

# Chapter 1. Introduction

---

This thesis reports on a 5-year longitudinal study which traces the learning journeys of adult Australians who are long-term learners of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language. Their engagement with learning Chinese extends into a period of rapid change in two very relevant areas: first in the global profile of China and the expansion of the field of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign or additional language (CFL),<sup>1</sup> and secondly in terms of the emergence of new learning environments afforded by developments in accessible technologies for learning and communication. Since interest in the study of Chinese as a foreign language is booming, it is timely to try to find out more about, and from, people who have been learning it: how they go about it, what settings and modes of study they choose and how they use their growing language skills. The learners with whom this enquiry is concerned have all undertaken university-based study of Chinese, but they fall outside of the mainstream of tertiary study on several dimensions. First, they have undertaken all or most of their university study by distance learning, and secondly, they are adult learners who have not proceeded directly from secondary school to tertiary study, but are studying at a later stage of life. (As will become clear, these two features are not unrelated.) The learning modes they engage in encompass a variety of levels of formality and informality. Whereas existing studies on learning Chinese (as opposed to teaching it) mainly address one particular stage of study or mode of delivery, such as university first year students, or students participating in an in-country sojourn, this enquiry is different in that its focus is on learners as they traverse different stages or contexts of learning. I am as interested in periods of informal learning (or even of no apparent learning) as I am in periods of formal study. I enquire how learners create or chart their individual paths, in what ways they exercise agency and what kind of discourses affect their choices.

Each person creates and follows a unique language learning trajectory. The trajectory of each learner in this study includes a period of distance language education, as just described. However, that is not the full story. As Cynthia White (2003) observes, “people generally learn languages through a mixed means learning route, including teach-yourself courses, interactions with native speakers, some classroom-based learning, and accessing target language sources on the web. In other words, the distance course is likely to be only one learning context

---

<sup>1</sup> As a generic term, I prefer ‘additional language’; but in this thesis my focus is largely upon people for whom it genuinely is a ‘foreign’ language.

among many in the experience (past, current, and future) of learners” (p. 205). Similarly Kennett (2003), in her work on biographies of Australians learning Japanese, looks at language learning as an ongoing pursuit in the lives of long-term learners, noting the need for “research that tracks learners to informal learning environments” and for “recognition that learners will experience various different formal and informal learning situations over their life trajectories and educational careers” (p. 77). This study is concerned with individual efforts to learn or use Chinese, as well as institutionally situated ones. It adopts a longitudinal perspective in order to reach a better understanding of the interweaving by individual learners of different episodes, modes and contexts of learning over a period of several years, and of their negotiation of transitions between modes and contexts. As such it situates itself within the qualitative research tradition.

Qualitative research is based on the key philosophical assumption that reality is constructed by individuals in interaction with their social worlds, and therefore “there are many ‘realities’ rather than the one, observable, measurable reality which is key to research based in the positivist paradigm” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 97). Thus qualitative research starts from a question to be explored, rather than a hypothesis to be proved. Taking an emic, i.e. participant-relevant, view of phenomena, it aims to represent diversity rather than to make generalisations. The basic aim of this type of research is “to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcome or the product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 98). In fields such as adult education, distance education, and language learning, an understanding of the experiences of participants can contribute to the improvement of practice.

Researcher subjectivity is understood within qualitative research orientations to be something to be clarified and questioned as an integral part of the research process. The researcher position can shape the research activity and findings; and, in a process of mutual influence, the research activity can “sometimes profoundly affect the researcher’s sense of the world and themselves” (Canagarajah, 1996, p. 324). To set the scene for continuing reflection on my own situation through the thesis, I briefly introduce my story here. As a native speaker of English with an affinity for languages, I was attracted by the challenge of Chinese and began learning Mandarin as an undergraduate in England; I then spent several years studying in China in the late 1970s, an experience which was intensely challenging and involving. I consider that I have never stopped being a learner of Chinese since then. After that I began to teach the language as a keen and idealistic young university lecturer in the UK. Over the next three decades I would continue to teach Mandarin in the UK (with an interlude of TESOL in China) and then Australia, in a variety of modes and settings and to many different types of

learner group, with a growing focus on curriculum development for distance learning of Chinese, incorporating new technology. I became increasingly aware of the persistence of the people I was encountering who were progressing with the difficult task of learning Chinese by distance education while leading lives already full of their fair share of challenge and complexity. Talking with learners and reflecting with them about our different experiences of learning Chinese nurtured the seed of curiosity which would germinate into this research project.

This enquiry is positioned in the context of the rapidly growing trend in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) towards qualitative research which can provide a holistically oriented description of the experience of the learner, taking social, affective and conceptual aspects into account. It subscribes to the view that people who learn a language (in this case, adult Australians learning Chinese as an additional language) are “socially situated participants who operate with varying degrees of licensed choice in particular settings, and are constrained individually and in various ways by structuring of power, by particular distributions of knowledge, and by their own individual investments of energy and commitment” (Candlin, 2001, p. xvi).

Among those who argue for a more socially sensitive approach to research which would enrich our understanding of the language learning process is Block (2003). He notes an increase in research which takes as its data learners’ accounts of their language learning experiences, and observes that this represents a shift from seeing outcomes of encounters with languages only in linguistic or metacognitive terms, to seeing them in socio-historical terms. Similarly, in a recent overview of developments in the TESOL field over the last 15 years, the necessity is highlighted “to orient ourselves to our learners in more specific ways, taking into account their diverse learning contexts and needs” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 14). An indicator of the growth of this research orientation is also to be found in a sample of the titles of recently published important collections of work taking autobiographical or narrative approaches to research into learners’ stories and learners’ experiences of language study: *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research* (Breen, 2001c); *Portraits of the L2 User* (Cook, 2002b); *Beliefs about SLA: New Research Approaches* (Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003); *Learners’ Stories: Difference and Diversity in Language Learning* (Benson & Nunan, 2005); and *Narratives of Learning and Teaching EFL* (Kalaja, Menezes, & Barcelos, 2008).

From a different perspective, the value of longitudinal approaches is emphasised in work by Ortega, Byrnes and others which proposes, as a fruitful new area of research, the longitudinal study of L2 (second language) development and of the development of advanced L2 capacities (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008; Ortega & Iberri-Shea, 2005). The focus of this thesis is on learners

and their experiences of learning and using Chinese, rather than on particular features of the language and proficiency development; however in this regard the capacity of longitudinal research to allow for the recognition of dynamism and change and mutual influence is very important. Therefore this enquiry will draw upon both life history and longitudinal methods to create a rich description of the dynamics of the journeys of long-term learners of Chinese from a holistic perspective. The focus is on the concept of the learning journey and how to describe, analyse and interpret it, rather than on tracing the development of any particular feature across time.

This enquiry intersects with many different fields and styles of research and draws on various bodies of scholarship. In its substantive research focus it makes connections with adult learning, Chinese pedagogy, and themes such as emotion and desire, imagined community and future selves, learner autonomy and learning ‘beyond’ the classroom. In its methodological focus it calls upon qualitative longitudinal research, narrative, case study, and metaphor; and in terms of theoretical interests it invokes time, ecological perspectives, agency and identity, and complexity.

Complexity theory and related orientations have been emerging recently in many fields including the social sciences (Byrne, 2005), education (Mason, 2008b) and applied linguistics (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) as an approach to the description and explanation of real-world phenomena which can encompass fluidity and change, process, interaction and interconnection. Since it will be a theme in the thesis, but is a relatively new orientation for this type of research, I devote the next few paragraphs to introducing it briefly.

Unsurprisingly, it is hard to sum up complexity theory in a sentence, but Keith Richards’ (2003, p. 255) modest claim to a “brief and brutal characterisation of a beautiful theory” nicely captures some of its essence:

Complexity Theory is anything but simple. It predicts that nothing is entirely predictable, and that though the pattern of complex systems may exert a very powerful influence and be susceptible to identification, it is never *quite* clear and can never *quite* be pinned down. Complex systems are the outcome of local actions and perturbations interacting with other local systems [...]. There is a bigger pattern, but it’s a messy one.

While complexity theory originated in mathematics and the sciences, it now represents a growing body of transdisciplinary knowledge, and a paradigmatic or strategic orientation (Hodge, 2007; Kuhn, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). As Kuhn (2007, p. 163) explains, the ontology and epistemology of complexity are far removed from scientific rationalism, and it offers new metaphors and vocabulary not bound to linearity, dualism or certainty, for explaining and understanding social phenomena. Complexity theory proposes a

“radical relational” non-linear view of the world, in which time is no longer a parameter, but “part of the organising forces” (Kuhn, 2007, p. 159), and human knowing emerges out of complex interrelatedness. In this sense a complexity perspective sits easily with constructivist and interpretivist orientations to qualitative enquiry, which view meaning as being constructed through social interactions (p. 170).

I have chosen to broach the topic of complexity up front in this introduction, as a point of reference for what follows, but there is much more to be told. The thesis will draw upon complexity as a metaphor, rather than aiming to create a fully elaborated theoretical application. Like a fugue, the complexity theme will thread through the other melodies of this thesis, sometimes silent, sometimes referenced obliquely, and at times reappearing to be reprised and developed.

In the last part of this introduction I will outline the substantive chapters which follow. In order to ground the reader in the real lived experience which is the focus of this enquiry, I begin with a learner’s story, that of Stella. Then, the background to the research project, and to the situation of Chinese learning in Australia, is described in Chapter 2. The learner is represented as travelling across a landscape of features, possibilities and choices. The salient features of Mandarin for English-speaking learners constitute one set of features. The rapidly changing range of possibilities available for the study of Chinese, described in terms of both the global and the local, constitute another. Significant dimensions along which learning situations can vary are identified: the spatial dimension involves issues of distance and contiguity between learners, educators, and Chinese linguistic environments and resources; and the learning modality dimension deals with scales of structure, informality and locus of control. The temporal dimension affords a view of some of the multiple timescales which are in operation, including life stage, stage of learning and pace of learning. After setting the scene in this way it is then possible to delineate the research area and the principal broad research questions. There is also sufficient background to make a first investigation of the possible ‘fit’ between the research area and a complexivist framework at the end of Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 selects and reviews scholarly work of relevance to this enquiry, taking as its guiding and organising principle the concept of the long view of learning, and moving from the general to the specific. First, the idea of trajectories as developed in lifecourse research is presented; then I turn to adult education to consider theoretical orientations to learning in adulthood, lifelong learning, and the conceptualisations of the learning trajectory and the learning career. Settling to a focus on language, I compare features of longitudinal research into language learning with life history and narrative research. Some key themes and issues in learner-focussed studies are presented, including identity, agency, emotion and motivation. I investigate research into independent and self-directed learning beyond the

classroom, and present in detail a small number of studies of long-term language learning experience, and of learners of Chinese, which are of particular interest or relevance to this enquiry.

As an interlude between Chapters 3 and 4, another participant story is presented, that of Michelle.

The fourth chapter is concerned with methodology and design. It discusses the interrelation between conceptual framework and choice of methodology, and then describes the tiered research design, which follows a multi-layered longitudinal qualitative case study format, and also incorporates a narrative component. I explain the analytic procedures followed and the use of visuals to assist in representing and interpreting temporal concepts, and end with some observations of issues of method arising from the longitudinal approach.

The three following chapters present the data findings in stages. Chapter 5 describes in four phases aspects of the learning trajectories of the broader group of participants, beginning with a snapshot (including retrospective self-report data) of 41 learners surveyed in 2005. The snapshot is followed by the updated responses of 26 of that group who provided further material 4–5 years later, to give a view of progression. A visual method of representing the chronologies of their learning is devised and used to assist description and analysis (and its strengths and limitations are assessed). The third part considers retrospection, analysing what can be found when participants look back over their own timelines. The final section is about anticipation, as the learners look ahead and reflect upon various aspects of their plans to continue learning and using Chinese. Some interesting observations can be made when comparing anticipation and retrospection at different stages of the same individual's timeline.

Chapter 6 presents an original method devised specifically for this enquiry, which emerged from the data as a way of describing and categorising learners' patterns of engagement with a range of Chinese learning activities over time. This method identifies three new concepts for this task: 'intentional direction', and 'dynamic activity patterns' and 'dynamic contours of engagement'. It allows for the identification of instances of dynamic concepts such as emergence, disappearance, gathering frequency and diminishing frequency.

Chapter 7 represents a shift to the life history perspective. For the core group of seven people who were followed at greater frequency and in greater depth over the five years from 2005, elaborated graphic timelines of learning were created, and rich and detailed individual narratives were constructed with the participants. A couple of those narratives have been inserted earlier in the thesis, as interludes, to juxtapose a lifelike and personal perspective against the focus on background, theory and method. The rest of the narrative portraits, and the commentaries on each one, are all in Chapter 7.

In Chapter 8 I provide an overview of the themes arising from the narratives against the background of the data presentation and analysis of the previous three chapters.

Chapter 9 summarises the whole study and points out its contribution and limitations, and suggests areas for future research as well as some suggestions for practical outcomes which may be of assistance to learners like those whose learning journeys have been described in this thesis.





## Interlude: Stella's story

---

*I would classify it as a lifetime's ambition: I would like to be able to speak it really, really fluently and really well. I sort of feel I might be half way there.*

*I learn Chinese because I love languages, I love Chinese people, I have a son who speaks very fluent Chinese and I have two little Chinese granddaughters. And I've been to China and like it and would love to see more. — Stella*

Stella<sup>1</sup> was born in South Africa in 1934 and grew up in an extended family in which both Afrikaans and English were spoken. She traces her passion for languages back to her father. She moved to Australia with her husband and three young sons in 1969, and in 1981 when her husband got a job as a school headmaster in a small city in a rather remote part of Australia, the family moved there and established a home on a working farm. Had circumstances been different, teaching English as a second language would have been her chosen career, but conservative values at that time impacted on her choices, and “the [school] Board more or less said to me ‘we don’t expect you to work’ but to be available to host school guests and international visitors”.

Stella's learning journey has four distinct phases. The first one is her early experiences of learning Chinese and first visits to China.

Stella's love of language learning led her to take a diploma in Japanese, and then to enrol in a local evening class in Chinese in 1992. She pursued the course for the best part of a year, but the experience was not altogether positive: first, the class was scheduled from 6-9 in the evening which was tiring and too long; secondly, not all the other class participants were interested in learning Chinese characters, though Stella definitely was because she had already studied Japanese *kanji*; and thirdly, the other learners were of mixed levels of language learning experience and commitment to study, and Stella began to feel rather impatient with the pace of the class. This experience would contribute to her later choice to study Chinese by distance education: “From that brief experience, I have found it very much easier to do distance learning with tapes with authentic Chinese speakers [than to study in a group class]”. *In complexity terms, this can be seen as an instance of initial conditions affecting the subsequent trajectory.*<sup>2</sup>

Apart from that class, one of Stella's first introductions to China and Chinese culture was through a friend of her son's, who became very close to the family: “we had an opportunity to help a little bit

---

<sup>1</sup> All names of participants and their contacts are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Italic font is used for analytical comments in this portrait. The complexity concepts referred to in the comments will be explained in subsequent chapters.

in his education. He was a sort of Chinese son and called us Mum and Dad”. Chinese became “a great interest”.

Following the evening class experience, for 10 years Stella maintained her interest in Chinese informally by engaging in “very fragmented, occasional independent study using text-books and tape” which she characterised as “attempted, but not completed”. She did have some informal lessons with a Chinese native speaker in 1993, but that arrangement ended before long when that tutor left the local area (as happened similarly to other participants in this study Stephanie and Rachel). *This pattern of a first experience of participation in a Chinese class followed by a lengthy period in which interest is maintained in occasional informal activities will also be seen in the timelines of Rachel and Stephanie (and, to a lesser extent, Brenda).*

In 1999 Stella’s older son and his wife went to China where they would live and work in the medical/ social field for six years (in the process learning Mandarin themselves). Hearing their experiences and visiting them on several occasions would be powerful fuel to Stella’s own interest in the language. On one of her visits her son arranged for her to attend some of the introductory Chinese classes which were offered to the employees of his organisation. Having been full of anticipation she came away frustrated. Her experiences of attending the evening class many years earlier in Australia were reinforced: “you listen to everybody else’s mistakes, you are in a group of seven or eight, there is no direct contact between you and the Chinese teacher”. *In complexity terms, this opinion functions as an ‘attractor basin’ in the landscape of her learning journey.*<sup>3</sup>

On her next visit to her son in China, she asked him to arrange a private tutor for the duration of her stay. The tutor, Lina, told Stella: “I am here to show you how to learn, not to teach you the vocabulary”. Stella was very positive about Lina’s approach, finding it “really helpful and quite enlightening”. This was to be the beginning of a long association; on each of her subsequent visits to her son in China Stella would have some private lessons with Lina, and the contact would continue thereafter.

The second phase of Stella’s learning journey takes her from self-guided study to university-based distance learning.

Her growing engagement with Chinese prompted Stella to buy herself a textbook and tapes in 2002, and work through it on her own for about nine months. She completed Part 1 of the book, and felt she “got on well with it”; however she had difficulty fitting in sufficient study time with family and farm chores. Rather than feeling discouraged, she concluded that “the only way was to follow a course where I *had* to do assignments and *had* to follow a work schedule” and therefore in 2003 began a university diploma in Chinese by distance learning. She had already had the experience of distance learning at that particular university when she had taken her Diploma in Education there in the 1970s - “I knew the system and knew that it was a good way of learning”.

---

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2

For the next four years Stella followed the sequence of university language study units. After years of trying to learn on her own, she was pleased to “rely on [the teaching staff] for choice of appropriate materials” and found the materials “motivating and helpful”, and the activities and feedback “language expanding and reinforcing”. She liked the independence it gave her: “It’s not self-learning, because I find the assessments and the guidance from tutors a very, very valuable part. I couldn’t just do it by myself, but distance education has a large part of self-learning, doesn’t it?”. Distance learning was for her a positive choice which suited her learning style in various ways: it allowed her to work at her own pace, rather than feeling held back by others in the class; and it freed her from “having to listen to other people’s mistakes” which had frustrated her in her earlier classroom learning experiences. Instead she felt that in terms of listening and speaking skills she actually preferred to “do the spade work by distance, using a tape from an authentic Chinese speaker, and then fill in when you can with somebody who has the language as their native language”. She did however enjoy connecting with other learners for peer support and to share learning strategies: “the idea of a solitary distance learner linking up with other people in the group and knowing what their difficulties are and how they overcame them, is [...] very helpful”.

*Stella’s perception of working with audio recordings as useful “spadework” to establish foundations on which to build later, stands out in contrast to the opinions voiced by several other participants that distance learning simply cannot adequately develop speaking and listening skills.<sup>4</sup>*

She described her learning style as thorough and slow, helped by high motivation, enjoyment and being prepared to spend a lot of time on her study (two hours daily, and more at assessment times). It was not easy to fit it in with other demands on her time as she needed to participate, and be seen to participate, in farm chores: “There is a slight difficulty in that I do have to organise my studies so it doesn’t impinge too much on my husband” who “at first didn’t take it easily that I had taken on such a time-consuming thing”. Stella strove to minimise the impact of her study on their relationship: “if I can do it when he is away or not there, it’s much better than when I have to say, “I’m going upstairs to study Chinese”, while he is slaving away, probably needing another pair of hands”. She tried studying in the very early morning before her husband was awake so as to avoid any conflict, but often babysitting her grandchildren prevented that, or she was tired. Apart from the formal study, Stella would sometimes watch the Chinese television news and Chinese films, filling several notebooks with new words as she managed to identify them.

She and her husband had two more 3-week visits to her son and his family in China during these years. From the beginning she had occasional conversational exchanges with native speakers of Chinese whom she knew, increasing in frequency and duration as her confidence and proficiency

---

<sup>4</sup> The model of working with audio recordings which the participants in this study have experienced is now rapidly being replaced by models based on the interactive online technologies of web 2 which open up many possibilities of using real-time two way spoken interaction over the internet for language learning. (The adoption of such methods is however dependent on many factors including resources, institutional support and training, staff time and commitment, and curriculum implications.)

increased. By 2005, she felt that she had “just started being able to speak Chinese and I am thrilled about that, I really want to improve it”. Social contact and conversation are frequently mentioned as highlights. For instance, when in China they visited the family of the young man who was a friend and contemporary of her son, and “spoke Chinese with them, and that was wonderful”; when taking her adopted granddaughters to the park she recalls “we were just surrounded by Chinese people asking ‘What are you doing with these babies?’, and because I could make myself understood, it was such a *wonderful* occasion to find myself speaking to Chinese people in the park and we had a lot of conversation”. At home in Australia, social gatherings with family and Chinese friends are recalled as high points. One of Stella’s ideals, articulated in a similar manner in 2005 and again in 2007, involves using Chinese in interaction in her local context: “I’d love to bump into Chinese people who are lost in [her home town], who don’t speak English, and be able to help them, and be able to say what I’d like to say fluently and without hesitation and without mistakes”.

Sometimes Stella found learning a struggle. After her son and his family returned from China to Australia in 2005 she told me: “occasionally, I think, ‘I am 71. I am struggling to learn this language, what am I doing it for?’ You know, it’s going to be hard for me to go to China now that my son is not living there anymore. But those are very fleeting moments, very fleeting moments”. Her determination and passion would soon reassert themselves: “I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t enjoy it so much. It’s the thing I enjoy most”.

In fact Stella would return to China sooner than expected: in late 2006/early 2007 an opportunity arose through the Australian university for her to participate in a 5-week immersion course. By coincidence it was at a university in the same Chinese city where her son and his family had been based, so Stella knew some people there from her previous visits, and in addition to the rigorous schedule of organised class attendance, preparation and homework, she also visited friends (and was thrilled to spend 2 or 3 hours at a time, speaking only Chinese) and she had a weekly two-hour private lesson with the Chinese tutor Lina, to whom she had been introduced by her son on a previous visit. Later she would reflect that the immersion course acted as “a real booster” to her continuing study.

In the third phase Stella learns Chinese from a tutor in China with real-time individual distance tuition over the internet.

The immersion course completed Stella’s university diploma in Chinese. After returning to the farm in Australia in early 2007, a new period in her Mandarin learning journey would begin. While in China, Stella had come to an agreement with Lina (who was now running a private language school and working over the internet) to continue having private individual tuition with her between China and Australia using Skype as the medium of communication.

The arrangement of regular one-on-one two-hour lessons over the internet began in February 2007 and was to continue to mid 2011. They worked slowly through a Chinese textbook doing intensive practice and mainly conducting the lessons in Chinese. The tutor played the major role in planning and organising the activities and requiring regular preparation and homework. Though initially lessons

had been planned as weekly, in fact over the course of the year with holidays and unavoidable absences, they averaged out as roughly bi-weekly. It seemed to Stella that although her rate of advance through the textbook was slower than she expected, the tutorial lessons went into a lot of depth and she was making progress in both reading and speaking and cultural understanding, and had now developed the ability to paraphrase when she didn't know a particular word.

Stella liked Lina's teaching style and felt she was learning a great deal from this tutoring arrangement. There were some difficulties involving the sound quality and, more frustratingly, the quality of the connection and the frequency with which it unexpectedly dropped out. After almost a year of individualised tuition over Skype, Stella was positive about continuing as long as the line quality and sound quality did not deteriorate further (although at times she would "just wish I could just be there and have it face-to-face"; and also she did find it a significant expense.)

Although she hoped to study in China again it could only be when time, home and financial circumstances allowed. There continued to be a delicate balance between Stella's fascination with Chinese study and her feelings of responsibility regarding her contribution to the running of the farm, and her husband's need for her support and attention. This was clearly a sensitive area and Stella only ever referred to it with restraint, tact and humour; but in some way that very restraint was suggestive of contested underlying feelings: "I have to be careful not to overdo the Chinese because I'm very passionate about it and I can spend too much time on it. And it's very important to me not to, you know, put spokes in the wheel [referring to her husband]". Reflecting on a possibility that had arisen for a second month's immersion study in Shanghai at the end of 2007, Stella explained that "it was November, December, I just felt I couldn't really justify spending that on myself, especially at this time when there's so much to do on the farm<sup>5</sup>. I know it would not have been a 'marriage-enhancing' thing! [spoken with an audible twinkle]".

The Skype tutorials and associated study took up most of the time Stella had available for Chinese, but sometimes she would watch Chinese films with only Chinese subtitles, pausing the recording from time to time to read the Chinese captions. During this time she also maintained contact with two Chinese friends in her home area: "I feel reluctant to impose on them but I really wish - ideally I'd love to have an hour's face to face speaking Chinese a week but I don't know how easy that would be... I learn so much from just having a conversation". She would occasionally speak some Chinese with her Chinese-speaking son and daughter-in-law, but the two granddaughters who had been adopted in China resisted using or learning Chinese. She now felt able to follow through on one long-held goal, and planned to contact the new mayor of her town and ask if she could be invited to attend when they had functions for visiting Chinese delegates or business people, "because I think it would be quite nice for visiting Chinese people to know that there are Chinese-speaking non-Chinese people in [her hometown] who are interested".

---

<sup>5</sup> December is early summer in Australia

Unexpectedly, 2008 was a year of upheaval and change in Stella's life. In her own words: "Some major events affected the opportunities and time to practise and study Chinese. These included my tutor having a baby, the illness and death of my husband, selling my home (the farm) and buying a new one (a house in town), moving house, and travel". By 2009, at the age of 75, for the first time in her life she was living alone. Her Chinese learning was affected by these upheavals, but did not stop: "although I had more or less regular Chinese study, there were gaps when study could not take place". In fact Stella implies that her continuing Chinese study helped her to structure her time: "I need to keep busy - I love to practise Tai Qi, and I go to the gym, and I do Chinese, so those are the three things I do".

The regular weekly two-hour Skype lessons with Lina continued, involving Stella in weekly reading, listening and conversation; and writing once every two or three weeks which would be corrected orally. The quality of the connection and the cost of the lessons, coupled with the fact that the teacher was often late or distracted by her young child, and sometimes had lengthy interruptions during the lesson, left Stella sometimes disconcerted and ambivalent about whether to continue the arrangement, but she persevered because she still found the quality of the teaching very good.

The fourth phase of Stella's learning journey is centred around independent study visits to China.

In August 2009 Stella went to China "specifically to study Chinese" based at her tutor's language school. The trip did not quite live up to her expectations in terms of the arrangements made by Lina, the accommodation provided, and the lack of easy opportunities for practice in the neighbourhood where the school was based. But what she referred to as her "optimistic framework" helped Stella to "see the best in situations". She was pleased that she "managed to take buses and taxis and find my way around using Chinese, and had a day with my daughter-in-law's former helper and her family, speaking only Chinese". *This capacity to use her language ability to get around independently fed her motivation to continue studying. In complexity terms this can be seen as a 'feedback loop'.*

She continued the Skype tutoring on her return, though the ongoing frustrations also continued: "If I could find as good a teacher more locally I would, but this teacher is very good in that she fully understands and imparts both the cultural background and the different structures and basic approaches between English and Chinese. (She's also very expensive!)".

In August 2010 Stella fulfilled a long-held study ambition and undertook a month's homestay and study in Beijing which she had organised independently through a Chinese educational organisation. When I admired her courage and resourcefulness, she responded: "It is a big adventure, it's quite unknown, but I think a lot of how you find it is attitude. I really want to do it". She went hoping to make big progress, with a particular focus on her speaking ability. On her return she reported very positively on the organisation, the arrangements, the homestay conditions and the host family. However, the three hours of daily private tutoring (a tutor came to the house every day for 2 hours in the morning and an hour in the afternoon) which Stella had booked as part of her homestay package was "disappointing". She "didn't feel the teacher was perceptive or proficient"; the selected textbook was very difficult for her and she "absolutely wallowed, or floundered, and felt miserable and stupid". She would make

suggestions for more discussion, and found it helpful when she could “divert the lesson into conversation”, but the teacher seemed to “want to race through”, and although she did not wish to complain, Stella breathed a sigh of relief every time the day's lessons came to an end. Overall though, despite not having made as much progress as she had hoped, she found the whole experience was very positive: “it has, if anything, increased my enthusiasm for learning Mandarin”.

*Stella's comments about the tutoring she received are another illustration of her characteristic clarity and critical understanding of her learning needs, and the kind of teaching which meets those needs, which has been a feature of her Chinese learning journey from the beginning, and has contributed to her agency in fostering favourable conditions for her learning journey to develop.*

She has now had at least 6 short visits to China, three of which were on her own, with an increasing focus on formal study, and “each little trip underlines the importance of immersion”. As she contemplated her 76th birthday she remarked that because travel insurance has become “incredibly expensive” she probably won't be able to go to China again, although she knows her study of Chinese will continue: “It's like being a writer (which I'm not!) and feeling that you *have to* set aside time, whatever else, to study”. She has clearly articulated goals: “I'd like to be able to speak without hesitation and without the many vocabulary gaps which I have now; I'd like to be able to understand very fluent Chinese speakers, which I don't at the moment; and I'd like to be able to read it much better”. She feels she is halfway towards those goals and notes as a turning point the realisation that “I can now speak the language, and when a Chinese friend phones me, I can hold a conversation”.

Postscript: in mid-2011 Stella experienced a serious illness which involved 5½ months of hospitalisation and has left her in a wheelchair. In telling me of this severe occurrence she nonetheless commented with satisfaction how she had been able to use Chinese frequently with the medical staff in the hospital (even, her son reported to her, when unconscious: “the people anxiously standing around my bed said: “she's delirious”. “No she's not”, said Dr 'Wang', “she's speaking Chinese”). She tells me of the Chinese reader she is working through: “no pinyin, and no vocabulary lists; it's very slow, but rewarding”. Though her circumstances have changed dramatically, her enthusiasm is undiminished: “Being in a wheelchair - and I HOPE that within another 12 months I may be able to walk again, though I'm not confident about that, - studying Chinese is something I can do with enjoyment and without being a nuisance to people. I don't spend nearly enough time on it”.

*(Commentary on Stella's story will be introduced in Chapter 7.)*





# Chapter 2. The landscape

---

## Introduction

Learners of Chinese traverse a landscape shaped by many forces including educational, social, political and geographical ones. At any time a journey is affected by climatic influences and weather variability and by shifts in the traveller's own attitudes and mood. Traveller and landscape are in dynamic relation: the learner leaves her trace as she passes through the landscape, and the landscape has an effect upon the traveller and the shape of the journey. Each learner of Chinese, at any stage of their<sup>1</sup> learning, represents the momentary coming together of many different influences. Learners enter the landscape by different routes and head for a variety of destinations. Each learner's experience represents a unique combination of personal and external factors.

The aim of this thesis is to create a rich representation of the journeys of a group of learners of Chinese who share some travel orientations, and are highly distinctive in others. In this chapter I set the scene. I will first sketch out some of the forces shaping the landscape of learning Chinese for Australian learners, mindful of the needs of readers who may not be familiar with the Australian context. The goal is to provide general background information to help contextualise the research, and to provide an overview of the map and the main topographical features.

As the chapter proceeds, I will point out some of the areas of curiosity which led me to “wondering” (Somerville, 2007),<sup>2</sup> and which would contribute to the emergence and delineation of this research area.

I have chosen to use the landscape metaphor as an heuristic device in this chapter and indeed throughout the thesis for several reasons. I was already using an associated metaphor, having conceptualised ‘learning journeys’ as my research focus quite early on. To describe development over time in terms of travel through physical space is a rhetorical device with which most readers are familiar in Anglophone culture, and the learning journey metaphor has some conceptual reality or “phenomenological validity” (Dörnyei, 2010) for learners. It lends itself easily to extension by shifting focus to the landscape through which the traveller moves. In addition, the metaphor of landscape and topography is used in complexity theory,

---

<sup>1</sup> Gender neutral pronoun usage and alternation between generic feminine and masculine are employed in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> In her article exploring a methodology of postmodern emergence, Somerville (2007, p. 228) argues for the value of adopting a stance of wondering, described as: “opening the mind, expansion, seeking to know the unknown, being uncertain; not proving, but wondering”.

and was the one that I have found most useful for gaining an understanding of complexity concepts. A system is pictured as traversing a landscape of possible state spaces, leaving behind it a trace of its trajectory. Particular modes or behaviours that the system ‘prefers’ are visualised as ‘attractor basins’ in the landscape into which the system may slide, or settle for a while. Less settled states are conceived of as hills or ridges in the landscape. The metaphor links the subject matter of the enquiry and the conceptual framework adopted. As this thesis evolves there will be further discussion, and some convergence in the two uses of the metaphor.

## 2.1 The linguistic terrain: prominent features of the Chinese language for learners

In learning Chinese, what is it that learners are engaging with? To set the scene for what follows, I offer a sketch of some of the aspects of Chinese that are particularly salient for those involved in learning it and in teaching it, and that tend to be invoked as significant to various stages of the pedagogical journey. The perspective taken is largely in relation to the English-speaking learner, and the focus will initially be on descriptive and formal linguistic features, subsequently moving on to evolving contexts for learning and using Chinese.

‘Chinese’ corresponds to the term 汉语 *hànyǔ* which refers to the language of the Han race; in other words, the language of the ethnic Chinese originating within China. There are many different varieties of Chinese, generally classified into 7 principal geographically defined dialect areas. These dialects differ substantially from each other, particularly in pronunciation (and to some extent in their lexis and grammar). In terms of the phonology, some dialects differ to the point of being mutually unintelligible (Mandarin and Cantonese fall into this category). However the ideographic writing system, in which each symbol represents primarily a meaning rather than a sound, (or, in linguistic terms, is based on semantics rather than phonemics) is shared between all the dialects and is one of the forces which unifies the dialects into a common linguistic identity (other unifying forces are culture, history and ethnicity). Within each dialect area there is a wide variety of local variants.

