioning strategies himself, through observation. This accords with the questionnaire finding that the students had a positive view of learner autonomy.

> CSIS1: I hope the British lecturers will control the seminars. ***They should ensure that every student has an opportunity to discuss with him/her*** no matter whether we are willing to or not. Therefore I prefer small size classes. We were used to being silent in class. So they have to force us to speak out and we will start to think actively because ***we are afraid of making mistakes***. The other thing is that the lecturers will have to be patient to wait until we finish. ***They can ask us to explain why or provide more evidence.*** (translated)

Excerpt 5. 16

Seven out of the 12 student interviewees reported a preference for discussion in small groups of four to five members (see Excerpt 5.17).

> CSIS5: I expect more chances to do small group work and oral presentations than in China. ***I prefer group work involving around four to five students.*** I hope every group member can be active and innovative. (translated)

CSIS10 expected small group interactions in which each member listened to each other carefully and critically (see Excerpt 5.18). Like CSIB1, he also seemed to appreciate questioning and challenging strategies because they helped correct (纠正) his knowledge and opinions.

It is necessary to point out that the word 纠正 (correct) in Chinese is used to refer to the action of correcting errors or mistakes. Therefore it can be interpreted that CSIB10 thought there were right or wrong answers in case study group discussion. It was possible that he perceived business knowledge as convergent, a Chinese perspective suggested in the literature I have reviewed.

> CSIS10: Seminar 我还是很欣赏的，因为每个人都有自己的意见，而且我说的话能被他们所，不是吸收，而是尊重，还有是反驳，这是我所希望的。我不仅希望被吸收，还希望被反驳，这两点我也是希望的。我感觉是我的知识被纠正了，我的观点被纠正了。这是个好事。(original)
> I appreciate seminars because everyone has their own opinions. My opinions were listened to, not absorbed but respected and critically challenged. This is what I had hoped for. ***I hoped my opinions would not only be absorbed but also challenged.*** This is what I expected. ***I feel my knowledge is corrected. My opinions are corrected. This is good.*** (translated)

In contrast to CSIS1, CSIS6 preferred lecturers not to be present during small group discussion (see Excerpt 5.19). He seemed to be influenced by the large

power-distance between teachers and students in Chinese classrooms.

CSIS6: ***I don't like a lecturer to stand by our side to facilitate our discussion. He would become an authority and we would not be able to keep an open mind.*** He/she can just leave the classroom for some time. During this time, everyone in the classroom would be equal and we would have more opportunities to form new ideas. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 19

5.2.2 Lecturers' perceptions about the purpose of group discussion

This section addresses RQ3a: What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers?

In general, the British business lecturer interviewees expected students in seminar group discussions to move from exchanging information or opinions to constructing new knowledge, and therefore took a 'constructivist perspective' on group discussion. These expectations were also evident when they discussed the discussion results students report to them.

I did not observe any British lecturers making these expectations explicit to the students during classroom teaching. This may be because they had higher expectations of the students than the Chinese lecturers did, expecting them to be able to figure out the purpose of their teaching and learning techniques. Or they may have assumed that the students had already been well prepared for these techniques in the Chinese institution. International students might understand or interpret the purpose of specific techniques in a variety of different ways.

In the interviews with the British lecturers evidence can be found that they expected

seminar group discussions to move beyond exchanging information or ideas. Many of them explicitly said so. They considered both the discussion process and the result when commenting on their expectations of students' seminar participation.

BLI4 said that the ultimate goal of doing case studies is to critically evaluate proposals and opinions by identifying and challenging underlying assumptions (see Excerpt 5.20). He also implied that these proposals and opinions were open to discussion, in contrast to the Chinese lecturers' perception that doing case studies is to observe how the theoretical knowledge is used to inform and evaluate practice. BLI4 advocates the group discussion skills of questioning, challenging and persuading.

> BLI4: In Business Schools we are equipping them to be effective business people. In Business you aren't asking "can you tell me what Porter's five forces model tells us?" You are not asked to quote theory. What you are asked is: is this a good industry to move into or what are the changes in the micro-environment that our company has to be aware of in the coming years. So to think more critically. In business you are asked to evaluate proposals. Is this a good thing to invest in or good market to enter? So it's rarely a clear decision. ***So we want to help students to critically evaluate.*** Yes, use relevant theories but the main thing is to recognise ***there is no single right or wrong answer***. And perhaps to ***challenge assumptions or to question*** why people are suggesting this is the way forward. We could promote that by ***questioning with an open mind.*** I have an opinion and it may not be the right one. Can I listen to the reasons why you reached your opinion? Maybe what you suggest is the right way to go. ***Persuade me***. This is what I would aim for.

Excerpt 5. 20

BLI5 compared seminar discussion to a 'platform' on which students exchanged ideas in order to 'learn something they have not learned before'; 'sharing information' was perceived to be a means to an end rather than an end in itself (see Excerpt 5.21). As I discussed in a journal article (Wang 2013b: 602-603), the 'platform' is actually regarded as a 'springboard' or a 'starting line' for negotiation, building upon the

preceding speaker's utterance in order to construct new understanding or perceptions.

> BLI5: … ***It's a platform,*** you know. You exchange, two-ways. So you share information, which is very informative … and the common sense is where you can see I don't agree with you on these because of these. They have to support these. And they say yeah you are correct. So that's a balance. ***What they want to see from the seminar session is that they grew up from the rule and learned something they have not learned before.*** That's the idea of it. So that's the essence of having a group discussion. …We want students to participate and give us their viewpoints.

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 21</div>

BLI3 and BLI2 described the divergent approaches to fulfilling tasks as "ways to skin a cat" (Excerpt 5.22) and "shades of grey" (Excerpt 5.23). BLI3 said she expected students to use different approaches and theories to deal with a case study task but thought that international students without a Western educational background had difficulty with this. The reason according to BLI3 is that international students think there should be one 'correct' answer.

> BLI3: Sometimes the international students just receive everything from whoever they speak to. It shouldn't be that way because ***every question you have to answer won't make me happy with just one answer.*** You might have different ways to fulfil your objectives. That's why I am saying there is no definitely typical systematic way. ***There are a lot of ways to skin a cat.*** So you can do whatever you want with the cat and ***nobody would say which is the correct way of doing it***.

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 22</div>

BLI2 expressed a similar expectation that students can utilise different analytical tools and adopt multiple perspectives in order to reach diverse final answers (see Excerpt 5.23). He did not expect students to reach a 'consensus'. He implied that participating in case study group discussion requires questioning and challenging skills which can

facilitate the justification of each other's proposals.

> BLI2: … I think it's reasonable that they can agree to differ. ***It's not science.*** It's ***'shades of grey'*** which is an English phrase. So there are maybe a number of possible directions for companies to take, a number of possible answers to the questions I set them. Can you justify this question? And the same goes with theories. ***There is a tendency that students might think there is one theory, this is the theory you must use. If it is a successful business, you choose and apply the right theory. These theories only help us to model, to get the view of the world in a particular way. There is no right one.*** So you may prefer to use this theory and the other students prefer to use that theory. It's no problem and that's fine. And in business strategy which I taught, there are many strategies that companies can adopt. It's not necessary to say which one is better than the others. You can say for this theory there are a number of risks and you've got to weigh up. ***So there is no necessity to research a consensus.*** It's more helpful if you get a variety of answers.

Excerpt 5. 23

BLI2 described a problematic tendency amongst students to believe there is one 'right' theory to deal with a problem. He clearly pointed out that business and management is not 'science'; this is in contrast to the Chinese perspective that business and management is a science-based discipline (Ivory *et al*. 2006; Perriton & Reynolds 2004) (see section 3.3.2).

BLI6 clearly said the application of analytic tools was only the first step towards doing a case study and should progress to analysis and evaluation (see Excerpt 5.24). He emphasised the importance of questioning skills in case study group discussion.

> BLI6: The analysis tools are not used to produce a report. These tools are made to be used to make reality easier to understand. They are there to simplify reality. They cannot capture the reality at all. They are too rough. Any tool, any method is too rough to capture reality. They are only here to help people to make decisions and understand roughly a frame. So I think these are the purposes of the tools. ***These tools can be used to do something.*** … They are decision tools rather than you do that and you do that. It's only the beginning. It's like taking a picture and you look at the picture and try to understand it. So that's how to apply SWOT for example. ***Analyse. Think.*** Not just apply.

So it's much about a question to think. Think freely. What do you want to do? Yeah, some tools. You don't have any answers yet. ***The idea is to ask questions. The more questions you ask the better. And then you try to answer them.***

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 24</div>

BLI1 in the interview emphasised that the seminar was not about teacher-student interaction but student-student interaction (see Excerpt 5.25), in contrast to the Chinese business lecturers who attached much more importance to teacher-student interaction during discussion.

BLI1: … That's the idea behind a seminar where students are freely encouraged to speak within the context of the question. Not outside the context of the question. It's a learning experience for the group as well. … Our seminar you have been witnessing is ***never about teacher-student interaction***. It's much about group employment. So everybody speaks and begins actually to challenge each person. You can even challenge me. So they can gain deep learning.

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 25</div>

However it seemed that BLI1 had a low expectation of his students' discussion skills because he said he was happy with whatever his students said, as long as they tried to respond to the question so that he could monitor their progress (see Excerpt 5.26). It may be inferred that he only required his students to bravely express themselves.

BLI1: When I ask a question, I usually set them a task to do. I'd expect them to do that rather than just a blank sheet of paper and no discussion. It doesn't give me any clue. If they have written plenty but got the wrong idea, that's not a problem. At least I know. Then I can say now why do you think that, have you considered this. This gives me something to work with. When there is little discussion, I can't tell how well they understood. That's the overall problem so I can't help them, I can't correct them, I can't prompt them to think a little deeper or to think from a different angle cos I don't have that feedback.

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 26</div>

5.2.3 Students' perceptions about the purpose of group discussion

This section addresses RQ3b: What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to Chinese students?

Most of the student interviewees implied or directly expressed the view that discussion facilitates learning. When asked about the discussion skills required of them in order to participate in seminars, they tended to reflect on their pre-departure experiences in the Chinese institution rather than their experiences in Britain. It seems that they had noticed the gap between their learning experiences in China and Britain, but that they were not sure about the required group discussion skills for British seminars.

In Excerpt 5.27, CSIB7 described his progress from resisting group discussion to appreciating the techniques and discussing with an open mind. However he seemed to stereotype his Chinese peers, believing that they could not express opinions which were as good as Western students'. This perception suggests that CSIB7 thought of group discussion as an exchange of ideas, whereas the British lecturers expected group discussion to move to construct new knowledge. CSIB7's perception of the nature of group discussion is possibly influenced by his Chinese lecturers who required students to check the accuracy of each other's answers during group discussion.

> CSIB7: I used to think I didn't need group discussion because I trusted myself and I didn't need to discuss with others. Although they could raise some opinions, I used to think it was much better I could offer supportive reasons and evidence for my own opinions. But

now I realise I need group discussion because sometimes others' points are really good, especially those raised by Western students. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 27</div>

CSIB12 said he needed English listening and speaking skills and pointed out that IELTS texts did not represent English usage in real contexts. On the other hand, he said he did not have problems with group discussion but needed more skills for doing course work (see Excerpt 5.28). It can be interpreted that CSIB12 was used to an exam-directed approach to learning. He did not recognise the pedagogical value of group discussion for subject learning, and perceived it as much less valuable than written course work that is assessed.

CSIB12: I hope I will be able to communicate with native English speakers fluently. But I haven't reached that level yet because I have been here for less than one year. My reading and writing is getting better. I still have problems with listening and speaking. Even if you obtain IELTS 6.5, it is rather different when you really use English in a real environment. ***Discussion, no problem. I think I need more skills for doing course work.*** … (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 5. 28</div>

CSIB8 seemed to understand group discussion skills as clearly expressing one's own 'answers' (see Excerpt 5.29); this is a 'goal-oriented' perception of group discussion, as noted by Wang (2012) and Frambach *et al*. (2013). She recognised the behaviour of some Western students as seeking 'consensus' on each point because they usually accepted her arguments and included them in the final report. However it might be truer to say that Western students do not seek consensus on each different viewpoint, as BLI2 believed, but instead make use of different viewpoints to construct new understanding. CSIB8 complained that some of her Western peers refused to participate in after-class group discussion. This may have been because the Western

students were not motivated to discuss in a 'goal-oriented' way.

CSIB8: I hope my Chinese classmates and I can learn to listen to others' opinions. I had a bad experience of group discussion in China. ***If there was a tiny bit of disagreement, consensus about the answer was hard to reach***. They never compromised. They used to be very stubborn. ***We used to have a group member who didn't express his opinion but strongly rejected other's opinions***. Western students always say 'it's fine'. In the group presentations they would say this was contributed by one of our group members. They usually respect each other's opinions. However I also had a bad experience with three Western students from Britain, France and Greece. They gave me a very strange feeling. They were lazy and always absent from after-class group discussion. They even played face book when we met together … My Chinese classmates and I did most of the work. (translated)

Excerpt 5. 29

5.2.4 Summary

RQ2 When the students arrived in the British university, what did they expect of seminars?

Some of the student interviewees preferred small group discussion in which students helped each other by checking their answers, as they had been taught in Part I in China.

Some of them preferred lecturer-led whole class discussion in which lecturers prompted them to think until they orally responded. Perhaps this was because they were used to the tightly-controlled classes in China and the lecturers' assistance. It can be interpreted that they wanted to observe the questioning and challenging strategies of British lecturers. Of course, it is also possible that they subscribed to the stereotypical view that Chinese students were unable to learn autonomously within small groups.

RQ3a What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers?

The British lecturers expected student-student interaction in small groups in seminars, rather than teacher-student interaction. The lecturers had a 'constructivist' perspective on group discussion; they expected students to critically evaluate proposals and opinions and to identify and challenge the underlying assumptions in order to construct new understanding and knowledge. They expected the skills of questioning, challenging and persuading. They thought the ultimate learning goal of group discussion was to achieve a high level of learner autonomy.

RQ3b What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to Chinese students?

The student interviewees were not sure about the required group discussion skills in British seminars. They had a 'goal-oriented' perception of group discussion. They discussed to find out one 'correct' answer. They did not recognise the value of discussion for subject learning, and perceived discussion as much less valuable than the assessed written work. According to their self-reported data, their Western peers did not seem to like their discussion methods and sometimes refused to discuss with them.

The findings suggest that the students' learning experiences in the Chinese university structured their 'habitus' which according to Maton (2008) helps to shape one's present and future practices, as demonstrated by Figure 2.3 in section 2.4.2. Chapter

6 will analyse the group discussion recording and the follow-up interviews, and discuss '2+1' students' discussion methods.

Chapter 6 Students' understanding of case-study discussions in British seminars

This chapter addresses research objective 2: to investigate how Chinese students understand the nature and the purpose of the instructional techniques they are exposed to in Britain. As explained in section 3.7.2, the 'laboratory' in which this will be examined is a set of case-study discussions, transcribed and coded to yield insights into patterns of participation and differing underlying assumptions. The corresponding research question is RQ4: What do patterns of participation in case-study discussions in British seminars reveal about the methods employed by Chinese students, and how do these differ from other non-native speakers of English?

6.1 Distribution of turns in the recording

Table 6.1 summarises the numbers of each type of turn produced by Chinese (CS) and non-Chinese (NCS) students and the number of turns produced by each Chinese and non-Chinese student. The figures for non-Chinese students are in brackets.

Group	Student	*Ix*	*I*	*R*	*F*	*R/I*	*F/I*	Total
2	3CS	4(1)	3(1)	17(6)	0(0)	2(1)	0(0)	26(9)
	4NCS	35(9)	51(13)	47(12)	7(2)	20(5)	11(3)	171(43)
3	2CS	2(1)	6(3)	15(8)	6(3)	7(4)	7(4)	43(22)
	4NCS	28(7)	67(17)	77(19)	18(5)	38(10)	18(5)	246(62)
1	3CS	2(1)	3(1)	59(20)	9(3)	13(4)	0(0)	86(29)
	2NCS	22(11)	73(37)	23(12)	1(1)	12(6)	2(1)	133(67)
4	3CS	12(4)	27(7)	29(10)	5(2)	31(10)	12(4)	116(39)
	1NCS	1(1)	8(8)	24(24)	7(7)	26(26)	8(8)	74(74)
5	4CS	18(5)	32(8)	40(10)	37(9)	6(2)	11(3)	144(36)
	1NCS	0(0)	9(9)	19(19)	18(18)	8(8)	1(1)	55(55)

6	3CS	18(6)	33(11)	33(11)	7(2)	31(10)	15(5)	137(46)
	1NCS	4(4)	5(5)	15(15)	10(10)	29(29)	1(1)	64(64)
8	4CS	31(8)	22(6)	23(6)	14(5)	6(2)	2(1)	98(25)
9	6CS	48(8)	31(5)	32(5)	18(3)	2(0.3)	4(0.7)	135(23)
10	4CS	29(7)	27(7)	29(7)	20(5)	5(1)	6(2)	116(29)

Table 6. 1 Chinese and non-Chinese students' turns

In the six mixed group discussion recordings, the number of total turns produced by each Chinese student is less than those produced by each non-Chinese student. It appears that the degree of participation of Chinese students is less than that of non-Chinese students. The number of *R/I* turns produced by each Chinese student in the mixed groups is consistently lower than the number produced by non-Chinese students. Chinese students seemed less likely to extend initiating utterances.

Table 6.2 summarises the total numbers of responding turns (*R* and *R/I* turns) made by the Chinese students responding to questions and to initiating turns expressing the opinions of others. In the six mixed group recordings (groups 1 to 6) Chinese students are more responsive to questions than to statements containing opinions, whereas in the three all-Chinese groups (groups 8 to 10), they seem to produce more responses to opinions than to questions.

Group	Mixed groups						Chinese groups		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10
Responding turns to questions	19	16	65	37	36	37	18	7	15
Responding turns to opinions	0	6	7	23	6	27	11	27	19

Table 6. 2 The number of turns produced by Chinese students responding to questions and opinions

6.2 The analysis

This section reports on my findings regarding the methods employed by Chinese students in each of the nine case-study discussions in British seminars, revealing their

participation patterns and how these differ from the participation patterns of other non-native speakers of English. It discusses the nine pieces of recording one by one by reporting on the findings from classroom observation, the IRF analysis and the follow-up interviews.

6.2.1 Group 1

Group 1 discussed a PESTEL analysis[21] (political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal analysis) of Shanghai Futures Company, a topic proposed by the Chinese students who had been preparing for it for one week.

