

Intercultural Adaptation of Chinese People in the UK on the Eve of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The development of globalization has intensified the growth of the worldwide floating population, and, in turn, diaspora studies and intercultural adaptation research have become hot research topics. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the circumstances of intercultural adaptation among Chinese people in the UK on the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research suggests that the extent of intercultural adaptation among individuals is somewhat correlated with their subjective willingness, English language proficiency, and duration of residence in the host society. These factors interact with one another to influence the level of intercultural adaptation. One of the most significant sociocultural adaptation challenges faced by Chinese workers in the UK during their intercultural adaptation process is the English language barrier. Despite some Chinese workers having lived in the UK for decades, their intercultural adaptation remains at the adaptation stage, and they struggle to reach the integration stage.

Keywords: Intercultural adaptation, cross-cultural adaptation, Chinese people in the UK, Chinese diaspora, Chinese-language media

1. Introduction

The development of globalization has intensified the growth of population movements worldwide. China is the country with the largest world population, and since the introduction of the country's "reform and opening" policies in 1979, the migration of the Chinese population worldwide has not stopped (Zhou, 2017). As strangers in the host country, intercultural adaptation is always a difficult process for migrating people. Intercultural adaptation can be examined from a psychological and sociocultural perspective (Hammer et al., 1978; 2003; 2008), and the process may be measured through the stress-coping-growth interaction (Kim, 2001; 2005). This paper discusses challenges encountered by Chinese people in the UK in terms of their psychological and sociocultural adaptation, as well as showing how they cope with these intercultural adaptation challenges. With reference to data gathered from the questionnaire survey, this research analyses data that were mainly collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups, describing the current circumstances of intercultural adaptation of Chinese people in the UK. This research aims to fill the gap in studies about the current intercultural adaptation process of Chinese people in the UK. This paper will answer the following research questions:

What are the current circumstances of intercultural adaptation among different groups of Chinese people in the UK?

How do Chinese-language media support the lives of Chinese people in the UK to cope with intercultural challenges?

For centuries people have migrated to the UK from around the world. One of the

main reasons that Chinese people have come to the UK is to work. In the mid-twentieth century, demographic decline and increasing demand for public services systems resulted in a shortage of labour; the UK therefore relaxed immigration controls and received a large influx of labour from other countries (Karim & Al-Rawi, 2018). Thus, another wave of labour from China arrived in the UK with this flow (Wang, 2000). Later, promoted by globalization and Mainland China's "reform and opening" policies, more and more Chinese workers and Chinese employees of transnational corporations have arrived in the UK since the 1980s (Zhou, 2017). Some of these people chose to work in the UK to find a higher income and a better life, and some for immigration (Tu, 2018). After years as sojourning workers, some of them settled down in the UK as Chinese immigrants, while others returned to China.

Apart from reasons of work and immigration, study is another main reason that Chinese people are residents in the UK. Plewa (2020) points out that today Chinese migration has evolved from being dominated by workers to being dominated by students. Chinese students can be regarded as sojourners in the UK. Siu (1952) defines the 'sojourner' as a stranger who has lived in a foreign country for many years but has not been assimilated by the host country. Siu (1952, p. 34) suggests that sojourners should include "the colonist, the foreign trader, the diplomat, the foreign student, the international journalist, the foreign missionary, the research anthropologist abroad." Compared with sojourner, diaspora is a widely accepted concept to describe people who separate from their original geographic location and reside elsewhere (Brazier & Mannur, 2003; Cristina, 2011). Both sojourning and diaspora refer to living outside the homeland, with geographical migration as a prerequisite. Compared with a sojourner who is a short-term visitor who aims to return to the homeland, diaspora refers to long-term settlers who have not been assimilated by the host country. Thus, Chinese students and Chinese workers are integral parts of sojourners, while Chinese immigrants can be regarded as part of the Chinese diaspora.

This research divided Chinese people in the UK into Chinese students, Chinese workers, and Chinese immigrants with consideration given to their purpose of coming to the UK, length of stay, and identities. In this paper, Chinese students refer to Chinese people who hold UK student visas and came to the UK for study, while Chinese workers mainly refer to Chinese labor who came to the UK for low-skilled work; they are usually less educated and engaged as chefs, waiters, dishwashers in Chinese restaurants or work in Chinese shops. Chinese immigrants in this research refer to all the first-generation Chinese immigrants who came to the UK for immigration purposes, or have lived in the UK for many years, hold permanent residence visas or have become United Kingdom nationals. Chinese students and most of the Chinese workers are Chinese sojourners, but they may become Chinese immigrants if they take up permanent residence or are granted UK citizenship; Chinese immigrants may end their diaspora lives by becoming assimilated into the UK society or by returning to China.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Models of Intercultural Adaptation