Among the dialects the one with the widest geographical coverage and the greatest number of native speakers within China is the northern dialect group. Over the centuries this northern dialect became the language of prestige used for spoken communication among imperial officials throughout China. The English name for this variety, ‘Mandarin’, reflects the fact that this was the language of the civil service Mandarins. When a unified language policy was introduced in China in the early twentieth century the northern dialect was chosen as the basis of the official spoken language of China, and after the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949 it became known as 普通话 *pǔtōnghuà* meaning ‘common speech’, also sometimes referred to as Modern Standard Chinese (MSC). The northern dialect is also the basis of the

official Chinese language in other Chinese-speaking countries, but different terms are used to avoid perceived socialist overtones of *pǔtōnghuà*: in Taiwan, it is called 国语 *guóyǔ* (national language), and in Singapore, 华语 *huáyǔ* (another term for Chinese language). In English, ‘Mandarin’ remains the most widely used term. In the west, in the vast majority of cases, learning Chinese as a foreign language implies learning Mandarin, and opportunities for formal study of other dialects or varieties of Chinese are limited. The standard is well defined and highly valued; however non-standard phonology is very commonly encountered in China and is a source of difficulty for learners.

In this thesis I will use the words Mandarin or Putonghua interchangeably to refer to the northern Chinese standard; I will use the term ‘the Chinese language’ or ‘Hanyu’ when it is not necessary to distinguish a particular dialect or variety.

Spoken Mandarin uses four distinct tones to distinguish the meaning of words: this concept, unfamiliar to English speakers, requires intense ear-training and practice; the rest of the sound system, however, is fairly simple to learn. Syllable structure is simple and there are few consonant clusters, but there is a high incidence of homophony in the lexis, usually disambiguated by context, which beginning learners find difficult until they grasp the fact that the written symbols corresponding to the homophonous words or morphemes are distinct. Chinese grammar is elegant and logical, relying strongly on context and the position of elements in the sentence. Since it does not have an inflectional morphology, it is ‘easier’ than French and German in its absence of irregular verbs or formal expression of case, tense, number or gender; however, the aspect marking system, and the use of numeral classifiers are important organising concepts which take some time to master. Where vocabulary learning is concerned, Chinese words are quite short and simple to memorise. At first the lack of any shared or cognate elements with Latin-based or Germanic languages causes difficulty, but after a certain stage learners start to understand how basic words and elements are combined and recombined to create more complex meanings. Memory load is high, however, when it comes to the Chinese writing system, in which each symbol or character does not primarily represent an individual sound, but rather is a meaning-bearing unit generally corresponding to a morpheme (of syllable length). Whereas in a language that uses the Roman alphabet learners can read and pronounce unfamiliar words even if they do not understand them, in the first year or so of learning Chinese it is necessary to have previously learned or encountered a written character before one can pronounce it. To achieve basic literacy levels in Chinese, recognition of several thousand characters is required. Norman (1988) estimates 3–4000 for “functional literacy” and other estimates for basic literacy range from 2000 characters upwards. The workload and available study time of most typical Australian university subjects at beginners and elementary level limits the numbers of characters that students can be expected to learn in a semester, when combined with the ongoing language work of developing

of communicative, grammatical, lexical and intercultural competence. The journey towards ‘basic levels’ of literacy in Chinese therefore takes over two years of study at the pace of most Australian university courses. According to the USA Foreign Service Institute (FSI), Mandarin falls into the category of “Languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers”, and it is estimated to require 2200 class hours and as many out of class, including a full year of in-country study, to reach their “General Professional” level of proficiency in speaking and reading. By comparison, French and German are estimated to require 600 class hours to reach a comparable level (*Effective Language Learning* 2011). In the early years of formal study, therefore, learning Chinese differs from learning European languages, or other languages with alphabetic scripts (in which unfamiliar words can at least be vocalised), in that there is necessarily a high degree of reliance on carefully sequenced, user-friendly materials and expert guidance to navigate through the multiple tasks and language contexts which face the learner.

The acquisition of the writing system is complicated by the fact that for historical and socio-political reasons two sets of Chinese characters have evolved. The traditional or full-form characters (繁体字 *fántǐzì*) were used in China prior to the establishment of the People’s Republic, and have continued to be used in Taiwan, Hong Kong and many communities in the Chinese diaspora, as well as for the study of Classical Chinese. They are considered harder to write but easier to recognise than simplified characters.<sup>3</sup> Simplified characters (简化字 *jiǎnhuàzì* or 简体字 *jiǎntǐzì*) have been used in China since the 1950s as the officially sanctioned writing system, and are also used in Singapore. Teaching materials produced in China for teaching Chinese to foreigners use mainly simplified characters, with the traditional versions sometimes listed in supplementary material. Teaching texts originating in the USA have a greater tendency to use traditional characters or both forms in parallel, while those coming from Taiwan tend to use only traditional characters.

The most widely used alphabetic transliteration system for Mandarin is 汉语拼音 *hànyǔ pīnyīn* (*pinyin* literally means ‘spell sound’) which was developed in mainland China and is also used in Singapore. It is now used for pedagogical purposes including teaching literacy and pronunciation of the standard Putonghua in primary and pre-primary education throughout China, and to speakers of non-Mandarin dialects, as well as in annotating pronunciation in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. In Taiwan a semi-syllabic sound notation system of 41 symbols derived from Chinese characters, known as 注音符号 *zhùyīn fúhào*, (*chu-yin*, or colloquially as *bopomofo*) is used. Some phrasebooks, and courses in Chinese for travellers use only pinyin (and no characters); most formal learning requires the learning of characters to different degrees, although there is some debate about the pace

---

<sup>3</sup> Debate among Chinese scholars and in the media about the relative merits and cultural values of traditional and simplified characters is ongoing.

introduction of characters at beginning levels (Liu & Lo Bianco, 2007). At intermediate levels and above it is largely the case that pinyin is only used for noting pronunciation of new items in vocabulary lists. The high occurrence of homophony mentioned above means that as a learner's vocabulary grows, the learner begins to recognise the value of referring to the written character to disambiguate potentially ambiguous usages.<sup>4</sup>

Stylistic, syntactic and discourse features mean that interacting with text at more advanced levels poses significant challenges to learners. As learners reach the stage of tackling longer written texts and the written style of newspaper reports and expository text, they encounter sentences of considerable length and complex structure often with several levels of embedding. Lengthy relative clauses, which in Chinese precede their head noun, cause learners, with an English-speaking background, significant difficulties for a while in such contexts. The paratactic nature of Chinese, in which the relationship between clauses is often not overtly marked, poses a challenge for learners who are more familiar with hypotactic languages such as English in which grammatical relationships are marked by connecting words.

Stylistic and lexical differences between registers are pronounced; in particular, the formal written style 文言 *wényán* draws to a significant extent on Classical Chinese which is markedly different to everyday language. Therefore it frequently enters the curriculum only in later years of study.

The preceding sketch has aimed to provide a simple delineation of some of the concepts, terminology and issues which present themselves to learners of Chinese. So far, it has focussed on aspects of the language system itself; but of course there is far more to becoming an advanced user of a language than gaining proficiency in the system of linguistic elements. One of the main challenges in teaching and learning any second language in an institutional context remains the variety and unpredictability of the way it will be used outside of that context, the “tension between the inherent stability sought through the exercise of curriculum, methodologies, and teaching practices and the turbulence of how these languages function in the world” (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008, p. 32). In the case of Mandarin Chinese, the extent to which the language is used, represented, and taught in the global landscape and in Australia is undergoing rapid and significant shifts and changes, and this will be the subject of the following section.

## 2.2 Shifting contours: developing options for learning Chinese as a Foreign Language

With China's increasing prominence in world affairs and its economic success, the profile of Chinese language, and of the study and use of Mandarin as a second, foreign or additional

---

<sup>4</sup> Something akin to “I meant ‘2’, not ‘too’”; or “his surname's Pane – spelt like the window, not the headache”.

language is rising. Not only is Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) being promoted from China across the world, but also interest is rising within many countries outside of China where changing patterns of population and economy lead to increased exposure to Chinese as a spoken and written language, and thereby to expanding perceptions of Mandarin as a language which is possible and useful to learn. This growth seeds and is seeded by burgeoning private and public initiatives for Chinese teaching and learning. The following sections will examine these two currents in turn, moving in progressively from a global to a local focus.

### 2.2.1 Chinese government strategies to promote Chinese learning worldwide

The teaching and learning of Chinese is undergoing a massive expansion as the Chinese government promotes the learning of Chinese throughout the world. This can be seen as an aspect of China's adoption of a soft power strategy (Nye, 2004) in its international relations. The means adopted by China to implement soft power have been classified into two groups, comprising the tools of business which include aid, trade, investment and the appeal of China's economic model; and the tools of culture which include Chinese arts and sciences, language and ethnicity (Kurlantzick, 2007).

Within China there is a rapidly growing industry of teaching Chinese to foreigners: a 2006 estimate was of 6000 teachers teaching roughly 110,000 foreign students ('China threat fear countered by culture', 2006). South Koreans are the largest group of foreigners studying in China, representing about 40% of the total in 2006 (Ramzy, 2006).

The *Hanban* or China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL), can be seen as an instrument of soft power reaching beyond China's borders. This non-governmental and non-profit organisation affiliated to the Ministry of Education of China was established in 1987. Its stated mission is a commitment "to making the Chinese language and culture teaching resources and services available to the world, to meeting the demands of overseas Chinese learners to the utmost, to contributing to the formation of a world of cultural diversity and harmony" (Hanban, 2011, section II). It engages in development of policies, standards, curricula, materials, teacher training, certification and recruitment, language program support, and language testing. A major activity of Hanban is the establishment of language and culture centres called Confucius Institutes overseas, normally through partnerships between Chinese and overseas universities (Gil, 2008). Between 2004 and August 2009 (well within the lifetime of this research project) a total of 356 Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms had been established in 84 countries and regions, distributed as follows: Oceania (includes Australia and New Zealand) 11 Institutes or Classrooms; Asia – 68 Institutes and 26 Classrooms; Europe – 94 Institutes and 30 Classrooms; Africa – 20 Institutes and 3 Classrooms; Americas – 80 Institutes and 24 Classrooms. The goal of this ambitious program is to set up 1000 institutes worldwide by

2020. The institutes tend to provide non-formal classes to the public and business communities, rather than participating in the teaching activities of the host university. While some critics express concerns that the presence of the institutes will restrict freedom of speech in academe on Chinese issues, or impose a set teaching methodology that may not be sensitive to local conditions, others counter that there is currently no evidence of such issues arising (Lane, 2011; Norrie, 2011; Patty, 2011); indeed it has also been argued that the institutes may contribute resources and expertise at a time when many Australian university language departments are under-resourced and underfunded (Gil, 2009).

### 2.2.2 Growth and promotion of Chinese learning in countries outside of China

There is a growing demand for learning Mandarin in many countries of the world. In Asian countries it is particularly strong: in Thailand and South Korea, all elementary and middle schools planned to offer Chinese by 2007; the number of Japanese secondary schools offering Mandarin more than tripled between 1993 and 2005, and in Japan it is now the most taught foreign language after English. In the UK, the number of students at colleges and universities taking Chinese as their main subject doubled between 2002 and 2005 (BBC, 2007). In the United States, the number of students enrolled in Chinese language programs increased from 6000 to 50,000 between 1998 and 2007, and there has been a significant investment of US government money into education in languages of ‘critical need’; such is its expansion that in 2011 it is reported that Chinese may soon be officially reclassified from its prior USA status as a ‘Less Commonly Taught Language’ to a ‘Commonly Taught Language’ (Tsung & Cruickshank, 2011). Media headlines are a barometer of the prevailing discourses, for example: “Get ahead, Learn Mandarin”; “The Mandarin Offensive”; and “Chinese – the language the whole world wants to learn” (Erard, 2006; MS, 2011; Ramzy, 2006). Such reports create further demand. Lo Bianco (2007, p. 11) notes that “as Chinese increasingly attracts wide social and cultural shaping power it generates an almost automatic demand for its acquisition”.

An important group of learners in many countries consists of those who have some family background in Chinese, originating from an area and social background where a dialect other than Mandarin was spoken; they wish to learn Mandarin as the language of their culture or heritage. The language situations of these learners will vary: for instance, some may be competent in a non-Mandarin dialect of Chinese; some may speak a variety of Chinese but have little or no knowledge of written characters; some may have not used their Chinese since childhood; and some may speak a Chinese dialect every day at home. Parents in these households sometimes send their children to community-run Saturday schools<sup>5</sup> to gain literacy in Chinese.

---

<sup>5</sup> Community-funded in some parts of the world, and publicly funded in others.

The linguistic ecology of western countries is also affected by changing migration patterns: whereas previous patterns of migration tended to be from southern Chinese areas where dialects other than Mandarin were spoken, there are now increasing numbers of migrants who are native Mandarin speakers settling in many communities. Thus learners of Chinese outside China may have more opportunities to interact with native speakers of Mandarin than was the case in the past (though other social and cultural factors will of course affect such opportunities). Insufficient knowledge about the extent to which learners of Chinese outside of the metropolitan centres in Australia have access to and take up such opportunities, and whether that is changing, was one of the points of curiosity that contributed to the development of this research enquiry.

### **2.2.3 Teaching and learning Chinese as an additional language in the Australian school and university context**

Australia, situated within the Asia-Pacific region, differs from other western countries, and particularly from the USA, in that the federal government has issued a series of formal policy statements on Asian language education. The manner in which these statements reflect changing attitudes and rationales is analysed by Lo Bianco (2007) as a three-phase development. The first phase situated Chinese within the multilingual and multicultural framework for education across the country; subsequent policy emphasised regional integration, trade, political and security factors; and more recently there has been a phase of commodification and internationalisation of education, with the result that there are growing groupings of native speakers in schools and universities (Lo Bianco, 2007).

The social and cultural presence of Chinese in multicultural Australia continues to increase: Mandarin is the fastest growing community language, and was expected to be the most widely used language other than English by 2011. Chinese “is present in public policy, educational settings and socio-demographics in an extraordinarily diverse and rich array of contexts, as cultural capital and as instrumental attraction on an unprecedented scale” (Lo Bianco, 2007, p. 24). An example of this presence was the high level of interest in the Mandarin proficiency of the 2007–2010 Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, who is able to conduct interviews and make public speeches in fluent Mandarin, and who is a strong advocate for learning Mandarin. The fact that a high ranking politician is modelling and demystifying linguistic and intercultural competence and confidence has brought the possibility of westerners becoming proficient in Mandarin into the sights of many Australians.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> It was also the source of a rich vein of typically Australian humour in which extracts of Rudd’s recorded speeches in Mandarin were presented with the original subtitles substituted by irreverent new ones carrying satirical and topical content. Such jokes reflect the monolingual mindset of many white Australians, and arguably reinforce stereotypes of the incomprehensibility of Chinese; it is debatable whether a French-speaking politician would have attracted similar attention.



Such models are helpful because in terms of Australian attitudes to language learning in general, in public perception and in policy, there is a huge obstacle of a prevailing monolingual mindset (Clyne, 2008) to be overcome. Foreign language learning is not well supported in the schooling system, where there is little opportunity for continuity from primary to secondary schools, and it is not uncommon for students to have to drop a language or change to a different one part-way through their schooling. Such disruptions clearly have a discouraging effect (Liu & Lo Bianco, 2007) which influences attitudes to language study in tertiary education. It is estimated that less than 13% of Year 12 students finish any language program in school (McLaren, 2008). A strong call for action to remedy the situation has recently been published in a report published by the Australian Council for Educational Research (Lo Bianco, 2009); and the national school curriculum, under development in 2011, proposes minimum numbers of class hours to be spent on language learning at different stages of primary and high school.

In regard to the provision and take-up of Mandarin, at Year 12 nationally, figures from 2007 show 3% of students taking Chinese, of whom over 90% are Chinese; prompting the observation that it is a case of Chinese teaching Chinese to Chinese (Orton, 2008). Since the mid 1990s government funding initiatives (National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Strategy (NALSAS) 1994–2002, and National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) 2008–2012) have encouraged the development of resources and programs to improve participation and proficiency levels in Asian languages in schools, and the current policy goal is for the number of school students learning Chinese in Year 10 to double by 2020, and for 12% of Year 12 students to be fluent in an Asian language by that time.<sup>7</sup> This has clear implications for teacher supply, and initiatives are underway at State and federal level to facilitate training for teachers of Chinese.

Turning to the tertiary sector, it must first be observed that at undergraduate level between 90–95% of students in Australia do not undertake any language study at all. For those who do, in 2006 Chinese was offered at 26 institutions of higher education. It is the second largest enrolment language in Australian higher education. From 2001 to 2007, enrolment growth in Chinese subjects has been estimated at around 30.8% (McLaren, 2008). It would be interesting to compare these with statistics for continuation and completions, since it is known that the drop-out rate during first year is high. However, in the same period, some universities reported a drop in enrolments in beginners' Chinese, accompanied by growth in enrolments by international students from China in advanced level classes (McLaren, 2008), wishing to develop their academic skills in their own language. In larger metropolitan universities this trend is so clear that it has had the effect of transforming Chinese language teaching for all learners. Clearly this leads to some issues of streaming (and related issues of

---

<sup>7</sup> For a critique of the feasibility of this goal, see Orton (2008).

funding) since a separate curriculum is called for for students who are native speakers of Chinese (Liu & Lo Bianco, 2007).

It cannot be assumed that issues in metropolitan areas are necessarily also relevant in regional areas of the country; the regional–metropolitan distinction will be further elaborated in section 2.3.1. Wondering to what extent this trend has come to the attention of or impacted upon adult learners based in regional Australia, and on those studying in distance mode, was one of the points of curiosity that contributed to the development of this research enquiry.

#### **2.2.4 Teaching and learning Chinese as an additional language in Australia outside the school and university context**

Chinese language classes are offered in other educational sectors as well. In community and further education, there are colleges<sup>8</sup> in the publicly funded TAFE (Technical and Further Education) network which offer Mandarin language classes. TAFE is the government-owned and nationally operated system of colleges and institutes offering pathways into the workforce or higher education as well as recreational courses, which may take place in the evenings outside regular working hours. Evening or daytime classes unconnected with the TAFE network are also sometimes offered at local schools and community centres, by individuals and community learning organisations such as the Workers Education Association (WEA) and the University of the Third Age (U3A).

Weekend and community Chinese schools (also known as Saturday schools) offer classes in Mandarin and in Chinese literacy skills, outside of school hours, normally for school-age children. Many of those attending are children of Australian Chinese families in which Chinese dialects and Mandarin are spoken, and some are Mainland born but with little or no formal education background in Chinese. In the city of Canberra (population 347,000) in the ACT (Australian Capital Territory), for example, in 2008 there were four weekend Chinese schools catering for children of 4 years and over.

In recent years there has been increasing interest in bilingual Chinese-English learning opportunities in early childhood, and kindergartens, day-care centres and preschools have been emerging in some urban areas, which are attended by children with family backgrounds in either or both languages. Part of the demand for such facilities comes from the growing number of Australian parents who adopt infants from China.

Privately-run Mandarin language schools offering either set classes or specially designed in-house training primarily for adult learners, as well as individual tutoring, are now emerging in the larger metropolitan centres. These are oriented principally though not exclusively towards the business community.

---

<sup>8</sup> In this context ‘colleges’ are post-secondary institutions that offer non-degree based qualifications.

The classes and schools described so far are of local Australian origin; in addition the relatively new players on the scene are the non-profit Confucius Institutes (described in section 2.2.1), originating from the Chinese NOTCFL (Hanban) and staffed mainly by Chinese-trained teachers. The institutes are located in the major cities; their activities vary according to their location and scope, but they tend mainly to provide classes and activities in Chinese language and culture for local community and business interests, and to conduct standardised language proficiency tests.

In the commodification and virtualisation of language learning taking place in the globalised context, Chinese tuition and classes originating from Chinese-speaking countries and elsewhere in the world are increasingly available over the internet. Now it is possible for learners of Chinese in regional Australia (or anywhere else in the world with internet access) to participate in Chinese study environments online, with access to online tutors who are native speakers, and opportunities for individual communication using VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) telephony such as Skype. Language schools and tutoring programs run on a commercial basis offer graded online materials, podcasts of lessons, and individualised tuition and feedback via synchronous audio or video messaging. In theory the learner in a remote area of regional Australia can now count among her classmates the expatriate American businessman in a high-rise in Shanghai and the young Korean student studying in Beijing for a year. However, the situation is a complex one. As with globalised English teaching, the diversity of the backgrounds and experiences of the learners brings a correspondingly wide range of culturally based expectations to the teaching/learning situation of online global delivery, creating a “complex topography” of cultural borders for learners to navigate, including the cultural framework through which the content is presented, the culture of the learner and of their immediate environment, and the culture of the use of technology and the immediate communications technology (Jegede 2000, cited in White 2007, p. 324). In practice, the extent to which these opportunities are taken up and considered effective by regionally based learners in Australia is not currently known.

In this section my focus has necessarily been a top-down one outlining institutional (and private sector) provision of courses and classes in Mandarin in Australia. It will be relevant for the reader, as the perspective of this thesis is developed, to understand the range of formal learning opportunities which may be available to people learning Mandarin in the Australian context. However, it is people rather than institutions who are the focus of my interest, and in the following sections I will explore various aspects of the parameters of place and time which have a bearing on the way people organise and experience their Chinese learning.

## **2.3 The spatial dimension: distance and contiguity**

Each individual’s Chinese learning journey will be affected at different times and in different ways by a range of factors relating to location: their own location at particular times, and that

of the learning environments with which they are engaging, and the institution, and the instructor (if these are involved). In this section I explain four significant issues of distance and contiguity relevant to learners of Chinese who are based in Australia: geography and population distribution; distance education in Australia; access to Chinese linguistic environments; and relative positioning of learner, teacher and linguistic resources.

### 2.3.1 Geographical distance: learners in regional Australia

Australia has a population of 22.7 million in 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011), and a geographical area of approximately 7.6 km<sup>2</sup>. Although it is the sixth largest country in the world by total area, a large part of its total area is desert and semi-arid land. Most of Australia's population is concentrated in two widely separated coastal regions – the south-east and east, and the south-west. There, the population is concentrated in urban centres, particularly the state and territory capital cities. Most of the larger institutions of higher education are located in these big metropolitan centres.

The term 'regional Australia' is used to include areas outside the state and territory capital cities of Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra and Darwin. About seven million people, one third of the population, live outside the capital cities. Regional Australia comprises larger regional towns and cities, as well as rural and remote areas situated significant distances away from any regional centre. Infrastructure, transport and communication are crucial to rural and regional communities. Health care and some community services to very isolated areas have been provided by the combined medical, air and radio services of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS); established in 1928, the RFDS influenced educational provision, in that its two-way radio system was later the basis for the establishment of the School of the Air in 1950, which provided support for school education by correspondence to families with school age children in very remote areas (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2008). Now, internet and telecommunications, which are increasingly important in remote, rural and regional areas, contribute to educational provision and access. According to the 2006 census figures, between 42% and 59% of households in regional and remote areas had internet access.<sup>9</sup> Compared to the major cities, people living in the inner regional areas were about 17% less likely to have any internet access, and people living in very remote areas were about 61% less likely to do so (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Comparable results from the 2011 census were not available at the time of writing but were generally reported to be significantly higher.

<sup>10</sup> The ABS Remoteness Structure is a classification into 5 broad classes of 'remoteness' (metropolitan, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote), which share common characteristics in terms of physical distance from services and opportunities for social interaction. Adjustments to this classification are discussed in Jones (2001).

In terms of access to formal education, then, regional Australians live in a wide variety of environments, from isolated properties where school education can involve home schooling or school of the air, through small and medium size towns, to substantial cities offering a complete educational hierarchy from pre-schools through to university (Ndarala Group, n. d.). Universities based in regional areas cater for regional, metropolitan and overseas students (as do metropolitan universities).

### 2.3.2 Distance education in Australia

In the context of the geographical distance and population distribution just described, models of tertiary distance education (DE) emerged in Australia as a way of improving access to higher education and training outside the metropolitan areas and larger regional centres. DE originated in part as a response to the needs of underqualified secondary school teachers in regional areas. Between 1946 and 1964 the numbers of secondary teachers in NSW doubled from 4500 to almost 10,000. At the same time the number of graduates amongst them dropped from 66% in 1953 to 45% in 1964; but higher career advancement and promotion required graduate status. When the University of New England (one of the pioneers in tertiary distance education in Australia) began offering its courses by distance education in 1955, more than 80% of the initial intake of 2200 external students were so-called ‘underqualified’ country secondary teachers and many of the rest were women with children, planning a teaching career. DE was initially established only with a view to improving access to study for the geographically isolated, rather than to providing flexible study options for groups of students prevented by other constraints, such as time, from attending university; indeed some universities which offered distance education had regulations requiring students living within 50 kilometres to attend classes on campus. After those requirements were relaxed, students unable to attend class regularly for other reasons such as the demands of paid work or child-rearing or travel commitments, quickly began to take up the study opportunities offered by distance learning provision.

The universities which offer distance education courses in Australia are largely mainstream campus universities (unlike the British model of concentrating distance education into one specialised ‘distance mode only’ university,<sup>11</sup> or the similar but independently developed Athabasca University in Canada), though not every university offers DE and some universities are more specialised in this mode of delivery. Course content and level of qualification are the same for internal (on-campus) and external modes. A proof of this equivalence is that mode of study is not specified on final certificates and testamurs. Under modular course structures students who are able to may combine internal mode and external mode subjects in one degree.

---

<sup>11</sup> The agency called Open Universities Australia is not comparable to the UK’s Open University, but is more like the Canadian Virtual University: it offers combinations of existing courses and units provided by various Australian universities and colleges to form fully online degrees.

The development of the Australian tertiary distance education model was also clearly distinguishable from the outset from that of open higher education in the United States. The US model did not essentially aim to provide opportunities for geographically distant students; rather, a small number of existing institutions or consortia of institutions (for example, the University Without Walls) offered opportunities for learning characterised by openness of curriculum and teaching method. Individualised programs and learning contracts were a feature, unlike the prescribed curriculum and teaching timetable of the British Open University. The use of outside facilities and sometimes adjunct staff were also characteristics (Karmel, 1975). The model was less integrated with regular campus degree programs than the Australian one both in terms of curriculum and of parity of qualifications.

In different parts of the world, terms used for distance learning activities can vary. To clarify, 'open learning' tends to describe the educational philosophy of giving learners choices about medium, place and pace of study, support mechanisms and entry and exit points; 'flexible learning' has an emphasis on recognition of principles of equity and diversity, and on the convergence of DE and classroom strategies (Commonwealth of Learning, 2000). A distinction must be made between the terms 'distance learning' and 'online learning' or 'e-learning'. Distance learning is a type of formal learning in which the student follows a planned and guided learning experience (Holmberg, 1986). It implies a geographical distance separating the learner from the teacher, and usually the learner is also geographically separate from the learning group. In some, but not all distance learning environments, learners who are geographically distant from each other are linked as a virtual group using the internet and online tools; however, distance learning is not necessarily synonymous with online learning. Online learning is a tool which can be used in a variety of learning modes and course structures. For example, in a networked language classroom with the teacher present, online learning may involve interacting with a class of native speakers of the target language in another country; in other circumstances a language course which is mainly taught in the traditional face-to-face classroom mode at a large university campus may be supplemented by online activities or quizzes which students must complete in their own time. However, neither of those two scenarios are likely to be termed distance learning.

Distance education has evolved through various stages associated with changing technologies for creating learning environments. Taylor (2001) distinguishes five generations of distance education: the correspondence model, in which the main medium is print; the multimedia model, which added audio and videotape and computer-based learning to print; the tele-learning model based on synchronous audio and video communication; the flexible learning model which uses online interactive multimedia, web resources and CMC; and the intelligent flexible learning model which adds automated response systems and campus portal access to institutional processes and resources. However, in practice there is considerable variability in

the resources and technologies employed in individual units or subjects, depending on how the subject has evolved, the preference of the lecturer/developer and institutional requirements.

### 2.3.2.1 Distance education for languages

Distance education for languages poses particular challenges for learner, and teacher, and the institution, regarding the provision of sufficient and timely feedback and the development of speaking and listening skills. Distance language learning (DLL) is a growing field of research which is now entering its fourth decade, marked by significant publications and collections (Holmberg, Shelley, & White, 2005; White, 2003). Earlier research in DLL tended to centre on such aspects as methodology, course design and delivery, new technologies and new learning environments; more recently, a focus has developed which can be said to extend Breen's (2001c) concept of learner contributions to language learning to the distance language learning context. Hurd (2000: 78) has identified the need to "find out as much as we can about our learners in order to be in a position to target their needs and respond appropriately"; and White (2005: 62) has asserted that "we know relatively little about the reality of DLL from the point of view of those who are most involved, the learners". The present enquiry is relevant to this emerging trend of explorations of the learners' experience and shaping of the DLL process; in addition, as will be addressed in subsequent sections, it takes a broader view and looks at the distance learning context as one of the many language learning contexts inhabited by learners over the course of their Chinese learning trajectory. Wondering how episodes of distance learning of Chinese are integrated with, interpolated with or followed by other types of learning in a learner's journey, and how the different modes of learning influence or inform each other, was a further area of curiosity which contributed to the development of this research enquiry.

### 2.3.3 Changing opportunities for access to Chinese linguistic environments

Issues of distance and contiguity are also of relevance if we consider the extent to which Chinese language can be encountered by learners of Chinese outside of China. In this regard there have been significant changes in the space of a generation or less, captured in the anecdote from my personal experience in Box 2.1 below.

As noted in section 2.2.3, Chinese has a growing social and cultural presence in Australia. This includes a linguistic presence: for example, spoken Mandarin can be heard regularly in cities and on university campuses; and there is a daily Mandarin news broadcast on one of the national free to air television channels. Many goods in shops all over the country are manufactured in China and written Chinese can be found on packaging and instructional material. Cultural products relating to China (such as books, films, music and performance) are frequently reviewed in the national press; and various aspects of traditional Chinese philosophy and practices (westernised to different degrees) are gaining popularity in the

personal development and ‘new age’ spheres, such as *feng shui* or geomancy, martial arts, *taijiquan* or Tai Chi, and traditional Chinese medicine.

**Box 2.1:** Personal anecdote: the changed environment for learning Chinese outside of China

*In 1977 an eager young student fresh out of university, where she had taken two years of Chinese as part of a linguistics degree, was travelling to join a small group of British students to fly to Hong Kong and then enter the People’s Republic of China to study in an immersion environment for a year or two. Mao Zedong had died less than a year previously, and the group was only the second intake of exchange students after the long period of China’s closure to the west during the cultural revolution.*

*Sitting on the train in a heightened state of nervous excitement about the big adventure she was embarking on, she momentarily had the wild thought that she could be the victim of a huge confidence trick: what proof did she have that the language she had been studying for two years was in fact Mandarin, and that she would be able to understand or communicate when she reached her destination?*

*Neither of her two excellent teachers (one Chinese, one western) had ever been to mainland China and she had never met anyone from there, nor had she ever encountered any real-life examples of the language used in daily life; her exposure to Mandarin was limited to the classroom and the textbook materials. Seeking native speakers in her provincial town had led her to local Chinese restaurants, where attempts to communicate in Chinese had failed, because the families were Cantonese speakers. In the linguistic landscape there were simply no instances to be found locally of written text using the simplified characters that she was studying. Was this language actually a real one?*

*Her paranoia was soon to be dispelled but it did reflect the decontextualised nature of the Mandarin learning environment for western students thirty-five years ago. Today that situation is unthinkable.*

Apart from the presence of Chinese in many different actual daily life environments in Australia, the internet and interactive web 2.0 technology now offer countless online environments where authentically purposive Chinese text is encountered, and where interaction can take place in Chinese with native speakers or with other learners. The days when teachers would save every train timetable, cinema ticket, menu, local newspaper and pieces of printed packaging to take back to the classroom and use as realia with students who otherwise had no exposure to authentic everyday language materials are over. Now students can be given a task to plan and cost a travel itinerary, or report on the current weather in Nanjing, using online resources in Chinese. Although it is probably less than ten years since setting up one’s computer to read or write Chinese characters required the purchase of special software and installation of special



programs, those days are a faint memory and teachers can now assume that all students with an up-to-date computer will be able to use it for reading and writing Chinese without complex or expensive setup procedures.

Travel between Australia and China is increasingly easy. Direct daily flights to China from Australian capital cities take between 7 and 13 hours, and there are also low-cost flights on budget airlines. China is in the same time zone as Western Australia, and the time difference between Australia's Eastern states and China is only a few hours. Visa formalities are fairly simple. Business travel, and both group and individual tourism, are all relatively easily arranged. China is increasingly popular as a tourist destination, and it can be expected that this phenomenon will bring a corresponding rise in interest in Chinese as a "tourist language" (Phipps, 2007). These developments mean that it is increasingly likely that tertiary students of Chinese might have visited China, or know someone who has done so, before they commence their course. It is also a reasonable expectation that many of them may visit China at some point during their course, either independently or as participants in a study trip made available to them by their university. Students at the University of New England (UNE), for example, have the option of participating in a five-week intensive immersion course at a university in Xi'an after completion of the first year of study. They also have an opportunity to study for a full semester or a full year in China in the third or subsequent year of their study. (The year of in-country study is compulsory for those who take a Chinese major as part of the Bachelor of Languages degree program, and optional for students taking Chinese in other degree programs.)