The discussion mainly consisted of an exchange of factual information about this company because of the information gap between the Chinese and non-Chinese students. The group contained three Chinese students (C1-3), one French student (F1), and one Indian student (I1). The non-Chinese students did not know the Chinese company; therefore they initiated plenty of *I* turns. Most of the Chinese students' contributions were *R* turns. The majority of the exchanges were I-R-F without expanded exchange elements. Although the Chinese students made some *R/I* turns, they did not really want to expand the topic but terminated it by initiating another topic.

Of the three Chinese students, only C2 made *I* turns explicitly requesting answers from specific students.

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[21] PESTEL analysis examines the macro-environment of an organisation in terms of what environmental influences have been important in the past, and the extent to which there are changes occurring (Johnson & Scholes 1999).

The Chinese students responded to three types of *I* turns: wh- and how-questions, statements with rising tone, and instructing. These types of *I* turns strongly predict corresponding responses. Excerpt 6.1 is an example in which C1 and C2 respond to I1 and F1's questions and requests. There is no evidence of Chinese students responding to any initiating turn containing an opinion.

18	I1: so it's better if you tell us about the company	I
19	C1: well	R
20	F1: I'm curious	I
21	C1: it's simple erm many company come together and make trades together er the future market er make it simple er it's just you just buy the things in the future with a fixed price it's like er it's September now er it's November now you you wanna buy goods er next year next January	R
22	I1: and you fix the price er today↗	I
23	C1: yeah	R
24	F1: what kinds of goods ↗every↗	I
25	C2: er many goods er sorry er iron iron gold silver something like that or something	R

Excerpt 6. 1

In Excerpt 6.2, line 50, F1 attempts to initiate with her own opinion about 'the political environment'. I code the interactive function as 'elicit' as it seems to be trying to meet the British lecturers' expectations in the way it tries to move from exchanging opinion towards constructing new knowledge (see sections 4.6.4 and 5.2.2). C1 concedes that F1 is right and then initiates another topic (the economy). Although concession may be followed by a challenge, as illustrated in Li and Nesi (2004), and in such cases it can be viewed as positive in terms of the development of dialogue (see line 21, Excerpt 6.9, group 2), this is not the case here. C1 does not want to explore 'the political environment' with F1 but is eager to express his own idea. He flouts Grice's maxim of relevance.

50	F1: the political environment is very important because	I	Elicit
51	C1: yeah I think it is the key driver of this company erm also I believe that the *__economy__*[22] is is another important key key feature of this company because you know the microenvironment like the inflation of the currency and the interest rates affect - - affect the company	R/I	Concession Inform
52	I1: yeah	R	Acknowledge

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 2</div>

It is interesting that when interviewed C1 interpreted F1's utterance in line 50 as *informing* rather than *eliciting* others' comments (see Excerpt 6.3). Informing moves predict acknowledgement, therefore he acknowledges it. C1 also explained his behaviour of initiating his opinion about 'the economy' as 'sharing opinion'. He seemed to regard the interaction in the group discussion as *informing and receiving*, rather than offering an opinion to elicit another's comment. Therefore I coded C1's contribution as 'inform'. C1 expected acknowledgement only, and this might have prohibited further exploration in a discussion. Therefore I recognised 'inform' as a negative interactive function.

C1: She wanted to show her opinion which I thought was too soon. ***That's only her opinion. I think her purpose was to gain approval so I showed agreement. Only showing agreement made me feel weak.*** I don't think she is absolutely right. I think the political environment is not the only important factor. … I wanted to ***share my opinion***. ***I hope the other group members could share their opinions.*** (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 3</div>

C1 in the interview also implied that commenting on others' opinions was more face-threatening than correcting factual information during group discussion. However in the West facts are generally regarded as verifiable, whereas opinions are not verifiable and are therefore open to discussion (Hofstede 2001). The non-Chinese

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[22] In the transcript excerpts, the subtopics added cumulatively are underlined and put into italics and bold. The subtopics which are initiated to indicate a different answer are put into italics and bold.

students with Western educational backgrounds may have found it less face-threatening when their opinions were objected to in group discussion. In collectivist societies, on the other hand, opinions are predetermined by the in-group (Hofstede 2001); therefore explicitly objecting to people's opinions is more face threatening than correcting facts.

There is evidence in the *R/I* turns made by the Chinese students that they responded by initiating new subtopics rather than adding further information or refining each other's opinion, as the British lecturers expected (see section 5.2.2). This type of *R/I* turn terminates the discussion of the current subtopic. This behaviour can be interpreted as goal-oriented.

47	C1: we are strictly controlled by the government the government er dominant the most market the most share of the market	I	Inform
48	F1: so they are ***politically*** protected↗	R/I	Develop Elicit
49	I1: yeah	R	Acknowledge
50	F1: the political environment is very important because	I	Elicit
51	C1: =yeah I think it is the key driver of this company erm also I believe that the *economy* is is another important key key feature of this company because you know the microenvironment like the inflation of the currency and the interest rates affect - - affect the company	R/I	Concession Inform
52	I1: yeah	R	Acknowledge
53	F1: ok and the ***social*** environment	I	Elicit
54	C1: I don't know how to describe social	R	Reply
55	I1: it's like building a platform for everyone so that they can exchange their goods	I	Elicit
56	C1: yeah	R	Acknowledge
57	F1: and a lot of people do that↗	Ix	Elicit
58	I1: social you can explain like this	I	Elicit
59	C1: yeah yeah	R	Acknowledge
60	I1: ***politically*** intervention is basically a government er er or institution so they will be politically er er affected on that the political situation will affect this company	I	Elicit
61	F1: yes	R	Acknowledge

Excerpt 6. 4

In Excerpt 6.4, the topics move from the political, economic, social, and back to the

political environment. The exchange from line 47 to line 49 is about the political

environment which is introduced by C1. In line 48, F1 builds upon C1's contribution.

This is the first time the group discusses this subtopic. In line 50, F1 initiates a new

but coherent subtopic about the importance of the political environment. But C1 in

line 51 interrupts F1 by abruptly initiating another subtopic about the economic

environment. Within the same turn she also proposes an argument that the Future

Company is influenced by currency and interest rates. I1 seems to want to discuss the

political environment a bit more, as he reinitiates this subtopic in line 60.

By changing the discussion topic in line 51 C1 prevents the group's further

exploration of the importance of the political environment for the Future Company.

In line 53, F1 uses a similar approach to respond to C1 by swiftly initiating a new

subtopic (social environment) after an I-R/I-R exchange (lines 50 and 52 are about the

economic environment). F1 says 'ok'. This can be regarded as a frame move[23]

bringing the discussion about the economic environment to an end and abruptly

initiating a new subtopic. She could have made an *F* or *F/I* turn to develop the

discussion. She does not do so, perhaps because C1 interrupts her when she is

initiating a new subtopic in line 50.

I describe this method of constantly bringing the discussion topic back to the original

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[23] A frame move, according to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) indicates a boundary in on-going discourse, signalling the transition from one stage to another.

discussion question as a 'spiral' discussion method. The word 'spiral' is used by Kaplan (1966) to describe an indirect Chinese rhetorical pattern (that is, paragraph- and essay-level organisational pattern) circling around a point. Following this style speakers do not tend to mention the main point, and Kaplan uses the spiral image to describe a type of cultural thought pattern. Galtung (1981) also makes a similar claim that 'Saxonic' non-dialectical thought develops linearly, whereas 'Nipponic' dialectical thought directs different points to a middle core to form a circle. Jin (1992) inferred that these different thinking formats might indicate different patterns and styles in Chinese and English oral interaction.

The exchange style performed by the students in Excerpt 6.4 is 'spiral' because their discussion circled around the original discussion question rather than developing the topics further. This 'spiral' discussion method seems to be consistent with the identified Chinese perspective of the case method which is to identify how theoretical knowledge is employed in practice (see Chapter 5).

In comparison, I1 and F1's behaviour in Excerpt 6.5 seems to be a productive collaboration with 'cumulative' effort (Mercer 1995).

183	F1: and social↗	I	Elicit
184	I1: social like basically it's like a **_platform_** (F1: =ah↗) it's a platform for people that they can interact and they can er target the prices or here like this company which is providing for us so that we can interact and er ? that we can er target the price for our products	R	Reply Develop Elicit
185	F1: but you know every **_single factor_** doesn't have to be	F/I	Develop Elicit
186	I1: oh they affect these	R	Reformulate

Excerpt 6. 5

In my opinion, I1 in line 184 intended to express his understanding of the social environment as soon as this subtopic was initiated. I1 attempts this in an obligatory *R* turn rather than delaying it to an optional *F* turn. By so doing, I1 leaves an option for the others to follow up on his comment, and creates opportunities for exploring further understanding. This discussion method enables the students to work as a team to construct new knowledge collaboratively. I1's behaviour is reminiscent of a group of American students which was discovered to delay explicit expressions of noncomprehension (Waring 2002a) (see section 2.2.3).

The 'exploratory' discussion method is consistent with the identified British view of case discussion as doing something more than simply identifying and describing how theoretical knowledge is employed in practice. The method suggests a 'constructivist' perspective on learning in which learners construct knowledge and experience by exploiting their own backgrounds and former experiences.

139	F1: future's rate		
140	C2: yeah I think how to explain that just er maybe you buy the gold now for one ounce er maybe it's er =200 dollars= (C3: =200 dollars=) and you set the contract with the company and the date will		
141	I1: which date		
142	C2: three months maybe three months and if three months after the gold's price is going up and you get the money back get more money back if it goes down you lose money		
143	F1: oh so it's like investment bank		
144	C2: yes		
145	I1: so you only fix the price the gold are not exchanged		
146	C2: yes		
147	I1: gold are exchanged or not	I	Elicit
148	C2: no just you have your contract you buy them but you don't have to go it's just maybe it's erm - -	R/I	Reply Inform
149	C3: it's virtual	R/I	Reformulate Inform

Excerpt 6.6 provides evidence of a Chinese student (C3) building on other's contributions (in the excerpt the utterances from line 139 to 146 are not relevant to the analysis; they offer contextual information). In line 147, I1 asks whether goods are physically exchanged in the Futures Company. C2 offers an answer. C3 in line 149 reformulates C2's description of the transaction, describing it as a virtual one. C3 demonstrates a kind of 'cumulative' and 'exploratory' effort in discussion. As I described in section 2.2.1, 'cumulative' and 'exploratory' efforts refer to the discussion behaviour of appropriately interpreting each other's opinions and testing hypotheses. However in the interviews with C2 and C3, they said they wanted to explain everything clearly for the non-Chinese students (see Excerpt 6.7). They did not indicate that they were taking 'constructivist' approach to the discussion. Therefore I coded the utterance in line 149 as 'inform', a negative interactive function.

C3: I was explaining what C2 said. The word of 'virtual' just came to my mind at that time. It was the word we need. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 7

The analysis of group discussion 1 reveals 'exploratory' and 'spiral' discussion methods. The 'spiral' method constantly brings the discussion back to the original discussion topic/question and prevents the development of the discussion topic. The 'exploratory' method develops the discussion topic until another topic arises. The 'spiral' method suggests 'goal-oriented' learning and the 'exploratory' method suggests a 'constructivist' perspective on learning.

The Chinese students were not likely to comment on others' opinions in the discussion because this was regarded as face-threatening. They apparently perceived the turns containing opinions as *informing* rather than *eliciting*. They also did not expect others to comment on their opinions, and for this reason their contributions are coded negatively as 'inform', predicting an 'acknowledge' rather than a new comment.

6.2.2 Group 2

Group 2 discussed a strategic group analysis[24] of Dutch polytechnics. The lecturer orally instructed the students to consider the question of how Dutch polytechnics could seek strategic development.

The lecturer assigned the case one week before the seminar, and therefore assumed that the students would be familiar with the case by the time they met to discuss it. The group consisted of three Chinese students (C1-3), two French students (F1-2), one British student (B1), and one Nigerian student (N1). The Chinese students made far fewer turns than the non-Chinese students, although this does not necessarily imply that the Chinese students participated less than the non-Chinese students, because participation is not only measurable in terms of the amount of oral contribution but also in terms of the "quality and discussion effectiveness" (Dallimore *et al*. 2004:104). However the Chinese students did fail to produce extended exchange elements.

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[24] Strategic group analysis aims to identify organisations with similar strategic characteristics, following similar strategies or competing on similar bases (Jonson & Scholes 1999). Usually strategic group analysis produces a strategic group map presenting the positions of the organisations decided by two or more key characteristics. In this thesis I call the key characteristics 'variables' and the organisations within a strategic group as 'competitors'.

Like the Chinese students in group 1, these Chinese students responded to questions which explicitly requested answers from a nominated person. There is no evidence of them responding to any initiating turn containing an opinion.

In an interview, I asked C2 to explain her expectation of how the others responded to her opinions because she contributed the most amongst the Chinese students in the group. She seemed to recognise two methods of responding to an opinion: accepting and writing down the opinion to form the final answer, or building upon the opinion (see Excerpt 6.8). Like C1 in group 1, C2 clearly said she did not like to reformulate or build on other's opinions because she wanted to demonstrate her independent thinking without the necessity of negotiating meaning with group members (see the emphasis in the excerpt). She implied that she did not need the intervention of group discussion; this is like the group of international students in Spiro *et al.*'s (2012) study. This perception of independent learning is in contrast to the expectation of British academic culture (see section Chapter 3). C2 seemed to perceive the purpose of group discussion as collecting answers to be reported to the lecturer.

> C2: When I was expressing my own opinion, I expected others to ask me to explain or to allow me some time to offer reasons. I hoped they would really consider my opinion and write it down. I contributed my opinion in order to make our final answer more valid, to be correct. I mean all of our opinions will be integrated at the end of the discussion. They will be presented on the poster … ***I don't like to reformulate or build on other people's opinions. It shows that I'm not an independent person. I hope they could also give their answers.*** (translated)

Excerpt 6. 8

Group 2 provides evidence of the 'exploratory' discussion method in which students interact via the sequence of elicit-reply-acknowledge/concession/challenge/develop

-acknowledge'. In Excerpt 6.9, B1 and N1 discuss the strategic development of Dutch

polytechnics. (Lines 9 to 14 are not quite relevant to the topic of the 'exploratory'

method here. They will be referred to in later discussion.)

9	B1: ok first discussion for everybody here we have two strategic choices we can either try to go to polytechnic national or we can try to be more academic so we have to choose now what we want to do and why so what do you think	I	
10	C1: I think we can choose academic	R	
11	B1: so we are here now but then I think yes it's a good idea but then we have er too much competition from profit business school because they want to do the same thing	F/I	
12	C1: yeah	R	
13	F1: is this from lecture↗	I	
14	N1: yeah last week	R	
15	B1: erm anybody anything↗ what do you think	I	Elicit
16	N1: oh I think er since we've been provided er we can cooperate with the universities like providing MBA and	R	Reply
17	B1: but **_can we provide MBA_**↗	F/I	Challenge Elicit
18	N1: no some of the polytechnics provided MBA in some cases in cooperation with universities **_in Britain_** so I think so I think we can be more academic rather than regional cos they would have to we still be able to offer the same services but to other people	R/I	Reply Develop Elicit
19	B1: so you mean that **_diversify_**↗	R/I	Develop Elicit
20	N1: yeah cos you see a polytechnic just offers um like a **_kind of education_**	R/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
21	B1: yeah but I think polytechnics are like for people are not academically skilled but they more like practical in nature which could say they are not smart but it's stupid to say that so but our **_customers_**	R/I	Concession Challenge Develop Elicit
22	N1: ok I know in **_our region_** that because we were not making	R/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
23	B1: it looks like a **_niche market_** haha ok erm you got a point because we already have this our plan is to do this strategic alliances with universities so that we offer MBA anybody object	R/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit

Excerpt 6. 9

In line 15, B1 elicits others' opinions by asking a question. N1 responds to B1's

elicitation by offering her opinion. B1 challenges N1's opinion. In line 18, N1 replies to B1's challenge by offering specific examples, thus her response develops the discussion. B1 links N1's answer to the professional term 'diversify' and elicits N1's opinion about her interpretation. N1 acknowledges B1's interpretation and attempts to add her evaluation of the case (polytechnics). In line 21, B1 concedes by agreeing with N1's attempted evaluation and doubts it by bringing in a new subtopic (polytechnic customers). N1 acknowledges B1's opinion and further explains her evaluation regarding B1's challenge. In line 23, B1 acknowledges N1's opinion by linking it to another professional term 'niche market'. B1 expresses the same opinion as the one N1 offers in line 16. However B1 and N1 obtain deeper understanding about their opinions. This behaviour accords with native English-speakers' 'cumulative' behaviour (Mercer 1995) in conversation in which a new initiative is 'delayed' (Schegloff 2000:225) if the current turn is of 'multiunit nature' in terms of the interpretation of the group members (Waring 2002a:1718).

B1 and N1 take eight turns to explore the development of polytechnics by making and testing assumptions and drawing links from many other professional angles, thus moving beyond the initial perspective. On average, these two students contributed equally to the discussion. They reflect on each other's contribution in order to seek more understanding. Their behaviour is similar to British students' discussion behaviour as described by Li and Nesi (2004), as the students agree with the opinion initiated and develop it further. In other words, students actively "expand their shared understanding of the current subtopic" (Li & Nesi 2004: 25) and by so doing try to understand each other critically.

B1 delays the explicit expression of her own opinion but actively builds upon N1's contribution. It appears that B1's behaviour is in contrast to I1's behaviour of expressing his understanding in an obligatory *R* turn (see Excerpt 6.9). However, the reason may be because B1's behaviour occurs at a stage of decision-making, whereas I1's behaviour in group 1 occurs at a stage of processing factual information. Both types of behaviour prolong the process of shared inquiry and delay answering the discussion question directly, indicating a constructivist perspective on group discussion.

Group discussion 2 also contains evidence of miscomprehension of each other's intention (Excerpt 6.10 and Excerpt 6.18) caused by the 'exploratory' and 'spiral' discussion methods.

In Excerpt 6.10, B1 and N1 use the 'exploratory' discussion method and C1 and C2 use the 'spiral' method.