Intercultural adaptation is a phenomenon describing people's long-term adjustment to cultural differences, that occurs when an individual enters a new culture and learns a

new language, communication habits, social rules, and so on, then gradually accepts and integrates into the new host culture to form a multi-cultural background (Berry & Kim, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Furnham, 1988; Kim & Ruben, 1988; Searle & Ward, 1990). In the early research, Redfield et al. (1935, pp. 229-230) defined intercultural adaptation as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into direct and continuous contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.” After that, many scholars have developed a number of theoretical models and frameworks for intercultural adaptation research on this basis.

Lysgaard (1955) suggested a U-shaped curve to describe people’s intercultural adaptation process. Lysgaard suggested that people’s adjustment to a new culture was an ongoing process that can be divided into temporary adaptation, crisis, recovery and adjustment. Oberg (1960) created the term ‘culture shock’ to describe the feelings of anxiety, confusion and strain that may occur when people first come into contact with a new culture. Then Oberg (1960) modified Lysgaard’s U-shaped Curve and further developed a four phases model of acculturation: the honeymoon stage; the crisis (experience of culture shock); the recovery; and finally adjustment. Hofstede (1991) agreed with Lysgaard’s U-shaped Curve expatriate adaptation model as the first three stages of his intercultural adaptation model and added a fourth stage ‘stable state’ to the model. Hofstede (1991) argued that the length that an individual spends on each stage of adaptation tends to correspond with the length of the individual’s stay in the new culture. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) extended Lysgaard’s U-shaped Curve to the W-shaped Curve adaptation model based on Oberg’s four phases mode. The W-shaped Curve refers to the predictable 5-stage model that includes honeymoon, cultural shock, initial adjustment, mental isolation, acceptance and integration, occurring when an individual experiences culture shock (Zeller & Mosier, 1993). Based on the work described above, Brown and Holloway (2008) summarised a four-stage adaptation model: excitement, culture shock, culture stress, and adaptation.

Adler (1975) further proposed a new stage of adaptation model, independence. Adler’s (1975) 5-stage adaptation model described culture shock in more neutral terms. The first stage is ‘honeymoon’, the newcomers experience curiosity and excitement in this stage, while maintaining their original national cultural identities. During the second stage their lives become rife with hostility and irritability, when the new culture overwhelms their familiar cues. They always suffer from cultural shock in this stage, and will feel a sense of self-blame when they encounter difficulties. In the third stage, the individual will reintegrate new cues and gradually adjust to the new culture. People usually feel anger and resentment to the difficulties they meet in the new culture; they are difficult to help due to the emotion of anger. The fourth stage is adaptation that continues the process of reintegrating new rules and forming a relatively balanced perspective, which helps the individual interpret both the homeland and the host cultures. As described above, the fifth stage is independence, which means newcomers have ideally become comfortable with both the old and the new cultures (Adler, 1975). These five stages are a gradual transition that occur one after the other, and the boundaries between the stages are very blurred.

To sum up everything that has been stated so far, intercultural adaptation is a state as well as a process. Theoretical models above showed the changing psychological state of intercultural individuals in their intercultural adaptation. The researcher summarizes this intercultural adaptation process into a five-stage model: honeymoon, culture shock, initial adjustment, adaptation, and integration. Among these five stages, honeymoon also refers to a kind of temporary adaptation. The integration stage does

not mean intercultural individuals are completely assimilated into the host society, but are showing a shrewd understanding of the host society's cultural values, cultural norms, and cultural symbols, and are able to switch between these two cultural systems flexibly, comfortably and freely. This research uses the five-stage model summarised above, and explores the intercultural adaptation of Chinese people in the UK and further improves the five-stage adaptation model by combining data collected from Chinese people in the UK to these theoretical models.

2.2 Measurement of Intercultural Adaptation

Hammer et al. (1978) suggest that intercultural adaptation can be examined from two dimensions, psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. Searle and Ward (1990) further propose that an individual's intercultural adaptation can be regarded as the adjustment to psychology and behaviour to adopt external social and cultural environmental changes, and as a complex result under the impact of various individual and social factors. Individuals' psychological adjustment is related to their intercultural sensitivities and focuses on the status of emotional and cognitive aspects of their intercultural lives. Good psychological adjustment is manifested in the sense of happiness, satisfaction with their intercultural lives, holding positive opinions about both cultural groups, and being able to adopt integration strategies in the transformation of these two cultures (Searle & Ward, 1990). Sociocultural adjustment relates to an individual's intercultural communication competence, and concentrates on the state of the individual's intercultural adaptation process in acquiring the cultural knowledge, and learning the social skills of the host country. Good sociocultural adjustment is manifested when the basic culture, knowledge, and social skills of the host country can be mastered, and the individual is able to communicate effectively with locals of the host country (Searle & Ward, 1990). This research will follow this path and analyse separately the intercultural adaptation of Chinese people in the UK from the aspect of psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation.