I have outlined here some possibilities for accessing Chinese, but there will be complex factors influencing the extent to which learners can do so. Since there are no previous studies of learners of Chinese in rural and regional Australia, the extent to which they can access Chinese language and culture in their local environment and feel able to engage with it, is not known. Furthermore, in terms of travel to China, little is known about the extent and the manner of the contribution of visits to China to the overall learning histories of adult learners. Wondering about these issues contributed to the development of this research enquiry.

#### **2.3.4 Relative positioning of learner, teacher and linguistic resources**

The previous two sections have discussed two different ways in which the spatial dimension can shape experiences of learning Chinese: first, distance education can allow for structured learning in situations when the learner cannot attend the institution from which the courses are offered; and secondly, the increasing presence of Chinese cultural and linguistic resources in local Australian contexts, and ease of communication and overseas travel, can contribute to opportunities for learners to encounter Chinese while based in Australia. Together these mean that the range of learning modes which may be available to learners at different stages

in their learning journeys is more complex than the terms ‘distance learning’ or ‘classroom learning’ suggest. The word “distance” in the term ‘distance education’ reflects the perspective of the institution, of administration and delivery of curriculum materials. The student is spatially distant from the centre. From a learner perspective however, it is of course they who are the locus of learning; and who are agents present to, in, or with their learning.

If the learner (rather than the teacher or educational institution) is taken as the point of reference, then at least three aspects of positioning and interaction in any formal learning situation become salient: first, the positioning of the learner in relation to the teacher or educational institution, and the modes of communication between them; secondly, the positioning of the learner in relation to fellow learners, classmates, study partners, and the modes of interaction between them; and thirdly, the positioning of the learner in relation to a Chinese linguistic environment, and the ways that the learner interacts with that environment.

Unpacking the term ‘distance learning’ in this way allows for an appreciation of the complex and varied range of learning circumstances in which learners operate. To illustrate with some examples of students who I have encountered over the years, a university class of distance learners of Chinese could include individuals in the following learning situations:

- Alice, who has only experienced Chinese language learning in the context of the course, has no access to a Chinese speaking community, and relies only on the materials and schedules received from the university to structure her learning experience;
- Ben, who is as isolated as Alice, participates regularly in online Chinese chatrooms;
- Chris, who uses Chinese occasionally in her work, uses that work context to try out, extend and reinforce the language she is learning in her university course;
- Dean, who speaks a variety of Mandarin regularly in Australia at home or when visiting parents and in-laws, uses the requirements of the formal course to structure his acquisition of literacy in Chinese;
- Elaine, an Australian working in China and using her Chinese to some extent in her day to day life, is taking the distance learning course in Chinese because it offers a chance for structured regular study contributing towards an Australian degree qualification; and
- Fee, who has been studying with the university for some years, is forced by personal circumstances to withdraw from her Chinese unit in the current semester, but since she plans to rejoin the course in 6 or 12 months’ time, she keeps her Chinese up by watching Chinese TV broadcasts, working through some Chinese readers, meeting regularly for coffee and a chat with a local Chinese student, and systematically reviewing some of the materials studied.

These examples demonstrate the wide variety of distance education students’ learning circumstances at any single point in time. A longitudinal perspective which traces individuals’

learning journeys over the years can add a dynamic modality to that picture to show how the positionings and modes of interaction shift over time through different sequential, overlapping and concurrent episodes of learning. The longitudinal theme will be revisited in section 2.5 where I address the temporal dimension of the learning landscape; before that, in section 2.4, I will consider the varying degrees of formality and structure which shape that landscape of possibilities, which I refer to as the learning modality dimension.

## 2.4 The learning modality dimension: scales of structure and informality

Taking a broad view of the landscape of Chinese learning allows for recognition of the range of modes of learning in which learners of Chinese may participate in the course of their Chinese journeys. These modes may come into play both consecutively or simultaneously. This section outlines these modes and characterises the way they may present themselves in terms of Chinese learning possibilities.

The parameters which distinguish learning modes include the following:

- whether or not the learning is leading directly to a qualification or an award (and if so, the level of recognition of the award);
- the extent to which the learning follows an externally established curriculum;
- whether primary directive control is located externally to or lies within the learner;
- the extent to which learning is guided by an instructor, tutor or mentor;
- the degree to which a structured program of study is desired and followed;
- the degree to which the learning initiative is instigated by the learner herself;
- the extent to which opportunities for informal learning are recognised and taken up;
- the extent to which the learning is intentional (anticipated and recognised) or incidental (unexpected and perhaps only identified retrospectively as learning).

These parameters apply to learning of any subject matter; however, in the case of language learning, there are further areas of variation to be taken into account, including *inter alia* the linguistic and cultural environment within which the learner is situated, and the accessibility to the learner of a community of language use, referred to in the preceding section. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development distinguishes three modes of learning: *formal learning* is characterised as learning through a program of instruction in an educational institution, adult training centre or in the workplace, which is generally recognised in a qualification or a certificate; *non-formal learning* is defined as learning through a program that it is not usually evaluated and does not lead to certification; and *informal learning* is learning which results from daily work-related, family or leisure activities (Halliday-Wynes & Beddie, 2009; OECD, 2005).

Livingstone (2001) proposes a slightly more nuanced distinction in his discussion of adult learning, depending on the degree of directive control of learning, and whether the body of

knowledge being learned is pre-established or situational; this allows for the distinction of *formal* education (high degree of teacher control and a pre-established curriculum); *non-formal* education (learners opt to study voluntarily with a teacher who assists their self-determined interests by using an organised curriculum); *informal* education (learners are instructed or guided by teachers or mentors who do not operate with externally imposed curricular criteria); and a further category of informal learning which is *self-directed* learning (learners engage in intentional learning without direct reliance on a teacher or an externally organised curriculum). The activities in Table 2.1 are suggested as exemplars of Livingstone's four categories applied to the field of opportunities for learning Chinese.

*Table 2.1:* Livingstone's (2001) four categories of adult learning applied to Chinese learning situations

Category	Example in terms of Chinese learning
Formal	participation in a university course
Non-formal	study with a tutor, following a plan
Informal	interactions with a native speaker who is requested to offer corrective feedback on the learner's Chinese
Self-directed	the learner sets up her own individual learning projects and challenges (for example: "I'm going to work through this Chinese novel"; or "I'll watch the news in Chinese every morning and learn 5 new words")

Qualifications and structured curriculum may have varying degrees of importance for individual learners at different stages of their learning trajectory. Curiosity about the unexplored area of the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning, and between other-directed and self-directed learning, in the stories of learners of Chinese, was a field of conjecture which contributed to the development of this research enquiry.

Informal learning is by its nature not easily monitored. In Canada, for example, approximately 20% of adults' learning efforts are visible and institutionally organised, while 80% are informal explicit learning activities; these proportions have been likened to an iceberg, with the larger part being submerged and invisible below the surface (New Approaches to Lifelong Learning survey reported by Livingstone (1999)). The scale of general informal learning in adult populations is high, but it is not well understood; referring to adult learning in general, Livingstone (2001) has attested that "both adults' informal education/training and their self-directed informal learning have been relatively little explored to date" (p. 3). Similarly, the scope and circumstances of learning Mandarin as a foreign language in informal contexts is also less visible for exploration, and hence is less well understood, than is its learning in formal circumstances. Realising this was another contributor to the development of the focus of this research enquiry.

The categories above relate to adult learning in general; moving to a focus on language learning, one classification of modes has been suggested by Umino (2002). Her model uses some dualistic distinctions which I believe should be reframed as continua, and I have added double-headed vertical arrows on the Figure 2.1 below to reflect this. The first distinction is between instructed and non-instructed or naturalistic learning. Then, instructed learning is divided into institutionalised forms of instructed learning, and non-institutionalised forms (self-instruction, which may involve differing degrees of self-direction). The institutionalised forms of instructed learning are further subclassified according to whether the teacher is physically present in the learning situation (classroom learning, or contingent learning), or geographically separated from the learners (distance learning). These categories are not mutually exclusive, and a learner may be involved concurrently in different modes of learning. Umino proposes that “investigation of the ‘grey area’ between classroom learning and naturalistic learning or fully self-directed self-instruction is likely to provide insights which might in turn inform conceptions of instructed learning and formal instruction” (2002, p. 26). I extend the ‘grey area’ worthy of investigation to cover the intersections between distance learning and self instruction as well.

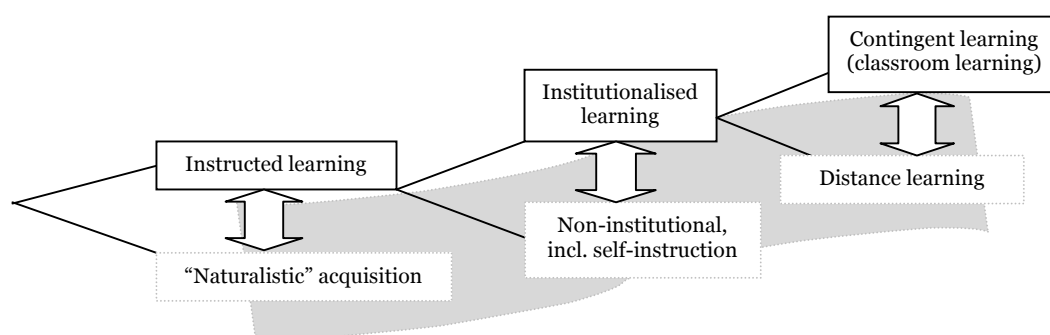


Figure 2.1: Relationship between different modes of language learning showing the ‘grey area’ of interest, adapted and extended from Umino (2002, p. 20)

This categorisation captures some useful distinctions but leaves some modes of language development as difficult to place. For instance, non-instructed, contingent, self-directed language use, and informal exploration of language resources are not represented. The framework proposed by Benson (2009), is more helpful in conceptualising the learning that happens in the ‘grey area’ beyond the classroom: he makes the distinction between *settings* for learning, which are the “overlapping terrains of language learning” (2009, p. 226) (for example, ‘classroom’, ‘self access’ or ‘study abroad’); and *modes of practice*, which are the processes or interactions of learning. Though distinct, they can be multiple and overlapping; an individual’s engagement with learning at a particular time and at a particular locality is likely to take place within configurations of several settings, and to draw upon various modes of practice. Benson argues that research is needed on “the ecology of settings and modes of

practices within the lives of language learners as they are lived in local contexts and at particular historical moments” (2009, p. 233). This enquiry aims to respond to that concern, and to add to it a longitudinal, dynamic element. I believe that an investigation of the learning trajectories of long-term learners (including but not limited to spells of distance learning) will add further insights into the significance and interrelationship of different settings and modes of practice through the course of a learner’s trajectory, and into the dynamics of learners’ movements between and among them.

## 2.5 The temporal dimension

Time and its associated manifestations (including chronological time, relative time, institutional schedules, individual life course, and pace of development) constitute another very significant dimension of forces shaping the landscape of Chinese learning. This section will identify some of the domains in which temporal issues might either impact upon the choices available to learners, or be reflected in the choices that are made.

### 2.5.1 Learner’s stage of life

People start learning Chinese at different stages of the life course, and the opportunities for learning it may vary across the life course. The life stage at which a learner is situated will have an effect upon the choices that they make in relation to their Chinese learning in various ways. The priority which people are able to allocate to formal study and to informal learning will vary at different times in the life course, as will the study options available to them. Distance learning offers to people with family or work demands upon their time the possibility of continuing part-time study towards a degree or other qualification. Thus in the distance learning context, class peer groups are often distinctively heterogeneous in terms of age, ranging from late teenagers through to septuagenarians and beyond.

A learner’s previous life experiences, involving exposure to languages, encounters with Chinese culture, and learning in different forms, will all shape their current attitudes. Of course, previous life experiences within a group of learners of varying ages, backgrounds and dispositions will be widely diverse. That diversity is further complicated by the rapidity of change in Chinese culture and society from the twentieth century onwards. It means that the ‘Chinas’ which are experienced or imagined by two Australians twenty or thirty years apart, and which contribute to their decisions to learn more about the language and culture, resulting in their becoming classmates, will be very different.

The prevailing discourses around learning at different stages of life will vary in different cultures. In China for example the customary attitude is that the appropriate time for university study (particularly at the undergraduate level) follows finishing high school and

precedes marriage and child-rearing. Mature-aged western students undertaking language study in China in later stages of their lives may encounter some levels of incomprehension as to why they are engaging in formal study at this stage of their lives.

An interest in the experiences of learners of Chinese at different life stages, and lack of knowledge about the ways in which their Chinese learning can be integrated with the other aspects of their lives, was another stimulus towards undertaking this enquiry.

Life course issues will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

### 2.5.2 Learner's stage of learning

The experience of learning a language is different at different levels of proficiency, and there have recently been calls for more research into advanced language learning (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008; Ortega & Iberri-Shea, 2005). It will be shown in Chapter 3 that much of the existing research on CFL relates to introductory and elementary levels.

However, the Chinese language learning journey is a particularly long one. As mentioned in section 2.1, for English speakers it takes significantly longer to reach established proficiency levels in Chinese than in many other languages. Before reaching what might be defined as advanced levels of proficiency, learners have already built up extensive experience of the process of learning the language. It can be useful therefore to make a distinction between '*advanced* learners' of Chinese (as a target-referenced, proficiency related term), and '*experienced* learners' of Chinese (as a process-referenced term capturing length of time and depth of involvement as a learner). Creating such a distinction raises many questions which have contributed to the delineation of the area of enquiry. What other features might characterise experienced learners of Chinese? Could it be that their learning experience is an enabling feature for engagement in informal and self-directed learning? This research concerns itself with people who share the defining attribute of being experienced learners, some of whom may reach stages of advanced proficiency during the period of investigation and some of whom may not.

### 2.5.3 Variable intensity of pace of learning

The pace at which learners' abilities in a language develop can vary widely from one individual to another, as teachers of any class group are constantly reminded. Shifting from a group to an individual focus and looking at a single learner's experience, it becomes clear that the pace of each individual's language development is also highly variable over time. In addition, the rate of a person's involvement in learning activities will also fluctuate for a variety of personal reasons. Periods of sequential or concurrent engagement in different modes of learning (including formal, non-formal, informal, or self-directed, as outlined in section 2.4) are likely to have their own effect on intensity of learning as well; as are changes in the communicative

contexts in which the learner is involved. Learners' own characterisations of the pace of their learning encompass ideas of going faster, slowing down, becoming stationary and even slipping backwards; and also express the way that perceived progress can be at times very gradual and at times occur as a sudden leap. Over the course of their learning trajectories, learners themselves exercise agency in choosing to adapt the pace of their learning to suit their current circumstances at different times. Curiosity about how this plays out for individuals over the long term contributed to shaping the scope of this enquiry. The multiple timescales concept, to be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, may help to approach the question.

Many of those who engage in formal learning of Chinese in distance education mode are adults with work or family commitments who choose to study part-time. The idea of part-time study is worth interrogating. 'Part-time' is actually an institutionally referenced term which means that a student is not undertaking a 'full load' of university subjects in a particular semester. Taking the University of New England as an example that is comparable to other Australian universities, a full load is four subjects which are nominally equivalent to 150 hours each. In terms of the Chinese language curriculum, though, one core compulsory language proficiency unit is offered each semester in a sequence over 3.5 or 4 years, with supporting units in aspects of Chinese language and culture concurrently available at certain points within the sequence. To reach a full load, full-time students combine their study of Chinese with other subjects chosen from among those available in their specific degree program. (Opportunities for intensive full-time language study in China of either 5–6 weeks (equivalent to 150 hours), or one or two full semesters (equivalent to 600 hours per semester) also exist at certain points within the program.) Students enrolled part-time often focus for several years solely on subjects in Chinese, proceeding at the rate of one subject per semester. (Some may choose to take a diploma consisting solely of Chinese subjects, rather than a full bachelor's degree.) As a result, the progress of part-time students through the core language units of the Chinese curriculum is not necessarily slower than that of full-time students; the difference is that they may take longer to complete a full degree.

Full-time students tend to be affected by funding constraints which pressure them to complete their degree within a relatively short time frame. Part-time students are less affected by such constraints and therefore have greater flexibility to suspend their formal study for a semester or two if other demands upon their time require it. This may further prolong the time involved in completing the formal course. Although from an institutional perspective learners who have suspended formal study are 'inactive', from the learners' perspectives (particularly the 'experienced learners' identified above) that is not necessarily the case; during such periods they may be engaging in informal or self-directed learning, or they may be using their Chinese in other contexts; and even if not engaged in intentional Chinese-



related activities, subconscious processing of what has previously been studied may be occurring. Their routes through the landscape of Chinese learning are worthy of investigation due to this high potential for diversity and complexity. As Livingstone (1999, p. 4) has observed “Informal learning never ends. But much of it occurs in irregular time and space patterns”.

For many, the Chinese learning journey does not end with the completion of formal study; the collection of a qualification is a milestone along the way but the destination is, or has evolved into, something further. How do learners’ journeys in Chinese develop beyond the milestone of formal study, and how does the experience of participation in formal study and of distance learning mode contribute to the subsequent stages? These are little-explored questions contributing to the delineation of this research area.

The concepts of stage of life, stage of learning and pace of learning which have been raised in this section will be revisited in Chapter 4 where the conceptual and methodological framework of the enquiry will be discussed.

## 2.6 Research Questions

The preceding sections sketched out the web of complex factors and forces which have a bearing on the situation of learners of Chinese in Australia, presenting them in terms of the dimensions of timescales, of space and positioning, of formality or informality of learning mode, and of shifting, evolving discourses and contexts of Chinese language learning. In this section I draw together some of the observations made in the sketch to point to those aspects which characterise the focus of this research. I will then present the research questions.

The focus of this research is the learner, and when the learner’s experience is seen from a viewpoint that captures its dynamic aspects, then strands of the forces outlined in the previous sections of this chapter can be perceived as always interwoven with each other and with those of personal factors to create a unique texture for each individual at each stage of their learning.

In the course of describing the landscape of Chinese learning in this chapter up to now, I have pointed out some of the gaps in knowledge that have, over many years of my involvement with CFL, given rise to curiosity and wondering, which in turn have contributed to my growing understanding that in this messy varied reality there is an identifiable research area. My ‘wonderings’ cluster around three themes: the dynamics of individuals’ trajectories of learning Chinese and the overlapping episodes within them; the interplay of formal, informal and self-directed learning; and the learning experiences and impacts of adult Chinese learners in rural and regional contexts.

These themes contribute to the articulation of my research questions. The research questions are:

1. At a time of significant development in the global prominence of Chinese, what is the nature of the learning journeys and experiences of adult long-term learners of Mandarin in regional Australia who engage in distance education and independent study modes?
2. How can the dynamic complexity and variety of people's long-term trajectories of learning Chinese be described, represented and interpreted?
3. What insights can be gained from taking a dynamic and holistic perspective of people's long-term learning of Chinese?

## 2.7 Exploring Complexity

Having described the background and features of the landscape of Chinese learning which is the setting for the research area, I now turn to consider how complexity theory (see Chapter 1) might 'fit' as a conceptual framework for this enquiry. I will outline some of complexity's main attributes and processes first, and then explore how they might apply to this context.

Complexity theory focuses on the *dynamic relationships and patterns* among phenomena rather than the static properties of isolated objects (Complexity and Education website, n.d.). Rather than seeking an explanation of something as a whole by isolating its ever smaller component parts, it is concerned with systems *in their environments*, and with the *relationships* that exist among their constituent elements or agents (Mason, 2008a, p. 2). Seeking to understand the structure, behaviour and dynamics of *change* in complex adaptive systems, complexity theory aims to account for how the interacting parts of a complex system give rise to the system's collective behaviour, and how such a system simultaneously interacts with its environment. As well as intersecting many disciplines, the power of a complexity orientation also comes from the fact that it can be applied to many different *levels* of the same phenomenon and reveal their interconnections – to a rainforest, or to a single tree within it; to the dynamics of a virtual classroom of learners and teacher, or to neurons in the brain of a single learner; to a single individual, or to an organisation, etc. (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 1). Multiscale descriptions are integral to a complexity orientation.

What is a complex system? It is a system (loosely speaking, a group of elements and processes in relationships with each other) which has a large number of *components that interact* in multiple ways. Belonging to the system affects the properties of the components (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 26). But the actions or behaviours of the components (or parts, or agents) within a system also alter the system as a whole. This is because of the interconnected *web of relations* between elements of the system, and the system as a whole, and the environment or context in which the system is embedded and forms a part.

*Emergence*, "the spontaneous occurrence of something new as a result of the dynamics of the system" (van Geert, 2008, p. 182) is an important aspect of complexity: "A complex system

arises through the dynamic, non-linear interaction of its component parts, yet it embodies *emergent possibilities exceeding the sum of these parts*" (Complexity and Education website, n.d., emphasis mine.). That is, unpredictable and unstable patterns of behaviour can arise, which may then lead to the emergence of new, more complex patterns of behaviour. States or particular patterns of behaviour that the system prefers are known as *attractors* (or 'attractor basins', in the vocabulary of the landscape of possibilities of the system). When the system is in a stable state, it is said to be in a deep attractor; when the behaviour of the system changes to a radically different mode it is said to move out of one attractor and towards another one in its state space: that is known as a *phase shift*. In these ways complex systems are 'living', in the sense that they are *dynamic*, they change and evolve. They are *adaptive*, in the sense that change in one area of the system leads to change in the system as a whole, and the system can change in response to its environment (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 33). Complex systems also display the feature of *sensitivity to initial conditions*, which means that a tiny detail in a system at an early stage can result in it taking a path that is hugely dissimilar to other seemingly comparable systems. Complex systems are *open* because there is a flow of energy or matter between the system and its environment, and context is seen as part of the system and its complexity; open systems not only adapt to their contexts but also influence their contexts. Larsen-Freeman's (2009) use of Spanish poet Machado's phrase "we make the road by walking" captures this aspect nicely.

The term Complexity Theory (CT) can be used to refer to a family of related approaches and theories with slightly differing foci, which use overlapping terminology and share some core concepts. Systems theory, dynamical systems, complex adaptive systems and chaos theory are some of the related family members. In this thesis I will be dealing with the common ground rather than the differences, and use the term 'complexity' in a generic sense. Complexity theory can be used in research as a *method*, in which complex systems are identified and aspects of their functioning are modelled or described; as a *metaphorical tool* to understand organisations and systems; and as a *lens* through which to view the world (Richardson & Cilliers, 2001). In the second and third senses, the terminology shifts slightly and terms used include complexity principles, complexity approach, complexity orientation, complexity perspective, complexity thinking – or simply complexity. Aspects of all three approaches will be drawn into this study, though since the enquiry is grounded in data it does not set out to construct a full model as an application of the theory.

Examples of complex systems that are of interest to educators include the human individual, classroom collectives, communities and cultural systems. In education, complexity has been applied in action research (Phelps, 2005; Phelps & Hase, 2002) and in studies of autodidacticism (Solomon, 2003), distance learning (Kiefer, 2006), and higher education (Haggis, 2005, 2007, 2009). Haggis's (2008) claim that complexity provides a rationale for

the investigation of individuals, difference and specificity, and process suggests that it may be an appropriate lens to consider for this project.

In applied linguistics, language itself can be conceived as a complex, adaptive dynamic system; as can discourse and discourse events, and the language classroom. It has been applied in studies of language development (Larsen-Freeman, 2006; van Geert, 2008); conversation analysis (Seedhouse, 2010); English language learning histories (Menezes, 2008); identity and motivation (Menezes, 2011; Sade, 2011); and multilingualism (Todeva & Cenoz, 2009b). Kramsch (2009, p.247) endorses complexity as “a productive metaphor in SLA to stress the relativity of self and other, the need to consider events on more than one timescale and to take into account the fractal nature and unfinalisability of events”.

### 2.7.1 Complexity ‘visualisation’

To check whether complexity theory may be a suitable approach to the research area, I conduct an initial exercise that Larsen-Freeman & Cameron (2008) call “thought modelling”, (though I would prefer a term like ‘visualisation’ which has fewer positivist associations), which involves identifying complexity concepts and processes in the research area under consideration.

A different approach to the concept of ‘unit of analysis’ is called for in a complexity approach:

Complexity theory suggests that the conventional units of analysis in educational research (e.g. individuals, institutions, communities and systems) should merge, so that the unit of analysis becomes a web or ecosystem (Capra, 1996, p. 33) focussed on, and arising from, a specific topic or centre of interest (a ‘strange attractor’). (Morrison, 2008, p. 25)

So in this case if the web were something like ‘long-term CFL in Australia’ centred around the attractor of formal distance education, then the focus would involve looking at what happens before, in and beyond it; how the learners, who are agents within the system, move out of the attractor basin and beyond it.

Identifying and limiting the focal point of interest is acknowledged to be a challenging task (Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), because of the complex web of interconnections and influences. Larsen-Freeman (2011) recommends extending the view one level up (at the system or systems that contain the focal system) and one level down (at the constituent systems nested within the focal one). She suggests that taking a functional view of the ‘whole’ that is the focus of attention, enables a recognition of the parts which are meaningful within it; and cites Lewontin’s (1998, pp. 81-82) useful point that “the hand is the appropriate unit for investigation if we are concerned with the physical act of holding, but the hand and the eye together are an irreducible unit for understanding how we come to seize the object that is held” (Larsen-Freeman, 2011, p. 61).

To illustrate the thought-modelling process, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron investigate to what extent ‘classroom language learning’ demonstrates the features of a complex dynamic system and present their findings in tabular form (2008, pp. 37, 70-71). Following their example, this researcher conducted a preliminary mapping of the focal research area of the current enquiry, which is ‘adult long-term CFL in Australia’, against a list of concepts or features which are important aspects of complexity. This is presented in Table 2.2 below.

In Table 2.2, each complexity concept or feature is followed by two sets of examples. The first set is taken from Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 37) and illustrates how they see that concept as represented when the complex dynamic system under consideration is ‘classroom language learning’. The second set of examples in each case represents a preliminary attempt to visualise or map complexity features when ‘adult long-term CFL in Australia’ is considered as a complex dynamic system, taking into account the various dimensions of the landscape which have been sketched out in this chapter.

This initial exercise suggests that there is a degree of fit between the contexts and dimensions of Chinese learning outlined in this chapter, and a complexity framework. The complexity perspective will be revisited in Chapter 4.

## 2.8 Summary

In this chapter I have described the background and context of learning Chinese as a foreign language in Australia in terms of a landscape of possibilities, and dimensions of variety and difference. Beginning by sketching the prominent features of the Chinese language which impact upon learners, I then described some of the changing features of formal provision of CFL in Australia. In the third section I looked at ways in which issues relating to geographical distance can impact upon learning Chinese. Following that I outlined the various modes of learning in which people can engage, and some issues about the categorisation of such modes. Next, the temporal dimension was addressed, including issues of duration, life stage and pace of learning. Having completed this sketch of the landscape it was then possible to identify the areas within it where there are unanswered questions which provide the impetus for this enquiry. Finally I picked up the complexity theme which had been introduced in Chapter 1 and found that it appeared to be applicable as a framework to guide thinking about the area identified.

To continue the landscape metaphor, in the next chapter (Chapter 3, the literature review) I will suggest some approaches to cartography and route mapping by pointing out broad trends in recent research which can provide a context for this kind of study of language learning journeys. I will delve into the literature that might be helpful, as one might consult a range of maps, guidebooks and gazetteers to get a range of information and perspectives on the routes, stopovers and destinations, and modes of transport which the travellers may select.

Table 2.2: Preliminary mapping of adult long-term CFL in terms of complexity concepts

<p><b>Complexity concept: Agents (the elements of a system)</b>  <i>(Identify the different subcomponents of the system, including agents, processes &amp; subsystems.)</i></p> <p><b>In classroom language learning:</b> students, teachers, languages</p> <p><b>In adult long-term CFL:</b> The learners, also (in this research situation) myself as learner, and researcher (and sometime teacher); other individuals involved in their learning.  Note, agents need not necessarily just be humans; can also be aspects and combinations of them</p>
<p><b>Complexity concept: Heterogeneity</b></p> <p><b>In classroom language learning:</b> Abilities, personalities, learning demands</p> <p><b>In adult long-term CFL:</b> The learners are heterogeneous in their backgrounds, their levels of proficiency and motivation, to name but a few ways. They also have different starting points in terms of learning Chinese (initial conditions) - so their different trajectories can be explained in part by the feature of <i>sensitivity to initial conditions</i>.</p>
<p><b>Complexity concept: Organisation</b>  <i>(Identify the timescales and levels of social and human organisation on which each component operates.)</i></p> <p><b>In classroom language learning:</b> Class, groups, curricula, grammars</p> <p><b>In adult long-term CFL:</b> Class groups; study groups; online learning communities; Chinese friends and tutors.  Work or study community. Family members.  Opportunities to engage with Chinese and use Chinese, including in China.  The multiple timescales described in Chapter 2</p>
<p><b>Complexity concept: Adaptation</b>  <i>(Describe how the system and context adapt to each other.)</i></p> <p><b>In classroom language learning:</b> Imitation, memorising, classroom behaviours</p> <p><b>In adult long-term CFL:</b> Learning plans and goals shift in response to individual situation; learning opportunities adapt in relation to changes in technology and globalisation (more Chinese language in the environment); incorporation of these into teaching depends upon many institutional factors of resources, support, teacher interest, student demand/response...</p>
<p><b>Complexity concept: Dynamics</b>  <i>(How the components, and relations among components, change over time.)</i></p> <p><b>In classroom language learning:</b> Classroom discourse, tasks, participation patterns</p> <p><b>In adult long-term CFL:</b> The system is constantly changing; the focus of the research is about how practices of learning and using Chinese change over time. The rate and intensity of engagement with Chinese will vary over time in relation to the many other systems each learner is involved with: personal, social, financial, global, etc.</p>
<p><b>Complexity concept: Emergent phenomena</b></p> <p><b>In classroom language learning:</b> Language learning, class/group behaviour, <i>linguae francae</i></p> <p><b>In adult long-term CFL:</b> New learning habits or practices, and new beliefs or attitudes, and changing identities  “A-ha” moments in learning when new ideas fall into place (and once understood, influence other ideas)  Response to new globalising contexts for learning/using Chinese</p>
<p><b>Complexity concept: Attractors</b></p> <p><b>In classroom language learning:</b> shared language and classroom norms; language play</p> <p><b>In adult long-term CFL:</b> Themes, beliefs, or practices that are common in an individual’s timeline or across a group  Recurring patterns of engagement in learning activities, for an individual over time, or across a group of individuals</p>

# Chapter 3. The long view of learning (literature review)

---

## Introduction

In the preceding chapter, a range of ways to classify different types and modes of learning was discussed. The focus of my enquiry is not on any particular one of those to the exclusion of others, nor is it on classifying learners in terms of their involvement in a single mode of learning. Instead, the focus is on individuals' long-term histories of learning and engaging with Chinese as an additional language. It is the sequences and combinations of settings and modes of learning in the course of an individual's learning history that are of interest. I enquire into ways in which individual learners participate in them, draw on them, and combine them, either simultaneously or consecutively, over the course of their learning. In Chapter 2 I described some dimensions of the landscape of possibilities which presents itself to Australian learners of Chinese. In later chapters I will present data and investigate the courses which the journeys of individual learners have taken through the landscape based on my long-term investigation. It is timely in this chapter, therefore, to review literature relating to the group of concepts which includes learning journeys, trajectories of learning and learning careers. In doing so, I will move from the general to the specific, first looking at understandings of these concepts in the context of the life course; then in the general context of learning; before focussing more specifically on the language learning context and then on the Chinese learning context.

## 3.1 Trajectories in the life course

The term 'trajectory' can be used in various ways. In the physical sciences it concerns the path of an object through air or space, under the influences of various inevitable forces (such as wind resistance or gravity). Metaphorically, this usage can be extended beyond the physical sciences to refer to 'the chosen or taken course' of individuals, groups, artefacts, ideas, and other phenomena through time. (In archaeology, for example, the term is used to refer to a course of development representing medium- or long-term social change, that can be mapped by reference to changes in specific characteristics through a series of successive stages.)

Reflecting on my own understanding of the word 'trajectory' in general usage, I find I associate with it a certain impetus or momentum from behind, as well as a possibility of an attraction forwards; and that it conjures up an image of a traceable pathway of the movement which has

already taken place through space or time. In the coming sections I will look at some more specialised ways in which the concept of ‘trajectory’ is used in relation to individuals and learning, beginning with life course research.

Life course research is “an area of interdisciplinary study of human lives between birth and death, bringing together anthropology, demography, economics, sociology, and developmental psychology with sociology as an important disciplinary anchor” (Mayer, 2008, p. 4). Its development in recent decades, triggered by the rapid social, historical and demographic changes in the world and particularly by the increasing average age in the population of America, has led to “increasing interest in the relation of earlier phases of life to later phases, from childhood to adulthood, and the power of larger social forces to shape the lifelong developmental trajectories of individuals” (Elder, Johnson, & Crosno, 2003, p. 6). The examination of life trajectories across multiple stages in both life-span psychology and life course sociology has triggered methodological innovations such as the use of both prospective and retrospective data collection to allow the creation of detailed life histories, and the conceptual development of “the life course as a theoretical orientation” (Elder, et al., 2003, p. 6). Associated with this orientation in the 1970s were the concepts of role sequences (such as those within a family), and of ‘careers’ based on role histories in education, work or family, but they were used in a limited way that did not allow for multiply coexisting roles and careers, or for a view of the influences of historical and biographical context.