9	B1: ok first discussion for everybody here we have two strategic choices we can either try to go to polytechnic national or we can try to be more academic so we have to choose now what we want to do and why so what do you think	I	Elicit
(this part is reproduced in the excerpt above and has been omitted here)			
23	B1: it looks like a ***niche market*** haha ok erm you got a point because we already have this our plan is to do this strategic alliances with universities so that we offer MBAs anybody objects	F/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
24	C2: I think ***polytechnic is more vocational***	R	Reject
25	B1: yes it is but because we already get away from this but if you want a ***strategy*** to expand	F/I	Concession Challenge Elicit
26	C2: ***what is strategy***	Ix	Reject
27	B1: erm what do you think	I	Elicit
28	N1: I think it's better er to diversify because	R	Reply
29	B1: so diversify to academic	I	Elicit

30	C1: yeah	R	Reply
31	B1: ok what do you think	I	Elicit
32	C3: the same	R	Reply
33	B1: the same ok I think we have a majority here vote for diversify	F/I	Acknowledge Elicit
34	C1: ***and you what do you think***	I	Elicit
35	B1: I think both are possible but it depends on what direction we want to go and I think it's better to have a majority because it's just I mean ***a question of preference*** but yeah it makes sense to me that make alliances with universities like a normal to say that now students are studying at our polytechnic and then for example like for the exam there must be a cooperation from the university like the um testers the questions the testers comes from because I think we are not allowed to test for MBA I think so that's why we need cooperation with and as for universities service we'd be benefits because then they will be more applicational so like mutual benefit also what we do have er like niche market (N1: =erm yeah) because the universities they are in the capitals these are the big cities but there are small cities um the students don't want to move away they have to go somewhere else you are writing ok what other questions do we have↗	R/I	Reply Develop Elicit

Excerpt 6. 10

In line 23, B1 offers a plan and invites comments saying 'anybody objects?'. C2 in line 24 does not comment on B1's opinion but offers similar factual information to what B1 offers in line 9. This can be interpreted as meaning that C2 dismisses B1's opinion.

When interviewed, C2 clearly said that she wanted to offer a different answer (see Excerpt 6.11). She wanted the group to reconsider the initial discussion question. I code C2's utterance in line 24 as 'reject' since she dismisses B1's opinion by attempting to offer her own opinion. She does not push the discussion forward to explore new knowledge. Therefore I recognise 'reject' as a negative interactive function.

C2: Staying within the polytechnic groups is also a strategy. We can expand. I emphasised the advantage of polytechnics by describing them as more vocational. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 11

Unlike the Chinese students in Li and Nesi's experiment, who directly objected to the preceding speaker's opinions, C2 shows her attitude to B1's opinion indirectly. The reason for this might be that C2 is still unfamiliar with B1.

In line 25, B1 seems not to recognise C2's purpose. B1 concedes by agreeing with C2's opinion and challenges it by referring to the professional term 'strategy'. It is possible that B1 is used to an 'exploratory' method and considers C2's contribution as offering further evidence to support her opinion.

In line 25, B1 appears to expect a further comment from C2. However, C2 does not make one and instead asks for a definition of the term 'strategy'. B1 ignores the question, making C2's utterance an *Ix*.

The function of C2's question is unclear. According to Eggins and Slade (1997), in casual conversation Western speakers ask real questions (i.e. questions to elicit answers). However in an interview C2 explained that she questioned B1 about the meaning of 'strategy' to show her strong objection to B1's opinion (see Excerpt 6.12). She asked the question in order to dismiss B1's opinion, rather than to elicit an explanation of the meaning of the term. For this reason I have coded C2's contribution in line 26 as 'reject'.

C2: I wanted to ***object to her opinion***. The question meant 'do you really understand the meaning of strategy?' She appeared to agree with me but actually she meant that I had

contributed an idea they had already discussed. She thought my suggestion was not a strategy. I thought her opinion was rather limited. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 12</div>

C2 also said that she interpreted what B1 said in line 25 as disagreeing rather than as supporting her opinion. That means C2 perceived the group discussion as an argument over the correctness of the answer. C2 seemed to believe that B1 would understand that her question was actually expressing an objection.

From lines 27 to 29, B1 re-checks Ni's opinion which is the same as the one C1 proposes in line 10. In Excerpt 6.13, C1 complains that B1 and N1 wasted time trying to find out the answer the lecturer expected after she had already provided this answer. She thought the British lecturer who assigned the task had a clear idea about the answer. However the British lecturers perceived the nature and procedure of case-study group discussion as divergent (see section 5.2.2).

C1: You see they finally agreed on what I proposed. The polytechnics should become academic. This is simple. ***I told them but why didn't they accept it? It's a waste of time.*** … I mean she checked everyone's opinion which was fine. But she also checked with N1 about whether the polytechnics could offer MBA programmes and the competition in the academic group. This was a simulated practice and expanding to the academic group was ***obviously what the lecturer wanted***. It was obvious that the academic group is competitive. It's also competitive if they stay in the current polytechnic group. There was nothing to worry about that. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 13</div>

Like C2, C1 also seemed to prefer to reach the decision quickly by directly exchanging opinions. This discussion method attaches more importance to the outcome and less importance to the analysis and exploration.

In line 33, B1 offers her opinion that the 'majority vote for diversity' and attempts to elicit comment about this opinion. In line 34, C1 dismisses B1's idea and asks for B1's own opinion. I code C1's contribution as a 'rejection' of B1's opinion and an invitation for comment. Her question brings the discussion back to the original discussion question. B1 responds to this unexpected question in line 35 in an extremely long turn. By the end of her utterance, she uses a framing move (ok) to terminate the present discussion and initiate another subtopic.

C1's question in line 34 does not satisfy the adjacency pair of elicit-reply. Her behaviour threatens B1's positive face to some extent because it disregards B1's feelings and wants. This face-threatening behaviour would lead to the possibility of stopping the conversation. On the other hand, Western students tend to support each other by showing agreement in classroom discussion (Tracy & Baratz 1993; Li & Nesi 2004). This discussion behaviour accords with the politeness maxim of agreement: minimise disagreement between self and other and maximise agreement between self and other (Cutting 2008).

L2 learners are sometimes hesitant to use adjacency sequences out of the concern that they will not be able to continue the conversation (Scollon & Scollon 2001). This is obviously not what concerns C1 (see Excerpt 6.14). In the interview, C1 said B1 did not provide her personal opinion, but only asked for and commented on the opinions of others. C1 thought that in a group discussion everyone should clearly present their opinions and attempt to find one correct answer. C1 implied that she did not like B1's method of discussion.

C1: I really did not think that B1 had expressed her own ideas clearly so far, although sometimes I could not follow what she was saying. Maybe she expressed her ideas in a way which was ambiguous for me. But most of the time she asked questions and synthesised opinions. I could do that but I didn't. … I knew it was not polite to ask her opinion at that moment. But I was told in China that when we speak English we should be brave and not worry about losing face. I hoped everyone would propose an opinion and give us appropriate reasons. And finally we could decide together on our final answer which would be the final group decision. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 14

In the interview, C1 pointed out two examples (lines 7 and 35) which she thought were too ambiguous to lead to the correct answer. Line 35 (see Excerpt 6.10) was ambiguous for her because B1 did not offer one correct answer (see Excerpt 6.15).

C1: Here you see she said both are possible but it depends on what direction we want to go. She thought both are possible. But I think there should be a right one, one that is better than the other one. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 15

Line 7, Excerpt 6.16 was also ambiguous for C1 because she thought B1 was not sure about the answer about the development direction for Dutch polytechnics (see Excerpt 6.17). C1 expected explicit expression of an opinion and reasons, indicating high uncertainty avoidance. On the other hand, B1's behaviour indicates low uncertainty avoidance.

1	B1: ok then	Ix
2	N1: I think we should go more academic	Ix
3	B1: I think we should try maybe both of them are risky what do you think	I
4	N1: I think both are risky we should try one	R/I
5	F1: you think academic is too risky	R/I
6	N1: I think professional is too risky	R
7	B1: but I think professional actually is more easier because we stay at the same where we are what we know the thing is erm but erm where are response for example here is empty here yet too but I think erm middle schools have better	F/I

	advantage to go here regional erm regional erm middle academic can go there because they just need like erm to be more practical for example what they say they want to do company training and then they are better than us so erm I think the competition in this industry is too high	
8	N1: ok you think we erm	R/I
9	B1: ok first discussion for everybody here we have two strategic choices we can either try to go to polytechnic national or we can try to be more academic so we have to choose now what we want to do and why so what do you think	I
10	C1: I think we can choose academic	R

Excerpt 6. 16

C1: … This utterance (line 7) is also very ambiguous for me. I got lost, to be honest. She expressed so much uncertainty. At first she said being professional is easier so I guessed she supported staying in the polytechnics group. But then she said it's better for middle schools to be regional, to be more professional. So I guessed she changed her mind. She might want to choose to enter the academic group. But finally she said the competition in the industry is too high. I didn't know what this industry referred to. I was absolutely lost. I didn't know what she wanted to say. I was told that native English speakers tend to clearly demonstrate their opinions at the very beginning in their writing. I supposed they were very direct but sometimes it is a torture to discuss with British or the other European students. I mean for most of the time it's not because of English language problems because they always slow down their speaking speed. I just ***I couldn't understand what they wanted to say, what is their point.*** I had the same problem with British lecturers. ***It's too ambiguous for me.*** (translated)

Excerpt 6. 17

Excerpt 6.18 is another example of confusion and miscomprehension between Chinese and non-Chinese students about each others' intention. In line 45, B1 proposes a new subtopic (barriers to be national) and also gives her own opinion in order to elicit other's comment. N1 agrees with her. In line 47, C2 does not show her attitude but repeats a piece of factual information, in which case the utterance is an *I* turn because it re-initiates an already-discussed topic. It is possible that she intends to add further information to support B1's opinion, in which case it is an *F/I* turn. I decided to define this utterance as an *I* turn because C2 in an interview said she had attempted to reinitiate a subtopic which had already been discussed. She wanted to

object to B1's opinion. I therefore identify the interactive function of her utterance as 'repeat' and 'reject'. She makes the discussion circle around the original discussion topic.

However B1 does not seem to recognise C2's rejection. In line 52, B1 agrees with C2 and expands her idea to another issue (the job market) which B1 considers to be relevant to the present subtopic (barriers to being national).

It needs to be pointed out that N1 in line 44 makes an *Ix* turn which constructs an incomplete exchange. B1 in line 45 explains her understanding of the 'barrier' rather than answering N1's question. This is not the preferred discussion method of simply exchanging opinions.

9	B1: ok first discussion for everybody here we have two strategic choices we can either try to go to polytechnic national or we can try to be more academic so we have to choose now what we want to do and why so what do you think	I	Elicit
...			
44	N1: erm so how can we overcome that	Ix	Elicit
45	B1: the barriers ↗ are there any barriers for us to go national ↗ it only will be competitive with the for-profit business schools which will be really bad let's say er we are polytechnics and we want to go to xx²⁵ let's say xx University is a more-for-profit business school we come to this place we have to compete directly with them so that it will be also difficult to do so	I	Elicit
46	N1: yeah	R	Acknowledge
47	C2: *but I think there are two different kinds of school and er poly- and polytechnics are er more erm - -*	I	Repeat Reject
48	B1: practical ↗	R/I	Elicit
49	C2: no profession	R	Reply
50	N1: professional ↗	F/I	Elicit
51	C2: yeah professional er they learn the er technique (B1: =new practice) technology yeah	R	Acknowledge Reply
52	B1: yeah the question is er what do **_employers_** want to do they like erm vocational degrees or do they like practical experience ↗	F/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
53	N1: **_depends_**	R/I	Develop

Excerpt 6. 18

In group 2, the Chinese students with a 'goal-oriented' perspective on the discussion tended to reject the preceding speaker's opinion and make the discussion circle around the initial discussion topic/question. They expected the discussion method of collecting answers, checking their correctness, and submitting a report to the lecturer. On the other hand, the non-Chinese students with a 'constructivist' perspective tended to agree with the preceding speaker's opinion and attempt to explore new knowledge. The Chinese students found that the non-Chinese students failed to give clear answers and thus considered that they were wasting time in their quest for the correct answer.

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²⁵ Specific places and names of universities in the transcripts were disguised by XX.

Students who are used to different discussion methods are likely to mis-comprehend each other's intentions, without recognising that miscomprehension has occurred.

There is evidence that Chinese students ask for definitions of theoretical terms as a means of showing objection, thinking that non-Chinese students will recognise their communicative intent. However asking questions is not a way of showing objection in English. The non-Chinese students may interpret such questions as genuine questions, requiring a full explanation.

6.2.3 Group 3

Group 3 contained two Chinese students (C1-2), three French students (F1-3), and one Polish student (P1). The group discussed a strategic analysis of the console game industry, a case industry recommended by F1, and was required to draw a strategic group map by choosing two key variables so as to present the positions of the competitors within the industry. The content of the discussion is similar to that of group 1 because it also concerns factual information about the industry. The group decided to consider three major competitors in the game industry: Microsoft Xbox, Sony PS3 and Nintendo. They also decided to take Nintendo as the case company for which they would make suggestions for strategic development.

C1, C2 and F1 were very familiar with the industry and contributed most of the turns. On average each of the non-Chinese students produced about three times more extended exchange elements than each Chinese student.

Group 3 contains 22 responding turns made by the Chinese students in which 16 turns respond to questions (wh- questions and statements with rising tone) and six turns respond to initiating turns containing people's opinions. The Chinese students respond to questions three times more than they respond to statements. This evidence accords with the claim by C2 in group 1 in the interview that she perceived utterances containing an opinion as *informing* moves rather than *eliciting* moves.

The Chinese students tend to state factual information in a subjective manner, by starting with 'I think' (see Table 6.4: a list of *I* turns made by the Chinese students). It is possible that this approach is influenced by L1 because in conversational Chinese "I think" (我觉得 Wo Juede) is one of the most routinised forms (Lim 2009). Wo Juede is the second rank (frequency=323.4 per 10,000) of right collocates of Wo (I) in Chinese conversation following after Wo Shi (I am) in the Chinese conversation corpus CallFriend[26]. Wo Juede is an epistemic stance marker of disagreement in response to assessments and also helps to elaborate a flat disagreement (Endo 2013; 2010). That is to say, disagreement is very common in Chinese conversation even though comment on others' opinions in casual conversation is considered impolite.

85	C1: and **_I think_** PS3 and Xbox even though the game is the same but the fee to PS3 to use and or the Xbox to use their the price is the different often the Xbox the game price is cheaper than the PS3
127	C1: **_I think_** the PS3 and Xbox they are two main the er machine that additionally have some differences ↗
210	C1: Sony had more the company help them to the er to make the game
212	C2: **_I think_** PS3 is a little bit professional (C1: =professional than Xbox)
253	C1: **_I think_** it's the mid-target er market is the head the game ok not the home the game market

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[26] The corpus comprises transcripts of 60 telephone conversation recordings (approximately 200,000 characters).

278	C2: the movement game do you mean that you catch a controller and just

Table 6. 3 A list of *I* turns made by the Chinese students in Group 3

Group discussion 3 illustrates the 'exploratory' and 'spiral' discussion methods. In Excerpt 6.19, C1 and C2 use the 'spiral' method and F1 uses the 'exploratory' method. In line 210, C1 contributes a piece of information about Sony. In an interview he said he wanted to share this information without expecting further comment. Therefore I code it as 'inform'. F1 acknowledges C1's information and develops it. In line 212, C2 dismisses F1's opinion by initiating another subtopic (the professional nature of PS3); C2's behaviour further proves that he does not perceive F1's uterance to function as an 'elicit' move.

In line 213, C1 seems to reformulate C2's contribution, in which case his behaviour can be compared to many non-Chinese students' behaviour in my recordings.

210	C1: sony had more the company help them to the er make the game	I	Inform
211	F1: yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah it's what we can explain here when we say Sony has ***a wider range of players and games***	*R/I*	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
212	C2: I think **PS3 is a little bit professional**	Ix	Reject
213	C1: =***professional than Xbox***	I	Reject
214	F1: yeah yeah	R	Acknowledge
215	C1: yeah	F	Acknowledge

Excerpt 6. 19

However in an interview C2 reflected that he did not think his discussion behaviour was cumulative in the way it appears to be (see Excerpt 6.20). He perceived his contribution as *unrelated* to the others' points. That is to say, C1 wanted to dismiss C2's opinion by initiating another point, making C2's utterance an incomplete

exchange. In fact, C1 rejects C2's opinion.

In the interview C2 implied that contributing different points was better than acknowledging others' opinions. He implied that it was not necessary to provide further evidence to support an opinion which had already been approved by other students. He intended to demonstrate that he was as autonomous as C1 and F1.

> C2: ***They said their points and I wanted to talk about my point.*** F1 only integrated C1's contribution into what we had discussed. But I'm able to offer something new. … I didn't want to repeat or follow what C1 had said because this French student had already accepted it.   (translated)

Excerpt 6. 20

In an interview, C1 said that he interpreted C2's behaviour as proposing new points rather than supporting his opinion, and that he approved of this method (see Excerpt 6.21).

> C1: I was happy that F1 agreed with my point and explained a possibility of integrating my point into the final report to the lecturer and the class. C2's contribution was also very good. He could always ***contribute something new*** which surprised me. ***I wanted to encourage his way of discussion***. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 21

Like the students in previous groups, the Chinese and the non-Chinese students misunderstood each others' intentions. In Excerpt 6.22 the students are discussing the global strategies of the three competitors.

61	P1: it's all we have to do ? nothing else ↗ do you have something to add ↗ no ↗	I	Elicit
62	F2: for example is this are these brands are in ***every country*** as a world or yeah you can find them everywhere	R/I	Reply
63	F1: all ***global*** all global erm	R/I	Develop Elicit

64	F2: so that there are some ***strategies*** yeah er is all global	R/I	Develop Elicit
65	F1: erm it depends for ***example*** Microsoft [Xbox][27] is the leader in US and Nintendo is the leader around the world.	R/I	Develop Elicit
66	C1: but I think PS3 is the er are country Japanese people are like to create the PS3 and not the er and Xbox is not popular in our country and Xbox I think just the Europe people like to use the Xbox and PS3 even those here have many more in England and EU the country had made more customer but they are not popular than the Xbox	R/I	Reject
67	F2: em do you know why? is it ***technical*** things or?	R/I	Develop Elicit
68	C1: erm I think it's the ***player*** the habit is have the difference er the PS3 not fit to the Europe people to play	R/I	Reply Develop
69	F1: because I have the ***global er figures*** about the number of the console selling in the world and we are the most selling customers and then the Xbox and after that the PS3 they are all over the world	R/I	Develop Elicit
70	C1: but we [Nintendo] ? customers are the younger or children it's the primary school students and in the er more than this age the people all play PS3 and so their the customers are different and they not have er er - - the customers are different and so and the game the style ? I think the PS3 and Xbox do not have the same market	R/I	Repeat Reject
71	F1: you mean to what ***market*** sorry ↗	R/I	Develop Elicit
72	C1: er the the I think the ? and Xbox the greatest three have different markets	R/I	Reply
73	F1: yeah yeah not exactly the same market	R	Acknowledge Reformulate
74	C1: yeah	F	Acknowledge

Excerpt 6. 22

From line 62 to 65, P1, F1 and F2 discuss in the 'cumulative' way by adding new information and theoretical terms and refining each other's comments. C1 discusses in the 'spiral' way by bringing the discussion back to the initial discussion topic.