Bennett (1986, 1993) posited a framework for the psychological intercultural adaptation process in his developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), and regarded the cultivation of intercultural sensitivity as an approach to acquire intercultural competence. The DMIS constitutes six stages including denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, integration, that chart the changing process of an individual from ethnocentric orientation to ethnorelative orientation (Bennett, 1993). Kim's (1988, 2017) integrative communication theory of intercultural adaptation applies two models to explain how and why people are changed when moving from a familiar cultural environment to a host culture as they continue to interact with the new environment. One is the process model which presents the psychological progress of an individual as stress-adaptation-growth; the other one is the structural model which emphasizes the intercultural competence and subjective intent of the individual (Kim, 2017). Ward et al. (2001) summarised three approaches to explore the intercultural adaptation of an individual, which included the stress and coping, the social identification, and the culture learning approach. Among them, the stress and coping approach hold that the intercultural adaptation process unfolds through the stress-coping-growth interaction (Kim, 2001; 2005). The approach also argues that the process of an individual suffering from stress and adaptation leads to the individual's growth in intercultural communication competences during this period of time (Kim & Ruben, 1988). This study will follow this research path, and measure the intercultural adaptation progress of Chinese people in the UK by

analyzing their intercultural adaptation challenges and coping mechanisms.

The culture learning approach regards intercultural adaptation as the process of learning the related culture and skills of the host country (Bochner, 1982); anxiety/uncertainty management theory (AUM theory) is a typical theory in this framework. Anxiety/uncertainty management theory noted by Gudykunst (1988; 1993; 1995; 1998) extended Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory. Gudykunst (1988; 1995) considered that individuals usually experience some level of anxiety and uncertainty interacting with people from another cultural group. Hammer (1989) proposed eight variables which may affect the degree of anxiety and uncertainty amongst sojourners in a new cultural environment. The eight variables are respectively: social support from the host country, shared social network, attitudes of host country members toward sojourners, communication modality of sojourners and the locals, stereotypes, cultural identity, cultural distance between home culture and the host culture, and proficiency in the host country's language (Hammer, 1989). This study will measure the intercultural adaptation progress of Chinese people in the UK by analyzing their intercultural adaptation challenges and coping from the eight variables.

3. Research Methods

This study adopts an explanatory sequential, mixed methods strategy that combines quantitative and qualitative research. Specifically, this research gathered data using a questionnaire survey, focus groups, and semi-structured in-depth interviews. People who satisfied the following three conditions were selected as participants for this research: Over 18 years old; holding Chinese nationality, coming from China, or considering themselves Chinese; and having lived in the UK for more than half a year. The researcher applied the following approaches to recruit participants. First, snowballing is one of the researcher's most effective approaches to finding satisfactory participants. In this approach, the researcher found most participants via friends' recommendations. Second, the researcher tried to find interviewees on university campuses and within the local Chinese communities in the UK. Third, the researcher travelled to Chinatowns and universities in London, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. The researcher also found participants through Chinese social media, such as WeChat groups.

For the questionnaire survey, the researcher employed electronic questionnaires using the professional survey software Wenjuan (www.wenjuan.com) to enhance research flexibility. This research collected 373 responses to the questionnaire, with 306 valid, and all questionnaires were preliminarily analysed before the subsequent focus groups and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. In focus groups, the researcher divided Chinese people in the UK into 4 groups: the Chinese student focus group, the Chinese worker focus group, the Chinese male focus group, and the Chinese female focus group. The focus groups were conducted in four cities with relatively larger Chinese populations: Birmingham, London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow (see Figure 1). The researcher also invited 10 Chinese immigrants to conduct 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews (see Figure 2). All focus groups and interviews were carried out in Mandarin Chinese. Consequently, the recordings were initially transcribed into Chinese-language text. The texts were coded in Chinese to mitigate potential misunderstandings in data analysis arising from inaccurate translations.