Subsequently, the concepts of social pathways, trajectories and turning points were refined, affording a clearer picture of biographical and historical contexts, and reflecting more effectively the temporal aspects of lives. In this view (Macmillan & Eliason, 2003, p. 531), *trajectories* are considered to be sequences of involvement with institutions and corresponding roles; by linking institutionally defined roles over time in terms of their sequence, duration and order, trajectories can be charted. *Transitions* are specific events (for example, graduation) embedded in trajectories, which signal changes in institutional contexts and roles. They are likely to be associated with shifts in status or identity, and possible behavioural change. The trajectories and transitions within a person’s life course are multiple and interdependent (Macmillan & Eliason, 2003, p. 531). Transitions which are subjectively or objectively defined as major changes in life direction are identified as *turning points*. Trajectories in areas of life such as work, family and education, which are strongly shaped by social and historical context, are referred to as *social pathways*. In these areas, “individuals choose the path they follow, yet choices are always constrained by the opportunities structured by social institutions and culture” (Elder, et al., 2003, p. 8). In words highly evocative of the complexity theory perspective of dynamic co-adaptation (to be discussed in section 5.2.3.1), it is observed that “social pathways are subject to change, both from the impact of the contexts in which they are



embedded and from the impact of the aggregation of lives that follow these pathways” (Elder, et al., 2003, p. 8). Indeed, this compatibility with the complexity theory perspective is sustained in the focus on adaptation and responsiveness to context which is clearly identifiable behind the principles of life course research. These are summarised by Elder et al. (2003, p. 12) as: the complex and dynamic interplay between agency and historical and social context; the shaping of the life course by individual or group experiences of time and place; the variation in developmental antecedents and consequences of life transitions according to their timing in a person’s life; and the principle of linked lives, “lived interdependently” and socio-historical influences “expressed through this network of shared relationships”.

Clearly, it is to be expected that the trajectories identified in life course research are likely to include ones related to individuals’ participation in education. An interesting large scale study based on questionnaire data which traced trajectories relating to education, work and love in adult lives, and then looked for patterns in the way those trajectories interrelate, was conducted by Merriam and Clark (1991). Their method of graphing the trajectories to create visual representations of life course developments enabled further comparison and analysis of pattern, dynamics and interrelationships among the complexity and variety of people’s personal histories. They identified three recurring patterns of interaction (parallel, steady/ fluctuating and divergent), consideration of which afforded interesting insights into the interrelationships between work, love and learning; and each pattern was found to contain a stabilising factor. Another study, in an anthropological frame, used a cultural models framework and ethnographic methods to create life-path maps along several dimensions and then compare them with metaphors of participants’ experience, revealing a close correspondence (Watts, 2011). This kind of visual representation and analysis of patterns of learning in holistic life-contexts has promise for the investigation of the nature and dynamics of additional language learning in the lives of long-term learners; it has been little used in that field to date, but in section 3.3.5.1 below I will describe one instance of such a use.

In this section I have introduced the field of life course research as a context in which to visualise the concept of trajectories. In the next section, I will turn more specifically to *learning* through the life course, in particular lifelong learning, learning journeys and learning careers.

## 3.2 Adult learning

The learning journey metaphor draws upon and reflects beliefs and theoretical bases of understanding about how adults learn, and these will be very briefly characterised in this section. Major orientations to adult learning are outlined, and the question of which approaches might be more or less compatible with the study of learning trajectories is considered.

### 3.2.1 Five orientations to adult learning

There is of course a wide range of theories and models about how adults learn, and many different ways of categorising them, for instance either chronologically; or by the academic field from which they originate (e.g. Tusting & Barton, 2003); or by a broad grouping in terms of alignment with one of five orientations to learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), which I shall follow here. The orientations are behaviourist, humanist, cognitivist, social cognitive and constructivist. Both behaviourist and cognitivist orientations view learning as something that takes place within the individual, the first, in terms of observable changes in behaviour, and the second, in terms of changes in mental constructs and processes, as the mind processes, stores and receives information. The purpose of learning, in behaviourist approaches, is to produce behavioural change in a desired direction; and in cognitivist approaches, is to develop one's cognitive skills, capacities and internal mental structures to facilitate the process.

Third, the humanist orientation (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1983) shifts perspective to affective dimensions of learning, emphasising that perceptions are grounded in experience, and that individuals have an intrinsic drive towards self-development and growth; learning is seen as a personal act, stimulated by emotional and developmental needs for self-actualisation, the highest level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In this view the impetus for learning is seen to come from the learner, and the process of learning, being needs-based, is seen as more important than the content. Humanistic perspectives lie behind the andragogy model of Knowles (1980, 1990), which puts forward a set of characteristics of adult learners to distinguish their learning process, and the strategies and approaches they require, from those of children. The characteristics (also referred to as assumptions) are that adults move from a dependent self-concept to a self-directing one as they mature; that their accumulating experience is a rich resource for learning; that their readiness to learn is linked to the developmental tasks of their social role; that as adults mature their perspective on learning becomes problem-centred rather than subject-centred in that it is increasingly focussed on immediate rather than future application; that it is important to them to understand the reasons for learning; and that their primary motivation is internal rather than external (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 84). The andragogy model has been described as psychologically driven, and criticised for isolating the individual learner from the learning context (Merriam, et al., 2007, pp. 91, 104), as well as for a prescriptive or essentialist approach which obscures the diversity of learner experience and characteristics, and relations of culture and power in particular learning settings (Hanson, 1996; Tusting & Barton, 2003, p. 21). Nonetheless, andragogy has been an influential model and remains popular. The humanistic orientation to learning is also evident in theories which see learning as a source of transformation: either personal transformation, for example Mezirow (1991), Daloz (1999), and Boyd (1991) (see Merriam, et al., 2007, pp. 132-139), or sociocultural transformation, for example Freire (1970).

Fourth, the social-cognitive orientation to learning places its emphasis on the social settings in which learning occurs. It is strongly associated with Bandura, and Merriam et al. (2007) also draw parallels between it and the much earlier work of Rotter (1954). They assert that the particular relevance of Bandura's three-way interactive model to adult learning is that the learning process is seen as involving both interaction with and observation of others in a social context, and the locus of learning is neither the individual nor the context, but in the interaction of both. In this reciprocal context "people influence their environment, which in turn influences the way they behave" (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 289). This reciprocal influence is echoed in ecological and complexity-oriented views of language development, to be discussed later. The purpose of learning, in this orientation, is to develop new roles and behaviours. Bandura's (1997) associated concept of self-efficacy refers to learners' self-assessed beliefs of their own likely competence in a particular environment, which in turn influences their effectiveness in the environment and in interactions with others.

Lastly, the constructivist orientation holds that learning is about how people make sense of their experience to construct meaning, and it entails an active process of collaboration, cooperation and dialogue. Within the broad orientation there are many strands and differing approaches. A personal constructivism perspective would take learning as an individual mental activity, the active personal construction of changing models of knowledge through interaction with the environment; whereas a social constructivist view would see meaning as being constructed through socially interactive interchange (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 297). This group includes the social constructivism of sociocultural and activity theory (e.g. Cole, Engeström, & Vasquez, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978), which moves far from the individual perspective to see cognition as distributed in the context of interactions, between people and cultural mediating tools or artefacts. Also included is situated learning and the associated concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991); here cognitive processes are no longer seen as primary, and instead "social practice is seen as the primary, generative phenomenon, and learning is one of its characteristics" and learning is conceptualised as "becoming able to participate in particular forms of practice" (Tusting & Barton, 2003, p. 17). There are overlaps rather than hard boundaries between the five sets of orientations to learning which I have discussed in this section so far, particularly in the case of the broad scope and influence of the constructivist orientation: a very wide variety of theories and models of learning can be seen to be related to it, including transformational learning and andragogy, already mentioned in terms of the humanist orientation.

In researching the learning journeys of adults as they unfold over time and through life contexts, the more appropriate approaches to learning are those which allow for it to be viewed as always connected with the settings and issues of their lives. In such a focus there

needs to be accommodation for understanding the meanings of and motivations for learning in the lives of individuals, and the dynamics of how these change over time. Recent developments in adult learning theory demonstrate two trends. First, there is growing acknowledgement of the importance of context, broadly conceived as encompassing both the physical or organisational setting as well as the sociocultural, for reaching a richer more holistic understanding of learning in adulthood. Secondly, research increasingly extends beyond the individual and the cognitive to emphasise the multidimensional nature of learning: “the mind, body, spirit, emotions and society are not themselves simply sites of learning; learning occurs in their intersections with each other” (Merriam, 2008, p. 97). These contextual and multidimensional relational trends support the focus of the current enquiry.

### 3.2.2 Adult learning and human development

Some influences of life stage issues on learners of Chinese were introduced in section 2.5.1. In a longitudinal focus on learning trajectories or learning journeys, the ways in which adult lives change and develop over the life course will clearly be of relevance; therefore it is apposite to briefly describe developmental approaches to adult learning. Development can be viewed in terms of biological change, psychological change, cognitive development, and changes relating to sociocultural factors. While single-perspective theories, especially those of psychological development, have been highly influential, there is an increasing interest in models of adult development which take an integrative perspective. Similarly, developmental models of learning frequently work to identify separate stages through which learners pass in the process of learning; many of these models are based on cognitive stages, but others include social, role-based and age-based stages. The linearity of such models has been criticised: Tusting and Barton (2003, p. 11) comment that the assumption of linearity is unable to capture the ‘spiky profiles’ of varying levels of confidence and ability typically displayed by adult learners; others question the absolutist assumption that all individuals pass through the same linear progression of stages and propose instead a view of learning involving multiple and nonlinear processes of change e.g. Tennant and Pogson (1995), cited in Tusting and Barton (2003 p. 12). It is argued that models which integrate perspectives and allow for multiple explanations are more likely to capture the complex realities of the interplay between developmental factors and adult learning (Tennant, 1988, cited in Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 322).

For an extended discussion of integrative models, including those of Baltes, Magnusson, Peron and Bielby, and Bronfenbrenner, see Merriam, et al., (2007, pp. 319-323). Here I will focus only on one of these: Bronfenbrenner’s (2001, 2005) ecological systems theory, which was originally based on child development, but has relevance for the learning of adults. Bronfenbrenner proposed that development be seen in terms of the dynamic relationships of five nested systems or levels of environmental influence, with the individual at the centre: the

*microsystem* (the pattern of roles, activities and interpersonal relations in the individual's immediate context, e.g. family, peers, and school); the *mesosystem* (the relation between microsystems or connections between contexts); the *exosystem* (external environments or larger social systems which indirectly influence development, for instance friends of family, and mass media); the *macrosystem* (the larger socio-cultural context and the attitudes and ideologies of the culture which affect the other systems); and the *chronosystem* (the influence of time and sociohistorical circumstances on life events). Each system contains roles, norms and rules that can powerfully shape development. This is known as the Process-Person-Context-Time model. This type of model appears to offer the capacity to accommodate the levels of scale, multiple contexts, and multiple timescales, and the interrelations between them, which were outlined in Chapter 2 as part of the context of this enquiry into individual Chinese learning journeys. It has very close connections with the complexity theory framework. Ecological theory and complexity theory have much in common.

### 3.2.3 Lifelong learning

The much cited phrase “the long course of learning” was Bruner’s term, used in his rejection of a radical behaviourist explanation of education on the grounds that it “does not nourish, reliably, the long course of learning by which man [sic] slowly builds in his own way a serviceable model of what the world is and what it can be” (Bruner, 1966, p. 128; see also Fletcher, 2003, para. 36). Lifelong learning looks beyond the institutional timescale, to the timescale of human life; it focusses most commonly on the post-compulsory education period, and therefore tends to be associated with adult, vocational and further education, as well as learning in non-formal, self-directed and recreational contexts. The term ‘lifelong learning’ can be used with a variety of different emphases. First, it can be defined in relation to timescale, in terms of a succession of learning experiences (which may or may not overlap) throughout a person’s lifetime. A different perspective appears in definitions originating from the educational planning and adult and vocational education sectors, in which lifelong learning is characterised in functional and aspirational terms relating to its role and purpose for the development of individuals in society. For example, the European Lifelong Learning Initiative offers this definition: “a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment, in all roles, circumstances, and environments” (Watson, 2003, p. 3). This definition carries an implication of policy and processes of planning, funding and delivery to the individual; the use of the words “supportive”, “stimulates and empowers” imply an agentive presence of some kind behind them. Lifelong learning is often linked to the need for people to update their work-related and other skills in response to change in the rapidly changing world of work practices

and technologisation; this can include workplace learning as well as training in order to raise employment prospects for entry into new workplace arenas. Finally, the ‘long’ of lifelong learning is sometimes taken as the focus when the term is used specifically in relation to learning in later life which is undertaken for personal benefits and interest rather than in connection with employment.

Since the term ‘lifelong learning’ has a variety of interpretations, the term ‘learning journey’ becomes a useful one for referring to the combination of episodes of learning for an individual learner.

### 3.2.4 The learning journey

The conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is a pervasive one in Anglophone culture.<sup>1</sup> As Lakoff and Johnson (1989, pp. 60-61) describe it:

Our understanding of life as a journey uses our knowledge about journeys. All journeys involve travellers, paths travelled, places where we start, and places where we have been. Some journeys are purposeful and have destinations that we set out for, while others may involve wandering without any destination in mind, consciously or more likely unconsciously, a correspondence between a traveller and person living life, the road travelled and the ‘course’ of a lifetime, a starting point and a time of birth, and so on.

Extension to other major processes of life, including education, leads to LEARNING IS A JOURNEY as a commonly encountered conceptual metaphor (Ellis, 2001), represented frequently by the condensed noun phrase “the learning journey” (see also Chapter 2 and section 5.5.4.3). This widely used phrase should not be assumed to be neutral, and indeed reflects the value system of a western cultural perspective (Turner (1998).

Bearing these implications in mind, I nonetheless draw on the metaphor myself in this thesis, as both a descriptive device and an heuristic one, which guides the investigation of the complexity of a situation and may allow for fresh perspectives to present themselves. The concept of a journey links the traveller and the landscape in mutual relation: the journey cannot exist in isolation from the traveller (unlike, say, a predetermined route); the traveller has creative input into the journey, and the journey affects the traveller; and journeys are both situated in and formative of the landscapes they traverse. As it happens, there is a further aspect of the journey metaphor which is pertinent to this enquiry: it offers a high degree of congruence with the language and concepts used in the analytical framework of complexity theory (see section 2.7).

---

<sup>1</sup> I follow convention in presenting conceptual metaphors in uppercase letters.

### 3.2.5 Learning trajectories and learning careers

The term ‘learning trajectory’ is used in a variety of contexts with different implications. (Specialised meanings associated with mathematics and technology do not concern me here.) In one group of uses, learning trajectories represent organisational frameworks used by educators. In the training context, ‘learning trajectory’ can be used to refer to a process of linked learning experiences, workshops, and coaching directed towards a specific goal. For instance, de Weerd et al. (2002) conceptualise the learning trajectory as the arc of a learning process that consists of the interplay between orientation (awareness of learning needs), elaboration (knowing and doing), and integration (application of learning) (Kerka, 2003). In the context of global and international curricular frameworks, Strijker (2010, p. 7) uses the concept of learning trajectories to refer to an intermediate level of curricular organisation, “a reasoned structured set of learning objectives and content leading to a certain core objective” which can be developed at different levels of educational structure.

In another group of uses, learning trajectories represent the course of learning through an individual’s life and relate it to social context. Pallas uses the similar term ‘educational trajectories’, defined as: “Well-travelled sequences of [education-related] transitions that are shaped by cultural and structural forces” (2003, p. 168). Barron, Martin and Lewis, (2007) at the Learning in Informal and Formal Environments (LIFE) Centre at Stanford University have developed a tool to create visual ‘learning timelines’ which map learning activities over both setting and developmental time; they have been used to chart the learning events of young people through and beyond high school, and in youth programs.

In the extensive work of Gorard into participation in learning over the lifetime, the learning trajectory is seen as the aggregate of an individual’s learning experiences across the whole life span, determined by social capital, contextual factors, long-term processes of historical change, and individual choices that reflect learner identity (Kerka, 2003). Gorard and colleagues conducted large-scale studies of adults learning in the UK, and identified several recurring patterns: the non-participant (no continuous or formal education after initial schooling); the transitional learner (only full-time continuous education or immediate post-school work-based training in life so far); the delayed learner (who returns to education and training after leaving school at the earliest opportunity); and the lifetime learner (both transitional and later learning episodes) (Gorard, Rees, Fevre, & Furlong, 1998). Their earlier work has been criticised for taking a controversial ‘quasi-determinist’ view that characteristics set very early (including age, gender, and family), largely predict later life trajectories, and that efforts to increase learning participation will not help people who do not see themselves as learners (Kerka, 2003). In more recent work, however, Gorard and Rees, (2002) draw on their findings to question the UK policy discourses of extending participation in lifelong learning, on the

grounds that they show insufficient understanding of reasons for non-participation, and underestimate the extent of self-directed learning undertaken even by seeming ‘non-participants’. Gorard (2005) also questions claims that e-learning, and information and communication technology (ICT) are widening participation in adult learning, arguing that rather than making learning accessible to a broader range of social groups, ICT simply increases levels of participation within those groups that were already predisposed to learning. He argues for a more holistic view of learning, a reappraisal of the nature of learning opportunities available to “non-participants”, and increased recognition of the importance of self-directed learning. Gorard’s work is of relevance to this enquiry, although there is a huge difference in scale, and it is concerned with learning in general rather than learning a specific skill or subject. First, it is relevant in terms of its interest in uncovering dynamic patterns of individual participation in learning and the interplay of learner identity and context. Secondly, the trajectories are not seen as mono-dimensional, but can accommodate hierarchies and nesting, as well as overlapping and simultaneous events. Thirdly, it is relevant in terms of the research design: in the broad-ranging nature of the data collection; in the combination of survey and interview method; and in the openness to include a wide diversity of forms of learning activity in describing people’s patterns of participation in learning (comparable to the wide variety of language activities which I ask respondents about). What is not relevant to the current study is: the purpose and context; the link with policy and with understanding barriers to participation in the particular geographical and social-historical context of Wales; and the tendency to look for social determinants.

For some researchers, the learning career is differentiated from the learning trajectory: the concept of a ‘learning career’ is used to refer to the development of an individual’s attitudes and orientations towards participation in institutional learning and also sometimes towards informal learning. A learning career is composed of events, activities, and interpretations that develop individual learning dispositions over time (Kerka, 2003; Merrill, 2009). The learning career construct is closely associated with the work of Martin Bloomer, Phil Hodgkinson and Heather Hodgkinson, relating to a four year study of the experience of the learner in further education. They demonstrate that contrary to policy assumptions of learning progression as predictable and informed by rational learner choices, in fact, instability and unpredictability are commonplace, while life experiences outside educational institutions have considerable influence on learning choices and progression. From their theoretical background in situated learning and symbolic interactionism, the learning career is conceptualised as:

simultaneously subjective and objective [...] it is a career of events, activities and meanings, and the making and re-making of meanings through those activities and events, and it is a career of relationship and the constant making and re-making of relationships, including relationships between position and disposition. (Bloomer & P. Hodgkinson, 2000a, p. 6)



Bloomer (1997) originally suggested that individuals agentially construct their own learning, and that their approaches to learning vary in ways that are non-linear and sometimes unpredictable. Bloomer and P. Hodkinson (2000b, 2002) later applied Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, the development of a system of embodied, enduring yet changeable *dispositions*, as a way to integrate structure and agency in the concept of a learning career (see Bourdieu, 1977). An individual's ongoing dispositions to learning will enable some forms of learning and constrain others, and dispositions can change according to a person's changing social, economic, or other position in the world (Bloomer & P. Hodkinson, 2000a). Relationships between learning and changing life circumstances can be plotted, and will appear differently depending on whether the time scale is that of shorter or longer periods of an individual's life (P. Hodkinson, Hawthorn, Ford, & H. Hodkinson, 2007); and Hodkinson et al., (2007) argue that formal and informal learning are attributes of a complex process rather than separate categories.<sup>2</sup> This notion of the significance of scale in the interpretation of episodes in a learning career recalls the nested ecosystems of Bronfenbrenner discussed above; both it and the interrelation of formal and informal learning over a learning career are of relevance to the conceptualisation of the current enquiry.

Learning careers, conceived as trajectories of participation in education, were the focus of *Learning Lives: Learning, Identity and Agency in the Life Course*, a longitudinal project, led by G. Biesta, which explored the meaning and significance of learning in the lives of adults. This large scale project followed 117 adults between the ages of 25 and 84 over three years across four different locations in the UK, combining retrospective life history research, 'real time' longitudinal interpretive life course research and survey and census research. The methods generated fine-grained evidence of the variety, scope and characteristics of learning through the life course, leading to a conclusion that "following individuals over time generates a different understanding of participation in formal education and training from that gained by a snapshot view", which can mask long-term and gradual influences, as well as unexpected impacts (Biesta, 2008, p. 1). The Learning Lives project identified different trajectories of participation and explored links and interrelations between learning, identity and agency. The researchers on the project also developed a theory of narrative learning, in which the telling of life-story acts as a site for biographical learning as well as an outcome (Biesta, 2008). There are several other research projects from the UK<sup>3</sup> which, though based more specifically on participation in particular learning settings and contexts, take a

---

<sup>2</sup> In later work Hodkinson takes these ideas a step further to suggest that learning, being situated in everyday practice and taking place in many informal ways, cannot be viewed as a distinctly identifiable part of, or a separate process in, a person's life, and that therefore the learning career should not be isolated as a separate concept (P. Hodkinson, et al., 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The *Teaching and Learning Research Programme* (TLRP) in the UK from 2000–2009 provided government funding for many significant projects on learning across contexts and through the life course.

longitudinal, learner experience perspective and make reference to the construct of learning careers or trajectories. They include the learner experience of e-learning (Creanor, Trinder, Gowan, & Howells, 2006; Mayes, 2006); participation in further education colleges by non-traditional adult learners (Crossan, Field, Gallacher, & Merrill, 2003); cultures of support for staff and learners in community-based learning centres (Gallacher, et al., 2006; James & Bloomer, 2001); and understanding learning in higher education (Haggis, 2009).

A further example of the application of the learning trajectory concept, this time in the field of professional learning, comes from a Danish study of educational psychologists (Tanggaarda & Elmholtb, 2007). Their analysis discusses learning trajectories as examples of how individuals combine and connect learning across both time (past-present-future over the course of a person's life) and also place (different places of work, formal education and further education, and varied contexts of activity and communities of practice with different and overlapping goals, values and rules). In Chapter 2 the significance in this enquiry of both the spatial and temporal dimensions of the learning landscape for learners of Chinese was pointed out. To consider individual learning trajectories in terms of combining and connecting both those dimensions is therefore of relevance for the conceptualisation of this study.

This section has explored some research orientations to the constructs of the learning journey, the learning trajectory and the learning career, in the fields of adult education and lifelong learning. The following sections turn to the field of second language acquisition and development to investigate the use of these concepts in research approaches to long-term language learning.

### **3.3 The long view of language learning**

#### **3.3.1 Orientation**

##### **3.3.1.1 Background: approaches to SLA**

In the late 1990s, Firth and Wagner (1997) called for a reconceptualisation of SLA research and theory from its then predominantly cognitivist orientation towards orientations which could acknowledge and prioritise social, cultural and contextual aspects of language learning, acknowledging the individual agency and multiple identities of learners and taking an emic perspective. This influential publication was one of the triggers for a developing climate of conceptual change, and the resultant 'social turn' in approaches to SLA research has been well documented (e.g. Atkinson, 2011; Block, 2003; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2007; Ortega, 2011; Swain & Deters, 2007). Holistic and contextualised views of language learning are now more prevalent, and the field is increasingly responsive to sociopolitical, historical and cultural aspects including the agency and identity of learners. A growing field of research in SLA focusses on social, affective and conceptual aspects of the learner's experience. Ecological

orientations to language development lie behind a number of rising theoretical approaches, based upon “the post-structuralist realisation that learning is a non-linear, relational human activity, co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history, and a site of struggle for the control of power and cultural memory” (Kramsch, 2002a, p. 5). Traditional dichotomies are being questioned and reframed by new conceptual lenses including those of multicompetence (Cook, 2002a, 2003) which challenges the native speaker vs. non-native speaker (NS/NNS) distinction; complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) which rethinks the individual/social distinction; and language ecology (Kramsch, 2002b; Van Lier, 2004) which looks beyond the language acquisition/language socialisation divide (Kramsch, 2009, p. 248).

### 3.3.1.2 Introduction to long-term language learning

Having established an understanding of the significance of learning in adulthood and of conceptualisations of long-term learning and learning through the life course in the first half of this chapter, I will now sharpen the focus of this review and turn to research in applied linguistics on language learners, to examine the complementarities and distinctions between longitudinal approaches and life history/narrative approaches to language learning. I will draw attention to features of longitudinal study and outline some key concepts in the study of learner experiences of language learning. Following that I will look more closely at the learning of additional languages beyond the institution, and then at studies of learning Chinese from the learner perspective.

In recent years there have been growing calls for longitudinal studies of language development. According to Ortega and Byrnes (2008a, p. 18) (whose focus is longitudinal study of advancedness):

longitudinal designs can uniquely help researchers document the lengthy trajectories of adults who strive to become multicompetent and multicultural language users, thus capturing speakers' gradual pathways towards comfortable, competent and dynamically evolving abilities to deploy sophisticated capacities for the use of two or more languages.

However, not all longitudinal designs focus on the lengthy trajectory or the gradual pathway, and in the following sections I aim to clarify the areas of overlap between longitudinal study and the language learning journey or career.

### 3.3.2 Features and parameters of longitudinal research into language learning

Distinguishing features of longitudinal research in SLA have been identified as study length, multiple waves of data collection, a conceptual focus on capturing change, and prolonged tracking of the phenomenon under investigation in its context to establish antecedent-consequent relationships. In a survey of longitudinal studies in SLA between 2002 and 2005,

published research is divided among four categories; descriptive-quantitative longitudinal studies of L2 development; longitudinal research on L2 program outcomes; longitudinal investigation of L2 instructional effectiveness; and qualitative longitudinal research (Ortega & Iberri-Shea, 2005). My principal focus (though not the sole one) in this overview is on the last of these: qualitative longitudinal research. Saldaña (2003) characterises the basic outcome of a longitudinal qualitative study as “describing from qualitative data what types of participant changes occurred, if any, through an extended period of time”; additional possible outcomes are analysing or interpreting: “when, how, how much, in what ways, and/or why changes might have occurred or did not occur through that extended period of time” (pp. 13-14). The emphasis on description, process and development is strong; process is considered to be complex and continuously evolving, and consequence as “not the final result defining how change has occurred, but a step in the continuous action/interaction process of participants over time” (Saldaña, 2003, p. 49).

There are a number of parameters along which longitudinal studies can vary, including length, tempo, setting, consistency of learner background, and proficiency level. They will be considered in turn below.

### **3.3.2.1 Length**

The first is length: ‘longitudinal’ is a relative term, used to describe periods of focus ranging from several weeks to many years. In general, the shorter the period covered, the higher the level of detail and degree of granularity of the research focus. There are many longitudinal studies that are based on following aspects of language development or classroom practice which take place in a single class group over the course of a university semester of 3–4 months length. Due to their limited time frame and bounded institutional context, single semester studies are excluded from consideration here unless they explicitly situate their findings in the context of individuals’ longer learning journeys. Of greater relevance are the medium term (up to 2 years) and particularly the longer studies (over 2 years), which are more likely to incorporate a focus on the development of the learning trajectory over time.

### **3.3.2.2 Tempo**

‘Longitudinal’ can also be used to describe a wide range of tempos and rhythms of data collection, including: single point interviews which encourage the retelling of a narrative of experience; snapshots of a situation taken at various points in time and then compared to reveal change that has occurred during the intervening period; multiple waves of collection of a variety of types of data; and ongoing observation of an ethnographic nature. The texture, detail and focal length of these different types of data collection reflect different approaches and research purposes and will yield very different results.

### 3.3.2.3 *Setting*

Another parameter of variation in longitudinal studies is whether they deal with a single setting for language learning, or with multiple ones. Studies which have a primary interest in instructed language acquisition and have as one of their aims to understand the effects of instructional practices in order to work towards improving outcomes, tend to focus on one particular setting of instruction (often the classroom). Enquiries which are based on the more holistic view of language development in its social dimensions, seeking to understand the dialectical relationship between individual development and the wider sociocultural context, seek research sites where transformation in the skills and capacities of participants are likely to be readily observable over time, which for practical reasons often correspond, once again, to the formal language class group (Kingtoner, 2010) or to a group enrolled to study in a particular mode.

On the other hand, in order to get a view of the interrelationship between different contexts and episodes of learning in people's longer term trajectories of learning, it is necessary to find a vantage point which can look further than the classroom and accommodate a view of multiple sites or contexts of learning, and of the route an individual takes as she moves among and between sites and contexts at different times. Longitudinal studies that take, as a site for research, a setting other than the instructed classroom are more likely to meet this requirement. For example, those longitudinal studies which are based around study abroad tend to take into account the variety of learning experiences and opportunities or obstacles outside the classroom, and to have a focus on sites of intercultural as well as strictly linguistic development (Allen & Herron, 2003; DuFon, 2002; Iino, 1996; Kingtoner & Blattner, 2008; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Polanyi, 1995). In addition, the nature of the in-country sojourn, which is commonly situated as an episode in a course of institutionally defined learning, also leads to a stronger likelihood of it being seen in the context of preceding and following sites and modes of study, which may have some relevance to the learning trajectory (Kingtoner, 2004; Kingtoner & Whitworth, 2005; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Shedivy, 2004).

### 3.3.2.4 *Consistency of learner background*

Longitudinal studies also vary in terms of degree of heterogeneity of age and life stage of the learner group investigated. A 2005 survey found that the majority of longitudinal studies of SLA concern young adult learners in university education, and that there are far fewer such studies of children or older adults (Ortega & Iberri-Shea, 2005). The spread of age groups of participants in longitudinal study tends to relate to the degree to which the study is based upon an institutional timescale. A group of participants from a particular class cohort is more likely to be relatively homogeneous in terms of age and stage of life than a group identified by non-institutional criteria; having said that, however, even in the institutional context, there is one setting in which mixed age group and older adults regularly form learner groups, and

that is part-time and distance mode courses. While valuable research in this type of setting has been reported which takes a short and medium term longitudinal aspect (Hurd, 2000, 2001; Lamy & Hassan, 2003; Sataporn & Lamb, 2005; White, 1999), there is very little research in this area with a central, longer-term longitudinal or learner trajectory focus.

### 3.3.2.5 Proficiency level

Level of proficiency, or stage of learning, or language development of the individuals or group followed in a longitudinal study is also variable. In studies where the research site of foreign language learning is the classroom, a certain degree of homogeneity in the stage of language development is likely, and the activities in which participants engage will have a degree of similarity or comparability of focus, even though the way that participants engage in or react to the activities may be very different. Research sites which are less strongly focussed on the instructed or institutional context are likely to yield a higher degree of variety in this regard.

### 3.3.3 Proficiency-related longitudinal studies

Some studies, which take a medium or long-term perspective, are explicitly focussed on aspects of language acquisition and development. When they involve groups rather than individuals, they tend to be bounded within an institutional context, in which longitudinal studies of instructed acquisition of foreign languages commonly investigate beginner and intermediate levels, in first and second year university classes (e.g. Boss, 2008).

Recently, however, *advanced* language learning has emerged as a focus for longitudinal research. Ortega and Byrnes (2008a) link longitudinal study and the study of advanced language learning and propose that the concept of a “trajectory toward advancedness” can inform both SLA and the longitudinal study of language development. This is germane to this study but there are also some points of difference. First, as previously mentioned the focus of the current study is not primarily proficiency-oriented. The participants are experienced as learners, but have not necessarily reached advanced levels of proficiency (see section 2.5.2). Secondly, in this study, the notion of a trajectory is not one that leads towards a goal of advancedness; rather it is one that leads towards the learner’s imagined future/s as a language learner/user, whatever that may be and however it may evolve; and it may or may not be defined in terms of proficiency level.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.3.4 Longitudinal studies centred on learner experience: key concepts

Another category of longitudinal study is that which focusses on the development of particular ‘attributes’ of the learner, or concepts of central importance in the learning situation, such as

---

<sup>4</sup> The study of fossilisation is one of the language acquisition research areas which has a longitudinal aspect, but it is outside the territory of this thesis.

learning strategies, motivation, agency, identity and beliefs. As Breen reminds us, most learner contributions to language learning are dynamic and mutable, and a longitudinal research orientation is necessary to trace how they shift during learning over time, and to capture the transitions, turning points and moments of crisis that “require of the learners reconceptualisation, significant affective investment or adaptation in actions taken” (2001b, p. 179). In this way, research which traces particular aspects of learner contributions and the language learner’s experience can contribute directly or indirectly to an understanding of various types of trajectories: emotional and affective ones (Bown & White, 2010b; Hurd, 2008; Kramsch, 2010; Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Schumann, 1997); motivational trajectories (Ushioda, 2009, 2011a, 2011b); identity trajectories (Block, 2007a, 2007b); and trajectories of belief (Benson & Lor, 1999; Kalaja, 2003; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003; Kramsch, 2003; White, 1999); among others.

The concept of the learning journey or the learning trajectory is a significantly holistic one. In this thesis it is centred around the individual learners, and the ways that they engage in learning Chinese over time, in different settings, and through different timescales. It is concerned with both what they do in terms of Chinese activity, and what they think and feel about it, as their journey evolves over time. The patterns of the journey as it evolves, significant episodes and connections, and the way it shapes and is shaped by the multiple contexts within which learners live their lives, are all of interest. There are many aspects of the learner experience of language learning which have been productively and deeply theorised, and which can be considered integral to conceptualising the learning journey. They are likely to be significantly implicated in the choices and decisions that learners make over the course of their trajectory and to feature in the interrelationship between context and person. These issues include identity, agency, autonomy, emotion and motivation. They will be presented briefly in the next sections. In the coming data presentation and analysis (Chapters 5–8) it will be essential to be alert to their presence and the variety and extent of the roles they may play, but it will be necessary to confine the commentary to the ways they relate to and add value to the central theme – which, as already explained, is that of the description and dynamics of the learning journey or trajectory.