In line 62, F2 guesses that the products of the three competitors could be found in almost every country in the world. This information is approved by F1. In line 64, F2 as the initiator of this topic attempts to further link the information to an academic

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[27] The word in square brackets is explanation I added.

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term. F1 reformulates F2's opinion and offers evidence.

C1 in line 66 dismisses F2's opinion by describing consumers of PS3 and Xbox. In line 72, C1 explicitly states that the three competitors have different markets; therefore it is possible that he has a different answer. The interview with C1 supports my inference (see Excerpt 6.23). He wants to reject F2's opinion.

C1: I didn't think that all of them had global strategies. For example I have said PS3 is popular in Japan and maybe in China. It is not so popular here in Britain or Europe. This may be because it doesn't have a global strategy although they have sold products all over the world. They don't especially design games for the European market as far as I know. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 23

C1 and F1 might have different understandings of the term 'global strategy'. However this does not affect this analysis of the students' discussion methods and purposes.

For the non-Chinese students, C1's contribution in line 66 may be cumulative because it offers further evidence. In line 67, F2 asks C1 to explain why he thinks PS3 is not as popular as Xbox in Europe. C1 replies that the style of PS3 games does not suit European players. In line 69, F1 starts with 'because' and offers a worldwide ranking of sales for the three competitors which helps to support C1's opinion. At the end of line 69, F1 repeats the fact that all the three competitors are all over the world. Therefore it is rather possible that F1 adopts a 'constructive' perspective of the group discussion and considers C1's contribution in line 68 as offering evidence in support of his argument.

In lines 70 and 72, C1 repeats what he says in lines 66 and 68 in order to reject F1's

opinion. However, in line 73, F1 further approves of C1's contribution as offering evidence in support of his opinion. In line 74, C1 shows agreement with F1. C1 and F1 appear to reach an agreement; however they actually hold different opinions.

There is no evidence in this excerpt that C1 directly comments on the information or opinions offered by the others. In Excerpt 6.24, C1 said he intended to avoid building on others' points in group discussion, out of politeness. He preferred to list every point on a poster which would finally be presented to the lecturer. This evidence further indicates that he perceived the utterances containing opinions as 'inform' rather than 'elicit'.

> C1: ***It is not polite to add things when someone else provides some information or opinions. They would feel I was correcting them or disagreeing with them[28] and they would not be happy*** (紧跟着别人的观点加东西的话，他们会认为我不同意他们的观点，他们会不高兴的。有可能不太礼貌。). I really hope that the person who took responsibility for writing that poster would keep notes of all the opinions and evidence we contributed. I felt very happy when they wrote my points on the poster. I felt I was a valuable member of the group. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 24</div>

In the interview, C1 used '观点' (opinions) to refer to both the factual information and the opinions offered by the other group members; he did not talk of 'correcting' but used the more ambiguous words '加' (add) and '不同意' (disagree). He implied that the behaviour of correcting and disagreeing with others was impolite. However he may not have realised that in Anglo-Saxon societies opinions are open to discussion, as I mentioned in my analysis of group 1.

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[28] For a discussion of the meaning of 'fact', 'opinion', 'disagreement' and 'correction' in Chinese, see the summary of the findings of the IRF analysis at the end of this chapter.

It seems that C1 was not used to distinguishing fact from opinion. There is further evidence of this in the recording of group 3 discussion. In lines 66, 68, 70, 72 he precedes his statements of fact with the words 'I think'. This indicates that he was trying to analyse the factual information but the statements cannot be considered as expressions of his own personal opinion, or in other words as his own original contribution to the discussion (see section 3.5 about critical thinking).

Excerpt 6.25 is another example of the way the Chinese and non-Chinese students adopted different discussion methods. From line 75 to 78, F1 and F2 discuss using the 'exploratory' method through the sequence of 'elicit-reply-acknowledge/develop'. In line 75, F2 initiates an opinion and elicits comments about it. F1 replies. F2 as the initiator of this topic further explains it. In line 78, F1 acknowledges F2's point and extends it to 'type of games', which he suggests to replace the variable of 'price' in the strategic group map they are drawing.

In line 79, C2 dismisses F1's opinion by offering his own opinion (PS3 and Xbox are the same in terms of game type). Since in line 85 C2 makes his point clear that the three competitors are different in terms of 'price' rather than 'type of games', C2's contribution in line 79 might be regarded as a rejection of F1's idea. In an interview, C2 confirmed that this was indeed the case. Again C2's behaviour made the discussion circle around the initial discussion topic (the variables of the strategic group map).

75	F2: I think also Nintendo is only doing the game consoles now	I	Elicit
76	F1: no they do games too	R	Reply
77	F2: no but I mean yeah on this industry I mean cos Microsoft they are doing	R/I	Acknowledge

	like for computers software etc Sony is doing like mp3 and (F1: =globally yeah yeah) well Nintendo is only concentrated on this **_market_** I think		Develop Elicit
78	F1: normally yeah you are right erm I think that we can maybe change er don't choose price here choose something else er like **_types of games_** it will be more erm maybe more adequate	R/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
79	C2: **_if you if you choose type of game PS3 and Xbox are quite the same_**	R/I	Reject
80	F1: yeah quite the same	R	Acknowledge
81	F2: so we start to write or	I	Elicit
82	F1: yeah we can erm do you want to (C1: =and) put some **_information about the market in general_** before making the group analysis ↗	R/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
83	P1: er do we have any information	I	Elicit
84	F1: yes a lot	R	Reply
85	C2: and I think PS3 and Xbox even though the game is the same but the fee to PS3 to use and or the Xbox to use their the **_price_** is the different often the Xbox the game price is cheaper than the PS3	I	Repeat Reject
86	F1: yeah yeah yeah it's the cheapest one between Nintendo and PS3	R	Acknowledge
87	C2: yeah	F	Acknowledge

Excerpt 6. 25

In line 80, F1 acknowledges C2's opinion. It is possible that F1 considers C2's opinion (that PS3 and Xbox would be the same in terms of game type) as support for F1's point that 'type of game' can be a potential variable, since C2 predicts the positions of the competitors on the strategic group map.

In line 81, F2 suggests the group write the group analysis on the poster. F1 acknowledges this and makes specific suggestions. In line 85, C2 does not follow F1's suggestion but repeats what he has stated in line 79 and initiates the subtopic of 'price'. His behaviour drags the discussion back to the initial discussion topic when the discussion is about to move forward. It indicates that C2 thinks there is one correct answer to the divergent discussion task.

C1 and F1 appear to reach an agreement about the variables of the strategic group

map; they do not realise that their opinions are different.

Excerpt 6.26 contains an example (line 245) in which C1 appears to offer evidence in support of F1's opinion (line 243).

242	F2: so we get this one DVD ↗	I	Elicit
243	F1: yeah yeah - - no it's very er so it's really ***two different strategies*** this one [PS3] cares about techno- (F2: =yeah) technological probably and this one [Nintendo] really wants to care about the game what game is	R/I	Acknowledge Develop
244	F2: ***technological*** ↗	R/I	Develop Elicit
245	C1: Nintendo can only play game and Sony er Xbox and PS3 can see the video and technology is higher [than Nintendo]	R	Reply
246	F1: yeah	F	Acknowledge
247	P1: I agree because ***Nintendo*** games are not fully like them I mean (F1: =yeah) ? but it's as good as PS3 ↗	F/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
248	F1: yeah yeah yeah	R	Acknowledge

Excerpt 6. 26

In line 242, F2 suggests 'DVD' as a variable to differentiate the three competitors. F1 develops the subtopic 'technology' and proposes an argument (that PS3 focuses on technology whereas Nintendo focuses on games). F2 in line 244 uses a rising tone on the word 'technological'. She seems to ask for an explanation of 'technology'. In line 245, C1 explains it with a piece of evidence. In an interview, C1 explained that he had replied to F2's question (see Excerpt 6.27), and this implies that he perceived *questions* as *eliciting*, and *statements* of opinions as *informing*. He thought that it was not necessary to show agreement or raise similar opinions in group discussion. In other words, he thought group discussion only required students to exchange *different* opinions.

C1: **_I would not have said this sentence_** in line 245 if F2 had not asked about 'technology' **_because I totally agree with what F1 said_**. Xbox and PS3 focus on technological innovation. Nintendo focuses on game design and innovation. Therefore in terms of technology Xbox and PS3 are better than Nintendo I think. But this was an opportunity to practise my English because F2 asked a question. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 27</div>

Excerpt 6.28 provides an example of F1's recognition that a Chinese member of the group is not offering supporting evidence but is giving a different opinion. It is interesting to see how F1 deals with the disagreement.

184	F1: erm maybe you can do best if we put them really in the middle	I	Elicit
185	F2: in the middle ↗	R/I	Elicit
186	F1: yeah really in the middle I think because there are a lot of **_different games_** so	R/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit
187	C1: **_but the PS3 have the game the Xbox have them too/two_**	R/I	Reject
188	F1: PS3 has the game and Xbox has ↗	R/I	Elicit
189	C1: 不是 [no] both have too/two	R	Reply
190	F1: two ↗ these both ↗	F/I	Elicit
191	C1: erm have this game too, too, t-o-o too	R	Reply
192	F1: oh too er er which too are you talking about	F/I	Elicit
193	C1: anything from the	R	Reply
194	C2: he means their games are quite same	F/I	Inform
195	F1: yeah yeah the game	R	Acknowledge
196	C2: if if PS3 have this kind of game and Xbox will establish one	F/I	Inform
197	F1: there are a lot a lot of it's crazy of the game	R	Reformulate
198	C2: yeah	F	Acknowledge
199	F1: you're right but I think these three has really **_more games_** than than Xbox (C2: =yeah) really more and I think for example if you are a child and you want to play er a game from er for example animation movie or something like this you will find these on PS3 and maybe less on Xbox	F/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 28</div>

In line 184, F1 makes a suggestion. In line 186, he explains that the three competitors have different products. In line 187, C1 dismisses F1's opinion by stating the fact that PS3 and Xbox have similar games. In an interview, C1 explained he wanted to offer a

different opinion from F1's. Therefore I coded C1's utterance as 'reject', a negative interactive function intending to make the group members reconsider the answer to the discussion question.

From lines 188 to 196, F1 leaves time for C1 and C2 to explain their argument using the positive interactive functions of 'elicit' and 'acknowledge'. Finally C2 makes his argument explicit in line 196. In line 199, F1 explicitly shows his approval of C2's argument and adds more evidence to refine and develop it.

F1 behaves as if he is willing to explore with C1 and C2 the situations of the three competitors. He encourages C1 and C2 to explain their argument until he finds a way to build upon it and integrate it into a new argument. F1 delays the explicit expression of his own opinion and actively builds upon C1 and C2's contribution. He prolongs the process of shared inquiry and exploration. This behaviour can be compared to B1's behaviour in group 2.

The recording data suggests that C1 and C2 do not have much problem with understanding spoken English, although of course they do make grammatical mistakes. It is therefore unlikely that they resorted to expressing their own opinions because they did not understand what the other students were saying.

Analysis of group discussion 3 suggests that the Chinese students adopted the 'spiral' discussion method and that the non-Chinese students adopted the 'exploratory' method.

The Chinese students perceived that the utterances containing opinions functioned to *inform* rather than *elicit*. They only responded to others' opinions when they had different answers. On the other hand, the non-Chinese students seemed to perceive the Chinese students' contributions as supporting evidence. When they recognised disagreement, the non-Chinese students were willing to explore the issue with group members by seeking opportunities to build upon others' opinions in order to obtain new understanding. The Chinese students, on the other hand, did not seem to do this.

The Chinese students tended to express their opinions by stating factual information, and were seemingly unused to distinguishing between 'fact' and 'opinion'. There is also evidence in the Chinese interview data that the Chinese students did not distinguish between 'opinion' and 'fact', and between 'disagreeing' and 'correcting'. They seemed to regard both correcting 'facts' and disagreeing with 'opinions' as equally impolite behaviour.

6.2.4 Group 4

This group discussed a VRIO[29] analysis of Google's major resources and competences. The lecturer had distributed a written case study handout about Google Company one week before the seminar. In order to assist the students' analysis, the lecturer

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[29] The VRIO (value, rarity, imitation and organisational capability) framework is a tool for testing competitive resources of a company. The VRIO framework provides a sequential decision-making approach to exploit its resources starting from questioning if each resource is valuable, and then rare, cannot be imitated and being organised. The four categories are considered to be the competences of a company. The valuable resource of an organisation allows it to choose strategies to exploit environmental opportunities or neutralise a competitive threat. An organisation's resource needs to be rare; otherwise it will not generate competitive advantage in terms of economic performance. An organisation's resource needs to be costly to imitate. An organisation needs to be able to organise itself to exploit its valuable, rare and inimitable resource (Lynch 2012).

had drawn a table of the VRIO model for students to group Google's resources into competences. The group contained three Chinese students (C1-3) and one French student (F1). These three Chinese students made many extended exchange elements; however on average the amount made by each of them was still less than those made by F1.

As we will find in the following analysis of Excerpt 6.30, Group 4 spent most of the time negotiating which resource should be in which category of the VRIO framework. When the group discussion was about to finish, the lecturer joined the discussion for 10 minutes, after which F1 asked whether they could categorise one resource in more than one category (see Excerpt 6.29). The lecturer appreciated their effort to recognise the multiple competences of Google's resources, preferring diversified answers.

F1: We can write it in both like inimitable and organised?
The lecturer: Yes. A lot are provided. That sounds good. …
Excerpt 6. 29

The Chinese students in group 4 tended to be goal-oriented, contributing their own answers without commenting on others' opinions.

105	C2: oh maybe we can say the high ability of creativity and innovation↗	I	Elicit
106	F1: maybe it's **_inimitable_** ↗ no ↗ ability to creative it's maybe inimitable no ↗	R/I	Reply Develop Elicit
107	C2: oh inimitable what's the meaning of inimitable	R/I	Reject
108	F1: the I inimitable you can't	R	Reply
109	C2: copyright is inimitable	I	Inform
110	C1: I wrote initiative as rare	Ix	Inform

111	F1: and for inimitable _**management system**_ ↗	_R/I_	Elicit
			Develop
			Elicit
112	C2: yeah	R	Acknowledge
113	F1: and the ability to be creative ↗ but I don't know if it is inimitable	Ix	Elicit
114	C2: I think _**enterprise culture**_ is inimitable	I	Inform

Excerpt 6. 30

In line 106, Excerpt 6.30, F1 advances her opinion that creativity is related to 'inimitability'. C2 dismisses F1's opinion by asking a question about the definition of 'inimitability'. F1 tries to define 'inimitability'. In line 109, C2 does not try to help F1 to complete the definition but offers her opinion that copyright is inimitable.

Perhaps C2 did not agree with F1 that creativity is connected to 'inimitability', because in line 114 she says that enterprise culture belongs to inimitability. Another Chinese student, C1, also says that she places creativity in the 'rare' category (line 110).

C2 in an interview said that she disagreed with F1's opinion about the inimitable nature of creativity. She therefore asked a 'what' question in order to show her objection rather than in order to receive an answer. F1 on the other hand treated C2's utterance as a genuine question. C2's way of showing strong objection is similar to that of C2 in group 2 (line 26) who asked "what is strategy?". They presumed that the non-Chinese students would be able to recognise their intention to show their objection.

C1 and C2 also explained in the interview that their intention in lines 109, 110 and 114 was to share their opinions. Like the Chinese students in other groups, they did

not expect any comment apart from the lecturer's judgement. This attitude towards group discussions is in contrast with the British lecturers' attitude that a case study should move from understanding the case to analysis and evaluation.

I consider that C2 and C3 in Excerpt 6.31 adopted the 'spiral' discussion method. They give their answers whilst including new topics and evidence within the same turn, and in this way they brought the discussion back to the initial question.

In line 24, C2 makes an initiating turn containing three clauses about three different points (Google's leader group is a resource; Google's leaders are creative; and Google's leaders make their workers creative). In line 25, C3 also makes three clauses containing two points (Google provides a good working environment for the workers; the good environment encourages the workers to be creative).

Since the two turns have one common point that the workers in Google are creative, it is possible that C3 agrees with C2 and adds further information to support C2's point. It is also possible that C3 intends to propose a different point; this would accord with the finding in Group 1-3—that the Chinese students tended to provide different answers. In the first case, C2's utterance in line 24 is an *I* turn; in the second case, it is an *Ix* turn because it is not responded to and fails to construct an exchange.

24	C2: *I think another resource is maybe Google's leaders maybe the leaders are creative and inno- (C1: =initiate) initiative maybe they guide their employees to create the new area and the new technology because they want*	Ix	Inform
25	C3: *you know the Google company provides very good er very good*	I	Inform

	environment to their staffs to their workers because the company have good food good environment in their company they can play some games such as Xbox in their company I think this way can encourage their creativity		
26	F1: so a social company ↗	R/I	Elicit
27	C3: yeah social company	R	Acknowledge Reply

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 31</div>

In Excerpt 6.32, C3 clearly said she intended to share a different answer rather than supporting what C2 had said. She also thought that she demonstrated the critical thinking skill of avoiding saying what everyone says. C2 in an interview also explained that she wanted to tell the group members about her opinion. Therefore I recognise lines 24 and 25 as having the negative interactive function of 'inform' rather than the positive function of 'elicit'.

It has to be made clear here that C3's understanding of critical thinking is rather narrow. As Braskamp (2007) says, critical thinking often ends up being critical without constructing and creating one's own thinking.

C3: I intended to give a different reason why the workers in Google are creative. ***I didn't want to follow what C2 said. British lecturers told us to be creative and critical so I thought I shouldn't say the same thing as she (C2) had already said.*** (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 32</div>

I want to argue that the 'spiral' discussion method is not confined to a specific type of discussion task or question because the discussion tasks of the four groups analysed so far are different and the 'spiral' method occurs in each group. It results from the tendency of Chinese students to adopt the 'goal-oriented' approach to group discussion.

Group 4 also provides evidence of another discussion method in which the initiator of a new subtopic takes the major responsibility for eliciting others' comments and/or develops their opinions. The other group members are not likely to build upon the initiator's contribution. I call this discussion method 'individual' because there is not much exploratory effort between group members. This method is similar to the 'spiral' method in terms of goal-orientation. The differences will be discussed after the analysis of Excerpt 6.33.

In Excerpt 6.33, line 50, C1 initiates her opinion about 'culture'. After receiving acknowledgement from F1, she seems not to be satisfied with a mere acknowledgement and moves on to elicit F1's opinion by saying 'culture' in a rising tone.