Date	Group Name	Age Range	Length of Stay in the UK	Number of Participant	Place
8 Feb 2020	Chinese Females	23 - 30	6 Months -6 Years	6 Females Participants	Edinburgh
14 Feb 2020	Chinese Workers	24 - 65	7 Years - 30 Years	6 Participants 2 Males & 4 Females	London
18 Feb 2020	Chinese Students	20 - 24	1 Year - 3 Years	7 Participants 3 Males & 4 Females	Birmingham
29 Feb 2020	Chinese Males	22 - 42	6 Months - 27 Years	7 Males Participants	Glasgow

Figure 1. Focus Groups Distribution Information

	Assumed Name	Gender	Age	Length of Stay in the UK	Occupation	Purpose of Stay in the UK
1	X	Male	43	18 Years	CEO of an IT Company Chinese Restaurant Owner	Study and Work
2	C	Female	35	10 Years	Chief Editor of a Chinese-language Media in the UK	Study, and Married with a Chinese Immigrant
3	F	Male	45	18 Years	Manager of a Chinese Travel Agency	Study and Work
4	D	Male	29	19 Years	Staff in a British Company	Family Immigration
5	ZH	Male	44	22 Years	CEO of a Transnational Chinese Company	Work
6	L	Female	40	4 Years	Manager of a Transnational Chinese Enterprise	Immigration and Work, Married with a British
7	M	Female	30	6 Years	Editor of a Chinese-language Media in the UK	Study and Immigration
8	ZE	Female	28	5 Years	Journalist of a Chinese-language Media in the UK	Study and Work
9	H	Male	52	27 Years	Lawyer	Study and Immigration
10	J	Male	21	1.5 Years	Student	Study

Figure 2. Interviewees' Demographic Information

All the data in this research was collected in the UK from January 2020 to March 2020. COVID-19 had not spread widely in the UK when the researcher conducted data collection, but it had broken out in China, which aroused great attention, arguments, and panic among people around the world. Therefore, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have shaped the findings of this research on the intercultural adaptation of Chinese people in the UK. Since the research reported in this article focuses on the text collected in focus groups and interviews, textual analysis was mainly used in this research. Since the qualitative data from 4 focus groups and 10 interviews was abundant, the researchers used the highly respected

professional qualitative data analysis software - NVivo to assist in data coding during data analysis (Denscombe, 2014). Once the work of transcribing all the recordings to Chinese-language text was finished, the transcription of Chinese-language text data was coded within NVivo, and the responses and opinions of participants were extracted and analysed.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Intercultural Adaptation Difficulties and Coping of Chinese People in the UK

Chinese people who came to the UK at different times encountered different intercultural adaptation challenges; they also show different characteristics and preferences in terms of coping with the intercultural adaptation challenges. In the past, to allay anxiety and to cope with the intercultural adaptation challenges in their daily lives, newly arrived Chinese people in the UK were more likely to seek help from existing Chinese communities (including Chinese friends and Chinese intermediaries) and Chinese-language newspapers in the UK. Nowadays, the internet-based media, especially Chinese-language internet-based media, are the most important tools for Chinese people in the UK to seek help when they encounter problems. According to the analysis of the 306 questionnaires received in this research, 73.9% of participants agreed that Chinese-language internet-based media helps them to overcome loneliness to a large extent, 63.7% of participants said that they would turn to Chinese-language internet-based media when they met with difficulties, while 69.3% of participants think that they could hardly do without Chinese-language internet-based media during their stay in the UK (see the Figure 3 below).

Intercultural adaptation is a difficult process, with most Chinese people in the UK suffering from cultural shock when they first arrive in this new cultural environment. Following the five-stage adaptation model summarised in the literature review, culture shock is the second stage followed by a short period of excitement, then the intercultural newcomer may experience ongoing culture stress while making initial adjustments before progressing towards the adaptation stage and ultimately reaching the integration stage. In reaction to this kind of cultural shock on psychological adaptation, people experience a sense of uncertainty, anxiety, and loneliness (Gudykunst, 1995). This research suggests that this kind of loneliness may lead to Chinese people in the UK seeking emotional support on Chinese-language social media. Interviewee D (2020) who came to the UK 19 years ago with his parents, said he felt out of place and experienced a great sense of loneliness during the first few years after his arrival in the UK. Participants from the Chinese students focus group (2020) also agreed that compared to their lives in China, Chinese student P (2020) from the Chinese students focus group said that she has few friends in the UK and her social circle is narrow, most of time she is alone and spends a great deal of time on Chinese-language social media.