The important themes of agency, identity, autonomy and motivation in language learning have arisen from different fields, and until recently have tended to be studied as separate foci in language acquisition/development studies. The concept of agency has strong links with social theory and the social sciences; so also does identity, and identity research is particularly strong in sociolinguistic and critical approaches to language learning. The study of motivation arises from, and still has strong associations with, social-psychological theory and approaches, but it has been reframed in more critical perspectives as investment (Norton, 2000). Research

into learner autonomy originally had strong connections with the self-access movement in Europe. Despite their different origins, it is a sign of the developing trend towards holistic, contingent and situated approaches in SLA that increasingly the interrelationships and links between these phenomena are being explored and are found to yield theoretical insights in various areas. For example, identity and agency (Duff, 2012); autonomy and agency (Hunter & Cooke, 2007; Toohey, 2007; Toohey & Norton, 2003); motivation and identity (Murphy, 2011; Ryan, 2009; Ushioda, 2011a); autonomy, motivation and agency (Gao, 2010a, 2010b); motivation and autonomy (Ushioda, 2006, 2011b) ; identity, motivation and autonomy (Lamb, 2011; Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011).

In this thesis, since the focus is on trajectories and long-term experiences of learners, rather than on a particular single aspect or concept, the relational aspects of these issues are significant, and the focus will be on looking at interrelations and intersections through the learner's trajectory, and fluctuating and contingent influences. Since the conceptual framework adopted is one that takes, as its core, interrelationships, dynamics, and non-linearity, it can comfortably accommodate an integrative view of these key concepts.

#### **3.3.4.1 Identity, agency and investment**

In recent years, the study of identity in language learning has been linked with the “social turn” in SLA (Block, 2003). Identity research in SLA is often associated with constructivist and post-structural approaches, which view identity as dynamic, multiple and shifting (Pavlenko, 2002); these approaches also make reference to the work of critical social theorists such as Bourdieu and Giddens, and to Bakhtinian concepts of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981; Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1991). The fact that identity in SLA now has scholarly journals dedicated to it, and has been the subject of several recent overviews, ‘state of the art’ summaries, and critiques (Block, 2007a, 2007b; Duff, 2012; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2011), signals the extent to which it is now established as a productive and complex research area. Within the confines of this section there is insufficient space to survey the field in detail, and I merely aim to signal the key concepts of identity, agency and investment.

Norton (writing as Norton Peirce in 1995 and subsequently as Norton) whose work has been highly influential in the field, defined *identity* as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5). Norton's characterisation frames identity as associated with individuals' own evolving perceptions of the progression of their language learning through time. Ten years on, surveying identity research in SLA over the intervening period, Norton and McKinney (2011, p. 89) argue for a view of identity as “always in process”. Research in this area adopts an emic approach, and frequently draws on self-report and reflective data in order to access participants' own



understandings of their experience (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 87). As well as being concerned with the past and current experiences of language learners, such research can also allow for consideration of their future trajectories in respect to using the language. The process view of identity is of considerable relevance to the longitudinal and learner trajectory focus of this enquiry.

The concept of *agency* relates to the capacity for intentional activity which contributes to the processes implicated in personal identity work. The connection is explained by Duff (2012, p. 417) as “people’s ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation”. Hunter and Cooke (2007, p. 75) describe agency as “the ability to act with initiative and effect in a socially constructed world”, commenting that learners “have to act in numerous mundane and ingenious ways to promote their own learning”. The combination of the mundane and the ingenious in learners’ agentic orientations towards their learning trajectories will be of interest in this enquiry. Sociocultural-theoretical perspectives on agency see it as socially and historically constructed, and prefer to conceptualise it as more than a property or a set of abilities, and rather in terms of a relationship “that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 148). Views such as these which see agency as situated and dynamic are compatible with a longitudinal perspective on language learning. They are also compatible with the agency theorisation of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) that informs approaches in life course research, in which agency is perceived as linking orientations to past, present and future: “[agency] can involve the effects of past experiences on current behaviours. It can involve the rational calculation and assessment of current situations and circumstances. It can involve a projection into the future that then serves to orient present activities” (Macmillan & Eliason, 2003, p. 532). In this connection Biesta and Tedder (2007, p. 138) point out the importance of maintaining focus on the contextual and the temporal dimensions of agency concurrently, which requires “an understanding of changes and differences in agentic orientations against the background of biography and lifecourse, and against the background of the histories of contexts for action themselves”. Biesta and Tedder’s ecological understanding of agency as “a quality of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for-action” (2007, p. 146) also fits well with the situated, dynamic and relational approach.

A critique of the approach to agency in some identity research in SLA is offered by Block (2009), who draws on the work of the anthropologist, Ortner (e.g. Ortner, 2005, 2006), to advocate a clearer understanding of the interrelationship between agency and structure.<sup>5</sup> In

---

<sup>5</sup> This is an issue which is also discussed in other research fields; it has already been alluded to in section 3.2.5, in the context of learning trajectories.

this view, whereas agency is conscious action by individuals actively shaping their realities, structure, on the other hand, has some associations with Bourdieu's *habitus*. It refers to the social constraints operating at an unconscious level which affect such action at every juncture, characterised as "socialised structures within individuals which guide them in their actions but which cannot be grasped and comprehended by individuals" (Block 2009, p. 223). Block contends that the role of structural aspects in the interrelationship is sometimes overlooked. Interestingly, it seems that a complexity theory perspective on issues of human agency may be able to encompass this interrelation, because the individual is conceptualised as positioned in the context of multiple nested complex systems, which are also represented as fractals at lower levels of organisation (such as internalised structures). Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 76) describe it in this way: "as agents in multiple, nested complex systems, the decisions that we make as individuals cannot help but be influenced by our connections into all kinds of social groupings. [...] every aspect of the decision reveals our interconnectedness". This view does in fact find parallels in an earlier characterisation by Block of the factors influencing identity work: "beyond the immediate context [...] there are macro-level forces, such as the world economic order, and micro-level forces, such as moment-to-moment experiences, that impinge on and shape opportunities for second-language identity work to take place" (Block, 2007b, p. 202).

Another vein of identity theorising and research identifies a need for the incorporation of a more psychological or psychoanalytic view, such as that taken by Granger (2004), into discussions of identity and agency. Block cautiously advises researchers to "attempt to reconcile underlying deep emotions and passion with semiotically-mediated surface-level behaviour" (2009, p. 228). The role of emotion will be further considered in section 3.3.4.3.

A significant concept, which relates to identity and agency, is that of *investment*, introduced as a sociological construct (to complement the psychological construct of motivation) by Norton (Norton Peirce, 1995). The concept seeks to connect "a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language and their changing identities" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420). Investment continues the economic metaphor implicit in Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), to describe a learner's commitment to learning the target language in terms of the understanding that "if learners invest in a second language, they [...] will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 75; Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 420). The learner is conceived in post-structural terms as having a complex identity and multiple desires, which affect and are affected by her relationship with and investment in the target language. "When language learners speak [...] with target language speakers, [...] they are constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's

own identity, an identity that is constantly changing across time and space” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 75).

The role played by imagination in learners’ investment in learning and in identity construction is important, since their interactions take place not only in the present time and with accessible communities, but also in imagined future contexts. The concept of *imagined communities* (Anderson, 1983; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) is one which is of significant relevance to the study of the dynamics of long-term learning journeys, especially those undertaken by learners in a ‘foreign language learning situation’ based outside of the main speech communities for that language. Together with the associated idea of *imagined identity* as a target language (TL) user, it enables the exploration of “how learners’ affiliation with such communities might affect their learning trajectories” (Norton & McKinney, 2011, p. 76), and how the imagined communities of learners may shift, adjust, develop, recede or materialise as the trajectory unfolds.

#### 3.3.4.2 *Autonomy*

The concept of learner autonomy, as “an attribute of the learner’s approach to the learning process” (Benson, 2001, p. 2) is often linked to that of agency, and has relevance for the longitudinal study of language learners’ experience. The widely accepted definition is that of Holec (1981, p. 3): “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. There are various different interpretations and categorisations of autonomy which are briefly outlined below.

Oxford (2003) identifies four broad perspectives on autonomy, reflecting significantly different orientations to SLA, and advocates that they should be distinguished clearly but applied in combination. The technical perspective focusses on external conditions for autonomy because “a rich description of literal, physical circumstances is often very important for understanding psychological, social and political factors in a learning situation” (2003, p. 82). The psychological perspective focusses on mental and emotional characteristics of learners considered to be autonomous, and also their learning strategies and motivation. The sociocultural perspective focusses on the development of autonomy via interaction and mediated, meaningful and situated learning. The political-critical perspective, which has a focus on power, access and ideology, emphasises that autonomy involves “gaining access to cultural alternatives and power structures; [and] developing an articulate voice amid competing ideologies” (Oxford 2003, p. 79). A further perspective on autonomy, which takes an ecological orientation to language learning and invokes authenticity and connection, is offered by van Lier (2004, p. 8): “having the authorship of one’s actions, having the voice that speaks one’s words, and being emotionally connected to one’s actions and speech, within one’s community of practice”.

Historical perspectives on the shifting focus of autonomy research since the 1970s are offered by Benson (2001, 2006), Little (2007a, 2007b), and Palfreyman (2003) among others. Developments in language learning policies and structures in Europe in the 1970s, and the widespread establishment there of self-access centres for language learning resulted in an early focus on the aspects of autonomy that related to self-directed learning of individuals attending these centres. Subsequently, interest extended to the notion of autonomy in the language classroom context, involving interdependence, collaboration and social interaction (Kohonen, 2003; Little, 2007b): “Learner autonomy now seemed to be a matter of learners doing things not necessarily on their own but for themselves” (Little, 2007a, p. 14). More recently, the connection between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy in the classroom context has emerged as a strong research focus (Barfield & Brown, 2007; Lamb & Reinders, 2008).

Autonomy is also linked to ideas of learning independently in various different settings and modes of learning of the types discussed in Chapter 2, such as distance learning and self-instruction, as well as computer assisted language learning (CALL) and tandem learning. Benson (2001, p. 34) makes a distinction between autonomy (as an attribute or capacity of the learner) and self-directed learning (as a particular mode of learning in which the learner makes decisions about content and methods); the two are linked in that the degree of autonomy a learner can call upon at any time will have an impact upon their effectiveness in carrying out self-directed learning. In the context of distance learning, and also independent learning, White has theorised issues of autonomy in relation to the distribution of control, and proposes a valuable perspective based on dimensions of “learner involvement” and “collaborative control” (White, 2003, 2008).

Taking the political-critical perspective, Pennycook (1997, p. 44) critiques what he called mainstream views of autonomy for being isolating and individualised, and for ignoring cultural, political, social and economic constraints; and Holliday (2003) raises concerns that simplistic views of autonomy contribute to generalisations and stereotyped dichotomising of Western and non-Western students (see Benson, 2006, p. 25). There is now a trend towards a more global perspective in autonomy research which attends to cultural aspects of autonomy in language learning (Barfield & Brown, 2007; Palfreyman & Smith, 2003).

The result of these various developments is that autonomy is now increasingly seen from a broader perspective as a contextually and culturally variable construct (Benson 2006, p. 34), rather than simply as a quality or an ability to be fostered in or developed by individual learners.

The studies examined later in this chapter (section 3.3.5.1) draw significantly on the concept of autonomy as it can develop in the long-term learning of additional languages.

### 3.3.4.3 Emotion

Since the current enquiry relates to learners' personal lived experience of learning Mandarin over a number of years, and to their reflections on their past experience and their projections and hopes for their future engagement with Chinese, emotional aspects of their experience will be an important focus. This section explores relevant work that has been done on the relationship between emotion and language learning, dividing it into two broad approaches: first, research on the impact of emotional factors on the language acquisition process and outcomes; and secondly, enquiries into the emotional impact upon learners of their engagement with language learning.

First, in traditional approaches to SLA, the psychological term 'affect' is used to refer to one of a group of 'learner variables' or 'individual learner differences' which are seen as separate to the core cognitive business of language learning, and the word 'emotion' has not often been used in relation to instructed SLA. A significant amount of research in the cognitivist tradition clusters around the investigation of how affect (in various forms) influences learning outcomes.

Contexts which imply a degree of isolation for learners and require them to work alone or independently such as distance education, online and flexible learning, and learning in self-access centres, have led to research into a variety of affective aspects, particularly anxiety; the research stems from a wish to understand what the difficulties might be in order to support learners to develop practical strategies to overcome them (e.g. Hurd, 2000, 2007, 2008; White, 2008). As White (2011) observes, however, "anxiety's not the only game in town" and to study it alone may mask the fact that there are many emotions in learning, both positive and negative, and they tend to arise in relationship to each other.

Other areas of enquiry within this perspective are those of learning styles and language learning strategies. The latter include cognitive strategies (direct ways of manipulating language material e.g. analysis and note-taking), metacognitive ones (managing the learning process overall), and affective strategies (strategies which help learners to manage their emotions and level of anxiety, such as self-talk and rewards) (Oxford, 1990). Much motivation research has also been conducted from this perspective (but, as will be explained in section 3.3.4.4, there is a more recent trend in motivation research which starts from a different set of assumptions).

In the investigation of these areas, large-scale studies using surveys and questionnaires are common. In addition, action research by teacher-researchers on these issues leads to attention to affect being increasingly incorporated into language teaching methodology and the language curriculum, as Dewaele (2005) recommends.

Turning to the second group of approaches to this topic, the study of emotion (I am choosing this word rather than 'affect' to distinguish it from the 'individual differences' approach) in

language learning emerges from various areas. One area in which a wider view of emotional aspects of personal experience of second language learning and use has been offered is that of narrative and autobiographical studies which address multilingualism, language development and identity as part of the migrant experience (see section 3.3.5). Post-structural, critical, feminist and psychoanalytic research approaches have tended to be the ones to bring this aspect into view, as evidenced in the work of Kramsch and Whiteside (2007), Phipps and Guilherme (2004), Pavlenko (2001, 2002, 2007), and Granger (2004), among others. Emergent ecological and systems-oriented frameworks for viewing language acquisition also allow for more holistic views of learners and learning in which emotional aspects can be given a more integrated role. In parallel, as learner-centred approaches in SLA have increased, the role of emotion in specific contexts has been given more attention. For example, emotional aspects of learner experience and identity have been the focus of some research on study-abroad contexts (see section 3.3.2.3).

Compared to the first group, these approaches tend to frame questioning about emotion differently. Rather than asking how it affects the progress and outcomes of successful language acquisition, they enquire how language learners are affected emotionally by their involvement with language learning. Language learners are characterised as: “thinking, feeling and acting persons in a context of language use grounded in social relationships with others” (Breen, 2001a, p. 1); and as “having a complex social history and multiple desires” (Norton, 2000, p. 10). The investigation of learner emotions extends well beyond the ‘successful’ outcome of the language acquisition process, and the focus is on variety, rather than generalisable patterns; and on emotions as integral to, and in dynamic relationship with, language learning, as opposed to being a separate influence ‘on’ it. Enquiry methods include interview studies, diary and self-report, observation, narrative study, metaphor studies and longitudinal approaches.

A wide variety of theoretical approaches is represented. One example situated at the post-structural, critical side of the field, comes from the work of Kramsch (2010) on desire and subjectivity as expressed by university students taking ‘foreign’ language courses, which offers interesting insights into emotional aspects of language learning. Countering claims by Block (2007) that the classroom foreign language learning context does not offer affordances for changes to occur in the learner’s conceptual system and his/her sense of self in the target language, Kramsch notes the emotional aspects of language learning in such contexts. She speaks of the imagined, emotional resonances in speaking and hearing a new language. For beginning learners, the referential relation between signs and their objects is not yet fixed, and the symbolic properties of the sign are more available. This allows the learners to engage in playful projection of meanings and emotions onto the sounds and symbols of the language (perceiving words or sounds as mysterious, exotic or angry, for example) as they try to make sense of a new symbolic system.

Additionally, the emotional intensity in foreign language learners' accounts of their experiences is analysed by Kramsch (2010, p. 14) who suggests that on a deep level, the impulse to learn a foreign language comes from the desire of the learner for the fulfilment of self, or the impulse towards physical, emotional and social equilibrium; it is the exploration of possibilities of the Self in real or imagined encounters with Others. Elsewhere, in a rich study of adults learning 'tourist languages' in evening classes in preparation for their holidays, Phipps also invokes the concept of desire, describing it as "a yearning, a longing, a grasping towards an unknown embodiment, a sensed but not yet felt fluency that comes with travels into another language" (2007, p. 41). Embodiment is a key concept here, and in Kramsch's study embodied emotions are strongly apparent in learners' metaphors of the first years of foreign language learning: physical challenge, 'escaping one's skin', exploration, physical pain and the quest.<sup>6</sup>

The contrasting approaches to emotion in language learning outlined in this section find echoes in research in adult education, as reported by Dirkx (2001). Whereas popular notions frame teaching and learning as largely rational, cognitive processes, and understand emotions as either impediments to, or motivators of, learning, there is, however, a growing body of research reflecting a variety of conceptual frameworks, sharing the perspective that emotions and feelings are more than merely a motivational concern in learning:

Personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adult's emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world... this meaning-making process is essentially imaginative and extrarational, rather than merely reflective and rational. (Dirkx, 2001, pp. 67-68)

The work outlined in this section points to the fact that emotion (in its various and interrelating forms) is an important aspect of the current enquiry into people's longer term learning trajectories. Desire, emotion, imagination and beliefs play an important part in how people frame and reflect upon their previous experiences as well as in how they envisage and plan towards their projected, continuing learning. Desire also has an important role in projecting the imagined communities (Anderson, 1983; Kanno & Norton, 2003) and ideal selves (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Higgins, 1987) or future L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) which express learners' dreams and intentions for the future, and nourish their engagement with learning in the present.

This study aspires to move beyond the dualism implicit in the way the two approaches outlined in this section have been presented, and to adopt a view that can encompass complementarities and interrelations. Adopting a complexity framework affords a relational and co-adaptational

---

<sup>6</sup> The complex connection between body, emotion and self is also illuminated, from another angle, by the somatic and ecological theories of self of writers such as neuroscientist Damasio, and ecological psychologist Neisser.

view, which sees a learner as affected emotionally by her involvement with language learning, and her language learning in turn affected by the emotions she is experiencing.

#### 3.3.4.4 *Motivation*

In the study of motivation in language learning there is increasing focus on motivation as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed entity; social constructivist approaches, for example, emphasise the importance of attending to both initiating and sustaining aspects of motivation (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 41). A strong advocate for a dynamic view of motivation and qualitative research approaches is Ushioda (2009, 2011a), whose work explores personal motivation trajectories of learners at macro (long-term) and micro (discourse) levels. In recent years the work of Dörnyei (2009) relating to motivation has moved from a comparatively static perspective towards one which is also in alignment with a process-oriented view, particularly with his proposed “L2 motivational self system”; and in his latest writings Dörnyei (2009, 2010, in press) has also begun to adopt a complexity framework in his analysis.

One study of motivation by Shoaib and Dörnyei, (2004) which is relevant to this enquiry because it relates to language learning trajectories, investigated fluctuation and change in the level of motivation over time of 25 long-term learners of English as a foreign language, aged from 18–34, as evidenced in short single point retrospective semi-structured interviews. Template analysis of the interview data revealed six recurring temporal patterns of motivational change: maturation and gradually increasing interest; stand-still period; moving into a new life phase; internalising external goals and “imported visions”; relationship with a “significant other” and time spent in the host environment. A limitation of this interesting study is that although the creation of individual timecharts of each participant’s temporal motivational progression is alluded to, the presentation of the discussion as a cross-case thematic analysis does not allow for a view of the way that the patterns identified combined over time within the learning trajectories of individuals. In contrast, the present study combines some cross-case thematic analysis with a significant amount of longitudinal through-case tracing and analysis of patterns.

Campbell and Storch (2011) studied dynamic and developmental aspects of motivation of learners of Chinese as a foreign language in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year university contexts. Their interview data was collected over the course of one semester only, but from both a second year and a first year cohort. Conclusions were drawn about the longitudinal development of motivation by comparing these two sets of data; such a research design carries an inevitable assumption of generalisation, since continuity could not be traced in the development and trajectories of individuals. A comparable data collection design comparing cohorts of students at different levels in the same semester was employed in Matsumoto’s (2009)



investigation of persistence in Japanese language study for learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This study demonstrated the way in which motivation is not something fixed in the learners' minds but can change over the course of learning, and showed that motivational factors vary according to levels of language proficiency. However, it did not consider learning beyond the institutional setting or timescale.

A motivation-based study, which does go beyond the setting of a single institution, was conducted by Shedivy in 2004. Shedivy explored students' own perceptions of what had motivated them to persist with language study past the 'usual' (in the US) obligatory two years in high school, and on to college study which included prolonged in-country immersion. The five participants were college students or graduates who had studied Spanish through high school and college, and who had spent significant periods of study time in Spanish-speaking countries. Shedivy's (2004) study is framed in terms of Dörnyei's (2000, 2003) process view of motivation which aims to represent the learners' perceptions of their experience in terms of a motivational sequence of distinct stages. Following Gardner's (1985) distinction between instrumental and integrative orientations, Shedivy was interested to find out how integrative orientation developed and contributed to the continuing learning of persistent learners; her phenomenological enquiry is based on single in-depth retrospective interviews which explore student perceptions of their own changing motivational orientations over the course of their Spanish-learning story. Recurrent themes were: a spark to kindle interest; a desire to blend in after an initial in-country experience; a desire to immerse; instrumental orientations co-existing with integrative ones; and increased political awareness. The process of integration and immersion is seen to be one of 'twists and turns'; and though the narratives of each participant's learning story are brief they do convey a flavour of the evolving learning trajectories of these students, and the importance within them of the in-country study experience.

In this section some key concepts in language development studies have been introduced, which are of particular relevance to the characterisation and analysis of long-term language learning journeys. The following section will focus on those studies of language learning journeys which adopt a time-frame stretching beyond the institution.

### 3.3.5 Long-term language learning journey studies: beyond the institution

One vein of such work is to be found in (auto)biographical accounts and research studies of language learning histories which reflect the experience of migrants using and learning an additional language having moved to another country, for example Hoffman's (1989) *Lost in Translation*, and several edited collections (Belcher & Connor, 2001; Besemeres & Wierzbicka, 2007). Many of these reflect the ESL experience of people developing multilingual skills in English-speaking countries. In terms of experiences of learning foreign languages other than English, autobiographical memoirs and popular accounts of adapting to the cultural and

linguistic aspects of long-term residence in another country also reflect some aspects of language learning trajectories (e.g. Kaplan, 1993; Turnbull, 2004). On the whole, the details of such studies fall outside the scope of this literature review, since the focus of the current enquiry is on tracing the experience of learning an additional or foreign language primarily from a base outside of the lands where it is spoken.

In SLA, historically studies which trace learners beyond the level of the institution, or the course, have been less numerous because of practical difficulties of identifying participants and also because of constraints upon the conduct of very long-term research projects associated with funding and publishing pressures on academics (a point also made by Ortega and Iberri-Shea (2005, p. 34)). A further reason for their relative scarcity is that mainstream approaches to SLA until recently aimed to achieve generalisable insights and cause-effect attributions about learners, and therefore did not value personal accounts of the language learning of individuals highly.

Increasingly in the last decade, however, the influential work of Norton and others in TESOL has brought to light the value of studies of the individual experience for affording new insights into issues such as identity and agency in language learning (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995); others have championed the use of narrative and life history methodology in ESL research (Barkhuizen, 2011b; Bell, 2002, 2011; Benson, 2004; Kouritzin, 2000); and these new perspectives are also influencing approaches to the study of the learning of additional languages other than English. As Polanyi (1995, p. 287) has argued, “ultimately, every language learner is alone with a unique experience, an experience tailored to, by and for that individual”. Conferences and collections of ‘learners’ stories’ published in recent years indicate increasing acceptance of the significance of such work (Benson & Nunan, 2002, 2005; Kalaja, Menezes, & Barcelos, 2008). The fact that there is more research output focussed on learners of English than learners of other languages reflects both the relative size of the two fields and also socio-political aspects of the phenomenon of ‘global Englishes’, and gives rise to strong critical perspectives on these topics (Block, 2007b; Pavlenko, 2007). The focus of such studies is often broad enough to afford a longer-term view of an individual’s language learning.

Research which takes as its focus learners who are considered ‘successful’ in some way (see Griffiths (2008) for a recent overview), includes studies which gather retrospective data from interviews or other sources to try to identify and trace factors which might contribute to or explain aspects of their ‘success’. Some of these studies produce accounts that capture aspects of the dynamics of the language learning journey (e.g. Gao, 2010a).

Other research which takes an extra-institutional perspective, and provides insights into the learning journey, is to be found in the field of self-directed learning or ‘autonomous’ language learning. Some studies in this field are based around specific self-access language learning

centres established within universities or similar institutions; among them those which investigate the ways that students make use of the structured materials, language advisory sessions and facilities offered tend to afford a close-up view (e.g. Jones, 1998; Lai & Hamp-Lyons, 2001); while those with a longer perspective are of greater relevance to the theme of the longer overall learning journey (e.g. Cotterall, 2008). Some longer studies of guided self-instruction in contexts other than self-access centres include Bown and White's (2010a) study of affect and emotion in the experiences of 3 students of Russian undertaking guided independent study; Umino's (2002) research on people learning with TV-based self-instructional materials; White's (1999) enquiry into the expectations and beliefs of self-instructed learners in a solo distance language learning context; and Cotterall and Murray's (2009) 3-year study of the development of metacognitive knowledge among Japanese students in a self-directed learning course.

Moving further from the institutional context, there is a small but growing body of research on 'independent' and self-directed learners in and across a variety of other settings that does contribute to a view of language learning trajectories or journeys. As Murray (2003, p. 1) observes, "countless individuals around the world have been learning languages on their own without direct institutional ties. Research exploring experiences of these learners has the potential to further enhance theoretical knowledge as well as inform the practice of educators". Murray's 2003 study uses life-history research methods. Other longitudinal studies with a focus on independent self-directed learning include: Schmidt and Frota's (1986) classic study of Schmidt's learning of L2 Portuguese during a 5 month stay in Brazil; Murray's (2008) work on language learners' engagement with popular culture; and Gao's (2010a) study of Chinese government-promoted role model Zhang Haidi's learning of English 'against all the odds'.

In grouping research areas as institutional and extra-institutional, instructed and non-instructed, the aim is to point out the variety of modes of language learning in which learners can be involved. The separation is largely academic, though, and the boundaries between these modes more and more porous, as the examples in section 2.3.4 demonstrate. The focus of this enquiry is not on any one of these categories but rather on the interplay, both sequential and concurrent, *between* self-directed, naturalistic and instructed learning in different settings in the long-term language learning journeys of individuals.

Benson (2001) has observed that the length and complexity of the task of developing proficiency in a foreign language means that most proficient adult learners are likely to self-manage their learning and to have "a plan of learning that is self-directed overall" which may include participation in formal instructed courses as well as other non-institutional modes of learning and that "most language learning careers include phases of self-instruction" (pp. 61-63). Here the concept of the long course of language learning as an undertaking shaped and

directed by the individual learner can be seen to emerge. Although the word ‘plan’ suggests a considerable degree of direction and control, it is likely that the degree of formal planning will vary considerably from one learner to another, depending on a complex variety of factors both personal and external. The self-management of long-term language learning by adult learners in response to their own changing life contexts and other pressures is an area that has not been widely researched – perhaps less so than long-term learning which is not language related, discussed in section 3.2. However, there are some self-studies and auto-ethnographies which can add to our knowledge and understanding of the ways that individuals self-direct their trajectories of learning to incorporate both instructed and independent learning, such as Brown’s (2002) chronicle and comparison of his ‘auto-communal’ learning of Mandarin and Samoan, Bell’s (1998) monograph of her own acquisition of literacy in Chinese, and Spencer’s (2010) doctoral research on her own experiences over many years of learning German.

Out-of-class learning is identified as an area of study in which research is lacking (Benson, 2001). I prefer the term “learning beyond the classroom” (Benson, 2009), which more comfortably accommodates both spatial and temporal interpretation (although it still privileges the classroom by referring to its absence). Benson warns against becoming absorbed in researching constructs which are “abstracted from the complexity of multiple individuals’ lives” and points out the need to supplement analytical tools with “more holistic constructs that can somehow capture relationships between the ‘parts’ and the ‘whole’ in specific contexts of learning” (2009, p. 229). He proposes differentiating ‘setting’ and ‘mode’ to enable a better understanding of learning beyond the classroom. A language learning setting is “a particular kind of arrangement for learning involving one or more learners in a particular kind of place, and situated in particular kinds of physical, social, or instructional relationships with others (teachers, learners, others)”; while a mode of practice is “a typical set of routine processes or interactions that deploy the elements of a particular type of setting and are characteristic of it” (Benson, 2009, pp. 225-226). The two constructs are interrelated, since in one setting, various different modes of language learning can take place, and modes of practice can be shaped by settings. Therefore we should be wary of defining learners by setting (such as distance learner, or classroom learner) because to do so overlooks the fact that from the individual’s point of view it may be “only one of several forms of engagement with language learning” (2009, p. 232); instead we should move beyond the dualistic distinction of in-classroom and beyond-classroom learning. Benson (2009, p. 232) further notes:

What ethnographic and biographical studies are beginning to show us above all is that we need to pay more attention to the language learning in the everyday lives of learners and the roles that various settings and modes of practice play in these everyday lives.

The research reported in this thesis represents one instance of the “more open-ended investigations of the ways in which individuals engage with language learning in their daily lives” for which Benson calls (2009, p. 233).

In Benson (2009), the temporal aspect of ‘beyond’ the classroom is implied, but the discussion centres largely on its spatial aspect. However the distinction between mode and setting is also useful in characterising long-term language learning journeys, during which individuals are likely to move among modes and settings, and combine them in different ways; and over the course of which the settings available to learners, and associated modes of practice may diversify and change.

In a more recent article Benson (2011) extends his analysis to address issues in narrative research in the description and analysis of long-term language learning experiences. He points out that the term ‘language learning history’ can be used to refer to either the whole course of learning or to shorter periods or episodes within it; and that the term is potentially ambiguous in that it can be used to refer to either life reality or text reality. He proposes the concept of a ‘language learning career’ to clarify these issues, and to mediate between language learning histories as narrative texts and the life realities of language learning which they describe. The language learning career refers to the long-term presence of learning a language in a person’s life; it is not, however, simply a chronology because it is about the ‘subject reality’ of the individual’s developing conceptions of themselves as language learners/users. It is “the sense that a language learner makes of experiences that might otherwise remain incoherent, by construing them, first, as experiences of language learning and, second, as being sequentially and meaningfully interrelated” (Benson, 2011, p. 551). Benson defines a vocabulary of phases, processes, incidents and critical incidents for use in describing larger and smaller periods within a language learning career, to assist in analysing the connections between shorter episodes and the whole trajectory. The learning career concept has significant relevance to this enquiry. Although Benson’s 2011 article draws only on the TESOL context, I believe the concepts could be extended to the foreign language context as well. In the presentation of examples, there is a focus on sequencing of phases and identification of transitions and articulations between phases; it would be interesting to investigate how this promising model might accommodate dynamic aspects of trajectory such as discontinuities, recurrences and dormant or fallow periods, as well as multiple timescales, as are examined here. A further issue of interest is the extent to which the concept of the language learning career, which is defined by Benson specifically in relation to narrative research using language learning histories as data (and, he comments (2011, p. 552), not appropriate for use with very brief responses to interview prompts), can be adapted for research which draws upon other types of data in combination with narrative; for example, data from multiple sources, as might be gathered in case studies.

Resembling the ‘learning career’ is Coffey’s use of the term “the language learning project” to refer to both an individual’s language learning history and the impact it has on their life (Coffey, 2007; Coffey & Street, 2008). Coffey’s view of identity as both contingent and discursively constructed draws from discursive psychology the idea of learning as a series of identity projects (Harré, 1987). Coming from a position that sees learners “as social selves actively enacting a range of social identities” (Coffey, 2007, p. 149), Coffey’s choice of the word ‘project’ also clearly makes reference to Giddens’ (1991) sociological concept of the self in late modernity as an ongoing reflexive project, created, maintained and revised as a set of biographical narratives. Language learning is seen as an identity project within a life history, and the language learning project reflects the learner’s own view of factors both predisposing and sustaining different trajectories of learning. In Coffey’s research, written autobiographies of language learning were collected from 6 adult English long-term learners of various European languages, each followed by one semi-structured interview which was the main subject of the discursive narrative analysis; it was found that the participants made unexpected links between the language learning project and other aspects of their ‘autobiographical landscape’, and expressed key moments in terms of expansion, self-realisation, critical incidents, cultural types and metaphors of struggle. Coffey (2007) notes that this type of narrative approach can yield both individual and cross-case insights: “it allows the language learning experience to be articulated as a long-term life project from the emic perspective of individual learners while also recognising that common cultural narratives draw this experience across shared frames of reference” (p. 149).

The concepts of the language learning project and also the language learning career offer alternatives to the institutional lens and allow us to look at the whole course of an individual’s engagement with learning a language over time, in terms of the subjective reality of the learner. The application of the constructs in the two studies just described is in the analysis of up to two retrospective life history accounts, but neither of the studies could be called longitudinal. To combine retrospective analysis with ongoing longitudinal analysis would enrich understandings of the reality of individuals’ perceptions of their language learning trajectory as it unfolds over time. However such an undertaking requires a research design and a conceptual framework flexible enough to capture dynamic and multilayered aspects of learners’ experience.