In line 55, F1 initiates a subtopic about the 'worker' and elicits others' comments using a rising tone. In line 58, both C1 and C3 dismiss F1's opinion by saying 'worker' in a rising tone. It seemed highly possible that like the Chinese students in other groups, C1 and C3 asked questions to show disagreement, and in fact in their interviews, C1 and C3 confirmed this interpretation. Therefore I have coded their utterance in line 58 as 'reject'. It can be interpreted that they refused to explore with F1 his subtopic.

50	*C1*: value may be the ***culture***	I	Inform
51	F1: erm er - - yes	R	Acknowledge Reply
52	*C1*: culture ↗	F/I	Elicit
53	F1: yes a strong culture ↗	R/I	Acknowledge Elicit
54	*C1*: yes strong culture	R	Acknowledge
55	*F1*: er ***worker*** ↗ you know	I	Elicit

56	C1: where ↗	R/I	Elicit
57	**F1**: for V we can write worker here so	R	Reply
58	C3: =worker ↗= (C1: =worker ↗=)	F/I	Reject
59	**F1**: worker here like you said	R	Reply
60	C3: so you mean the workers have the high **technology** and (C1: =worker you mean the value ↗)	F/I	Elicit
61	**F1**: yeah no ↗	R/I	Elicit
62	C1: I don't know	R	Reply
63	**F1**: so human resource and organisation ↗	I	Elicit
64	C1: yeah	R	Reply
65	**F1**: yeah I think so because the worker have should have high technology and wide technology **background**	F/I	Acknowledge Develop Elicit

Excerpt 6. 33

There is a piece of evidence in Excerpt 6.34 in which C1 uses the interactive function of concession negatively, like C1 in group 1 (Excerpt 6.2). In line 16, F1 initiates a subtopic of 'workers'. C2 concedes by showing agreement with F1 and then turns to initiate another subtopic (Google documents). He does not want to explore with F1 but is eager to express his own opinion.

16	F1: so any resource ↗ worker here ↗ I think more than ten thousand worker here so it's good resource	I	Elicit
17	C2: **yeah ten thousand maybe there are resources just documentary document I don't know**	R/I	Concession Inform
18	C1: **yeah document is very enough if you want to search for something a lot of information will provide for you**	R/I	Acknowledge Inform
19	F1: yeah a lot of **servers**	R	Acknowledge Develop

Excerpt 6. 34

Also in line 17, C2 seems to have difficulty naming the services offered by Google. C1 in line 18 reformulates C2's contribution. It seems that C1 discusses cumulatively. However in an interview with C1 she said she was just responding to 'I don't know' in line 17 (see Excerpt 6.35).

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> C1: I will never let my Chinese classmates lose face in front of non-Chinese students. I felt she needed help so I helped her to explain her meaning. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 35</div>

There is evidence (see the analysis of Excerpt 6.36 and 6.37) that C2 expects F1 to offer an opinion and F1 intends to explore the unknown knowledge through collective effort. The Chinese students do not seem to recognise F1's intention.

In Excerpt 6.36, line 186, C2 makes a rather long turn stating information about 'advertising'. C2 explicitly expresses uncertainty about which category of VRIO 'advertising' should belong to, thus eliciting F1's opinion. However F1 does not reply to C2's elicitation but asks C2 whether she has read the whole case study. F1 seems to say 'I do not know either'. It is also possible that F1 wants to compliment C2 on her preparation. In both cases, F1 wants to support C2.

186	C2: this case mentioned about **advertising** you know Google does not use a lot of advertising it's not convenient for the people for users but he [case writer] says not many but also will choose to use advertising - - so what he said belongs to which area ↗ I don't know I just say about what the case have mentioned	I	Elicit
187	F1: haha you read all the case ↗	R/I	Acknowledge
188	C2: yeah	R	Acknowledge
189	F1: great	F	Acknowledge
Silence for five seconds			

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 36</div>

In an interview C2 said she felt disappointed with the way F1 responded to her (see Excerpt 6.37). She thought that when the non-Chinese students often say 'I don't know either' they are refusing to help her, whereas the non-Chinese students probably intended to support her and show willingness to explore knowledge with

her. C2 said that in these occasions she expected the non-Chinese students to explicitly offer opinions.

C2: I expected that F1 could tell me what category of VRIO the advertisement belongs to. I felt it would be an interesting point. But I had no idea yet. Actually I was asking 'what do you think'. I felt a bit disappointed when she did not give me any clue. … I came across this problem several times. ***When I described something and said I had no clear idea, the Western students often responded 'I am not sure either'. This is really not what I wanted. I was asking for their opinions when I said I had no idea. They were not helpful.*** (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 37</div>

Like the previous group recording, group discussion 4 also provides evidence of the 'exploratory' and 'spiral' discussion methods. It repeatedly happens in different groups and seminars that the Chinese students adopt the 'spiral' method and the non-Chinese students adopt the 'exploratory' method.

Group 4 also provides evidence of the 'individual' discussion method in which the initiator of an answer takes responsibility for eliciting others' comments and/or develops their opinions. The other group members do not build upon the initiator's contribution. The students using this method seem to be 'goal-oriented' and perceive the purpose of discussion as sharing opinions.

The non-Chinese students, on the other hand, tend to hold a 'constructivist' perspective of group discussion in which group members collectively explore unknown knowledge. The Chinese students are not likely to recognise the non-Chinese students' intentions or appreciate their efforts.

6.2.5 Group 5

Group 5 discussed Porter's five forces[30]. A handout containing the discussion question was offered to the students one week before the seminar. I reproduce it as follows:

> Government policies can have a significant impact on the average profitability of firms in an industry. Government is not included as a potential threat in the five forces model. Should the model be expanded to include government? Why and why not?

During the discussion, each group was required to draw a poster to be demonstrated to the class at the end of the seminar. This group contains four Chinese students (C1-4) and one Greek Cypriot (Cy1), who makes many more extended exchange elements than the average amount made by each Chinese student.

Group 5 provides evidence of a complete process by Chinese students fulfilling a case study group discussion task. They use the 'spiral' method to exchange answers to the discussion question and predict the final answer (see Excerpt 6.38 and Excerpt 6.40), and then adopt the 'individual' method to collect supportive arguments and evidence (see Excerpt 6.42).

In Excerpt 6.38, line 1, Cy1 initiates his opinion. C1 concedes Cy1's opinion by showing agreement and turns to initiate a different opinion. Like the Chinese students in groups 1 and 4, C1 uses concession negatively. In line 7, Cy1 concedes

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[30] Porter's five forces are threat of new competition, threat of substitute products or services, bargaining power of customers/buyers, bargaining power of suppliers, and intensity of competitive rivalry.

C1's opinion and challenges her. Cy1 employs concession positively. In line 8, C1 dismisses Cy1's opinion by explaining her opinion with evidence. She rejects Cy1's opinion. In line 9, Cy1 acknowledges C1. In line 10, C1 restates her opinion and part of the information about China that she offered in line 2.

1	Cy1: ok for the six model six forces model I think that we should not have government they have er because erm you know governments in different countries are different so the model will be different in each culture	I	Inform
2	C1: yes I think so and like China I think in China we should add the government er government policy as the sixth forces model because in China er a lot of industries they are controlled by the government er like er I think like the import and export for er the trade about it's it's in USA developed countries they are during the economic crisis they are they reduced the They are reducing the reducing to import goods from other countries	R/I	Concession Inform
3	Cy1: to import goods ↗	R/I	Elicit
4	C1: erm ↗	R/I	Elicit
5	Cy1: yeah ↗	R/I	Elicit
6	C1: they are reducing the numbers of the import goods from other countries	R	Reply
7	Cy1: yeah but they are important industries and trade	F/I	Concession Challenge
8	C1: erm erm they come to support the national product in order to stimulate the expenses and stimulate the economic and also the environmental issues right ↗	R/I	Reject Elicit
9	Cy1: yeah	R	Acknowledge
10	C1: like *in China* we are erm advocating the the er plastic bags reducing the plastic bags especially in super markets erm from these two aspects I think maybe in China we should add the government policies maybe in Western countries er there is less control by government	F/I	Repeat Reject
11	Cy1: we should yeah	R	Acknowledge

Excerpt 6. 38

My interview with C1 confirmed my interpretation (see Excerpt 6.39). She said she disagreed with Cy1 and had mentioned the Chinese context in order to reject Cy1's opinion and make Cy1 re-consider the answer to the discussion question.

> C1: I didn't agree with Cy1. His argument is not appropriate in the Chinese context. I agreed with the last part of his utterance that governments in different countries are

	different so Porter's five force model will be different in each culture. … (translated)

Excerpt 6. 39

It has to be pointed out that in line 3 Cy1 says 'to import goods' with a rising tone. It is possible for C1 to understand Cy1's question as showing objection because the Chinese students in groups 2 and 4 showed objection by asking questions. However in an interview with C1 she said she understood Cy1's question as eliciting explanation. This evidence seems to indicate that although the Chinese students tend to ask questions to show disagreement or objection they do not necessarily understand others' questions in this way.

In Excerpt 6.40, the Chinese students share their own answers within long turns containing opinions and evidence.

12	C1: how do you think ↗	I	Elicit
13	C2: *I also agree with you erm we should make the sixth force of the government because I have three reasons the first is the government policy can be a main entry of the exist barrier to many companies and the second reason is the government sometimes er they has a role of customer they will buy some goods erm from some er companies also they can be a supplier they also can offer some goods and the last reason is the government policies can help or restrict some supplies erm ? to add potential entrance the heavier situations erm so I think the government has a very strong power so I think they can become the force the sixth force*	R	Inform
14	Cy1: erm	F	Acknowledge
15	C1: how about you ↗	I	Elicit

16	C3: *I think maybe I am the only one who doesn't agree it erm I think the government can be a strong powerful in the six forces but it's not necessary cos now under the globalisation erm the government should give a how to say um freedom control - - to the market (C1: =erm) and then but to in some industries just like making weapons or very - - (C1: =like) very how to say erm very important industries government they can control but not all they can control so I don't think it's necessary to put the government into the five forces*	R	Inform
17	C1: and you ↗	I	Elicit
18	C4: *erm I think this model should be expanded include the government because government always uses the different kind the way of the control the er profit of the firm tax export and import interest rate of bank loan and vary of currency erm and the government always want to keep the balance of the stock market and real estate market so I think government is a very important role in the economic so I think it should be listed*	R	Inform
19	C1: so how are we going to write just different opinions ↗ yes and no ↗	I	Elicit
20	Cy1: just say yes	R	Reply
21	C1: part part part yes part no	F/I	Inform
22	Cy1: yeah	R	Acknowledge
23	C1: first of all	Ix	Inform
24	C3: I think it's not easy to say yes or no	Ix	Inform
25	C1: now we are gathering reasons for yes - - er what's your reason ↗	I	Elicit

Excerpt 6. 40

C1 leads the discussion by asking C2, C3 and C4 for answers, monitoring the process, and pushing the discussion to reach a complete answer. The answers of C2, C3 and C4 appear to be coherent because C3 directly says he does not agree with C2's opinion. However he does not reformulate or evaluate the reasons offered by C2 but raises different evidence. That is to say, they do not build upon each others' opinions. Therefore I coded their utterances containing answers as negative interactive 'inform' functions rather than positive 'elicit' functions. I recognise their discussion method as 'spiral', repeatedly bringing the discussion back to the initial topic.

According to my observation, the three Chinese students were reading their prepared written answers. This strategy of reading prepared content was perceived to be

appropriate by Chinese participants in Chen and Hird's (2006) study because they felt it helped them to perform well in group discussion (see section 2.3). However, it is hard to tell to what extent the students listen to each other.

It is interesting to notice that in line 24 C3 says it is hard to answer the question with 'yes' or 'no'. This opinion is different from what he says in line 16. It is possible that he changes his mind when the other students propose different opinions. However in an interview he said he recognised the discussion question as divergent without an absolutely right answer (see Excerpt 6.41). He explained that he pretended to contribute one part of the answer in order to encourage the group members to contribute different opinions and make the discussion more agonistic. Like the 'exploratory' discussion method, the agonistic discussion prolongs the discussion process in another way. The difference is that argumentative discussion is goal-oriented and the 'exploratory' discussion is process-oriented.

> C3: It's hard to answer the question with yes or no. I mean it is very controversial and could be a good debate topic when one party argues for yes and another party argues for no. I thought in the group discussion ***it's better for me to choose one from the two possible answers so that the other students could contribute different opinions and reasons. I tried to make the discussion agonistic.*** (translated)

Excerpt 6. 41

After the exchange of different opinions, C1 in line 19 proposes to write down each opinion on a poster. Cy1 says 'just say yes' because all the Chinese students except C3 agree that government should be the sixth force. C1 insists that the answer should be yes and no. That is to say, she does not really intend to vote for the majority as B1 in group 2 intends to do (see line 35, Excerpt 6.10). This evidence accords with C2, C3

and C4's behaviour, reading their prepared answers, in that emerging issues are not dealt with. Instead, they seem to act out a 'performance' of what they already know (Jin & Cortazzi 1998).

Excerpt 6.42 provides evidence of the 'individual' discussion method in which the students collect evidence and arguments to support the final answer. C1 checks the meaning and records contributions on the poster. The initiator of one topic takes responsibility for the explanation; the other group members do not build upon the initiator's contribution. In line 29, C1 commands C3 to give an example. Similar behaviour occurs in groups 8, 9 and 10 which will be discussed later; the British lecturers perceived it to be 'bullying' (see Excerpt 7.6 Chapter 7).

25	C1: now we are gathering reasons for yes - - er what's your reason	I	Elicit
26	C2: erm all these main entry and exit barrier	R	Reply
27	C1: for example er what kind of industry the government can be er main entry and exit barrier	F/I	Elicit
28	C3: resource industry	R	Reply
29	C1: you should name an industry give us an example	F/I	Command
30	C3: for example tobacco industry	R	Reply
31	C1: tobacco yes	F	Acknowledge
32	C3: so the government has a very high barrier about this industry - - erm the government has a role of customer and supplier	Ix	Inform
33	C1: er which industry ↗ for example the customer be a er customer and supplier ↗	I	Elicit
34	C2: stock ↗	R/I	Reply
35	C1: could stock be the industry ↗	Ix	Elicit
36	C2: 政府采购 [government procurement][31]	Ix	Inform
37	C1: how to say jijin	I	Elicit
38	C4: fund	R	Reply

Excerpt 6. 42

This group discussion circles around the discussion question by exchanging different

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[31] The student talks in Chinese. The English translation is mine.

answers, predicting the correct answer, and collecting supportive arguments and evidence about the answer. The Chinese students seem to treat the discussion question assigned by the lecturer as the 'finishing line' rather than making use of it as a 'springboard' by moving from the immediate discussion question to explore new understanding (Wang 2013b:603).

6.2.6 Group 6

Group 6 discussed Porter's five forces with reference to the fixed line telecom industry in Britain. A handout containing the question was distributed to the students in the seminar; the students did not have time to prepare their answers in advance. I reproduce the question as follows:

> The major forces shaping the business environment of the fixed line telecom industry are technology and government policy. The industry has been influenced by fibre optics, new models of telecommunication, deregulation and privatisation. Using Porter's five forces framework, show how each of these developments has influenced competition in the fixed line telecom industry.

Each group was required to draw a poster and demonstrate it to the class at the end of the seminar. This group contains three Chinese students (C1-3) and one French student (F1).

Forty-four of the turns discussed the vocabulary in the handout. The students discuss in a goal-oriented way by checking each type of resource in the case industries (see Excerpt 6.43). The Chinese students seem not to be interested in exploring what they do not know with F1, but instead expect an answer from the lecturer.

89	C1: we have er many selectors (F1: =yeah) so the buyers er bargain power (F1: =yeah) should be high (F1: =yeah) should be higher (F1: =yeah) this is the yeah fact and this er this one and this one I think is this one er internet (F1: =yeah yeah) should be the substitute (F1: =substance ok)	I	Inform
90	C2: how come you reach this point	R/I	Reject
91	C1: this is the substitute	R	Inform
92	C2: where is the internet telecom	Ix	Elicit
93	C1: new module new models of telecommunication the substitute erm I think er er it can be the substitute and potential entrance	I	Inform
94	F1: ***potential entrance*** ↗ is that er what ↗	R/I	Reply Develop Elicit
95	C1: potential entrance ↗	R/I	Elicit
96	F1: yeah on ↗	F/I	Elicit
97	C1: er this new model telecommunications	R	Reply
98	F1: no I think potential entrance - - erm ok erm yeah it's possible yeah	F	Acknowledge
99	C1: yeah yeah this is not this not belong to this	F	Acknowledge
100	F1: no	F	Acknowledge
101	C1: the new model of telecom industry development - - er I don't know this	Ix	Elicit
102	C2: It belongs to what ↗ what factors ↗	I	Elicit
103	F1: it affects all factor new product so er new product - - the same thing of that new model of telecom I think	R	Reply
104	C1: we can ask our tutor	I	Reject
105	F1: yeah	R	Acknowledge

Excerpt 6. 43

In line 101, C1 explicitly says that he does not know which category of Porter's five

forces 'the new model of telecom industry' belongs to. In line 102, C2 also shows

uncertainty about the answer. F1 offers a possible answer in line 103. C1 dismisses

F1's opinion by suggesting asking the tutor. According to the analysis of the previous

five groups, the Chinese students expect group members to give their opinions.

Therefore, F1's behaviour in line 103 should have met C1's expectation. However C1's

behaviour indicates that he is indifferent to F1's opinion.

I interviewed C1 about his reason for saying 'we can ask our tutor' after F1 had given

an answer. C1 implied that the major reason for him to turn to the lecturer was

because he was standing not far from them (see Excerpt 6.44). It can be interpreted that he prioritised the opportunity to consult the tutor about the answer. C1 said that he thought the tutor was the only one who could judge students' opinions.

C1's answer in the interview indicates that he was extremely goal-oriented because asking for help from the lecturer who was supposed to know the answer was obviously the easiest and the most direct way to get the 'correct' answer.

Like many other Chinese students, C1 thought that utterances containing opinions function as informing rather than eliciting acts. I have coded C1's utterance in line 104 as 'reject' because he refused to accept F1's opinion.

> C1: I already told F1 that I didn't know the answer. ***He said his opinion but I didn't have the right to judge his opinion.*** The lecturer stood not far from us at that time. ***It's better to ask the tutor. He knew the answer*** so why not ask him. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 44

The recording and the interview further prove that the '2+1' students perceive classroom group discussion as exchanging prepared ideas rather than as a 'springboard' to explore new knowledge. C1's behaviour does not accord with the British convention to avoid appealing to lecturers in seminars (see section 2.2.3).