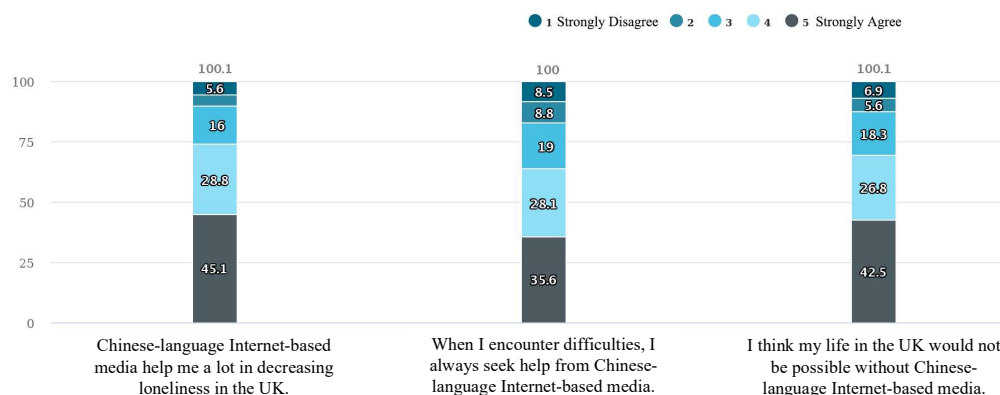


Figure 3. How do Chinese people in the UK think about Chinese-language internet-based media in their daily lives?

All the Chinese participants in four focus groups of this research agreed that the language barrier is one of the biggest sociocultural adaptation challenges that they encounter in their processes of intercultural adaptation in the UK, which often leaves them unable to communicate effectively with local people. From the Chinese students focus group (2020), all the participants agreed that they have at times failed to comprehend what they were taught during lectures. Participants from the Chinese workers focus group (2020) also pointed out that language difficulties present big challenges for them. They have to seek out help from the Chinese community or an interpreter when they need to communicate with local British people. Interviewee D (2020) who came to the UK when he was 10 years old thought one of the main reasons that made it difficult to integrate into British life was language barriers caused by his poor English-language skills. Interviewee H (2020) still remembers the first night he arrived at the UK when he watched BBC News. This was his first time watching an English TV programme, and the only word he understood was ‘Goodnight’. Thus, the language barrier is one of the key factors resulting in Chinese people in the UK remaining dependent on Chinese communities and Chinese-language media.

As the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests, our language helps mould our way of thinking, and people speaking different languages will have different thought patterns, different ways of thinking, different language structures and features of using languages (Lucy, 2001; Perlovsky, 2009; Sapir, 1921; 2012). Interviewee H (2020) pointed out that it is hard to change one’s way of thinking, as this is formed in childhood. H speaks both Chinese and English, but he is accustomed to thinking in Chinese (Male interviewee H, 2020). H thinks the British culture is very inclusive, but it is very hard for people who are accustomed to the Chinese way of thinking to fully integrate (Male interviewee H, 2020). Interviewee C (2020) then added that in some respects the Chinese mind works rather differently from the occidental one, and her Chinese style of thinking obstructed her ability to adapt to the local British culture.

Intercultural adaptation difficulties in the sociocultural adaptation of Chinese people in the UK are mirrored in various aspects of cultural differences between the British culture and Chinese culture. Among the ten aspects of cultural differences

offered by Harris et al., (2004), several Chinese participants in this research emphasised that the difference between Chinese culture and British culture with regards to food and dietary habits are important factors that prevent them from adapting to mainstream British society. Interviewee H said he has changed a lot to integrate into British society, but he cannot change his Chinese tastes in food, he cannot go without rice and Chinese soup for a long time (Male interviewee H, 2020). A participant (2020) from the Chinese male focus group said he used Google maps to search for Chinese restaurants and read customer comments carefully before selecting a restaurant when he first arrived at the UK. Participants from the Chinese female focus group (2020) also mentioned that they usually browse restaurant comments on a Chinese-language social media called Xiao Hong Shu. Here they are able to obtain information about Chinese restaurants in their city recommended by other Chinese people in the UK.

Another pinch point for Chinese people in the UK is the difficulty in getting medical treatment. Although the NHS provides many medical services for free, participants from the Chinese workers focus group agreed that it is inconvenient to see a doctor in the UK. In China, they can walk into a hospital to see a doctor at any time they need, but in the UK, they have to make an appointment with their GP first and wait for at least one or two weeks to see a doctor (Chinese worker focus group in London, 2020). This reflects the difference between Chinese culture and the British culture in relation to time management and working habits (Harris et al., 2004). Participants from the Chinese students focus group (2020) also complained about this. Since it is difficult to see a doctor in a timely fashion when they do not feel well, they usually searched their symptoms on Baidu to find how to treat on it or consulted an online doctor through Chinese-language websites regarding medication. They then went to a pharmacy in the UK to buy suitable medicines.