### **3.3.5.1 *Specific longitudinal studies***

In this section, three interesting studies are presented in more detail. They were selected for their relevance to the current enquiry, for their learner-centred focus and because they combine aspects of language learning trajectory perspectives, focus on dynamics, and use of multiple data sources and methods. Their similarities and differences are used to point out particular characteristics of this enquiry.

**Kinginger: Alice learning French**

First, Kinginger's four year study of a young American woman learning French investigates the significance of history, imagination and desire in her "organisation of lived experience related to foreign language learning" (2004, p. 219), through episodes of French immersion in Quebec, classroom study on the US university campus, and work-study in France. It is a robust and detailed case study, compelling in its rich contextualisation; data include interviews, journals and correspondence spread over the four years, analysed thematically and longitudinally. Taking the perspective of language learning as social practice, the study reveals how Alice continually reconstructs her motives for learning French in line with her circumstances and experiences, and negotiates her social, gender and class identity. The seeds of Alice's interest in French are presented in the context of a rich description of her early life history, and then her early experiences of French study. Her goal to become a speaker of French as a way of reorienting herself in the world is described as a "personal mission" (a term recalling the notion of an identity project). Of particular interest to me is the way the dynamic and evolving nature of her engagement with French study, and its significance in her life, and the reciprocal influences between the two, are emphasised.

**Gao: strategic language learning from China to Hong Kong**

The second study under consideration is Gao's three-phase study into the English language learning experiences and strategy use of students from mainland China prior to, and after, their arrival in an English-medium university in Hong Kong (Gao, 2010b). Unlike many studies of English learners which are based in communities where the linguistic environment is largely English, the participants in this enquiry were based first in China, and then subsequently away from home in an English-medium university in the multilingual environment of Hong Kong, where Cantonese is the main spoken language, English is widely used in business and professional contexts, and Putonghua (Mandarin) is increasingly used. While reliance on language learning strategy inventories has tended to generate decontextualised and static data (Ellis, 1994), Gao favours a more dynamic view, adopting sociocultural and critical perspectives to analyse shifting strategy use in learners' own accounts of seeking and creating facilitative learning settings within the constraints of context. His analytical framework allows for dynamic interaction between context, setting, situated activity and self.

Gao's study is of interest to the current enquiry in the way that it looks beyond the classroom in both time and space, and follows people's learning journeys and shifting motivational discourses and sense of agency through a period of transition from highly 'other-directed' school study in China, and then at university in China, through to a new learning environment in Hong Kong. The research design, which incorporates multiple phases and multiple data collection methods over twenty months and which accommodates the qualitative research

concept of methodological bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005) in response to the shifting and evolving reality of longitudinal research, allows a richly textured descriptive and interpretive picture to emerge. The combination of language learning histories with further ongoing follow-up conveys a sense of the language learning journeys of the participants from the beginning of their engagement with English.

It is not, however, the journeys themselves which are the focus of Gao's study, but rather developments in learners' strategy use through changing contexts and settings on the journey. While there are significant similarities between Gao's study and this study (and an overlap in the data collection periods) there are other differences as well. In terms of the sociolinguistic and sociopolitical background, there are very different values associated with learning English in China, where English is a high-stakes language, prominent in popular consciousness and societal discourse, and the educational context is highly competitive and exam-oriented. By comparison, Chinese has much lesser prominence in Australia and at the time when the participants in my research began learning it, was still widely considered an unusual choice of language to learn with few models of 'successful' users out there. Furthermore, although in popular consciousness China is increasingly associated with Australia's economic development, knowledge of Chinese is not as closely tied to the idea of career opportunity as knowledge of English is in China. Related to these differences in context, the participants in Gao's study form a more homogeneous sample in terms of age and stage of life than do those in the present study.

#### **Kennett: Australian learners of Japanese**

The third study of interest here is Kennett's narrative enquiry into the biographies of Australians learning Japanese, which is one of the few to date which has a focus on tracing the learning journeys of adult foreign language learners based in Australia (Kennett, 2003). Compared to Chinese, Japanese has been more widely studied as a foreign language in both school and university in Australia, and Kennett's analysis of policy documents demonstrates official discourses of 'the national interest' in acquiring a workforce able to use Japanese in their work. Noting that more is required to reach that capability than the contact hours offered by a university Japanese course with a period of immersion at the end like a "linguistic finishing school" (2003, p. 43), Kennett surveys and interviews 6 long-term users of Japanese to establish the pathways they have followed to becoming able to use Japanese in work, and the ways they incorporate learning and using Japanese into their lives in the long term, including periods of living and working in Japan. Drawing on theories of identity in travel and tourism, as well as the social theory of Giddens (1991) and the language and identity work of Norton (2000), Kennett accounts for her participants' management and accommodation of mixed and sometimes polarised cultural lives into coherent and satisfying



lifestyles using a three-part model consisting of Preference Refinement, Investment Capitalisation, and Identity Management.

Kennett's study was influential in the early development of the current enquiry for a number of reasons. She has a strong focus on learning careers or learning pathways seen from an extra-institutional perspective in the context of the life-path of the learner, and on the episodic nature of long-term foreign language learning. 'Episodes' are delimited by contextual changes in learners' lives (e.g. moving, new learning context, new job, new family circumstances) and offer new identity perspectives, "new ways of being and communicating in Japanese" (2003, p. 369). The learning pathway of each individual is summarised as a graphic timeline, a linear depiction of successive episodes defined by location and type of engagement with Japanese, and marking in-country periods. I found the timelines helpful as a basic representation of the length and variety of these learning journeys; but noted the marked contrast between their linear simplicity and the rich data in the accompanying biographical narratives, which revealed diverse ebbing and flowing currents of influence.

Kennett is specifically interested in looking at the interplay between formal and informal learning environments in learners' histories. Her participants were well advanced along their trajectory of Japanese learning, having studied Japanese formally for at least 10 years and having connections with Japan ranging between 18 and 27 years. The length of time under consideration means that the focus on the learning episodes and the transitions between them, and the nature of the informal learning that the participants chose to engage in at different times, cannot be highly detailed. I wondered if it would be possible to find an approach that could encompass both the broader picture of the context and also close up views of how aspects of the context were reflected in particular choices and informal learning activities and practices. Such a research design would require something more, in terms of data collection and method, than the single semi-structured interviews employed to prompt retrospective narratives in Kennett's study. I will return to this question in the discussion of methodology in Chapter 4.

Some of the other differences between Kennett's study and the current enquiry relate to the participants. The learners in whom I have an interest are less advanced. At the beginning of my research most are still involved in formal university study, and over the course of the 5 year data collection period, a significant transition occurs to a 'post-university' period which brings choices for (or against) continuing independent or informal learning and use of Chinese. Since little is known about long-term distance learners of languages, and those who study part-time, so in the current enquiry these two factors are considered criterial attributes shared amongst all participants, whereas language proficiency is not. In Kennett's study, the participants are chosen for being successful users of Japanese, and one purpose of the study

is to understand what has contributed to their ‘success’. In the current study, the notion of success emerges from the data and is understood to vary from one individual to the next according to their own purpose and priorities. Finally, the learning and teaching of Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) in Australia and Japan, and the opportunities available to Australians to live and work in Japan, has developed very differently to the corresponding situation for Chinese (though there has been some speculation in the media that the current and increasing growth in Chinese learning may have some parallels to the boom in JFL several decades ago).

To summarise, the three exemplar studies just presented are all of relevance to this enquiry by virtue of their dynamic element. They all look beyond a single institutional perspective, to consider language learning as a practice in the context of the life course, and they all attend to transitions.

### 3.3.6 Accounts of learner experience of learning Chinese

As Chinese grows in popularity as a foreign language to study (see section 2.2), there is an increase in research into the teaching of Chinese and the acquisition of Chinese; however, studies of the learner experience are less frequent, and those that do exist are more often based on the early years of learning than on longer term experiences. For example, the study by Campbell and Storch (2011) (mentioned in section 3.3.4.4) into the motivation of university learners of Chinese reflected something of the experience of beginning learners of Chinese. The auto-ethnographical studies by Brown (2002) and Bell (1998) (referred to in section 3.3.5) were based on the early years of their learning. Lantolf and Genung’s (2003) illuminating sociocultural and activity theory analysis of the experience of an adult learner of Chinese who failed in her attempt to learn Chinese was based on a 9-week intensive beginners’ course.

Le’s (2004) study of affective aspects of studying in China used quantitative methods and is based upon various inventories such as the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Le also administered a background questionnaire that asked participants about their Chinese language learning history. Though not claiming to be a longitudinal study it does have a certain longitudinal/developmental aspect.

A longitudinal study of learners’ strategy use and metacognitive thinking during a two-year beginners’ Chinese course in Australia was undertaken by Postmus. She joined the course as a participant herself, and collected learner self-report data, diaries and semi-structured interviews to compare beliefs about language learning and actual practices between groups of students with different degrees of experience of studying and using other languages (Postmus, 1999, 2005). To the extent that she takes into account the prior language learning history of participants, her study looks beyond the course of instruction itself.

Research by de Courcy (1997, 2002) investigates the learning experiences of adults in their 30s who were involved in an unusual 2 year immersion program for Australian qualified

teachers wishing to retrain as teachers of Chinese. The program involved intensive instruction in Chinese and language teaching methodology, full immersion in content-based learning in Chinese, and a year's experience teaching ESL in China while continuing to receive one-to-one language tuition. Based on data collected over two years, this is a longitudinal case study, grounded in qualitative research methodology and taking an ethnographic approach. The main focus of the research is on the immersion classroom context, using observation, video recording, stimulated recall, field notes, interviews, learner diaries and think-aloud protocols, which together produce quite finely detailed data. The findings show a range of student approaches and strategies for learning Chinese in immersion contexts. They also draw attention to issues caused by incompatibility of cultural scripts or expectations for the language classroom context between the learners (experienced as teachers in Australia) and those of their teachers who came from a Chinese educational background; in addition, personal dynamics among the student group are shown to have significant impact on the learning culture. The study clearly demonstrates the complexities of the learning context and the intensity and personal challenges of learning Chinese for mature adult learners in immersion; but its scope does not allow for much consideration of learning beyond the classroom in either a temporal or a spatial sense, and it would be interesting to understand more about such issues over the longer term and across a variety of non-immersion contexts.

Work in progress by Duff, et al. (2009-2011), promises to go some way towards enhancing our understandings of experiences of learning Chinese. It is described as “a longitudinal multiple-case (auto-ethnographic) study about the experiences of five Anglo-Canadian team members who have been learning Chinese, both formally and informally, actively and passively, for many years in a variety of contexts: in Canada, the U.S., Singapore, Taiwan, and China” which will adopt both a language development focus, and a post-structural, sociocultural focus in relation to shifting identities and communities, as well as a narrative lens (Duff, et al., 2009–2011). Preliminary findings revealed considerable fluctuation over time in proficiency, indicating that learning Chinese is “not a simple, linear, cumulative process”; they underscore the need for “more in-depth narratives and analyses of complexities, subjectivities, and possibilities of learning Chinese over an extended period [...] by a wider cross-section of CAL [Chinese as an additional language] learners”; and call for new methodologies for approaching complex problems (Duff, 2010). Though the research reported in this thesis was well under way by the time this Canadian research project was announced, it appears that we have independently reached a common recognition of a gap in the research literature and the need for qualitative longitudinal research to extend understanding of learners' experiences of the complexities of Chinese learning, especially at a time when the field is expanding rapidly. There are, however, significant differences of approach and detail between the two projects: for instance, in research design, this thesis adopts a multitiered approach, collecting

empirical material from an initial group of 41 and then at progressively greater levels of detail from a continuing group of 26 and then a core group of 7 (to be explained in Chapter 4).

### 3.4 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has presented research literature from various fields, which has a bearing on the research questions articulated at the end of Chapter 2 (see section 2.6). The sustaining focus has been the longitudinal view of language learning from the perspective of the individual learner. The discussion has moved gradually from the general to the particular. The first half of the chapter looked beyond applied linguistics: first to the very broad concept of life course trajectories, and then to models of adult learning, and thence to lifelong learning. The concepts of ‘learning journey’, ‘learning trajectory’ and ‘learning career’ as used in adult education were explored. The second half of the chapter then turned to language learning in particular. Both longitudinal SLA research and language learning history research have been investigated, as sources of insight into the nature and dynamics of long-term language learning journeys. Concepts of identity, agency, emotion, desire and motivation have been discussed as they relate to long-term language learning; and attention paid to different forms of non-instructed learning and learning ‘beyond’ the formal classroom, which may form an important part of a learning trajectory. In the last part of the chapter selected studies of conceptual and methodological relevance to this enquiry were presented and discussed.

Just as not all longitudinal studies add to our understandings of the learning journey of individuals over time, so also there is some language learning history research, which may not meet the definitional criteria of length and multiwave data collection to be called ‘longitudinal’, but which through the analysis of retrospective narrative data certainly brings insights into the development of people’s language learning journeys. There is potential for combining aspects of the two approaches: both retrospective narratives and also ongoing data collection in a longitudinal format. Such an endeavour would allow for insights into the evolving interrelation, in context, of individuals’ past experience, current practice, and prospective views ahead to imagined futures, which could be traced using multiple waves of data collection in a longitudinal study format. According to Kierkegaard (1996, pp. 63, 161): “life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”; if such “backwards” and “forwards” views can be collected over a succession of present moments, then a richer understanding of the evolution of a learning journey from the perspective of the learner may be reached. The possibilities will be further explored in Chapter 4, where the focus will turn to methodology and design.

## Interlude: Michelle's story

---

*My momentum fluctuates. There is this underlying fascination with the language and culture that never goes away, then it's sparked by an event or an opportunity. — Michelle*

At the beginning of this enquiry, it had already been a couple of years since Michelle had completed her BA degree; and her studies for it had extended over ten years. When she was in her 30s she had interrupted her study to spend 18 months backpacking in South-East Asia, and on her return to Australia when she resumed her university studies in 1999 (in face-to-face mode at a large regional campus) she enrolled in Chinese, on a whim: "It simply seemed like an interesting option. I was looking purely for something to interest me. Turned out I fell in love with it". She found the language "exciting", "unusual" and the origins of the script "fascinating". She had two years of classroom learning, studying hard to meet the expectations of the teacher who she perceived as strict and demanding; during that time she practised Chinese with a classmate but had no other opportunities to use Chinese outside the classroom. However the language led her to develop an interest in Chinese culture and philosophy, and she began to explore Chinese martial arts, Daoism and Chinese herbalism. These interests grew and Chinese displaced her other subjects as her main focus: "I thought if I'm going to get this degree, the only thing I'm really interested in is Chinese and things associated with it... that's just where my heart lies for some reason". She described it as a passion that she could not explain, and started to consider the possibility of spending time studying traditional Chinese medicine in China, or else going to teach English there for 12 months.

Then unexpectedly Michelle suffered significant health problems, which forced her to take a complete break from all study, including Chinese, for a year or so. Her memories of that period of illness are hazy but she often refers to "before" and "after" it, and she is clear that it had significant effects in all aspects of her life including study "I just let a lot of dreams, yeah, just completely go".

In 2002 when she resumed her studies, her health and reduced stamina and a new need for solitude led her to choose distance learning at a different university. She did this for two and a half years. At first she missed the immediacy of the classroom, but she liked working at her own pace and enjoyed the opportunities for interaction with staff, students and native speaker conversation partners at the residential schools. She felt that studying through this mode gave "all the written and listening skills and really, everything you need, but the speaking, it's really hard to just speak without having someone there to bounce off". She rarely used the internet to support her study at that time because she did not have a connection at home.

Michelle needed to build up her health and find some stability in Australia before she could consider travelling overseas again. She came to realise that her interest was in traditional Chinese culture and she now felt ambivalent about the idea of visiting China for an extended period to study. In Australia

she chose to lead a simple lifestyle with few possessions in a small country town with a strong sense of community, and she was not attracted by what she perceived to be the fast pace and business orientation of modern urban Chinese life. She let go of the idea of visiting China, temporarily: “I think when the time’s right, I’ll know”. Financial considerations also constrained possibilities of travel.

Michelle had few opportunities to use her Chinese to communicate beyond the classroom setting during either of these first two periods of formal study (Periods 1 and 3, 1999-2004).<sup>1</sup> At that time her informal activities relating to Chinese were watching movies and reading. She tried to find people to practise Chinese with in her local rural area. She was excited to read an advert on a local noticeboard from a woman living locally studying Mandarin who was seeking a study partner; they met once but did not hit it off at all. After a chance meeting at the local markets she made friends with a Chinese family who ran a fruit farm nearby. For a while she would visit them and practise Chinese with their children (although the family were not native speakers of Mandarin dialect, she discovered). She was nervous about speaking but she enjoyed the cultural exchange.

After completing her degree studies in 2004 for a while she enjoyed having time to follow up interests other than Chinese. By the time of our first interview in late 2005 she was teaching ESL and art in an alternative school for Korean students, and beginning to consider the idea of studying for a Diploma of Education which would qualify her to teach Chinese in Australian government schools and give her the security of a professional qualification. But she was also drawn to studying more Chinese: “I still feel, yeah, I’m not quite sure what to do with that study that I’ve done or where I can best utilise it. But yeah, I would like to further my studies and also use it. I feel like I’ve done so much in that field and I loved it. I would like to do more”. As it turned out, for some time she had very little Chinese-related activity. She liked the idea of revising from her textbooks, but without the focus of formal study she found it hard to study independently. However, her interest in the Chinese healing arts continued and she attended a class in Qi Gong.<sup>2</sup>

Then at the request of some of the other women in the class she started translating some of the Qi Gong terms for them, and teaching them some basic Chinese. Her classes were well received and the experience boosted her self-image as a user of Chinese: “It makes me feel like I do have some skill or talent that I can pass on to someone else. I feel I’m utilising my Chinese finally, I can do it”. She also did some tutoring to support a local high school student who was learning Mandarin by distance education. These tutoring activities, and some chance meetings with other people interested in learning Chinese in the local area stimulated her interest again, and in particular she began to wonder and investigate what were effective ways of teaching Chinese. When we met again in 2007 she was very happy to talk over her experiences and ideas. Looking back, she described how her passion for Chinese became something that fluctuated: “It’s still there, it just takes something to ignite every now and then, and then, to keep it ignited [...] then certain things will happen and it’ll spark again, then die down and spark again”. The triggers included study experiences, films, books and hearing

---

<sup>1</sup> The periodisation referred to in Michelle’s story will be explained in Chapter 5

<sup>2</sup> A Chinese healing art involving meditation, controlled breathing and movement exercises.

people talk about their trips to China. She was at that time in a period of uncertainty about future direction, but possibilities she was considering were a short study trip to China, getting a qualification to teach in government schools, and finding language work associated with the Chinese healing arts.

Subsequently, in 2008 (period 5 on the timeline, see section 5.6), Michelle enrolled in a Graduate Diploma in Education (by distance education at the same university where she had finished her BA degree) to train as a high school teacher, with Chinese as one of her areas of specialisation. This gave her impetus to review her Chinese: “to teach it you have to know it”, and make use of it in her study and work/practice environment. During this time she began exploring Chinese on the internet. At the end of that year she successfully applied for a scholarship to participate in a 3 week study tour for trainee teachers - her first ever trip to China. It was a short but intense experience of using Chinese to communicate and study in an immersive Chinese environment. She found the experience “daunting but fabulous” but she also felt “a mixture of bitter disappointment with my skill level and then went between wanting to give it up completely or study again and get back to a point of confidence with it”.

However, her first teaching post after qualification was at a P-10 school<sup>3</sup> in a remote country area in 2009 (period 7) where Chinese was not taught. During this busy year her involvement with the idea of Chinese was quite intense, but it occurred at an inner level of reflection rather than as externalised action. She reports: “I was not doing any Chinese-related activity, but I OFTEN thought about things to do with China, Chinese culture, Chinese language and I also thought about studying again or going to China to study”. In her home life, Michelle was now in a steady relationship; her partner had to move frequently for his work, and had no interest in China. She commented: “I wish [he] had just a small desire to see China but he doesn’t”.

A year later in 2010, in the 8th chapter or period of this ongoing story, an integration of Chinese into Michelle's working life occurred when she added two terms of teaching primary ‘Cultural studies: China’ to her workload. With this came her first reported independent but goal-oriented learning and practice of reading, characters and writing, as well as exploring Chinese on the internet. She then took a 3-month break from teaching due to a health problem. This was a time of reflection, again with little or just occasional active use of Chinese, but with much thinking about “visiting China, studying Chinese, how best to teach basic Chinese to kids” and purchase of Chinese study books. She talked with enthusiasm and longing of various possibilities for formal Chinese study; commenting on the online forum set up for research participants in this study to practise their Chinese with each other she wrote: “really exciting to think about getting back into my Chinese language and having others to confer with”; on another occasion: “found some old brochures on the Taoist Temple where I have been a few times and they have Chinese lessons on Saturday. Would LOVE to attend. Bit difficult living [many] hours inland”; and in a diary entry: “Partner talking about moving north but also inland so any study will be via correspondence. Tempting”.

---

<sup>3</sup> Primary to year 10. In less populated areas of Australia a single school caters for both primary and secondary pupils.

After this break she resumed teaching for 6 months, including teaching primary Chinese, which she much enjoyed. However, with another job transfer for her partner on the cards this was not to last, and she wrote to me that “with all this change in the air and my future looking far from settled, I thought again about going to China. If my partner decides to move to [a remote inland area], I might think a bit more seriously about going to China”.

Michelle’s story reflects a long-lasting emotional attachment to Chinese and an ongoing struggle to find ways to integrate it with other aspects of her life. Michelle’s own words in reflecting over the length of her story as a Chinese learner portray the unsettled and conflicted nature of this time for her and are worth citing at some length.

Firstly I remember my passion and enjoyment of the subject. Then I think about the end of my education when I felt I really didn’t know as much as I should have... Then I think about my trip to China and how wonderful it was - but how lacking in the language I felt. My lack of skill in the language worries me and I am reluctant to say it, but sometimes I feel like a bit of a ‘fake’. I have the degree but I can’t speak more than the basics now. Then... I start to think about my earlier Chinese study, and I did do OK, actually really well at times, so then... I start thinking about how I can get back into it? How I can learn again and pick it up? I think about my options out here in [small outer regional town]. I have old books, tapes and some texts but I know I have told myself I will study it before and without any formal study, I just don’t do it. So then, I think about formal study? What can I do? What should I do? And I wonder about doing graduate study but I worry that my Chinese has deteriorated so much I would have to start from First Year. These thoughts tend to go around in a vicious circle.

Desire and struggle for integration are evident here.<sup>4</sup> Although Michelle cannot at present progress her Chinese language learning as she would like to, it is now a part of her life in her teaching work; and she continues, increasingly to nurture her “underlying fascination with the language and culture that never goes away” in the inner world of her thoughts and plans as well as in her engagement with the Chinese healing arts.

At the end of 2010 Michelle was preparing for the next domestic move to another country town and wrote to me: “I won’t teach full time next year. I might just do supply?<sup>5</sup> Still considering options. Always think of studying again. I miss parts of it. ... I still have a passion for Chinese and surround myself with Chinese things in my home”. A year later, she had moved again, this time to the city, with a view to positioning herself to apply for full-time work teaching Chinese, which was likely to be more available in the city. She expressed “urgency to get proficient again... I feel closer now to being able to achieve that”.

*(Commentary on Michelle’s story will be introduced in Chapter 7.)*

---

<sup>4</sup> On a different note, Michelle’s story further reveals the obstacles which exist at the institutional organisational level to past students wishing to refresh, maintain, or update their language skills by means of formal study. She would happily have re-taken units of study completed much earlier, but institutional regulations forbid that. Such obstacles only become apparent when a learner-centred perspective is adopted which looks beyond the institutional timescale.

<sup>5</sup> Supply teaching involves making oneself available to be called in as a substitute teacher at short notice.



# Chapter 4. Methodology and design

---

## Introduction

In preceding chapters I have described the landscape of Chinese learning in Australia, and have consulted scholarly theoretical and empirical studies which are of relevance to the study of long-term journeys of foreign language learning.

The focus of this chapter is to explain the research design which was developed to investigate the research questions (presented in section 2.6). First I will explain the conceptual framework adopted and the choice of methodology. Then I will describe the scale and scope of the research design, and how the various different components within it fit together. In the subsequent section I will introduce the rationale, design and implementation of each of the complementary strategies adopted for collecting and generating empirical materials. After that I will introduce the principles guiding data analysis and the procedures followed; and finally I will comment on some interesting methodological puzzles which I encountered along the way.

## 4.1 Conceptual framework and selection of the methodology

The journeys of learners of Chinese are the focus of the present study. However, a journey cannot be separated from the landscape through which it passes, nor from the consciousness of the individual traveller; indeed a journey is a construct, which only exists as the interaction or intersection of traveller and terrain. Two travellers on the same route can experience very different journeys, whether they travel at different times or by different means, or even if they are seated on the same bus. No two journeys are the same.

To fit this view of individual learning journeys as trails or traces emerging from the dynamic interrelations of landscape (contexts) and travellers (learners), the conceptual framework adopted needs to accommodate a longitudinal approach with multiple waves of data collection. It also needs to offer a means of incorporating groups of participants who may generate data at differing levels of depth and intensity. It should be based upon an acceptance of diversity as the norm rather than as an inconvenience; and it needs to comfortably allow for the voicing of individual perceptions and experience. These conditions appear to be met by complexity-based approaches (introduced in Chapter 1).

This section will discuss some of the issues and choices which emerged as significant in the process of establishing compatibility between research focus, methodology and conceptual framework.

#### 4.1.1 Complexity thinking in research design

Complexity theory is associated with methodological, paradigmatic and theoretical pluralism in research. Its concern for interconnection and context suggests the suitability of case-study methodology, multi-perspectival forms of research and interpretive accounts: “heterogeneity is the watchword” (Morrison, 2008, p. 25). Complexity’s insistence on the dynamic nature of interrelationship means that researchers must “find new, functional ways of viewing our ‘objects of concern’, reconceptualising them in terms of processes, change and continuities” (Larsen-Freeman, 2011, p. 61). In this enquiry, the longitudinal focus with its concern to capture change, and the combination of different methods for creating and analysing empirical materials, can be accommodated within these requirements of a complexivist orientation.

A complexity thinking framework enables a view of the research project itself as a complex adaptive system which has evolved and adapted through dynamic processes and changing relationships, in which the researcher is a part of the system right from the crucial stage of initial conditions, and in which variability is central; as such it can accommodate a degree of diversity of method. (This is especially the case in a longitudinal study (see section 4.4.3)). While it is appropriate, and not inaccurate, to characterise this enquiry overall as a type of multiple nested case study, the longitudinal focus and reflexive approach mean that traces and influences from a variety of methods including narrative are to be found in the approaches to research design, data generation and analysis; and they will be pointed out at various junctures in this chapter.

However, despite this diversity, I make no claim to define this study as ‘Mixed Method’ with two capital Ms, because that is a category or approach in its own right which brings with it issues of definition and procedure, and whose status is currently the topic of some debate within the research community (Creswell, 2011; Lincoln & Denzin, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into that debate. Perhaps it is more suited to my approach to speak of (lowercase) ‘multiple methods’ of strategies, analysis and interpretation (Ellingson, 2011); or of the idea of methodological/analytical bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Bricolage is a term associated with interpretivist, qualitative research approaches, and it tallies well with complexivist principles too. Cooksey (2001, pp. 82, 84) reminds us that “complexity science embraces paradigm diversity by attaching value to what can be learned about system behavior from within any particular paradigm perspective, be it positivistic, interpretive/phenomenological, critical social science, or some other”, and that complexity also reinforces the value of multiple theoretical stances and of diversity in methodology.

#### 4.1.2 Multiple timescales

The notions of heterochrony and dynamic timescales of learning explored by Lemke (2002) within the framework of ecosocial dynamics, tally well with the complexity theory/dynamic

systems approach. It is argued that single, linear notions of time are not as adequate to describe complex systems as is the concept of a hierarchy of overlapping time processes relating to the many different scales of dynamical organisation of a system. Heterochrony refers to the idea that “certain events widely separated in linear time may be more relevant to meaningful behaviour now than other events which are closer in linear time” (Lemke, 2002, p. 80). A heterochronous standpoint enables a view of development as running, not by clock time, but “by its own internally generated timeclocks, many of them, on many different timescales, cycling at vastly different rates (molecular, cellular, organismic, ecological)” (Lemke, 2002, p. 81). In the theory of relativity, as Hawking observes, “there is no absolute time, but instead each individual has his [sic] own personal measure of time that depends on where he is and how he is moving” (Hawking, 1998, p. 33). Time in this view is not simply linear; it is a cultural construct, and it is also an individually and subjectively interpreted construct (Saldaña, 2003, p. 6). In section 2.5 I depicted stage of life, stage of learning and pace of learning as three aspects of the temporal dimensions of the landscape of learning Chinese; the idea of dynamic timescales allows them to be incorporated into the conceptual framework.

Various timescales are drawn upon in the framing of this research, and the interplay between them will be explored in the analysis; some of the principal ones are introduced below.

The chronological timescale of learning is a chronology of the episodes of each individual’s learning, constructed after gathering information on several occasions about past stages and their current situation, as well as projected futures at different times. What is created is not a sequential ‘single strand’ timeline, but rather an unstructured braid consisting of various parallel or intertwining strands of learning activities at different times, which might be considered a ‘heterochronology’.

The institutional timescale itself contains various nested scales at different levels of detail. At a broader level it involves periods of enrolment (numbers of semesters, contributing towards completion of an award) and summative assessment points (assessment milestones reached). At a closer level it would involve progress through the curriculum and activities of a particular semester. The institutional timescale is not much concerned with abandoned or incomplete periods of study, and has a tendency to overlook or obscure the learning or development which may take place during unfinished episodes of enrolment or alongside completed attempts; or that which occurs outside the number of hours advised to be spent on study and the prescribed curriculum. The institutional timescale initially came into play in this project in the criteria for selection of participants (described in detail in section 4.2.3.1), which include the requirement of previous completion of a certain number of years of study within a formal Chinese program. It was not required that these were consecutive years of study, rather that a particular point on the institutional timescale had been reached; thus the

criterion allowed that the journey to reach such a point could take place at significantly varying speeds, and in this way it acknowledged the impact of the personal timescale on the institutional one. The nature of the interplay of institutional and personal timescales of learning is a theme to be explored during the enquiry.

The socio-biological timescale refers to the participants' developmental life stages. The stage of biological existence in which they currently find themselves (for example, are they young independent adults, are they raising young children, are they supporting their elders, or are they more or less mobile senior citizens) may have an impact upon the options open to them for learning and the choices they make about learning; it may affect their energy levels, mobility, or time available, as well as having an impact upon their opinions and attitudes, practices and beliefs about learning.

The biographical timescale concerns the life course and life experiences and history of each participant which will be conditioned by their own individual life contexts.

Any of these timescales can be viewed at different levels of granularity, taking in more detail or else zooming out for a view of a broader span.

#### 4.1.3 Longitudinal research

The parameters of longitudinal research have already been discussed in section 3.3.1; that discussion is resumed here in terms of the implications for methodology. The aims are likely to include capturing, through long-term immersion, the depth and breadth of participant life experiences, as well as capturing participant change, if any, through long-term comparative observation of their perceptions and actions (Saldaña, 2003, p. 16). Qualitatively-based studies of a more ethnographic nature aim to produce thick descriptions and a longitudinal view of the complexity of learners' lives. In second language research,

longitudinal designs can uniquely help researchers document the lengthy trajectories of adults who strive to become multicompetent and multicultural language users, thus capturing speakers' gradual pathways towards comfortable, competent and dynamically evolving abilities to deploy sophisticated capacities for the use of two or more languages. (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008a, p. 18)

Longitudinal research is characterised by length of the study, multiwave data collection, a focus on change over time and a goal of establishing antecedent and consequent relations. However, as Ortega and Byrnes observe, these seemingly straightforward characteristics cloak complex choices when a dynamic conception of time is adopted. Dynamicity, variability and non-linearity become central; and rather than explaining cause and effect chains of causality, the task becomes to capture change and variability over time (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008b, p. 290).

Data can be collected or generated in longitudinal research by a variety of methods which include the cross-sectional, the immersive, and the retrospective. The selection and combination of these approaches depends upon such matters as the focus and goal of the study, the timeframe and timescale, and the relationship between the microscopic and the macroscopic perspectives. Whereas some distinguish the retrospective and the longitudinal as separate approaches (Skyrme, 2008, for example), in this study *longitudinal* is considered to refer to data relating to a stretch of time and to potential changes over that time, including that which refers back to the time before the data collection and generation activities had started. Documentary data and retrospective self-reports from the participants allow us to shine a torch backwards along the pathways travelled, in order to perceive (albeit in a foreshortened way) some aspects of the development which preceded participation in the study, and to gain some understanding of how the present position and future intentions have developed. One of the hallmarks of complexity thinking is that attempts to describe systems and behaviour are undertaken not by forecasting, but by tracing trajectories of change that have taken place, together with interaction between systems or among multiple elements in a system, in a process of ‘retrocasting’ or retrodiction. The fact that data generated during the study is always analysed retrospectively, points towards acceptance of retrospective accounts relating to preceding periods. This is possible in a study like the present one, which has a stronger focus on learners’ attitudes, personal experience and beliefs than on the development of specific linguistic features.