Line 90 is of interest to this study. C2 dismisses C1's opinion by saying 'how come you reach this point'. C2 does not give her opinion or ask C1 to explain. I interpret C2's utterance in line 90 as showing negative surprise and disapproval. The situation seems to be the same as the one CSIB8 described (see section 5.2.3) where one of his Chinese classmates strongly objected to another's opinion without offering his

own opinion. Therefore it was necessary to ask C2 about her interpretation of the situation.

She said she did not offer her opinion because she did not know how to answer the discussion question (see Excerpt 6.45). She thought C2 and F1 were weaker than her in terms of subject knowledge and could not offer the 'correct' answer. She rejected C2's opinion because she was impatient with him. Like many '2+1' students, C2 perceived group discussion as an assessment of the correctness of the answer.

C2: I didn't know how to answer the question and it made me nervous. C2 was weak in subject knowledge, I know that. I didn't bother to listen to his opinion. He is always wrong. The French student was also weak. He always tells us that he is not sure. I didn't think that I could discuss anything with those weak students. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 45

It also needs to be pointed out that there is evidence in Excerpt 6.43 that Chinese students are able to distinguish 'fact' and 'opinion' (see line 89), although they may not be used to doing so. C1 explicitly identified a piece of information as a 'fact'.

6.2.7 Groups 8, 9 and 10

Groups 8, 9 and 10 discussed Chinese business culture and its influence on foreign investment ventures in China. The three groups were from different seminars but with the same lecturer. The lecturer orally stated the discussion topic in the seminar classes. Each group was required to orally report their discussion results to the class at the end of the seminar.

The lecturer explained before the group discussion that the question was a good one

to discuss within homogeneous groups in the L1, because he believed that students understand their own cultures best. He expected the students to discuss by reflecting on their own business cultures rather than simply exchanging information.

The three Chinese group discussions produced an average of 150 turns, less than the average amount of turns (=215) in the mixed group discussions. The three group discussions automatically ended within 20 minutes.

The three groups mainly discussed their understanding of the question and of the cross-cultural use of the terms '后门 (backdoor)' and '关系 (relationships)' which are key cultural terms in China. It can be interpreted that the students were goal-oriented.

The three groups adopted the 'individual' discussion method in which the initiator of a topic takes responsibility for the explanation and the other group members do not build on the initiator's contribution (see Excerpts 6.46, 6.47 and 7.49).

In Excerpt 6.46, the students change subtopics three times without moving on to reflect and critically evaluate the influence on foreign enterprises in China.

	Original	Translated		Function
10	C1: 拿张纸来。有什么就记一下。中国嘛，很多的嘛。先是。	Pass me a piece of paper. Write down everything we can think about. China, there should be a lot to say. The first one is.	Ix	Command
11	C2: 这个是什么？	What is this?	Ix	Elicit
12	C3: Power distance?	*Power distance*?	Ix	Elicit
13	C1: 这个太难说了。	This is hard to say.	Ix	Inform
14	C2: 家族式管理算不算？依照老板的那个关系来分工作，优先考虑，有些是血缘关	How about *family style management*? The boss assigns tasks according to	I	Inform Elicit

		Guan Xi. People having blood relation have priority.		
15	C1: 有关系在中国什么都好办。	Things would be easy if we have **Guan Xi** in China.	R	Inform

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 46</div>

In Excerpt 6.47, C1 initiates the subtopic of 'relationships marketing' and takes responsibility for explaining his opinion (see lines 13, 15 and 17).

		Original	Translated		Function
13	C1: 中国企业主要就有一个关系营销,就是一个。	One part of Chinese enterprise culture is about relationships marketing. It's.	Ix	Inform
14	C3: 家族企业？	Family enterprise?	Ix	Inform
15	C1: 一个 relationships，还有就是一个家族企业吧。好多就是小企业，由家庭成员组成，然后企业跟政府有很密切的联系。	One is about relationships. And the other one is about family enterprises which are usually small ones run by family members. They often have close ties with the government.	Ix	Inform
16	C2: 还有就是。	And another one is.	Ix	Inform
17	C1: 中国企业容易走后门。	Chinese enterprises are used to make use of backdoor deals.	I	Inform
18	C3: 对对，这就是我刚才想查的单词。	Yes. Yes. This word [后门] is what I wanted to check.	R	Acknowledge
19	C2: Backdoor.	Backdoor.	Ix	Inform
20	C1: 快想啊，同志们。	Think fast, comrades.	I	Command
21	C2: 在想啊。中国企业的文化。企业文化。	I am thinking. Chinese enterprise culture. Enterprise culture.	R	Reply
22	C3: 是啊，差不多啊。	Yes. Just something like that.	F	Acknowledge

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 47</div>

C3 in line 14 says 'family enterprise', seemingly adding supportive evidence to C1's initiated subtopic. However in an interview C3 said she was proposing her own answer rather than building upon C1's contribution (see Excerpt 6.48).

C3: He is the group leader. I was helping him by contributing my own answer. I was happy that he could mention my answer in line 15. It's my contribution. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 48</div>

C3 in line 18 says it is the word 'backdoor' he was looking for. He seems to tell the group that C1 raised a subtopic which he had been thinking about before he had come up with the English expression. He seems to tell the group that he is able to answer the discussion question independently without the help of group discussion. C3 seems to be impatient as he says in line 22 'just something like that'.

Excerpt 6.49 is another example of the 'individual' discussion method. The first five lines are not relevant to here.

	Original	Translated		Function
1	C1：讲啊，快讲啊，我们都听你讲啊。	Say something. Hurry up. All of us want to listen to your opinion.	I	Command
2	C2：不要啦。	Oh, please.	R	Reply
3	C3：我都不知道他说什么，我就没怎么听懂。	I don't even know what he was talking about. I don't quite understand.	Ix	Inform
4	C1：随便说一点啊。	Just say something.	Ix	Command
5	C2：就是关于文化对企业的影响。	It's just about the influence of culture on manufacture.	Ix	Inform
6	C1：那就是关系。这应该算一点。	So it's about *Guan Xi*. This can be counted as one factor.	I	Inform
7	C3：Relationships?	Relationships?	R/I	Elicit
8	C2：国内有专门的关于关系的研究。直接写中文就可以了。	There is a special research about Guan Xi in China. Just write it in Chinese.	R	Reply
9	C1：Power distance 算不算？	Can *power distance* be another factor?	Ix	Elicit
10	C2：我知道。	I know that.	Ix	Inform
11	C1：中国是个 power distance 很高的国家。	China is a country with high power distance.	Ix	Inform
12	C2：权利集中。应该是这样的。	Power is centralised. It should be right.	Ix	Acknowledge
13	C1：下级很难向上级传达意见。	It's hard for the subordinates to pass their opinions to the superiors.	Ix	Inform

Excerpt 6. 49

C1 raises the subtopic of 'Guan Xi' in line 6 and his group members contribute their translations of the term rather than developing the subtopic. C1 raises another subtopic of 'power distance' in line 9 and contributes most of the effort to explain its

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features in China. C2 does not reply to C1's question but says 'I know that' in line 10. He seems to tell C1 that he has the knowledge about the subtopic and does not need the help of the discussion, like C3 in group 9. The interactive function of this utterance is 'inform' rather than 'acknowledge'. It does not satisfy the adjacency pair of elicit-reply.

In line 12, C2 appears to build upon C1's contribution by stating his understanding of power distance in China. In an interview, C2 emphasised that he was showing his knowledge about the subtopic rather than linking his contribution to what C1 had said (see Excerpt 6.50). He clearly said that he avoided building upon what the others had said in order to demonstrate his independent thinking.

> C2: I know that. She did not need to tell me about that. I was stating my understanding about power distance in China. It had nothing to do with what C1 said in line 11. I did not want people feel that I was saying what C1 said. ***I never want to follow what the others said***. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 6. 50</div>

Since English language proficiency was not a factor, the discussion behaviour in these three groups is further proof that the students are inclined towards a goal-oriented approach.

Another discovery from the three groups is that the students automatically established a hierarchical group structure, as the Chinese students in group 5 did, in which the leaders are supposed to report the discussion results to the lecturer. The leaders in the three groups are identified as C2 in group 8, C1 in group 9 and C1 in group 10. They are not as active, however, as C1 in group 5 who volunteered to be the group leader.

In an interview, C1 from group 9 described his experience of leading Chinese groups. He offered an insider's view of classroom group discussion, which he regarded as a means of assessment, the correctness of their answers being judged by the lecturers (see Excerpt 6.51).

> C1: I felt the task was all on my shoulders. My group members only helped me by giving me subtopics. My peers hid behind me. They appeared to support me but I think the real reason was that ***they were afraid of making mistakes in front of the lecturer.*** Sometimes I felt a little bit helpless because I was not ready to report and answer questions. ***I am also afraid of making mistakes.*** (translated)

Excerpt 6. 51

The fact that the Chinese students feel under pressure to find out the 'correct' answer is also evident in the interview with C1 from group 8. She was asked to explain why she demanded that C2 express his opinion (see Excerpt 6.49). She said it was because C2 was the most proficient in terms of subject knowledge and English proficiency (see Excerpt 6.52). She wanted to select C2 as the group leader.

> C1: He is the best one in our group. His English is also very good. Of course everyone would agree that he should lead the group. We need a group leader. Otherwise we don't know how to start and how to finish. People would only express their own opinion. There should be someone to control the process, coordinate conflicts, and make the final decision. (translated)

Excerpt 6. 52

C1 explicitly pointed out the problem that Chinese students in group discussion only express their own answers without listening to each other. She implied that it was not easy for her Chinese peers to change.

The interviewees (C1 in group 8, C1 in group 9) seem to think that having a group leader was an efficient way of getting a task done. This may be so if the nature of the

task is convergent. However if the task is divergent, completing the task as quickly as possible will limit the opportunity to construct new understanding.

The two interviewees implied that they did not trust their Chinese peers to be able to offer logical contributions. This prejudiced view constrained their understanding of the nature of small group discussion and their ability to choosing from a range of different discussion strategies.

It is worth discussing here that in line 3 Excerpt 6.49 C3 seems to say that he had difficulty understanding the discussion question orally described by the lecturer. I asked C3 to explain this in an interview. He said it was not really because he did not understand the question (see Excerpt 6.53). Like C1 from group 2, he also felt it wasted time to discuss a question to which the answer was rather obvious. He was making an excuse for refusing to contribute to the discussion. This is reminiscent of the students who refused to participate in group discussion in Deng's (2010) class (see section 2.3).

C3: I think the topic is rather boring. It is a very old topic which is well discussed in textbooks and in the class in China. British lecturers also discussed it in lectures. It is always about Guan Xi, family-run businesses, and power distance. ***We can't raise anything new. It's a waste of time.*** (translated)

Excerpt 6. 53

The three Chinese groups discuss using the 'individual' method without building upon the initiators' contribution. This discussion method prohibits their exploration of new knowledge. They consider group discussion as assessment with one correct answer. Therefore they predict the expected answer and then contribute arguments

and evidence to support it.

6.3 The findings

1. Chinese and non-Chinese students displayed different discussion methods, which can be described as 'spiral', 'exploratory' and 'individual'. The Chinese students tended to discuss spirally and the non-Chinese students tended to discuss cumulatively.

The users of the 'exploratory' discussion method identified in the study reformulated previous statements and added new information in order to develop the discussion further and explore new knowledge. The 'exploratory' method prolonged the discussion process in two ways: it delayed the explicit expression of the speaker's own opinion but it actively built upon the others' contributions; understanding was expressed in *R* turns so as to leave others to develop new subtopics further when they were initiated.

The users of the 'spiral' discussion method repeatedly brought the discussion back to the original discussion topic/question, thereby preventing the development of the discussion topic. Many Chinese students adopted the 'spiral' discussion method in mixed group discussion by employing negative interactive functions. They did not think it was necessary to comment on utterances containing opinions.

The 'individual' discussion method occurred in homogeneous Chinese groups in which the initiator of a subtopic took responsibility for offering explanations and the

other group members were unlikely to build upon the initiator's contribution. Such groups automatically established a hierarchical structure, with a leader who collected different answers and reported them to the lecturer.

2. The Chinese students perceived the group discussion as 'goal-oriented' whereas the non-Chinese students perceived the group discussion as constructivist.

The non-Chinese students seem to recognise group discussion as a 'springboard' or a 'starting line' (Wang 2013b:603) from which they explore new understanding as much as they can. The 'exploratory' discussion method they employ is 'constructivist', involving the process of adding new experiences into an existing knowledge framework and the process of reframing a present mental representation of the external world (Qu 2008; Colliver 2000). Through collaborative exploration and enquiry, they learn 'how to learn' in order to be 'independent learners' (Higher Education Academy 2010).

The Chinese students understood group discussion as a kind of assessment with right and wrong answers. The 'spiral' and 'individual' discussion methods they employed are 'goal-oriented', enabling them to find out a 'correct' answer as quickly as possible. They felt that the students who discussed using the 'exploratory' method failed to express opinions clearly and thus wasted time. They did not recognise the value of discussion for cognitive learning.

3. The Chinese students recognised that questions function to elicit and statements (of facts and opinions) function to inform.

The Chinese students believed that it was obligatory to answer questions. When they were asked by non-Chinese students they tried to answer. They also tended to ask questions to show objection or disagreement. There were four examples (one in group 2, three in group 4), indicating they lacked awareness of the illocutionary force of the utterances as interactive acts in the context of a discussion..

The Chinese students did not think it was obligatory to respond to opinions in group discussion. They only responded to opinions when they had a different point to make. However the non-Chinese students tended to perceive statements of opinions as eliciting comments.

4. The Chinese students tended to use 观点 (opinion) to cover 观点 (opinions) and 事实 (facts) and to use 不同意 (disagree) to object to 观点 (opinions) and correct 事实 (facts) in Chinese or English.

The Chinese language does not strictly oblige its speakers to distinguish between fact and opinion, especially in casual conversation. People tend to use '不同意' (disagree) to query either facts or opinions. Thus in the interview data, it was found that the Chinese students used 观点 (opinion) to refer to both 事实 (fact) and 观点 (opinion). For example when they wanted to say ' that they corrected a fact , they said '我不同意他的观点' (I disagreed with his opinion). They did not seem to recognise the pragmatic difference between disagreeing with others' opinions and querying factual information offered by others.

This confusion of fact and opinion was also evident in the Chinese students' rather

long discussion turns. They seemed to present their opinions as facts, and these were understood by the non-Chinese students as evidence in support of their own opinions.

The Chinese students thought that both correcting 'facts' and disagreeing with 'opinions' were impolite. However according to Western perceptions, as discussed by Hofstede (2001), facts are verifiable and can be proved wrong, while opinions are not verifiable and are open to discussion. Thus for the non-Chinese students with Western-style educational backgrounds it may be less face-threatening to object to an opinion than to challenge what someone presents as a fact. In collectivist societies, on the other hand, explicitly objecting to people's opinions is more face-threatening than correcting facts, because opinions are predetermined by the in-group (Hofstede 2001).

It can be interpreted that the Chinese students' sense of truth was informed by their habit of using 'opinion' to refer to both opinion and fact, and using 'disagree' to show objection to both fact and opinion, in both Chinese and English. According to Slobin (1996) the way certain types of information are specified in a given language may settle into habits of mind affecting speakers' experiences, perceptions, associations, feelings, memories and orientation in the world. This is also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis[32] (Jakobson 1959; Deutscher 2010).

Table 6.4 lists the frequency of '观点' (opinion) and '事实' (fact) in a British and a

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[32] The strong version of this hypothesis is that language determines thought and linguistic categories limit and determine cognitive categories; the weak version is that linguistic categories and usage influence thought and certain kinds of non-linguistic behaviour (Deutscher 2010).

Chinese language corpus. The two concepts are not frequently mentioned in either British English or Chinese, but they appear to be much less common in Chinese discourse. 'Fact' in British English is used about six times more than '事实' (fact) is used in Chinese.

	Fact (事实) (per million)	Opinion (观点) (per million)
British National Corpus[33]	426 (Leech *et al*. 2001)	93 (Leech *et al*. 2001)
Chinese corpus by CCL[34]	67	34

Table 6. 4 The frequency of fact (事实) and opinion (观点) in a British English and a mandarin Chinese corpus

In the English language, people are not only expected but also obliged to distinguish between fact and opinion when they show objection. On most occasions, people '*correct'* a fact rather than '*disagree'* with a fact, but '*disagree"* with an opinion rather than '*correcting'* an opinion'. In Western countries, people are educated to distinguish between fact and opinion. On the BBC Skillswise website[35], for example, distinguishing 'fact or opinion' is listed as one of the eight skills of reading, indicating that although this distinction is important for academic activities, without education people may tend to confuse the two concepts (Wang 2013a).

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[33] http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/ The British National Corpus is a 100 million word collection of samples of written (90percent) and spoken discourse (10percent) from a wide range of sources to represent British English from the late part of the 20th century.

[34] http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus/index.jsp?dir=xiandai CCL is an abbreviation of the Centre for Chinese Linguistics of Beijing University. The Chinese language corpus is a collection of 477 million words of written (around 90percent) and spoken discourse samples (around 10percent). The written discourse part contains various genres ranging from news reports to novels. The spoken discourse part contains casual conversations in the work place, monologues in court, and interview discourse in Beijing dialect.

[35] http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic-group/reading

Chapter 7 Students and lecturers' attitudes towards case-study group discussion

This chapter addresses research objective 3: to investigate students' and lecturers' attitudes towards the use of case-studies and methods of conducting group discussion of case-studies, as revealed by the exploration of RQ4. The corresponding research question is RQ5: What discussion methods uncovered by the study did Chinese students, British lecturers and Chinese lecturers from China prefer? A ranking task and follow-up interviews were conducted, as explained in section 4.5.7. The participants were six British business lecturers (BLR1-6), six Chinese business lecturers who were visiting scholars in Britain (CLR1-6), and six Chinese business undergraduates (CSR1-6).

7.1 Investigation results

7.1.1 The ranking choices of the participants

Table 7.1 lists the findings of the investigation (see chapter 4 section 4.5.7). Excerpt I represents the 'spiral' discussion method. Excerpt II represents the 'exploratory' method. Excerpt III represents the 'individual' method. Six British lecturers preferred the 'exploratory' method. Three Chinese lecturers preferred the 'spiral' method and the other three preferred the 'exploratory' method. Five Chinese students preferred the 'spiral' method; only one preferred the 'exploratory' method.