In sum, participants in this research agreed that the internet that includes Chinese-language internet-based media, Chinese communities in the UK, and the British professionals or institutions are the three main approaches by which Chinese people in the UK seek help when they encounter difficulties. Chinese communities in the UK include both the physical and virtual Chinese community. The physical Chinese community refers to all kind of Chinese organisations in the UK who provide support for Chinese people, while the virtual Chinese community includes all the imagined groups of Chinese people in the UK such as Chinese students in the UK and Chinese immigrants in the UK. Although Chinese people in the UK can now find most of the information they need on the internet, they still need other Chinese people to provide help in some cases. However, sometimes Chinese people in the UK may not be able to find other Chinese people who can offer them help. A Chinese student (2020) from the Chinese students focus group said that most of time his Chinese friends in the UK also have difficulty solving the problems that he cannot solve, so he has to ask British local people or professionals for help.

4.2 Intercultural Adaptation of Different Groups of Chinese People in the UK

As described in the literature review section, the culture learning approach regards intercultural adaptation as the process of acquiring the related culture and skills of the host country (Bochner, 1982). This study finds that the process of Chinese people learning the culture and skills of the UK may be impacted by the reasons they chose to come to the UK, the length of time they have lived in the UK, their individual intercultural competences, and their subjective desires. Among these, subjective

desires refer to the intensity of subjective desire that Chinese people in the UK have towards integrating into UK society, such as their personal choices, attitudes to the social norms of the host society, and whether they actively communicate with the local people. The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) posited by Bennett (1986, 1993), divides the reactions to cultural difference of an individual along his or her intercultural adaptation process into six stages, they are: denial, defence, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation, integration. The degree of intercultural adaptation of Chinese people in the UK is also reflected by their different reactions to cultural difference. The following content will further analyse intercultural adaptation differences among Chinese students, Chinese workers, and Chinese immigrants with reference to the qualitative data.

4.2.1 Chinese Students

Chinese students usually stay in the UK for a relatively short period of time; they often live in a relatively closed and fixed social cultural environment such as student accommodation on university campuses. Participants from the Chinese students focus group (2020) agreed that Chinese students like to cluster together in small groups. They find Chinese students in a class and always form a group spontaneously, they will go to class together and sit together, and are unwilling to make active contact with other foreign students in the class or to take the initiative to integrate into British society. To explain this, participants in the Chinese student focus group said that this is because they are not fluent in English and are restricted by culture barriers (Chinese students focus group in Birmingham, 2020). As the analysis in the last section showed, the English-language barrier is one of the biggest challenges faced by Chinese people in their intercultural adaptation process in the UK. A male participant from the Chinese students focus group (2020) said that he is unable to integrate into the British society due to his lack of fluency in the English language; sometimes he wants to communicate with the British people and other foreign people in the UK, but he is not confident about using English to talk with them smoothly and happily.

Apart from language skills, individual personality and preference also have a great influence on the intercultural adaptation of an individual. Participants from the Chinese students focus group also said that there are a lot of Chinese students in their classes or around them who think it is not necessary for them to integrate into the life with foreigners (Chinese students focus group in Birmingham, 2020). A participant from the Chinese students focus group (2020) added, if a Chinese student has a Chinese partner or good Chinese friends in the UK, they might not want to go to a foreigners' party, and he thought this is the main reason why they do not integrate into local society in the UK. Another participant from the Chinese students focus group (2020) said he did not find the British lifestyle attractive to him. He shares few common interests and habits with the British people, and is not interested in the musical entertainment that is provided in bars every day.

Thus, this study suggests that Chinese students in the UK show the characteristic of adaptation but not integration according to the scale of intercultural adaptation. The above evidence shows that Chinese students tend to stay with people from a similar culture to theirs, and shy away from people from other cultures. According to the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993), this suggests Chinese students in the UK may be in the stage of denial, defence, minimisation, acceptance, or even adaptation, but have not attained the stage of integration. As a female Chinese student L from the Chinese female focus group said,

“The adaptation we feel is just a kind of habit, it is not a real integration” (L from the Chinese female focus group in Edinburgh, 2020).