In discussing research directions in the area of learner contributions to language learning, Breen (2001b) has observed that the relation between practices and contexts is best captured by longitudinal research: “Most learner contributions are dynamic and mutable and imply the need to trace how they shift during learning over time” (p. 179). Along concomitant lines, a recent set of recommendations for establishing a research agenda in the longitudinal study of the development of advanced second language capacities points out that “the full longitudinal perspective needs to include nonlinguistic dimensions that are to be found in the interplay between the language learner (a socially situated agent) and the context” (Ortega & Byrnes, 2008b, p. 296). That is the area in which this project is situated. In recent years a growing number of studies have taken as principal focus the learner experience of language learning rather than the measurement of development of proficiency (e.g. Kennett, 2003; Kinginger, 2004; Kinginger & Blattner, 2008; Phipps, 2007; White, 1999). Some examples of longitudinal research into learner experience in areas of learning which are not specifically language related are also of relevance to this study, such as Creanor et al. (2006), Kasworm (2003), Mayes (2006), Shedivy (2004), Shoaib and Dörnyei (2004), and Skyrme (2008). The methods commonly employed within studies which adopt a largely qualitative longitudinal framework include case study, narrative or life-history, and ethnographic approaches. They will be considered below.

#### 4.1.4 Case study

It has been claimed that case study is “the most widely used approach to qualitative research in education” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 433, cited in Duff, 2008, p. 21), and it is also characterised by its adaptability to different research issues in many fields of study (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 109). Essential properties of a qualitative case study are that it is particularistic; that it produces a rich description of the phenomenon under study; and that it is heuristic, in the sense that it can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known (Merriam, 1998, pp. 29-31). Definitions of case study foreground a range of characteristics in varied ways, but the key defining attributes are boundedness or singularity, in-depth study, multiple perspectives, particularity, contextualisation and interpretation (Duff, 2008, p. 23). It will be shown in this chapter how the design of the current enquiry exhibits these attributes.

A case study can be identified in various ways: for example, in terms of its unit of analysis (one case) (Merriam, 1998) or in terms of the process followed (investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2003)). Case studies typically have a smaller number of participants than survey methods and generate data at higher level of detail. However survey methods and case study methods can be linked. For example, some research designs such as Morita (2004), Kouritzin (2000), Norton (2000) and Gao (2010), involve the conduct of a survey with a broader group which is then followed up with selection of a smaller focal group of respondents who indicate a willingness to take part in additional research and who represent important sectors or combinations of characteristics within the larger survey. The present enquiry also takes such an approach.

There is a strong link between case study and longitudinal research approaches. The in-depth nature of case study renders it a suitable vehicle for examining change using a longitudinal design (Duff, 2008, p. 46). van Lier (2005a) asserts that case study, particularly that of an intrinsic rather than an instrumental nature (Stake, 1995) is contextual study, unfolding over time and in real settings. He notes that: “It zeroes in on a particular case (an individual, a group, or a situation) in great detail, within its natural context of situation, and tries to probe into its characteristics, dynamics and purposes” (van Lier, 2005a, p. 195). Similarly, it is noted by Harklau (2008) that case studies are particularly suited to documenting how language learning is mediated by participants’ understandings of and interactions with context over time, and provide access to the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of learners within particular contexts. Case study can be used as a qualitative, naturalistic method; longitudinal case study can help to develop context-sensitive insights about the experience of language learning as a process.

A useful working definition of a case is “a unit of human activity embedded in the real world, which can only be studied or understood in context, which exists in the here and now, and which merges in with its context so that the boundaries are hard to draw” (Gillham, 2000, p. 1). Single cases, or multiple/collective cases can be incorporated into a research design; and one case can itself constitute the focus of investigation, or it can contain several different foci<sup>1</sup> (Yin, 2003). A case could be an individual, a group, a program, an institution or a large-scale community, and more; Duff notes a tendency for case studies in applied linguistics to take individuals as cases (Duff, 2008, pp. 35, 114). In this enquiry a tiered or nested design is adopted with both individual and group elements informing each other.

#### 4.1.4.1 Case and system

The potential for focus on the dynamic nature of a case, and the central role allocated to context, enable case study to be seen as a method which is in tune with ecological principles and complexity thinking (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 245; van Lier, 2004, p. 194, 2005). A note of caution is sounded by Haggis, however, regarding thematic analysis across cases if such analysis aims to produce generalisations which are applicable to broader contexts; she contends that such an aim is potentially a “distancing from the particular” and from the dynamic context, and is at odds with the “epistemology of the close-up” which is a feature of a complexity theory view (Haggis, 2005, p. 103). Haggis’s point is clearly argued; however thematic analysis need not necessarily be linked to such a goal. It can contribute to the rich description which assists understanding of a complex situation without claiming broader generalisability; and indeed this is axiomatic in many approaches to qualitative research.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, reliance on a single analytical method does not suit the spirit of a complexivist approach as comfortably as does combining multiple methods. In this enquiry I employ a judicious combination of thematic analysis across individuals, with close-up snapshots of single individuals at particular times embedded in their particular contexts, as well as analytical attention to the situated dynamic ‘story lines’ of an individual through time.

Haggis’s argument seems to rest on the assumption that each individual is a case, so therefore to compare themes across individuals is cross-case comparison; she also implies that she is equating case with system, but does not explain this. However in some research contexts the case could be taken as a unit on a larger scale than the individual; it could be a complex system that contains individuals as heterogeneous and independent agents. A possible delineation of the focal system in this enquiry was presented in section 2.7.1, together with the idea of looking also at the next levels of organisation beyond and within. In

---

<sup>1</sup> I choose this term in preference to Yin’s (2003) ‘unit of analysis’, which reflects his post-positivist orientation.

<sup>2</sup> The variety of positions on the issue of generalisability and transferability of case study findings is surveyed by Duff (2008, pp. 48-55, 176-178).

such a view, the case can be both the individual and something larger than the individual; then thematic ‘generalisations’ across the experience of one individual may be compared with those of another individual and together contribute to an understanding of the larger ‘case’ or system to which they also belong. This recalls the nested systems in Bronfenbrenner’s (2001, 2005) ecological theory of human development introduced in section 3.2.2. The nature of the connections between the concepts of ‘case’ and ‘system’ is indeed interesting .

#### 4.1.5 Narrative, life-history method

Narrative materials and the construction of narrative form a significant component of this study and therefore I explore here some theoretical and methodological aspects of working with narrative.

Todeva and Cenoz (2009a, p. 1) offer a simple generic definition of language learning personal narratives as “stories based on the writers’/speakers’ personal knowledge and experience with learning languages” which can be either spontaneous or elicited through various procedures. ‘Restoried experience’ uses the researcher’s voice rather than the learners themselves being the principal narrators. In terms of genre, narratives can be either introspective and retrospective (autobiographies and memoirs) or more synchronous diaries and journals. Both aspects are present in this study.

Narratives can be both a focus of enquiry, and an analytic method or tool. Approaches to narrative data can be either referential and content-focussed, or more textual and discursive with a focus on expression, but in fact selection and interpretation are involved at every stage of the production of any representation of experience in a narrative text. Scholars including Pavlenko (2007), Johnson and Golombek (2002a), Bamberg (2004) and Block (2008) urge a view of personal narratives as discursive constructions rather than factual representations, and of narrative as social practice. (Talmy (2010) makes similar suggestions in his critical analysis of the treatment of interview data as social practice.)

Barkhuizen’s (2011a) suggestion for taking a process-oriented view characterised as *narrative knowledging* captures and unpacks many facets of research-involving-narrative. He defines narrative knowledging as the “meaning making, learning, and knowledge construction” (2011a, p. 395), that is entered into by a variety of different actors over the following four stages: first, (co)constructing narratives in particular contexts as discursive artifacts; secondly, analysing narratives in terms of narrative content, narrative form and narrative context; thirdly, representing and reporting the findings; and fourthly, receiving and engaging with the findings. The concept is persuasive because it “recognizes the active, fluid nature of meaning making, and aims to avoid conceptions of knowledge as stable, permanent and unchallengeable” (Barkhuizen, 2011a, p. 396) and in this respect is also compatible with a complexity perspective.



Vasquez (2011) distinguishes the research tradition of ‘narrative *inquiry*’ which focusses on researcher-elicited ‘big stories’ or grander narratives, from the emerging approach of narrative *analysis*, which focusses on the specific details and discourse contexts of ‘small stories’ emerging spontaneously in everyday life (see also Georgakopoulou, 2007; Watson, 2007). Though informal anecdotes offered by the research participants in various contexts of this enquiry had the flavour of the small story, the narratives co-constructed with the seven learners in the core group are treated as big stories (which may have small stories nested within them). The relationship between small story and big story may be one which is compatible with the complexivist concept of fractals, in which patterning at one level of organisation is reflected at higher and lower levels as well. In approaching the stories from the core group, the dimensions suggested by Connelly and Clandinin are useful, and neatly mirror the features of the landscape of learning Chinese elaborated on in Chapter 2 of this thesis. They are “temporality (the times – past, present and future – in which experiences unfold), place (the place or sequence of places in which experiences are lived), and sociality (personal emotions and desires, and the people narrators interact with” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477, cited in Barkhuizen, 2011a, p. 401).

From this broader perspective of narrative knowledging, it is possible to see the whole project as a form of narrative enquiry: in one sense this is so because the overall aim is to discover and present the *stories* of the journeys of long-term learners of Chinese. The enquiry draws on a variety of empirical materials that are not all, on the face of it, narratives – but they may contain small stories and my main point here is that they contribute to constructing the narratives.

There is another simple sense in which the whole project can be viewed from a narrative perspective: stretching over nearly 8 years of the researcher’s enrolment as a PhD student and including a 5-year data collection period, the study itself is quite simply a long story! Moreover it is situated in and has grown organically from the much longer story of my involvement in learning Chinese and working with learners of Chinese over several decades. The project as ‘Long Story’ (narrative approach) has some resonance with the idea of the research project as a complex system, as already mentioned.

## 4.2 Overall plan of the project

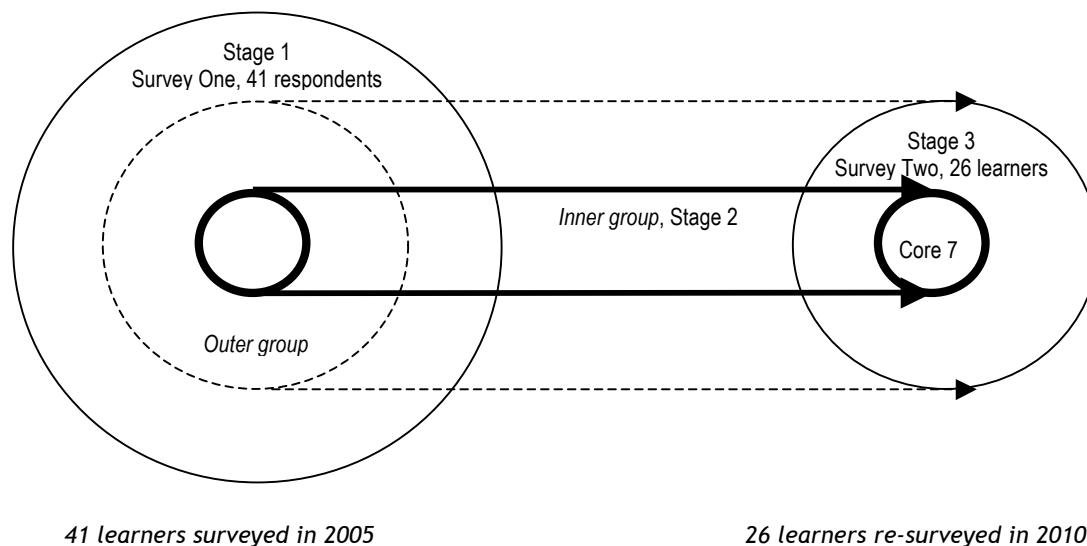
### 4.2.1 Design

Since very little is known about learners of Chinese at intermediate level and beyond who study in distance mode or in environments other than the traditional university classroom, this project has taken an approach to the collection of empirical materials<sup>3</sup> that has both multiple

---

<sup>3</sup> To avoid the overtones of a positivist, quantitative approach which the term ‘data’ can convey, I use ‘empirical materials’ in alternation with it.

tiers and multiple waves in order to reach an understanding of background and contextual variety as well as individual detail. The research participants fall into two groups which are nested both in terms of the timing of their participation and in terms of the frequency and intensity of data collection episodes.



*Figure 4.1: Schematic map of data collected*

The ‘outer’ group of research participants was the source of broad-brush data to give an idea of the range of their learning experiences and learning pathways; their participation involved completion of two written surveys (containing both closed and open items) separated by an interval of 4–5 years. The first survey marked the beginning of the data collection period in 2005 and constituted Stage One, while the second follow-up survey came towards the end of the data collection phase of the research in 2010, and constituted Stage Three.

The smaller inner core group of 7, in addition to participating with the outer group, also took part in data creation activities during Stage Two between 2006 and 2010. This group was followed at more frequent intervals and with a closer focus in order to gather finer-textured detail of their individual experiences. Data generation methods employed with the inner group included a series of regular in-depth interviews, language activities, written records and self-reports; and there was some ongoing contact with the researcher by email or telephone.

Research involving an initial survey followed up by additional research with a smaller number of respondents has been endorsed (Duff, 2008) as a design which is fairly common and which allows the researcher to establish the representativeness of the cases presented, if that is desired. The research presented here adds to this the inclusion of a second survey after an intervening period of five years (of all respondents to the initial survey who were still available). In this way the longitudinal nature of the study allows for insights to be sought through comparison over time as well as between groups.

Table 4.1 summarises the research design by showing the stages of gathering empirical materials, the strategies used and their purpose in terms of contributing to the research objectives. The choice of strategies and issues around their implementation will be examined in subsequent sections.

*Table 4.1: Summary of the design of the study*

<b>Preliminary/pilot/inspiration</b> (see section 4.3.1)		27 participants
<b>Data generation strategy</b> <i>Reflections on the first two years of Chinese study written by students completing their 2<sup>nd</sup> year, collected over 6 years</i>	<b>Function/Objective</b> <i>Provide evidence of richness of data and range of metacognitive and emotional aspects. Not part of the main data set but a clear antecedent, available for comparison or cross-checking</i>	
<b>Stage One: “outer group” - Late 2005</b> (see sections 4.3.2.1, 4.3.2.2 and 5.2)		41 participants
<b>Data generation strategy</b> Survey One: Initial written questionnaire	<b>Function/Objective</b> Gather background information about the learners’ contexts and episodes of learning Chinese to date, and preliminary data on learner beliefs etc. Assist in selection of participants for Stage Two.	
<b>Stage Two: “inner group” - 2006-2010</b> (see sections 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.3.5 and Chapter 6)		
Interview 1: 16 participants; Interview 2: 10 participants; Interview 3: 7 participants (33 interviews in total)		
<b>Data generation strategy</b> Semi-structured interviews (3 waves over the 4-year period)  <i>Interview 1: early 2006</i> <i>Interview 2: mid-late 2007</i> <i>Interview 3: 2010-11 (conducted with the ‘core group’)</i>	<b>Function/Objective</b> Gather cumulative data over 4 years on participants’ experience of their Chinese learning situation including learning biographies; changing contexts and influences; how they approach and manage their learning; how they chart learning paths, negotiate transitions, and construct learning opportunities; and their perceptions and beliefs on issues relating to Chinese and to distance learning.	
Self-reports (Learning diaries/personal notes) (Occasional contributions from interview participants)	Provide opportunities for interim sampling and more closely textured insights into levels of ongoing individual learning activities, contexts and feelings about learning Chinese	
Discussions and activities using Chinese (individual/group) conducted with the core group of 7.	Provide a context in which learners can interact, reflect on learning issues and communicate in Chinese; obtain samples of their Chinese use for possible reflection at Interview 3	
<b>Stage Three: “outer group” - Early 2010</b> (see section 4.3.2.3 to 4.3.2.5 and 5.3)		26 participants
<b>Data generation strategy</b> Survey Two: update on the Survey One details and following up on insights gathered during Stage Two. (participants were all those in the Stage One group still contactable and available).	<b>Function/Objective</b> Gather comparative data on changes and developments in the 4-5 year period	

The research design relates to a complexity framing of the study in that it reflects different levels of focus. In Chapter 2 (section 2.7.1) I already referred to issues of bounding and identifying a system. A strategy proposed by Larsen-Freeman & Cameron (2008) to meet this challenge is to define a central level of focus and also to look at the level above and the level below. I visualise it as a lens which allows me to zoom out to see how the focal subject relates to its surrounding environment, and also to zoom right in and see the way that finer details contribute to the focal subject's activity. (Ortega and Byrnes 2008a, 2008b, refer to "grain size" or "degree of granularity" with a similar intent.) Data collected for this enquiry exemplify such a strategy in that they include survey data which provides a broader view, together with rich longitudinal material on the experiences of the focal core group of 7, and a close up focus on the patterning of engagement in language activities over time.

#### **4.2.1.1 Attrition and intensity**

In a study where data collection episodes are separated by significant time intervals, particularly one like this which is not bounded by an institutional timescale but rather follows people as they reach the end of an institutional study cycle and move beyond it, attrition is an inevitable phenomenon as participants change plans, move interstate or overseas, change contact details, and shift their priorities and interests. A solution to attrition is compensatory early over-recruiting. While I made efforts to lessen the likelihood of losing contact with participants, I also took the inevitability of its occurrence into account, and for that reason the number of participants initially included, particularly in the case of the inner group, was intentionally higher than that commonly found in this type of qualitative research. The larger group began with 41 participants in Survey One and ended with 26 participants in Survey Two; the inner group began with 16 participants in Interview 1 and ended with a core group of 7 who had participated in all the interviews and most of the other related activities.

Taking a different view of this issue, in a longitudinal study the other side of attrition is intensification. As the period over which individuals participate in the research lengthens, the numbers of participants progressively diminishes; however at the same time the data generated in relation to the longer-term participants gathers in detail and intensity as the period of their participation extends. Numbers dwindle over time, but as chronological involvement extends, data is enriched. (See section 4.5.1 for further discussion of issues relating to attrition in longitudinal studies.)

The qualitative research approach adopted (explained in Chapter 1) does not require or expect findings to be representative, however it does allow for areas of interest to be identified, which can then be further investigated with other groups. The inclusion in this longitudinal research design of a second, concluding survey with the larger outer group four years after the first survey, allows for some of the insights gathered from the more intense

work with the core group to be checked against the experiences of participants in the broader group. This is one of the forms of validation of data, or crystallisation (Ellingson, 2011; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) incorporated into this project.

Another form of data validation is proposed by Woods (1996); he refers to “dynamic triangulation” in which the researcher and the audience for the research participate in contributing to the ongoing construction of understanding of a particular area. This is a claim sometimes made to justify case study research: that by assembling a sufficient body of qualitative work in a given area, eventually significant understandings will become apparent (E. Ellis, 2003; Woods, 1996).

#### 4.2.2 Timeframe

Since this is a longitudinal study which aims to provide an extended view of the experiences and learning trajectories of people learning Chinese as they proceed through a variety of stages and contexts, it is considered that the longer the data collection period the better. Initially a two year data collection period was planned, in order to fit the time available for completion of the whole PhD research project. During that period, however, unexpected circumstances arose which caused repeated delays, and which pushed back the completion date of the project quite considerably, extending it by 2–3 years. The intervals between data collection activities were significantly increased. Had the purpose of the research been to understand or compare people’s experiences at specific moments or in particular given contexts in their learning histories, then this change would have had a big impact; however, since the purpose was to trace learners’ experiences over time, and since the research approach was one which acknowledged that the intensity of involvement with Chinese and the pace of developments was likely to fluctuate over time for each person and to vary widely between individuals (see section 2.5.2), the extended time in fact makes this enquiry distinctive for its length and reveals facets of the long-term learning journey which would otherwise have been missed.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 4.2 below shows the how the collection of empirical materials from the various groups and subgroups was spread over time.

Multiwave data collection is put forward as a necessary or defining characteristic of longitudinal research by Ortega and Byrnes (2008a), and in this study is evident at various different levels, which will be discussed in the following sections.

---

<sup>4</sup> The lengthy timeframe for data collection is something that at doctoral level can only be achieved by researchers who are in part-time enrolment. The obstacles to long time-frame and early-career longitudinal studies which are presented by academic career pressure for publication rates and dissertation completions have been noted in the North American context (Harklau, 2008; Ortega & Iberri-Shea, 2005).

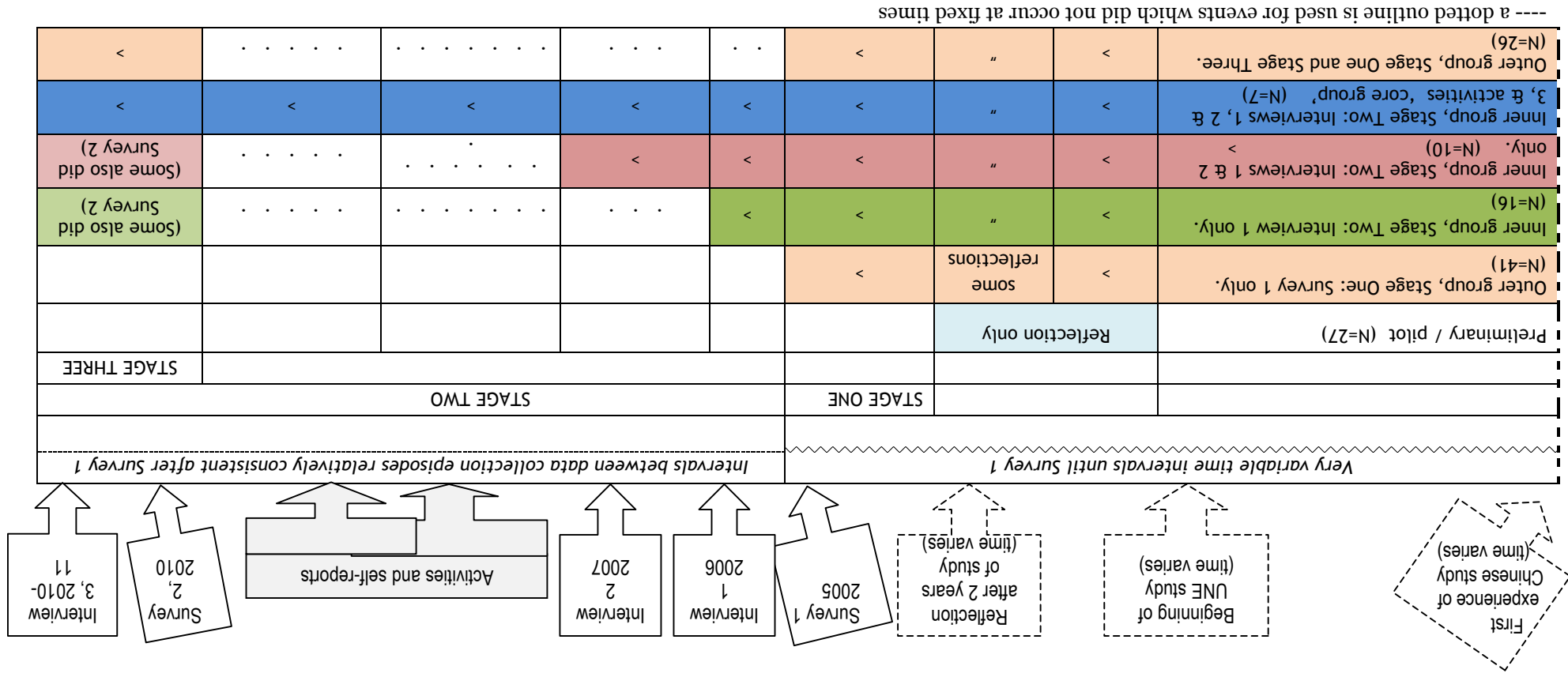


Figure 4.2: Timing of multiwave data collection, and comparison of levels of participation in different stages as natural attrition takes place

### 4.2.3 Identifying the potential participants

#### 4.2.3.1 Criterion sampling

The criterion sampling method, defined as picking all the cases that meet certain criteria (Patton, 2002) was used initially to locate potential participants in Stage One of the study; Stage Two participants came from within the Stage One group.

As was pointed out in section 3.3.6, the majority of existing studies of learners of Chinese take as their focus either learners who have some degree of Chinese family and linguistic background, or else beginning learners in their first or second year of university study. The current research focusses instead on learners who continue through and beyond the beginning stage. This criterion relates to the institutional timescale introduced in section 4.1.2. Many of those who take up Chinese study at university drop out during the first semester or after completing one year (McLaren, 2008). For the purpose of this study, perseverance up to or beyond two years was taken as a demonstration of a certain level of commitment and sustained interest in learning Chinese, and therefore, participants were selected from among those who had been studying Chinese at university for two years or more. Allowing for variable duration of prior study from two years upwards of course meant that the participants' levels of development in Mandarin would differ significantly, but proficiency was not of concern in this research design. Even amongst those with comparable study histories, homogeneity was not to be expected, and the levels of proficiency attained by different individuals would be expected to vary widely; what was of interest was that every individual selected had already, at the beginning of the research period, a minimum of two years of personal experience of the process of learning Chinese. While they may or may not have been advanced Mandarin *users*, they were all considered experienced *learners* of Mandarin.

The data gathering period is simply a construct, representing a slice of each individual's trajectory stretching on either side of their participation in distance learning. The fact that the participants are at different stages of learning when they begin participation, and at the end of it too, can be accommodated within a complexity perspective. Such a perspective expects that the different length or scale of trajectory of each participant, and the relatively different starting points, would be taken into account as an integral feature of the landscape, rather than as a potential drawback in research design that has to be defended.

Movement beyond the two-year mark on the institutional timescale was taken as a key event motivating the beginning of the sampling period; there was then a fairly strong likelihood that during the timeframe of the project many of the participants would pass through another turning point where institutional and personal timeframes might intersect, namely the completion of the formal course of study offered by the institution, and transition into the following phase.

Two years was set as the lower limit of duration of previous university study of Chinese, but it was not considered necessary to arbitrarily set an upper limit, since the other criteria (explained below) would narrow the numbers and effectively bring the range down to probably two to five years.

Most existing studies of Chinese learning are based in the formal classroom setting; however, as previously explained, this research seeks to gain understanding of learners in non-traditional settings, in particular the environment of formal distance education. Therefore, a further criterion, which was applied in the initial recruitment phase, was that all participants should have undertaken all or part (at least one semester) of their previous formal study of Chinese in distance learning mode. For participation in Stage Two a further requirement was that the participants should have an intention to continue with or resume some distance learning of Chinese in the following two years. This combination of requiring both two or more years prior experience of Chinese study of which some or all was by distance learning, and an intention to continue study in formal distance mode, constrained the setting for selection of participants to tertiary institutions where a sequence of at least three or four years of Chinese subjects were available in distance mode. Only one Australian university met this criterion at the time: it is one of medium size, with a strong tradition of distance education as well as on-campus education, located in a regional centre.

To recap, participants were initially sought for Stage One who:

- a. had past or present enrolment in Chinese language subjects as tertiary students; *and*
- b. had been learning Chinese for at least two years; *and*
- c. had been involved in distance learning of Chinese during that time.

Participants for Stage Two were drawn from among the Stage One participants who:

- d. were planning to continue with or resume distance learning of Chinese at some point in the following two years; *and*
- e. expressed availability and interest in continuing involvement in the project.

It will be noticed that a feature of this study is that the participants did not all start at the same point, (for instance at the beginning of a formal course); and nor did they end at the same point: the data gathering period is clearly just a construct, and represents a 'slice' of each person's trajectory. This ties in with the complexity perspective which I believe allows for, or indeed expects, that the different length or scale of trajectory of each participant, and the relatively different starting points, be taken into account as an integral feature of the landscape, rather than as a potential drawback in design that has to be defended.



#### 4.2.3.2 *Ethical considerations: connections between researcher and participants*

A complexity thinking perspective implies viewing the researcher as unavoidably implicated as a participant in the system being studied (an aspect which distances this approach from a phenomenological one, in which the procedures involve the researcher bracketing out, or not engaging with, any knowledge about the phenomenon being researched that come from other sources). In this project, several levels of connection, either potential or actual, between researcher and participants can be distinguished.

Most if not all of the potential participants had previously been enrolled in units taught by the researcher, and so there was a personal connection. Their experience of the researcher as their lecturer may have influenced their decision to participate in the research project or not. By the time the research began, that teacher-student relationship was over and would not recur.

An important level of connection was that, as a non-native speaker of Mandarin who has studied the language herself through university courses and various other means (though not by distance education) since the 1970s, the researcher can claim some equivalent experience to the participants, qualifying her with a certain degree of “member’s competence” (Woods, 1996) which was some help in neutralising potential power imbalances in the research situation. At all times, the attitude adopted towards the participants was one of respect for the individual, acknowledgement of the complexity of the undertaking of learning Chinese, and genuine interest in their learning stories and whatever they had to say about their Chinese learning.

Several measures were taken to protect the participants. The planned data gathering procedures and draft documents to be provided to the participants were all submitted to the university’s research ethics committee for scrutiny before the data collection phase of the research began, and again when the research timeframe was extended (see section 4.2.2).<sup>5</sup> Copies of the explanatory documents sent to participants are attached in Appendix 1.

To assure anonymity, from receipt of Survey One onwards, all documents received from and relating to participants, including interview transcripts, were de-identified and all references to participants were made under a pseudonym (including those in the researcher’s private notes). Pseudonyms were allocated at the beginning of the study to avoid confusion as the quantity of data records grew in the later stages.

As a form of respondent validation, analyses were checked with participants in the latter stages of the study: the narrative portraits and visual timelines created for the core group of seven were shown to them, and their responses and any subsequent discussion fed into the findings.

---

<sup>5</sup> Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England, Approval No. HE10/o81)

#### **4.2.3.3 Procedure followed for contacting potential participants**

Permission was sought from and granted by the university authorities to access the university records and database to identify students who met criteria a, b and c listed in section 4.2.3.1. Sixty one individuals meeting the criteria were identified, and they were sent an introductory information letter which briefly outlined the research project, explaining what was involved in completion of the surveys, and asking if they were interested in participating. The response rate of 51 was high: the 51 were sent the printed survey and a secure URL at which they could access the online version of the survey if they preferred, together with further information and consent forms.

### **4.3 Strategies and techniques for collection of empirical materials: selection and implementation**

Tabular and diagrammatic summaries of the empirical materials collected have already been presented, in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1 in section 4.2.1. In the following sections more detailed information is provided.

#### **4.3.1 Preliminary/antecedent stage: student reflective writings**

Starting three years prior to the formal beginning of Stage One of this study, and continuing through to 2008, as each cohort of distance education students of Chinese neared the end of their basic two-year grounding in the language, they had been offered an optional activity of writing brief reflective reports of their personal progress and achievements. The purpose at the time was in part a confidence-building exercise, affording learners an opportunity to step back for a moment from the intensity of revising for the end of semester summative assessment examinations, which tends to be a period of awareness of deficit, and to focus instead on positive aspects of learning and personal development which might have taken place since they embarked upon the study of Chinese. These informal reflections, collected with student permission over a seven-year period, provided unexpectedly rich insights into the affective and emotional aspects of studying Mandarin by distance learning, and the range of metacognitive and affective strategies, which students had developed to deal with the demands of distance language learning (Tasker, 2002). Those insights contributed to the development of ideas for this research project and the reflective writings themselves became a subsidiary part of the data set. They extended retrospectively the duration of the study, and were available for comparison and reference when required.

The prompts for the reflective writings took the form of general questions inviting thought about such issues as developing identity as a learner of languages; personal challenges and triumphs in learning Chinese; change in perception of Chinese language and culture; change

in learning strategies and tactics; and the interface between learning Chinese and other areas of life. (The full instructions and prompt questions are supplied in Appendix 2).

Some of those who completed the reflective writing tasks subsequently became participants in the full research project, but not all of them. Similarly, there were numbers of Stage One participants who had not undertaken reflective writing tasks earlier. Thus there was only partial overlap between participants in the preliminary group and those in Stages One and Two.

### 4.3.2 Surveys: rationale

The purpose of Stage One of the research was to gather initial understandings of people who persevere with their Chinese learning for at least two years, and who undertake learning Chinese in distance mode. No previous research has systematically investigated learners of this kind. There is no established knowledge about their backgrounds, or the contexts and patterns of their learning. The first stage of this project therefore aimed to gather initial information on these issues from as large a pool of participants as could be practically identified in the research context. The resulting data would assist in gaining a general understanding of the range and variety of backgrounds and Chinese learning histories of the broader group. This group would also provide the ‘catchment’ from which the smaller group who would participate in the more in-depth research in Stage Two would emerge.

In longitudinal study, questionnaires and surveys are among the methods employed to gather baseline or core data on research participants including essential demographics, particular categories and other descriptive data, including that which is relevant to the initial research questions, and also that which may or may not become relevant for assessing future change as the study progresses (Saldaña, 2003). Though some researchers attempt to draw a clear distinction between the terms ‘survey’ and ‘questionnaire’, I choose to follow the practice of taking ‘survey’ as a superordinate term representing “a broad category of techniques that use questioning as a strategy to elicit information” which includes questionnaires and some types of oral interview (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 146). The survey can provide self-report data of different types, depending upon the degree of freedom allowed for responses. Closed questions are suitable for gathering factual data and for situations where some prior categorisation of possible responses is likely to be non-controversial, and are therefore appropriate for gathering background and demographic data about the participants, while open-ended questions elicit a wider range of possible responses and consequently, may deliver information that is unanticipated (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 147); they are better suited to gathering expressions of opinions, attitudes and beliefs. Therefore a written survey consisting of a combination of closed and open-ended questions was chosen as the means of data collection and data generation in Stage One and again in Stage Three.