British lecturers' choices	BLR1	BLR2	BLR3	BLR4	BLR5	BLR6
	II-I-III	II-III-I	II-I-III	II-I-III	II-I-III	II-I-III
Chinese lecturers' choices	CLR1	CLR2	CLR3	CLR4	CLR5	CLR6
	I-II-III	I-II-III	II-I-III	I-II-III	II-I-III	II-I-III
Chinese students' choices	CSR1	CSR2	CSR3	CSR4	CSR5	CSR6
	I-II-III	II-I-III	I-II-III	I-II-III	I-II-III	I-II-III

Table 7. 1 The ranking choices of the three groups of participants

7.1.2 Reasons for the British business lecturers' choices

All the British lecturers ranked the discussion in Excerpt II as the best. They explained that this was because the speakers constructed knowledge collaboratively, as they expected students in small group discussion to do. For example, BLR3 clearly described his perception of the ideal small group discussion when he explained his evaluation of Excerpt II (see Excerpt 7.1). He emphasised the importance of reflecting on the previous speaker's contribution and of pushing the argument forward.

BLR3: I mean I noticed that there were only two speakers in Excerpt II but I quite like the discussion where there is reflection on what's been said and then quite a lot of prompting questions to follow up. … I think they are listening to each other and so reflecting back. Or ***the conversation is based on one person's answer which should be turned down or explored a bit further in the next question. So they were definitely digesting what's being said and maybe picking a bit further analysing a bit more.***

Excerpt 7. 1

All the British lecturers automatically linked their reasons for their ranking choices to the nature of Business knowledge. They perceived knowledge as intangible and constructive. None of them seemed to think that there should be a right answer to the questions. They implied the importance of the discussion process. For example, BLR2 compared a classroom discussion to a training process (see Excerpt 7.2). He said group discussion were not always about 'applying theory' but 'learning new

things'. In other words, he implied that classroom discussion was not a problem-based but an experiential-based teaching and learning approach, through which students engaged in reflection and reconceptualisation (in the manner described by Holman 2000).

> BLR2: The purpose would be ***building up knowledge***, the contribution from one another. To listen to whatever they say and maybe to correct, to gain, to add. For me the discussion is more like a training. ***It's not about finding the right answer.*** For me this is not that important. … The process is to exchange, to discuss. … ***For most of the time, it is not about applying theory. It's about learning new things.***

<div align="center">Excerpt 7. 2</div>

BLR2 in Excerpt 7.3 discussed the interaction between Student C and B in Excerpt I. He ranked it as the least successful one because he thought the students did not directly interact with each other. He thought the students in excerpt III took much shorter turns and appeared to interact with each other more; this accords with the short turns made by the British students in Li and Nesi's (2004) study.

> BLR2: The students did not ***follow up each other directly***. This student said I am the only one who doesn't agree with it. With what? I don't know. According to his answer, I think he didn't agree that government should be counted as the sixth force. If so he did not really follow up student B's opinion about why the government should be counted as the sixth force.

<div align="center">Excerpt 7. 3</div>

BLR2 did not approve of the 'spiral' type of interaction because he did not recognise that the students were trying to move the discussion forward. He thought that each student in Excerpt I was arguing for his/her own opinion rather than collaborating with each other.

BLR3 expressed the same opinion about the spiral type of interaction in Excerpt I (see Excerpt 7.4). He thought group discussion should be 'constructivist' in which students adopt a flexible mind to explore 'new ideas'.

> BLR3: In the first excerpt, although it includes all the people there is rather each person has an opinion and they are pointing it but, reading it quickly, it strikes me that they are not at the same degree of listening and reflection on what is being said. They each one there made a contribution but they are not necessarily analysing or being critical or building on what each other has said. It's a bit more in isolation. They are probably most interested in, my guess, what they have to say. And that's very understandable cos we all want to have a chance to say what we think. And sometimes even in group discussion you could just be waiting for quite a moment, you are listening to what the others say and you just wait your chance to say what you think. And that's not so ***constructive***. We really, the interaction, ***you may have an idea to start with but you are picking up ideas from what the other people have said and might inspire you to think something or come up with new ideas.*** So excerpt II seems to illustrate that.

Excerpt 7. 4

BLR5 said that in Excerpts I and III students actually talked to themselves, therefore preventing the development of their own thinking (see Excerpt 7.5).

> BLR5: They should know to speak because ***they are actually talking to themselves preventing themselves to forward their thinking further.*** And that is not very good because they are the one who are talking it. Not us. Because the further they go in the outside world they have to speak what is wrong with an organisation. Because if they don't do that, for example if they want to analyse a company's financial performance, and they just receive everything from the manager, and the manager realises it is all wrong because they didn't speak up, the manager will fire the person. Because you spot that mistake so why don't you tell me.

Excerpt 7. 5

BLR3 said he did not see any constructive efforts between the speakers in Excerpt III. He therefore ranked the interaction in Excerpt III as least successful (see Excerpt 7.6).

BLR3: I'm not sure about Excerpt III "Say something. Hurry up" a kind of bullying approach in it, a few statements there. Not exactly threatening but pressurising people to speak, come on say something. I don't know how much listening is going on. It's all focusing on we want people to share their opinion but I think listening has got to be the key part, listening to others and maybe building on what they said or offering different opinions but very much ***valuing each other's opinion, accepting it, paying attention, not just I want you to hear my thought.***

<div align="center">Excerpt 7. 6</div>

7.1.3 Reasons for the Chinese business lecturers' choices

Compared with the British lecturers who did not think that the discussion was moving forward in Excerpt I, the Chinese lecturers thought it was very encouraging and interactive. CLR4 thought that Student C interacted with others because he offered a different answer (see Excerpt 7.7).

CLR4: I think the students in Excerpt I were ***interactive***. You see ***everyone stated very clearly*** about whether they thought the government should be counted as the sixth force, regardless of the quality of their reasons. In this way they were exchanging ideas and actually learning from each other. Student C is particularly ***interactive because he raised a different idea***. He was telling the others a different perspective. … . ***I hope each group in my class has one such kind of student.*** They are me. I expect my students to think in-depth by raising different opinions from the others. They could argue. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 7. 7</div>

According to CLR1, each student in Excerpt I was interactive because they were able to propose 'conclusive' statements when it was their turn to speak, and these contained the answers to the questions with sufficient supportive reasons. In this way, the students were perceived to exchange ideas. On the other hand, he thought the students in Excerpt II failed to demonstrate 'independent thinking' because they often questioned the previous speakers' opinion. He might interpret the students'

behaviour as taking a 'free-ride'. This opinion is very different from the finding of Furneaux *et al*. (1991) that British lecturers thought the purpose of seminars was asking questions and giving and receiving new information. In Excerpt 7.8, CLR1 implied that he preferred students to defend their opinions.

CLR1: I don't really think that asking questions is a good way to learn. ***Asking questions indicates that you don't think. I hope my students could raise some conclusive opinions.*** … If a student raises questions in group discussion, generally he/she does not think. If he/she thinks about it, he/she could raise conclusive points. The points indicate the students are independent thinkers. (translated)

Excerpt 7. 8

All the Chinese lecturers seemed to perceive business knowledge as hard and tangible, as can be seen in Excerpt 7.9 with CLR1.

CLR1: For example, I observed a seminar in this (British) university. Students were assigned to do a SWOT analysis with a British company in small groups. I joined in one group containing all Chinese students. When we finished the SWOT analysis which was simple and were about to agree to expand worldwide, a student suddenly raised a question about our budget. He asked 'where is our budget'. I don't think this student really thought about the task, the question. It's a simulated task. And the task is about SWOT and strategic development. ***Don't think about the others.*** It's practice in decision making. Expanding worldwide is ***obviously what the lecturer wanted***. The module is about international business. (translated)

Excerpt 7. 9

In Excerpt 7.9, CLR1 described his experience of participating in a small group discussion in the British university. He perceived the SWOT analysis as a convergent task with one correct answer, and he thought that the British lecturer who assigned the task would have a clear idea of the developmental direction of the British company. CLR1 did not make clear what the discussion interaction was like, but he implies that the students quickly reached a decision. CLR1 thought that the issue of

the budget was an unwise contribution to the discussion which might affect the group's ability to reach the 'right' answer. This is reminiscent of the finding from the follow-up interviews with the student participants; they perceived discussion using the 'exploratory' method as wasting time (see Excerpt 6.13).

CLR2 thought the interaction in Excerpt II resembled casual conversation rather than academic discussion. He implied that academic discussion should be structured without interruptions, in the manner of Excerpt I. He thought that each person should have an opportunity to clearly state their points and reasons. The following is CLR2's comment on the difference between Excerpts I and II:

CLR2: This excerpt (Excerpt I) is more academic in terms of interaction. I mean it's more **_formal and logical_** for me. Maybe it is because Excerpt I was more structured. The dialogue in Excerpt II is like daily talk. Students spoke randomly, I mean, you see, many sentences were not completed and interrupted by another. And they repeatedly raised questions. (translated)

Excerpt 7. 10

CL2 thought each student's opinion was ambiguous in Excerpt II (see Excerpt 7.11).

CLR2: Before reading the last contribution by student A, I can't see the points of the two speakers in Excerpt II. The discussion would become endless without a clear answer if it follows the approach of Excerpt II. However I could see the **_possible answer_** in Excerpt I, I mean the reasons to support or not support the government to be the sixth force. … The discussion in Excerpt III contains only results without the discussion process. (translated)

Excerpt 7. 11

On the other hand, CLR3 liked the way the two students in Excerpt II seemed to be trying out their ideas (see Excerpt 7.12), although like all the other five Chinese lecturers, he indicated that the purpose of academic discussion is to internalise

existing knowledge rather than construct new knowledge. CLR3 seemed to interpret the students in Excerpt II as acting out a 'performance', a common teaching and learning strategy in the Chinese classroom.

> CLR3: I think student A employed a very good discussing strategy or we can say it's a learning strategy. They skilfully tested their ideas. I think she already had an idea when she asked "anybody anything". She already got an idea of allying with universities to offer an MBA. I think she also had reasons. But she delayed expressing her opinion and invited others' opinions. When student B proposed a similar idea, she pretended to disagree and prompted student B to further state his/her reasons maybe in order to see if there were any other points she hadn't thought about. In this way student A proved her opinion right. You see, she was very happy finally. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 7. 12</div>

7.1.4 Reasons for the Chinese business students' choices

Five Chinese business students identified Excerpt II as a British method of discussion and Excerpts I and III as Chinese methods of discussion. Only CSR2 ranked Excerpt II as the best one for acquiring knowledge; she thought this method helps to explore new knowledge (see Excerpt 7.13). This student explained that she felt supported and could learn new knowledge during this kind of discussion, as can be seen from the following extract. She appreciated the chance to hear multiple viewpoints, and she implied that this would lead to the acquisition of new knowledge.

> CSR2: I prefer the second one. No one knows what will happen in this kind of discussion. That's why I intended to join in mixed group discussion rather than staying with my Chinese classmates. This is a totally different experience. Very different. Chinese students tend to discuss like the students in Excerpts I and III. They seemed to wait for somebody to make a final decision about the answer. I felt supported when I was in the kind of group in Excerpt II. I felt they were so interested in what I was talking about that they wanted to make sure of every point I made. New ideas came out through this process. You know, I often found I could not agree any longer with a new idea because people often raised a slightly different angle in relation to my comment. The angle was

> often very reasonable but I had not thought about it. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 7. 13</div>

She clearly stated that the students in Excerpt I expected a leader to integrate the answers, and for this reason they only argued in favour of their own opinions. On the other hand, she thought the students in Excerpt II collaboratively integrated different opinions.

CSR6 thought the ways of showing agreement in Excerpt II indicated a lack of critical thinking, which she understood as criticising others' opinions by proposing different or opposite opinions (see Excerpt 7.14). She implied that she thought British lecturers would not prefer the discussion method in Excerpt II.

> CSR6: I noticed that there were only two speakers in Excerpt II. If a group of five discussed like this, I mean by asking and answering, and showing agreement, they were not critical. British lecturers prefer critical thinking. I think they prefer us to raise different opinions. (translated)

<div align="center">Excerpt 7. 14</div>

Compared with the other Chinese student informants who recognised Excerpt II as a British method of discussion, CSR4 thought the interactions in all three Excerpts could be those of Chinese students (see Excerpt 7.15). He ranked Excerpt I as the best one because it was agonistic. He predicted that the students in Excerpt I would move to debate with each other. He also liked the interaction in Excerpt II because he thought the two students showed their understanding of each other and therefore discussed at the same level. He argued that the ideal interaction in small group discussion involved actively seeking understanding of others' views in order to defend one's own opinion, and defeat the others if possible. This strategy is also

revealed in an interview with C1 from group 5 (see Excerpt 6.39).

> CSR4: Although the students in Excerpt I appeared to exchange ideas, according to my experience if there were only Chinese students in that group they would move on to discuss like a **_debate_**. Very heated discussion with clashing ideas. … However I'm not sure if the students were at the same level. The students in Excerpt II seemed to be at the same level of understanding. So I think ideally small group discussion should be a combination of Excerpt I and II. (translated)

Excerpt 7. 15

CSR1 thought the interaction in Excerpt I welcomed different answers and was led by a group leader who had assumed responsibility for integrating their answers and reporting back to the lecturer (see Excerpt 7.16). She seemed to emphasise the importance of having a group leader who encouraged group members to share different opinions freely.

> CSR1: I think all the students in Excerpt I were participating and interacting because all of them were **_proposing different ideas_**. I think all of them were encouraging the proposal of new ideas because they were open to different opinions. Although Student A acted as a leader and only invited ideas at first, I think she could integrate all the contributed opinions into a good answer. An answer would be finally found out by this process of summarising, evaluating, and adjusting. (translated)

Excerpt 7. 16

CSR3 thought the interaction in Excerpt I was efficient, not because it would lead to a heated debate but because it would enable the group to reach a consensus as fast as possible (see Excerpt 7.17). He implied that the discussion in Excerpt II would be a waste of time. This understanding of the purpose of small group discussion is similar to that of the Chinese lecturer CLR1.

> CSR3: It's more efficient to discuss like this. We can **_reach a consensus quickly. This is our purpose_**. I could express my opinions thoroughly and completely. We can test our

ideas by brainstorming all the possible questions and challenges as Student C in Excerpt I did. If we found there was only a little supportive evidence, we could probably change our decision quickly. ***Finally we would be able to find a better answer or make a right decision.*** (translated)

<center>Excerpt 7. 17</center>

Although CSR3 and CSR4 appeared to have slightly different interpretations of Excerpt I, both of them implied that there should be one 'correct' answer. They indicated that they thought the purpose of group discussion was to reproduce or apply knowledge.

7.2 Conclusion

The investigation showed that the British lecturers preferred the 'exploratory' discussion method and the Chinese lecturers and students preferred the 'spiral' method.

The British lecturers perceived the purpose of group discussion as constructing new knowledge. They recognised group discussion as an experiential learning technique in which students obtained soft managerial skills and critical thinking; they treated Business and Management as divergent and soft knowledge. They appreciated the discussion behaviour of reflecting on others' contributions, reconceptualising, and pushing the argument forward.

Both the Chinese lecturers and students perceived the purpose of group discussion as succeeding in finding out one 'correct' answer as soon as possible; they treated Business and Management as a convergent and hard discipline which offered

judgement on good practice. The 'exploratory' discussion method was ambiguous for them in terms of the turn takers' opinions. The Chinese students appreciated the agonistic debate which facilitated the discovery of one 'correct' answer. They also emphasised the importance of having a group leader to collect different opinions and answers. The Chinese lecturers disliked the behaviour of asking questions in discussion because they thought it indicated that the speaker did not think and wanted to take a 'free-ride'.

A significant finding to emerge from the investigation is that after one year of study in Britain the '2+1' students recognised that non-Chinese students tended to adopt a 'exploratory' discussion method. However, they seemed not to realise its 'constructivist' value. This finding accords with the findings from interviews with the '2+1' students after learning in Britain for around six months. At that point they were not sure about the required discussion skills in British seminars; they thought they only needed fluency in the four English language skills. Their perceptions seemed to be greatly influenced by their Chinese lecturers.

Overall, the investigation was successful since it strengthened the findings of the perceptions of Chinese and British lecturers and the '2+1' students regarding the purpose of group discussion (RQ5), the discussion skills required, and Business and Management as a discipline (RQ1a and RQ2).

Chapter 8 Conclusions and suggestions

The answers to the five research questions are summarised in the following sub-sections. The internal relationships among the answers accord with Figure 3.2, Chapter 3 in which the Chinese culture of learning, including the attitudes to knowledge and to learning, the disciplinary culture of business and management, and expectations of how learning is demonstrated, shape classroom interactional practices in China and also remain as 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1994; Maton 2008) in the mind of students transferred to British universities. In addition I will suggest that the answers to the research questions suggest a broadening of the Chinese students' horizons (Cortazzi & Jin 2013) in internationalised education context.

8.1 Summary of main findings

8.1.1 What were the students' learning experiences in the Chinese university?

In answer to RQ1a (What group discussion skills did Chinese lecturers think that the students would need in British classrooms?), the lecturers engaged in the teaching of Part I in China did not seem to know the required group discussion skills in British business seminars. Some of them perceived group discussion as a rather natural skill which did not require special training. For example the Chinese English lecturer (CEIC1) thought that the '2+1' students in Britain when participating in small group discussion have only to listen to others carefully and express opinions bravely (see Excerpt 5.1). She did not think that the students would have problems with this.

Chinese lecturers seemed to think group discussion was useful for monitoring peer progress and finding correct answers. In classroom teaching, they required students to exchange answers and check accuracy in small groups, in a goal-oriented approach. For example in an observed class (class C), lecturer CM1 clearly told her students to exchange answers and check the accuracy of each other's answers. However other lecturers thought this discussion method wasted time and therefore avoided organising small group discussion in class, as a business lecturer CBIC2 reported in Excerpt 5.5.

Building on the finding that Chinese business lecturers attach less importance to the professional business skills of data processing, communication, and strategic problem-solving than to theoretical knowledge (Ji 2006; Luo 2010), this study also discovered that the Chinese lecturers seemed to consider business knowledge to be convergent and did not believe that discussion was necessary for subject learning. They did not seem to recognise the value of discussion for reflection, exploration and development of learner autonomy; according to Gong *et al*. (2008), He and Sun (2005) and Wang *et al*. (2012) case-study group discussion is not at the core of Chinese business students' learning experience.

The Chinese lecturers perceived the nature of classroom interaction as teacher-student rather than student-student interaction. They recognised the teachers' roles as knowledge providers. This accords with suggestions in the literature that whole-class discussion remains a major teaching technique (Zhao *et al*. 2003; Ji 2004). The business lecturers in my study also recognised building close ties

with lecturers as a positive learning strategy, and advised students to enlist British lecturers' help in the British institution.

In answer to RQ1b (What were the students' learning priorities?), the students recognised their learning priority as preparing for the IELTS and only sought a passing score in subject modules, although they said they were interested in business as a discipline.