4.2.2 Chinese Workers

Similarly with Chinese students, the feature of ‘adaptation but not integration’ is evident for Chinese workers as well. One of the reasons that Chinese students fail to integrate into the society of the UK is their short period of their stay in the UK, while the major limiting factor of some Chinese workers who have lived in the UK for more than twenty years and still fail to integrate into the society of the UK, is the limitation of their intercultural competencies. Similarly to some of the Chinese students mentioned above, though many Chinese workers stay in the UK for long periods, they are still unable to communicate effectively with the local British people. As participants from the Chinese workers focus group (2020) described, language is one of the major obstacles they must overcome during their intercultural adaptation process. These Chinese workers often live in Chinese communities in the UK all the year round; apart from the necessity to work and move around, they rarely have opportunity to make contact with other races in the UK.

Moreover, participants from the Chinese workers focus group (2020) also said that the living habits that they developed in China decades earlier are unlikely to change. As a Chinese participant from the Chinese workers focus group said, “I come from Chongqing, I feel that life should have hot pot and mah-jong. In any case, it is very difficult for me to integrate into the British society.” (Chinese workers focus group in London, 2020). All the same, Chinese workers in this research were relatively satisfied with their current lives in the UK. They are not fully integrated into the British society, cluster together in Chinese communities, use Chinese-language internet-based media to contact their Chinese friends, try to adapt their behaviours and lifestyles to the new cultural norms of the host society. This reflects that Chinese workers in the UK are at the intercultural communication and sensitivity stage from defence, minimisation, to acceptance; they may remain at the stage of acceptance forever and never reach the stage of integration.

4.2.3 Chinese Immigrants

According to the analysis of the interview data, Chinese immigrants seem to generally enjoy their intercultural lives, and the degree of their integration into UK society is related to the length of time they stay in the UK. Some interviewees in this research who are new Chinese immigrants and have lived in the UK for less than ten years are still in the process of intercultural adaptation, they enjoy their current lives and have high expectations for their future lives in the UK. Interviewee L (2020) emigrated with her family to the UK five years ago, but said she has not adapted to the society of the UK yet. L (2020) said she does not mix with Chinese people who came to the UK decades ago, and she feels quite satisfied with her present life in the UK. Interviewee M (2020) who has lived in the UK for 6 years also said she has not integrated into UK society to any great extent. She said she has not really been rooted in one place since she was a child, so she does not think it is necessary for her to integrate into UK society (Female interviewee M, 2020).

It is extremely difficult for Chinese who grew up in China to achieve both psychological and sociocultural adaptation in the UK in the short term. Interviewee ZE (2020) who has lived in the UK for five years said that she has adapted to the life

as a Chinese person in the UK, but does not really fit in with British society. Interviewee C (2020) who has lived in the UK for 10 years emphasised the importance of length of time and subjective desires in the process of intercultural adaptation; that is, the length of time Chinese people have been living in the UK, and whether they choose to get out of the comfort zone of their Chinese expat communities and actively integrate into the local communities in the UK. C (2020) said she felt that she has adapted, but not fully integrated. She came to the UK when she was twenty years old, and she has been living here for ten years (Female interviewee C, 2020). C (2020) thought because the length of time she lived in China is longer than the time she has lived in the UK, her mindset and lifestyle are still more like a Chinese person. Thus, to better ingratiate into the UK society, C (2020) decided to make more British friends and understand their mindset in order to get along with them.

Intercultural adaptation is a long and complicated process, and culture shock appears to be greatest in the early stages of arrival in the new environment and decreases over time (Ward & Kennedy, 1996). For Chinese immigrants who have lived in the UK for around twenty years or longer, the UK is not only their adoptive country, but now feels like their real home. Most of these Chinese immigrants have completed the process of intercultural adaptation and are at the intercultural communication and sensitivity stage of integration. Chinese immigrants at this stage accepted their identities are not constructed on a single culture; they integrate into the British culture naturally and are able to shift effortlessly between these two cultures (Bennett, 1993). Interviewee H who has lived in the UK for 27 years said, “Relatively speaking, I should be adapted. I can tolerate the British food, and I sent my children to Eton College.” (Male interviewee H, 2020). Interviewee ZH (2020) who has lived in the UK for 22 years said, he not only adapted to life in the UK but is also very fond of his life here. Interviewee F (2020) and Interviewee X who have lived in the UK for eighteen years also said that they have completely adjusted to their lives in the UK. Interviewee X (2020) added that now he has adapted to the lifestyle and culture of the UK, he may feel a cultural shock if he returns to China, and there will be some differences that would be difficult to adapt to.