In answer to RQ1c (What learning strategies did the students employ?), when engaged in group work, responses to the questionnaire survey indicated that most of the students chose to follow the group leaders, divide up the task and work individually. It can be interpreted that when they did group work, successful completion was the target. The student interview data revealed that many of them did not recognise the value of group discussion for the study of cases.

The questionnaire survey suggested that the students were positive about learner autonomy; however they seemed to recognise it as a learning skill which was only required outside the classroom. Similar conclusions were reached by Spiro *et al*. (2012); in their study a group of Chinese students were found to perceive independent learning as learning without the tutor's intervention.

In answer to RQ1d (How did the students evaluate the preparation they were offered in China?), the students thought they had not been correctly informed about the expectations and norms of British business education in terms of 'critical thinking', 'group work' and 'learner autonomy'.

8.1.2 When the students arrived in the British university, what did they expect of seminars?

When the students arrived in Britain, they expected teacher-student interaction in seminars and expressed their appreciation of the British lecturers' questioning and challenging strategies (e.g. Excerpt 5.16). It can be interpreted that they wanted to observe the employment of these discussion strategies. However, based on what was found from the questionnaire survey and bearing in mind the interviews based on the case-study discussion, it appears that a majority of Chinese students do not share the same conception as British lecturers concerning learning autonomously within small groups.

8.1.3 What was the purpose of small group discussion and seminar interaction, according to British lecturers and Chinese students?

British lecturers perceived the nature of seminar interaction as student-student interaction facilitated by lecturers. They perceived small group discussion as an experiential learning technique through which students critically evaluate proposals and opinions by identifying and challenging the underlying assumptions (Holman 2000; Lundberg *et al*. 2001) (e.g. Excerpts 5.22 and 5.23). They expected students to adopt multiple perspectives and identify a variety of answers (e.g. Excerpt 7.13).

Some Chinese students after one year of study in Britain recognised the 'exploratory' discussion method adopted by non-Chinese students (e.g. Excerpt 5.27). However they did not realise the underlying value of exploratory efforts. Both Chinese

lecturers and students perceived the purpose of group discussion as finding out a correct and complete answer as soon as possible (e.g. Excerpts 7.9 and 7.17). This accords with what was found regarding RQ1. They thought non-Chinese students by showing agreement with other's opinion failed to demonstrate the independent and critical thinking skill (e.g. Excerpt 7.14).

8.1.4 What do patterns of participation in case-study discussions in British seminars reveal about the methods employed by Chinese students, and how do these differ from other non-native speakers of English?

The Chinese students employed the 'spiral' method in mixed group discussion involving non-Chinese students (e.g. Excerpt 6.4). They constantly brought the discussion back to the original discussion topic/question, thus preventing the development of the discussion. When they discussed in homogeneous Chinese groups, they tended to adopt the 'individual' method in which the initiator of a topic takes responsibility for offering explanations and the other group members are not likely to build upon the initiator's contribution (e.g. Excerpt 6.33). They were used to relying on a leader who collected different answers and reported them to the lecturer.

The non-Chinese students tended to adopt an 'exploratory' discussion method by acknowledging and building upon the preceding utterance in a collaborative manner (Mercer 1995; Mercer & Littleton 2007; Dawes *et al*. 2000) (e.g. Excerpt 6.5). They intended to prolong the discussion process rather than finding out an answer. They seemed to perceive the Chinese students' contribution as supporting evidence for

their arguments (e.g. Excerpt 6.10).

8.1.5 What discussion methods uncovered by the study did Chinese students, British lecturers and Chinese lecturers from China prefer?

The British lecturers preferred the 'exploratory' discussion method and the Chinese lecturers and students preferred the 'spiral' method. According to the students' description of their discussion experiences, the non-Chinese students seemed not to like the goal-oriented discussion approach and sometimes refused to discuss with the Chinese students. Perhaps this was because the non-Chinese students did not think they could learn through the approach. The Chinese students also seemed to be impatient when discussing with non-Chinese students because they thought they wasted time (e.g. Excerpt 6.13).

Chinese lecturers were very negative about questioning and challenging discussion strategies (e.g. Excerpt 7.8). They thought that students adopting these strategies wanted to take a 'free-ride' and did not think for themselves.

This thesis argues that both the 'spiral' and 'individual' discussion methods are efficient ways of completing a convergent task which "requires students to agree on a solution to a problem" (Ellis 2003:90). However, if the task is divergent, doing the task as quickly as possible will limit the opportunity to construct new knowledge and understanding.

8.2 Evaluation of the research

8.2.1 Research objectives

Regarding research objective one (to identify how and to what extent students' prior learning experiences may have predisposed students to have certain attitudes towards seminar discussions), the findings of RQ1-3 revealed that the students were used to exchanging answers and checking accuracy in groups, following a goal-oriented approach. The intensive teacher-student interaction in Chinese classrooms made the students inclined to depend on their teachers and perceive them as knowledge providers. This perception seemed to persist in the minds of the students when they transferred to Britain. They appreciated British lecturers' questioning and challenging strategies but did not seem to perceive these strategies as ones they themselves might need.

Research objective two was to discover how Chinese students understand the nature and the purpose of the instruction techniques they are exposed to in Britain. The findings of students' patterns of participation in case-study group discussion (RQ4) revealed that although the Chinese students used all three discussion methods in British seminars ('spiral', 'individual' and 'exploratory'), they understood the purpose of group discussion as a kind of assessment of their right and wrong answers. Group discussion was thought of as a convergent task requiring students to exchange ideas in order to find the correct and complete answer. However British lecturers perceived case-study group discussion as a divergent task to construct new understanding. The underlying assumptions of the students concerning the case-study discussion activity

suggest the influence of the culture of learning in Chinese classrooms.

Research objective three was to investigate students' and lecturers' attitudes towards methods of group discussion of case-studies. The findings of RQ5 indicated that most of the Chinese students and lecturers preferred the 'spiral' group discussion method, whereas British lecturers preferred the 'exploratory' method. The results suggested that the Chinese and British participants, influenced by their own cultures of learning, differed in understanding the purpose of group discussion and the nature of business and management knowledge. However there was also some evidence that the participants were starting to recognise alternative approaches to group discussion with different underlying perspectives on Business and Management knowledge, and the nature of learning in general. As stated in section 1.3.1, this process helps to develop students' capacity for life-long learning and facilitates personal development. For this reason, the theoretical framework in section 2.4.2 (see Figure 2.3) could be developed to be more comprehensive, as will be shown in the following section.

8.2.2 A conclusive theoretical framework

The study reflects the influence of two important factors: 'culture of learning' (Bourdieu 1984; Maton 2008) and habitus (Bourdieu 1994; Maton 2008) in the mind of students transferred to British universities, as it is discussed in section 2.4.2. To be specific in China Chinese students learnt within Chinese culture of learning including attitudes, expectations and disciplinary culture. They ordered and structured their habitus (dispositions) of classroom interactional practices (see section 2.4.2). When the students transferred to Britain both 'culture of learning' and 'habitus' maintained

in their mind and shaped their classroom interactional practices in Britain (see Figure

8.1, a developed framework of Figure 2.3).
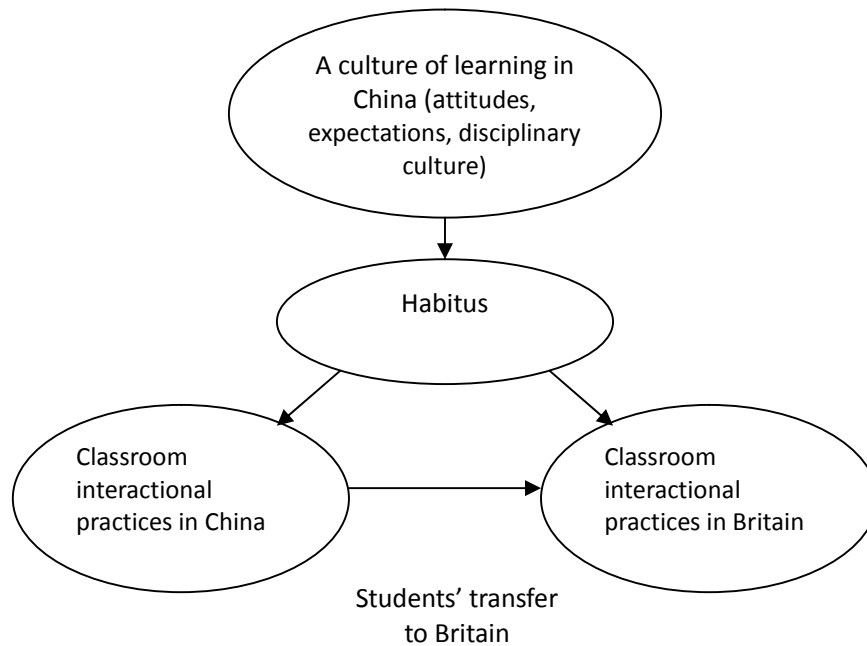
Figure 8. 1 The influence of 'culture of learning' and 'habitus' on Chinese students' classroom interactional practices in China and in Britain

8.2.3 Limitations

This study of Chinese students' case-study group discussions in British university seminars focuses on sociocultural aspects of Chinese students' adjustments. As pointed out in section 2.4.2, the study abstracts from factors which relate to individuals, and individuals are obviously never identical in terms of language proficiency, preferred learning styles or motivation to learn. Each of these factors will inevitably affect their participation in classroom events, but detailed investigation of the effect of these factors would entail a different set of methodologies, going well beyond what can be encompassed in this thesis.

Moreover the study adopted a student rather than lecturer perspective, and

therefore did not investigate any pedagogical adjustments the British lecturers in Part II of the programme may have made in their dealings with '2+1' students.

Through the comparison between the learning experiences in the Chinese and British classrooms, the study depicted '2+1' students' development facilitated by their international learning experiences. The study only investigated the students' group discussion behaviour in British seminars at a specific moment of time. It was not concerned with changes to their discussion skills over the course of the final year of study in Britain, focussing rather on the influence of their pre-departure learning experiences on their perceptions and methods of group discussion.

The study did not audio-record the discourse in the Chinese classrooms. Information about the learning experiences in the Chinese classrooms was self-reported by Chinese students and lecturers. The study did not recruit as many lecturer and student participants in Part I of the programme as initially planned. Therefore the findings from the interviews in Stage I of the study may only provide a partial picture of the Part I learning experience.

The 'exploratory' discussion method I discovered may not be used by all non-Chinese students; the study only intended to identify the discussion method that British lecturers most expected.

8.3 Practical implications of the study

8.3.1 Implications for teaching in higher education

This study has implications for teaching in higher education, especially teaching in internationalised higher education. As was clearly pointed out at the beginning of this thesis, the significance of higher education internationalisation is that participants gain life-long learning skills and personal development through 'cultural synergy' (Cortazzi & Jin 2013:100-101). This study found that goal-oriented discussion behaviour was evident amongst the Chinese and non-Chinese students. It supports Jin & Cortazzi's (2012) claim that the learning style of Chinese learners is different from non-Chinese students, but not for this reason deficient. However, misunderstandings between Chinese and non-Chinese students and lecturers could prevent some students from learning collaboratively and reflecting on their progress. The findings of the study have strong implications for student learning. The discussion behaviour of Chinese and non-Chinese students appeared to be set within a "taken-for-granted framework of values and beliefs" (Cortazzi & Jin 1996:169) about each other's cultures of learning.

This study also identified that the '2+1' students recognised these misunderstandings and the differences in course design and teaching practices in Part I and II of the programme, and that they made an effort to adjust to British business education. On the other hand, many lecturers involved in Part I and II of the '2+1' programme did not notice that there was misunderstanding about the nature of seminar interaction, the purpose of group discussion, and Business and Management as a discipline.

Although I did not interview the British lecturers about whether they employed any interventions in the seminars, some of them implied that they did not know how to deal with Chinese students who did not perform in the expected way.

Another emerging issue which is not often discussed in the literature is that some of the students perceived themselves to be different from students with Western-style educational backgrounds, and did not make enough effort to communicate with non-Chinese students in and out of classroom. It was probably for this reason that they did not find out why some non-Chinese students refused to discuss with them.

It is recommended that the findings should be made available to business and English lecturers engaged in partnership degree programmes.

For the '2+1' programme under investigation, lecturers from Part I of the programme in China need to help students better understand the demands that will be placed on them in Part II. In particular, they need to understand that British teachers are less likely to take on a mentoring role, and are more likely to expect students to co-construct knowledge with the help of their peers. Classroom speaking activities in Part I could introduce the concept of collaborative group work, where the solution to the task is given less importance than the discussion process. Students could be shown through examples of seminar exchanges where feedback also initiates further discussion, and could practise the language of exchanges of this type.

It is recommended that the British lecturers in the British institution make use of the multi-cultural nature of seminars to raise students' intercultural awareness. Seminar

discussion preferences and strategies can be treated as a syllabus topic, on the business programme and/or in accompanying English language support classes. Groups can be encouraged to reflect on their discussion experiences and talk through their discussion behaviour, their intentions, and the purposes they wanted to achieve.

This study obviously has implications for business education in China, where applied management and soft skills are still somewhat neglected. This neglect may be one of the reasons why Chinese business students with a first degree obtained in China are less likely to achieve good postgraduate degrees in Britain (Iannelli & Huang 2013; Pilcher *et al*. 2012).

8.3.2 Implications for teaching intercultural business communication

How and to what extent learning experiences of Chinese business students in China influence their intercultural business communication with non-Chinese partners in the professional workplace is a question for further study. The study has implications for teaching intercultural business communication in that if the three styles of discussion were made known to Chinese students, this would help them to understand the purposes, uses and the demands of studying international business in the medium of English. They might also become more sensitive to possible misunderstandings when discussing with people from different cultural backgrounds.

The findings of the study also provide business English lecturers with the information they need in order to decide on the criteria for assessing students' language skills, as

Xiong and Jie (2008) and Peng (2011) have discussed. The findings could also inform Business English textbooks in China, which at present tend to over-emphasise professional vocabulary and expressions, and to provide only very basic information about business communication and non-verbal communication (Chi 2010). Of course the study also has implications for the training of business English lecturers who tend not to have had academic or professional experience relating to Business and Management (Peng 2011;Chi 2010; Xiong & Jie 2008).

Further studies are especially needed to investigate business English courses in Chinese universities, to improve students' intercultural communication competence.

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Appendix 1 Ethics Approval Form

REGISTRY RESEARCH UNIT

ETHICS REVIEW FEEDBACK FORM
(Review feedback should be completed within 10 working days)

Name of applicant: Liyuan Wang

Faculty/School/Department: [Business, Environment and Society] English & Languages Dept

Research project title: '2+1' Chinese business students' methods of case-study group discussion in British university seminars

Comments by the reviewer

1. Evaluation of the ethics of the proposal: Approved	
2. Evaluation of the participant information sheet and consent form: These have been approved by the supervisor	
3. Recommendation: (Please indicate as appropriate and advise on any conditions. If there any conditions, the applicant will be required to resubmit his/her application and this will be sent to the same reviewer).	

X	Approved - no conditions attached
	Approved with minor conditions (no need to re-submit)
	Conditional upon the following – please use additional sheets if necessary (please re-submit application)
	Rejected for the following reason(s) – please use other side if necessary
	Not required

Name of reviewer: Anonymous

Date: 10/03/2011

Appendix 2 Questionnaire

This anonymous questionnaire survey consists of two parts in order to examine your perceptions of the learning targets in the university in China. Please follow the instruction following by each question and mark a number by "○" on the right columns which best represent your answer. Thank you for your cooperation!					
1. What do you think was the purpose of the Chinese programme? For each of the following choose a number from 1 (=not at all important) to 5 (=very important).	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.1 To gain a good IELTS score					
1.2 To develop English communication skills					
1.3 To develop academic English skills					
1.4 To develop fundamental knowledge of business					
2. At the Chinese university, how often do you do each of the following? Choose a number from 1 (=never) to 5 (=very often).	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2.1 Reading online business comments in Chinese					
2.2 Using translation tools					
2.3 Using a dictionary					
2.4 Using the library					
2.5 Practicing English with peers					
2.6 Preparing work to give to the group leader					
2.7 Choosing to be the leader of the group					

Chinese version:

大家好！ 感谢大家帮助我完成这份匿名问卷调查的数据收集工作。这份问卷调查主要了解你在国内学习的一般状况，包括你的学习目标，学习策略，和你所认为的师生关系。 这份问卷共有两个部分，请大家从 1,2,3,4,5 这五个数字中选择一个表示程度，用"O"标记。从 1 到 5 程度逐渐上升。请大家依次根据每道题后面的要求作答。谢谢大家					
1.请问在国内两年的学习中，你的学习的目是什么？以下是一些相关的学习目的的表述，从 1（完全不重要）到 5 （非常重要）中选择一个数字表示。	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1.1 考到一个满意的雅思成绩					
1.2 提高用英语交流的能力					
1.3 提高学术英语的能力，比如用英语写论文和讨论专业问题					
1.4 掌握基本的商科的专业知识					
2. 在国内两年的学习过程中你对以下这些事情的使用或参与频率怎么样?从 1 （从来不做）到 5 （经常做）中选择一个数字表示。	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2.1 阅读网上的商务评论					
2.2 利用翻译网站和软件					
2.3 使用词典					
2.4 到国内大学的图书馆找资料					
2.5 与同伴一起练习英语					
2.6 在做小组作业时，准备好自己的那一部分然后交给小组长					
2.7 资源做小组作业的小组长					

Appendix 3 A visual report on IRF coding of a group discussion recording clip produced by Nvivo 9.0

	Timespan	Content
1	0:00.0 – 0:03.5	B1: erm anybody anything ↗ what do you think
2	0:03.5 – 0:15.4	N1: oh I think er since we've been provided er we can cooperate with the universities like providing MBA and
3	0:15.4 – 0:16.7	B1: but can we provide MBA↗
4	0:18.0 – 0:35.5	N1: no some of the polytechnics provided MBA in some cases in cooperation with universities in the UK so I think so I think we can be more academic rather than regional cos they would have to we still be able to offer the same services but to other people
5	0:33.6 – 0:35.9	B1: so you mean that diversify↗
6	0:35.9 – 0:49.3	N1: yeah cos you see a polytechnic just offers um like a kind of educations
7	0:49.3 – 1:03.8	B1: yeah but I think polytechnics are like for people are not academically skilled but they more like practical in nature which could say they are not smart but it's stupid to say that so but our customersr
8	1:03.8 – 1:09.0	N1: ok I know in our region that because we were not making
9	1:09.0 – 1:20.0	B1: it looks like a niche market haha ok erm you got a point because we already have this our plan is to do this strategic alliances with universities so that we offer MBA anybody object