In contrast, some deep-seated habits, and attitudes of Chinese people in the UK are hard to change. For example, interviewee F (2020) said he and his family still celebrate traditional Chinese festivals every year although he has been settled in the UK for 18 years. Moreover, a participant from the Chinese workers focus group who has worked in the UK for more than twenty years said, “I will never really integrate into the UK no matter how long it has been. I cannot communicate with English people. I have black hair and yellow skin, obviously I am a Chinese.” (Chinese workers focus group in London, 2020). Thus, the intercultural adaptation process of Chinese people in the UK is affected by many complicated factors, the length that Chinese people have lived in the UK may impact the intercultural adaptation degree of them, but it cannot directly determine the degree to which Chinese people integrate into the British society. Likewise, the future plans of Chinese immigrants in the UK will also impact on their willingness to integrate into the UK society. This point will be further discussed in the conclusion.

5. Conclusion

This research regards intercultural adaptation as the adjustment of an individual's psychology and behaviour to changes in their cultural environment and shows

multiple results influenced by various individual and social factors. This study discusses the intercultural adaptation process of Chinese people in the UK from the perspective of how they deal with culture shock and culture stress in the new host society, that is, coping with the intercultural adaptation and cultural education challenges in the British society. The biggest sociocultural adaptation difficulty encountered by Chinese people in the UK during the process of intercultural adaptation appears to be the English-language barrier. Due to limitations in their English-language abilities, Chinese people in the UK often fail to communicate efficiently with the British local people. Language helps to shape our mode of thinking (Perlovsky, 2009), which means the ways of thinking of Chinese people take a long time to change. Other challenges mentioned by Chinese people in the UK include dietary habits, education mode, religion, and so on. In the past, when trying to deal with these challenges, Chinese people in the UK used to turn to Chinese communities and Chinese-language newspapers for assistance. Nowadays, they usually seek help on the Internet from sources that include Chinese-language internet-based media, physical and virtual Chinese communities in the UK, and British professionals or institutions.

To discuss the intercultural adaptation of different groups of Chinese people in the UK, this research analysed different features of the intercultural adaptation process of Chinese students, Chinese workers, and Chinese immigrants. This study finds that most Chinese students in the UK show the characteristic of adaptation but not integration. Chinese students usually stay in the UK for a relatively short period and tend to cluster together. Affected by the language barrier, their personality and individual preferences, Chinese students often say they are getting used to their lives in the UK; however, this research suggests that this is a kind of temporary adaptation, which is in the intercultural adaptation stage of defence, minimization, acceptance, or adaptation, but not integration (Bennett, 1993). Similarly, Chinese workers also show the feature of 'adaptation but not integration'. Some Chinese workers who have lived in the UK for 10 years or even decades have failed to reach the integration stage of intercultural adaptation in the British society due to the language barrier and their fixed Chinese lifestyle. By contrast, the intercultural adaptation of Chinese immigrants depended on the length of time they had lived in the UK and their subjective wishes. This research suggests that Chinese immigrants who have lived in the UK less than 10 years seem to be transitioning from acceptance, adaptation, to integration. Most Chinese immigrants who have lived in the UK for around twenty years have reached the stage of integration; their identity is now constructed on both British and Chinese culture and their behaviours can shift effortlessly between the cultures to adapt to the cultural norms of these two cultures (Bennett, 1993). Moreover, the researcher attempted to investigate the variances in intercultural adaptation among different genders of Chinese individuals in the UK through two focus groups. However, the research did not uncover the anticipated significant differences in intercultural adaptation between genders among Chinese individuals in the UK.

This paper contributes to a new understanding of the existing circumstances of intercultural adaptation of different groups of Chinese people in the UK, and further suggests Chinese students, Chinese workers, and Chinese immigrants are in different stages of intercultural adaptation. As sojourners, most of the Chinese students experienced the intercultural adaptation stages of honeymoon, culture shock, and reached an initial adjustment stage. Limited by their English-language proficiency, although some Chinese workers have lived in the UK for decades, their intercultural

adaptation is remaining at the adaptation stage and failed to reach the integration stage. By contrast, Chinese immigrants expect to integrate into the British society, and finally some of them reached the adaptation stage after decades of diaspora lives in the UK and showing the trend of integration.

Some of the previous research that has measured the acculturation of intercultural individuals has asked participants to provide information about their language skills (Organista, et, al., 2010). A limitation of this research project is that it does not collect specific information about the level of participants' English-language proficiency which may have skewed some of the relevant findings. Thus, the researcher suggests that data on English-language proficiency should be collected from participants as an important reference point for future research. Similarly, the length of stay in the host society can be used as a reference of categorization to subdivide different groups of Chinese people in the UK. This research set out to explore the differences in intercultural adaptation between Chinese males and females by setting up two control groups as part of the focus group research but failed to find significant differences between the genders. Future research should further explore the differences in intercultural adaptation between the genders.

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