#### 4.3.2.1 *Survey One: design*

Survey One consisted of thirty questions, divided into an introduction and four broad sections, and was a mixture of closed and open-ended items as appropriate. The first half of the survey (Introduction and Sections 1–2) aimed to establish learner profiles in regard to age, gender, family circumstances, linguistic background, learning experience, etc. After an introduction requesting demographic information on gender, age-group and residential area, the first section investigated learners' study environments and the demands on their time made by their daily occupations and family and social participation. It also gathered information about language background and proficiency in other languages. Section 2 asked each learner to provide a chronology or timeline of their language learning, in terms of different courses or modes of study (both formal and informal) undertaken at different times.

The second half of the survey (Sections 3 and 4) sought preliminary insights into opinions and attitudes of the participants in regard to their learning experiences, and also their future plans regarding Chinese learning, using mainly open-ended items including descriptive questions, hypotheticals (e.g. "what advice would you give someone who was just beginning to learn Chinese?"), invitations to make metaphorical comparisons (e.g. "Studying a language in distance mode is like ..."), and invitations to reflect on past experiences. Section three consisted of ten open-ended questions probing the development of each learner's perceptions and beliefs about learning the Chinese language. The nine questions in the fourth and final section focussed on their feelings about distance learning as a way of learning Chinese. At the end of the survey, students were reminded that there would be a follow-up survey after several years, and asked to provide stable contact details. In addition a brief description of Stage Two of the research was given, and respondents were asked to indicate any potential interest in participation.

#### 4.3.2.2 *Survey One: implementation and procedure*

The Stage One survey was designed as a printed paper document to be mailed out to all those who had agreed to participate. However in acknowledgement of the variety of media of choice which might be represented in the group, and in response to some possible difficulties or expenses for overseas participants in mailing back their responses, an online version of the survey was also made available. When it came to collation and analysis of the survey data, the online responses had the advantage that they were already in digital format, whereas the handwritten ones had to be retyped into the computer. This factor would be taken into account when designing Survey Two.

As noted in section 4.2.3.3, Survey One was sent out to 51 individuals in late 2005. In the end, 41 completed surveys were received. The relatively high rate of return (80.34 %) may be due to having established personal contact with potential respondents in advance, giving

them a chance to decline involvement before the surveys were even sent out. Furthermore the fact that the researcher was known, by name at least, to most of the respondents by virtue of her role as a staff member in the university Chinese department (as discussed in section 4.2.3.2) may have added a sense of personal connection which engendered a level of trust.

Twenty-four of the surveys were returned in handwritten form, and 17 were completed online. On receipt they were all de-identified and labelled with the participant's pseudonym. The handwritten surveys were subsequently typed up so that all the data was available for analysis in digital format. A copy of Survey One is attached in Appendix 3.

#### 4.3.2.3 *Survey Two: design*

The second survey marked the final stage of the data generation period for the 'outer' or 'containing' group.

The design and format of Survey Two was similar to that of Survey One. There was a check for changes to any elements of the learner profile, including study environment and time constraints, which had been reported in Survey One. The chronology or timeline of learning was extended to allow for a summary of activities (including formal study and informal practice) over the period since Survey One, and the extent of involvement in a variety of contexts for using and practising Chinese was investigated. The second half of the survey continued some of the lines of questioning regarding opinions, beliefs and attitudes to their Chinese learning from Survey One, and also probed some of the issues arising from preliminary analysis of the first survey and from analysis of the interview data, such as identity, transitions, turning points or significant moments, and responses to the changing global contexts of Chinese. Revisiting the outer group acted as a method of crystallisation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), as a way of checking the extent to which insights arising from the in-depth work with the smaller group, over the period since Survey One, might be applicable among the larger group.

#### 4.3.2.4 *Activities questionnaire within Survey Two*

A questionnaire about past, present and future practice was one of the data collection strategies. For convenience it was felt appropriate to incorporate it into Survey Two. However in design and intent it was distinctively different from the other parts of Survey Two, containing few open-ended questions and focussing on specific aspects of Chinese-learning practice. It sought to find out more about what kind of activities involving Chinese the learners have tried, or might do in the future. The questions can be broadly characterised as enquiring about their Chinese-related activities from two perspectives. One of these is about the forms of Chinese language they encounter and use to learn from, in terms of the kind of 'texts' (in the broadest sense of the word), the genres, the registers and the interactants, as well as the modes, channels and mediums; and how these forms might be changing over the years. The

other perspective is about what *opportunities* are available and what contexts they enter for accessing Chinese language; how these opportunities might be changing over the years; and how the contexts they enter may change over the years.

A listing was created of a wide range of activities involving the use of Chinese that the learners who are the focus of this research might reasonably be expected to engage in. Consideration was given to using one of the existing strategy inventory instruments such as the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), or the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), but for several reasons they were not appropriate. Apart from activities involving active use of Chinese, the listing was extended to include activities classified as ‘engaging with Chinese language and culture’ which involved encountering and thinking about Chinese language and culture without necessarily using it. The selection of activities and practices for investigation aimed to correspond to learners’ reality rather than to faithfully reproduce any linguistic categorisation: it was based upon the researcher’s professional knowledge and experience of the activities that learners of Chinese might engage in independently at different stages of their learning, and upon the empirical evidence emerging from the surveys, interviews and other data gathered at earlier stages of the research with this group of participants, as well as from the researcher’s monitoring of public online discussion fora and blogs for learners of Chinese worldwide.

The resultant list contains 77 items that enquire about learners’ ongoing and evolving Chinese language activities, divided among 7 groups according to macro-skills, genres and media that would be familiar and self-explanatory for learners, namely:

- reading;
- listening to Chinese and speaking Chinese;
- writing;
- translation;
- news, media and entertainment;
- study tools and language practice activities;
- thinking and communicating about Chinese language and culture.

Within each group, several specific activities were listed. Here are some examples to give the flavour: read fiction in Chinese; listen to Mandarin radio stations; listen in to Mandarin as you overhear it in your environment (public transport, workplace, shopping, etc.); ‘chat’ in Chinese online; use spoken Chinese in conversation; study as a registered participant in a Chinese learning website. The full list of activities is presented in Appendix 4.

For each of the activities, participants were asked a series of 3 linked questions for which they selected answers on Likert-type scales. The questions were designed to capture dynamic aspects of their past, present and future practice:

Have you ever done this, and if so how frequently?

Overall, over the past few years, have you been doing this more or less often?

How likely are you to do this in the future?

The analysis of the responses led to the emergence of a method which identified dynamic profiles or patterns of engagement of individual learners in different activities as their learning developed. Further details of the method and of the construct of ‘dynamic activity patterns’ thereby established, will be presented in Chapter 6.

A copy of Survey Two is attached in Appendix 5.

#### **4.3.2.5 Survey Two: implementation and procedure**

Taking into account the lessons learned from Survey One, Survey Two was offered in online format, with the printed version available on request for those who preferred it (none did). Those who had participated in the first survey were contacted using the details they had previously provided as reliable for long-term contact. Twenty six usable surveys were returned.

#### **4.3.3 Semi-structured interviews: rationale**

Having used the written format in the preliminary reflections, as well as to gather information and to generate data in responses to open-ended questions in Stage One of the research, oral interviews were chosen as the principal instrument for data generation for the more in-depth investigation in Stage Two of the experiences of a smaller group of learners. Spoken conversational interaction would allow for Stage Two participants’ responses to be explored in greater depth or with greater sensitivity to nuance as the need arose; it would also render more manifest the researcher’s presence, and allow for direct interaction between researcher and each participant. Qualitative interviewing follows the fundamental principle of providing a framework within which “respondents can express their own understanding in their own terms” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 153). Since the purpose was to elicit accounts of personal experiences and learning stories, together with insights and perspectives from the participants, the qualitative interview type considered the most appropriate was that of the in-depth interview, or semi-structured interview. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p. 49) have noted: “The in-depth interview takes seriously the notion that people are experts on their own experience and so best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon” (cited in Darlington & Scott, 2002, p. 49). Such interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but the wording and order of the questions or prompts is flexible and the interview structure is fluid, allowing the researcher to be guided by each participant’s responses, to clarify or follow up or probe responses, and to develop unexpected themes in collaboration with the interviewee (Darlington & Scott, 2002).



The interview situation is by no means a neutral site for collecting data; rather it is “highly interactional and contingent” (Duff, 2008, p. 134), and constitutes a joint production or negotiated accomplishment between interviewer and interviewee, shaped by its context and situation. Interview responses represent voices (in the Bakhtinian sense) adopted by the participants in response to the researcher’s prompts, and these voices may change over the course of a single interview (Block, 2000). Each interview evolves as its own discourse context; it is not an isolated context, however, since in the case of multiple interviews with different participants, or successive interviews with the same participant over time, that discourse context also evolves from one interview to the next (Duff, 2008, p. 134). As complexity theory reminds us, the context is an integral part of the situation under consideration. Context will be revisited in section 4.3.3.2.

#### **4.3.3.1 Interview setting and mode: face-to-face and by telephone**

To achieve as natural and conversational a setting as possible, it was considered desirable to conduct the interviews face-to-face where convenient. The site and time of the interviews, and the possibility of the researcher travelling to the interviewee location, was discussed with Stage Two participants in advance of each interview. In most cases where it was possible to meet face-to-face, they preferred for it to take place in their homes. This tended to be the option that caused them the least disruption, and did not require them to use their own funds or time in travelling; and the home setting allowed them to be more relaxed than a classroom setting would. A further reason for choosing an informal, non-institutional setting was to distance and distinguish the interview encounter from any previous institutionalised contacts between the researcher and the interviewee in which the roles had been those of student and teacher. In the home the roles were very different, with the interviewee as the host and the researcher as guest. In many cases also the home setting of the interview was the very same setting in which many of the study pursuits which were being described had taken place; this afforded the researcher a glimpse of the context in which the participants lived and pursued their learning goals, and allowed the interviewee to make direct reference to aspects of that setting if wished (for example by commenting on the location of their desk, referring to a poster or picture on the wall, or pulling out a book they had referred to). A further aspect of context was glimpsed on several occasions when the researcher briefly met household or family members after the interview had finished; this added extra depth to the understanding of the background and the life setting in which the participant’s learning was situated.

Face-to-face meetings for the interviews were not possible in every case, however, due to the scattered, and in some cases shifting, geographical locations of the participants over the 4–5 year Stage Two period: some participants were overseas, and some were at very distant locations in Australia. Rather than exclude those participants from the research group, it was



considered preferable to conduct interviews over the telephone where necessary. However, a goal was established (and subsequently met) that among the core group of 7 who were able to participate in all three of the Stage Two interviews, every effort would be made to meet each of the participants face-to-face on at least one of the three interview occasions.

The telephone interviews took the form of a pre-arranged telephone call made by the researcher to the interviewee at a time and a place of their choice. Most chose to be called at home, and as a 'warm-up' into the conversation they were invited to set the scene by describing their surroundings; this helped to establish shared understandings of the setting and a level of conversational informality that would have at least some level of comparability with the face-to-face interviews in the home. In each of the three waves of interviews, some face-to-face ones were conducted before the first telephone ones, to ensure that the researcher's familiarity with the interview plan had an established basis in experience, so that extra attention could be given to maintaining the dynamic of the interview conversation in the absence of the visual channel. Attention was paid to providing ongoing vocal feedback while the interviewee was speaking, to take the place of body language and facial expression which in the face-to-face context would signal attentive listening.

Each interview was between 70 and 110 minutes long and English was the principal language used. All the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

#### **4.3.3.2 Interview conduct and guides**

The overall design of this project meant that none of the interviews was undertaken 'cold' without any prior contact between researcher and interviewee, or without the interviewee having some knowledge of the areas of interest to the researcher. This situated nature of the context can be evidenced on various levels. First, as explained in section 4.2.3.2, all of the interviewees had at some time in the past been in a student–teacher relationship with the researcher (though without necessarily ever having met face-to-face), from which they would have gained some impression that the researcher had an interest in Chinese learning and in supporting learners of Chinese, as well as having a history as a learner of Chinese herself. Secondly, the data gathering activities in which respondents had participated prior to any specific interview (such as the research information and consent sheets prior to Survey One, the questions or topics in Survey One prior to Survey Two, and Interview 1 prior to Interview 2, etc.) provided a situating context for each interview, and a point of reference for the opening interactions and topics for discussion. This likelihood of linkage is a notable characteristic of multiwave data collection in longitudinal studies. In these circumstances, in most cases a fairly open invitation to talk about 'the story so far' or 'the story since we last spoke', or a comparable 'grand tour' question was sufficient to prompt the interviewee to embark on a lengthy personal account. This approach suited the aim of allowing the interview conversation

to develop in as natural a manner as possible, given that the in-depth interview is social interaction (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995, p. 101). In addition, in order to ensure that data relevant to the research questions was generated, an interview guide was prepared for each of the three sets of interviews. The guide was not intended to impose a rigid structure and order on the interview process; rather, it functioned as a checklist during the interview for the researcher to keep track of the areas which had been covered and those which remained to talk about. It served as a reminder to the interviewer of the planned areas of reflection and discussion; and for each general discussion area it included some prompt questions or probe questions which could be used if required.

As Richards (2003, p. 65) notes “all questioning is hollow unless accompanied by attentive listening”. In general, the knowledge that the interview was being captured by audio-recording had the effect of freeing this researcher to engage fully in active and attentive listening concurrently with reflective attention and monitoring of the flow of communication and interaction.

#### **4.3.3.3 Interview 1**

Originally it was envisaged that if the numbers volunteering for Stage Two were greater than about 10, then a selection would be made based on information provided in the survey to get an appropriate spread of Chinese learning backgrounds and contexts. In the end, however, given that the interviews would be spread over a relatively lengthy period, the 16 volunteers for Stage Two were not reduced, and instead the adjustment in numbers was allowed to take place by the unavoidable but unpredictable phenomenon of attrition (discussed in section 4.2.1.1).

The sixteen first interviews were conducted in January and February 2006. Nine were conducted in person, at locations in Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland. Apart from the interview with Clive, which he chose to do at his office when it was empty on a public holiday, the others took place at the interviewees' homes. The seven respondents whom it was not possible to visit were interviewed by telephone.

The general approach to conducting the interviews has been discussed in the preceding section. Prior to Interview 1 a generic interview guide was produced. Then, in the preparation for each individual first interview, the reflective writing (if it had been done) and the completed Survey One for that person, together with relevant researcher notes and comments, were re-read carefully, particularly to refresh recall of details of their chronology of learning, and also to note any particular issues arising which it might be pertinent to probe further at interview. Essentially an important focus of Interview 1 was to gain a retrospective account, in the learner's own words, of the story of their involvement with languages and as a learner of Chinese, and their associated feelings. Further groupings of questions and discussion

topics covered distance language learning; opportunities and strategies for using and practising their language skills; personal impacts of involvement in Chinese learning; and self-assessment of their current situation and future plans. A copy of the generic guide for Interview 1 is attached in Appendix 6.

#### 4.3.3.4 Interview 2

Interview 2 was conducted after an interval of between 18 months and two years after Interview 1, between August and December 2007. (The extended time-frame reflects the varied availability of participants.) Six of those who had participated in Interview 1 were no longer contactable, even after several attempts, so ten interviews were completed. Three were conducted by telephone, and seven in person, at locations in New South Wales and Queensland.

Interview 2 investigated the participants' Chinese language learning activities and their consciousness and feelings around learning Chinese in the context of their lives as they had unfolded since Interview 1. They were invited to identify successes and setbacks, and developments in their approaches and strategies for study, as well as to discuss their current perception of future plans and goals. Though their responses from Interview 1 were not ignored, neither were they central to the discussion at Interview 2, since it was not intended that this meeting be seen as a critical assessment of their progress towards previously articulated fixed goals; rather the attitude fostered was one of non-critical acceptance of and interest in the current situation whatever it might be. A copy of the generic guide for Interview 2 is attached in Appendix 7.

#### 4.3.3.5 Interview 3

The third interview contact took place at an interval of a further two to three years after Interview 2 in 2010–11. Seven of those who had participated in Interview 2 were still available to participate. There was greater flexibility in the timing and the format of the third interview; some were telephone conversations, some face-to-face meetings, and some email exchanges; some were conducted as a single event, and some were split between two or several shorter events.

This third interview had multiple purposes. One was to ask participants to look back and look forward: to reflect upon the presence of Chinese in their lives since Interview 2, in terms of learning it, practising it, encountering it or thinking about it; and to contemplate their plans, hopes and concerns regarding their future involvement with using and learning Chinese. Another was to follow up on issues arising from the preliminary analysis of the first two interviews and other data collected, including commenting on the graphic timelines created by the researcher and the other language activities which had been provided.

The description above acts a summary of the generic guide for Interview 3.

#### 4.3.4 Language activities: rationale

Apart from interviews, a small number of activities encouraging interaction in, with, or about Chinese language were also conducted during Stage Two of the project. It was not the main aim of the study to track each individual's Chinese language development per se, but rather to trace the trajectories of the learners as they moved among different contexts and through the landscape of Chinese learning, and to investigate their perceptions and experiences of learning. However, some observation and records of the participants using their Chinese was considered desirable for several reasons. First, they would add depth and dimension to the case/s studied. The personal accounts, reflections, opinions and beliefs about learning and using Chinese emerging from the interview discussions would be enriched by reference to actual instances of the participants using Chinese. The samples of their language use would afford a complementary perspective from which to view and compare the themes arising from analysis.

Secondly, participation in language activities or samples of the participants' written or spoken Chinese could be drawn upon if required as specific examples, known to both researcher and participant, to be referred to or reflected upon, in the course of the interview conversation.

The third reason for including language activities in the research design is concerned with the linked issues of researcher subjectivity and prior knowledge. As already described in section 4.2.3.2, some years prior to the commencement of this project, participants and researcher had been in pedagogical relationships as students and teacher in some first and second year Chinese courses. These prior relationships are considered to be a part of the complex nature of the research situation. Inevitably, some impressions of these learners' proficiency and confidence in Chinese as they evolved at that time would still be present, even if in a dormant state, in the researcher's professional teacher-memory (as would participants' memories of their interactions with the researcher as their lecturer). To attempt to ignore, suppress or bracket out such memories would be unrealistic; rather, the chosen approach was to acknowledge them and reflect on them privately, and then also to acknowledge that they were impressions formed at an earlier period, and that the current situation would now be different. Inviting participants to engage in Chinese language activities, observing or witnessing those activities and reflecting upon them both privately, in relation to the earlier impressions, and also collaboratively in conversation with the participants, offered the researcher a way to move on from those previous perceptions, and refresh and update understandings of the participants' current states of confidence and current abilities in using Chinese at various points during the study.

##### 4.3.4.1 Language activities: design

An online platform was set up to connect participants and researcher in an online group discussion board environment. The participants remaining in the inner group after Interview

2 had all had experience of text-based discussion boards or online fora (with varying degrees of participation) while enrolled in distance education Chinese subjects.

Taking into account the differing degrees of language usage, self-confidence and proficiency amongst the participants, the language activities needed to be as flexible as possible to encourage participation. Therefore participants were encouraged to use Chinese in whatever way felt the most comfortable: in speech, in writing in pinyin or in Chinese characters, or a mixture; and several activities were offered in order to provide participants with a choice of methods and levels of participation. For example, they were asked to explore a variety of written, audio and visual Chinese texts online, and respond to various general or specific prompt questions; another activity involved telling and exchanging their learning stories; and another involved discussion of strategies for keeping up their Chinese.

Participation in the online group was uneven. Three people did not participate; one made one posting, two made four postings each, and one made seven postings.

#### 4.3.5 Self reports and other ongoing informal contact

Interview participants were invited to keep informal records of their engagement with Chinese during the periods between the interviews. The purpose was to provide opportunities for interim sampling and more closely textured insights into levels of ongoing individual learning activities, contexts and feelings about learning Chinese. It was suggested that they could do this in diary form, or as occasional notes, or in any format that worked for them. The quantity and frequency of these records was deliberately kept quite flexible, so as to demonstrate respect for the other demands on their time, and to foster the engagement of each individual to the extent and in the manner that they were comfortable with. Some participants would send me an email from time to time with a broad-brush update of what they had been doing; others would keep fairly detailed records in a notebook for shorter periods. Some would write only in English, and some would use both Chinese and English in different proportions.

In addition, over the course of Stage Two several of the participants instigated contact with the researcher in relation to aspects of their study plans. Sometimes they sought advice or information about their future studies, for instance in a couple of cases my input was required as a former teacher familiar with their work who could provide a reference for further study or scholarships. One person did some work for the university tutoring in Chinese. Sometimes the contact was in a more social situation, such as when Brenda came with her husband to attend her graduation ceremony and we went out for a celebratory dinner, or when Stephanie entertained visitors from a Chinese university to an evening meal at her house. Where these types of contact were concerned, I was scrupulous in not referring to any of the content of the

interviews; however the participants themselves would not necessarily feel constrained to maintain such a clear boundary and would sometimes refer to what had been discussed in the interviews, in which case if they clearly expected response or interaction I would give it. It became clear that the participants valued having someone available who had shared knowledge of and interest in both their academic or institutional histories as learners of Mandarin, and also their personal situations and stories of engagement with Chinese. It was as if I had previously contributed to the script of one scene of their Chinese learning drama, as their lecturer, and was now engaged, by virtue of the research interview contact, as an interested observer or audience for their performance in subsequent acts; I was also a fellow-actor in the same company, having my own past and ongoing experiences of learning and using Chinese. Thus there were various levels on which the participants might connect with me or relate to me, and I to them. The contacts that took place served to enrich mutual understanding.

From a complexity perspective both researcher and participants are constitutive of, and acting within, the context. Existing and developing attitudes, connections, and relationships are also a part of the research context, to be treated as potentially of the same level of importance as all its other aspects. The complexity concept of co-adaptation may offer a way of looking at the interactions between participants and researcher that took place in informal contexts.

## 4.4 Data analysis

### 4.4.1 What constitutes analysis?

The following description by Ellingson is worth citing at length because it captures an essence of qualitative interpretive bricolage.

Analysis of data or other empirical materials will be understood as the process of separating aggregated texts (oral, written or visual) into smaller segments of meaning for close consideration, reflection, and interpretation. Forming representations will mean rendering intelligible accounts of analyses, such as through constructions of themes or patterns; transformation of journal entries or transcripts into narratives; or explication of an individual account using a particular theoretical lens. [...] The process of analysis and representation overlap throughout the entire duration of a qualitative project. (Ellingson, 2011, p. 595)

In terms of analysis in longitudinal qualitative studies, Saldaña (2003, p. 46) describes the task as:

to rigorously analyse and interpret primarily language-based data records to describe credibly, vividly, and persuasively for readers through appropriate narrative the processes of participant change through time. This entails the sophisticated transformation and integration of observed human interactions in their multiple social contexts into temporal patterns or structures.

A focus on patterning is important in this study.

The analytic perspectives of complexity theory are connectionist, holistic and non-linear (Mason, 2008a, p. 13). The researcher is implicated at a fundamental level as part of the system they are investigating, which calls for an interactive and reflexive research process. A complexity-informed analysis would seek instances of the following to describe and represent: interacting elements of the system; patterns and types of interaction which are taking place; emergent effects of such interactions; histories and evidence of different kinds of change over time; and the conditions surrounding particular forms of emergence or outcome (Haggis, 2006). In this study I am not aiming to build a full complexity theory model, but to use the conceptual framework of complexity to guide the questions I ask and the understanding I arrive at.

#### 4.4.2 Procedures

Broadly speaking, if the research is envisaged as a piece of woven and decorated textile fabric thrown over the uneven contours of a landscape, then the analysis tasks I engaged in could be described as:

- Mapping the system in its ‘landscape of possibilities’ – delineating the piece of fabric;
- Presenting and comparing trajectories of *individual* learners within the system over time – tracing lengthways warp threads; looking for points of change – knots, joins, etc.;
- Looking across the group at recurring (similar or dissimilar) transverse weft threads of processes, interrelations, and patterns of development;
- Looking at both the warp and the weft threads to identify recurring motifs, which might be termed attractors;
- Looking for patches of colour and texture which indicate the interplay of influences from other systems; and
- Moving back and forth between a very close up view of one area of the fabric, and a broader perspective of the whole piece.

I worked to achieve “intimate familiarity” (Ellingson, 2011, p. 600) with the empirical materials by listening to and reading texts many times and separated by lengthy intervals, making notes on emergent trends, and then identifying traces of themes or patterns. The data management and analysis software program NVivo was used to some extent throughout the project to support the analysis.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the duration of the study I practised “writing as a method of enquiry” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

---

<sup>6</sup> But not to as significant a degree as I had initially expected; I discovered that getting away from the computer screen to read, listen, annotate and diagram often freed up my creative thinking and enabled me to feel closer to the material, and to the individuals behind the texts.



In engaging with the data from the surveys, there were times when I followed the strategy of “transformation of qualitative data into proportions as a tactic for charting category frequency and thus discerning change” advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994; cited in Saldaña, 2003, p. 47). Such a procedure for locating qualitative change can be seen as complementary rather than incompatible (Wenger 1999). Saldaña (2003, p. 48) recommends that in longitudinal qualitative data analysis, the strategy of considering proportions can be most usefully employed as a springboard or else a supplement to additional analysis and thick description; and I have followed his recommendation in this enquiry, keeping any references to statistics simple and descriptive.

In considering responses to the open-ended survey questions and other texts, I experimented with grouping, rearranging and comparing them in many ways. Longitudinal analysis comparing participant views as expressed at different times was a significant part of the task, and throughout the study I fostered and foregrounded sensitivity to longitudinal and dynamic concepts of continuity, discontinuity, development, recurrences, transition, rhythm, and tempo, following many of the strategies of descriptive, analytical and interpretive questioning of the data recommended by Saldaña (2003). I also remained open to non-linear leaps of insight, which are consistent with complexivist thinking.

From the participants’ own accounts in the interviews and in the surveys I drew up detailed visual/graphic timelines of their Chinese learning, multilayered so as to represent the kinds of activities they engaged in at different times. I also (co-)created ‘word portrait’ narratives of the same learning trajectories, which contextualised the timelines and drew plentifully on the participants’ own words to convey the feelings and choices at different times, all with a view to capturing the lengthy, dynamic, evolving phenomenon of the journey of learning Chinese as it evolves in the context of the individual’s life course.<sup>7</sup> Each focal participant was consulted about the evolving draft word portraits and (in most cases) the graphic timelines, for correction, comment and further input.

Creating graphic and visual imagery, or information visualisation, has validity as “a mode of inquiry, a form of meaning-making, and a way of knowing” (Reason & Hawkins, 1988, cited in Sligo & Tilley, 2011, p. 81). The process of ‘graphic ideation’ emerges as a significant component of this research, used in both analysis and representation and reporting. Graphic ideation “offers the opportunity to thoroughly examine a problem from a number of perspectives using visual representations to both record and stimulate thought” and is particularly useful for complex, intangible and non-linear concepts (Crilly, Blackwell, &

---

<sup>7</sup> Acknowledging the debate about the status of the created/reported words and the notion of Voice (e.g. Block, 2000; Talmy, 2010), I endorse the value of taking such a perspective, and feel that further rich insights would be afforded by such an analysis of the recordings and transcripts of the interviews, but it is beyond the scope of the current thesis.



Clarkson, 2006, p. 345). Graphic ideation may be used heuristically to open up new lines of thinking and analysis (Schuller, 2004, p. 74), and creative leaps in interpretation, as “the iterative process of structuring ideas and developing representations for those ideas may trigger previously unconsidered notions” (Albarn & Smith, 1977, p. 7). In complexity-inspired research, mapping and diagramming is regularly used to communicate dynamics and processes (Cooksey, 2001; Haggis, 2006). In longitudinal and life course research, visuals can be created by researcher or participants or co-created by both, to capture crucial elements of development over time. Diverse examples are discussed by Schuller (2004), Bagnoli (2009), and Sligo and Tilley (2011).

#### 4.4.3 Inevitable change and evolution in a longitudinal study

In longitudinal study it is axiomatic that the findings from each wave of data generation influence the following one; it must also be acknowledged that they illuminate the preceding ones, resulting in a clear cyclical element. Over the course of a study, questions change and evolve; and the outside world changes and other surrounding contexts also change. The researcher needs to be responsive to what emerges, what works and what does not work. In this respect Agar’s (2004) proposal, to view an ethnographic research project as a complex system itself, is also relevant to a longitudinal qualitative case study like this one: “[ethnographers know that] a study always develops, methodologically speaking, in ways unforeseen at the beginning... One of the strengths of complex adaptive systems is that new circumstances can result in reorganisation to better respond to these changes” (p.19). He further explains that:

in ethnography [the researcher] can maintain flexibility and creativity to adapt method to unforeseen circumstances, and he/she can reorganise methods to adapt to research problems the likes of which were unknown when the proposal was written or, for that matter, until well after the study was underway. (Agar, 2004, p. 19)

In this study the complexivist approach supported a flexible approach to inevitable change.

### 4.5 Remarks: issues of methodology regarding longitudinal study

In the course of the study some interesting methodological issues arose related to the duration of the study, and they will be discussed in this final section of the chapter.

#### 4.5.1 Questions regarding inclusion or exclusion of partial participants

The relationship between attrition and intensity of data was addressed in section 4.2.1.1, where it was explained that the data gathers detail and intensity as the lessening number of participants contributes to the research in increasing depth over longer periods of time. A related issue comes to light over the course of a study of this length, in which the intervals

between data collection phases are comparatively long, and where cycles of data analysis take place during those intervals to feed into the next phases of data collection. Although attrition can be planned for in general terms, by deliberately beginning with a larger group than is required, it is impossible to know in advance which particular participants will drop out (just as in complexity theory it is proposed that there can be no prediction, only retrodiction). Therefore time is invested in the ongoing transcription and analysis of all the data at each stage; however some of that data may end up not being part of a full data set. This raises several issues for consideration.

First, a study with successive waves of data collection will result in a collection of datasets which are longitudinal, but of differing lengths. In this study, the groups and their involvement are presented in Table 4.2:

*Table 4.2: The datasets of different lengths*

	<i>those whose participation ended...</i>	<i>Length of involvement</i>
1	... after Survey One	Retrospective view back over minimum two years of university study to their first experience of Chinese study
2	... after Interview 1	As 1, and a further ½ year
3	... after Interview 2	As 1, and a further 2-2½ years
4	... after Interview 3	As 1, and a further 4-4½ years

(see also Figure 4.1 in section 4.2.1)

On what basis should decisions be taken to exclude some of these datasets? This question becomes relevant when data is qualitative in nature and is not proficiency-related, and when the focus is on individual learning journeys rather than cross-sample comparisons. Is data collected over three years in some way less valid than data collected over four years? As a practical measure I decided that while the inner group of 7 who continued right through to Interview 3 would be the core, the voices of those whose participation was not ‘complete’ might be drawn upon where clearly there is a contribution to be made.

Secondly, although practical constraints might suggest that the incomplete data sets could be simply set aside and not cited, I would argue that it is not possible to exclude retrospectively the influence on the evolution of the research of early participants who later drop out. I illustrate this point by taking just the Stage Two “inner group” as an example. A core group of 7 participated in all the data generation activities throughout the whole of Stage Two of the project, over a timeframe of 4–5 years. However, the early Stage Two data was collected and analysed from twice that number of participants. Insights were gathered from the analysis of all 16 of the first interviews, and they contributed to the development of themes and the planning of the second interview. Although 6 people were unavailable for Interview 2, in a

general sense their participation in Interview 1 nonetheless contributed to the development of the research, and such a contribution could not be ‘undone’ when it became apparent that they were no longer participating. The same thing would happen in the drop-off between Interview 2 and Interview 3.

#### 4.5.2 The longitudinal study and researcher as practitioner

Precursors, followers and overlappers are grist to the mill in a longitudinal study. Although the research project is necessarily bounded in terms of duration and participant group, adopting an ecological and complexity theory stance involves acknowledging that the boundary cannot be treated as if it were impermeable; the research process itself will inevitably affect and be affected by the context of the study and the researcher’s context. Over the course of the data gathering I have continued, in my work as lecturer in Chinese, to have contact with other cohorts of learners moving through their own learning trajectories, and while I have been absorbed by issues arising from the research project participant group, I have continued to learn and be stimulated by contact and conversations with learners who are following through similar stages but are not participants in the research. Although I have not formally gathered any data from them or cited them, I nonetheless must acknowledge their contribution to my ideas over the years. This is another aspect of longitudinal methodology to be recognised and explored, one that particularly impacts upon teacher-researchers and others for whom the research area is related to their regular field of work, rather than being a separate site that they visit and leave. In such circumstances the researcher is following a particular group of people, but meanwhile is also in regular contact with others who are treading comparable paths just a little behind; that contact may lead to new insights into the reported experiences of the research participants. Similarly, the insights from the research constantly have the potential to influence ongoing practice and interaction with those learners who are following. Longitudinal research in such a context inevitably has something of action research about it, even though the cycles of reflection, action and observation may extend beyond one particular group of participants, and are not the primary framework applied.

### 4.6 Summary

Chapter 4 has built up a picture of the many considerations that have gone into creating an effective and appropriate research design. After introducing the choice of conceptual framework and methodology, I have outlined the timeline and the way the different groups of participants are connected. I have described the different techniques for gathering data and materials, showing which techniques were used at which times, and why. I have presented the general principles which have guided the data analysis; in the next chapters the specifics of the various

complementary types of analysis will be fleshed out as I present the data and describe the strategies and procedures followed in examining it and interrogating it at each stage.

# Chapter 5. Learning trajectories of the outer group

---

## Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses the learning trajectories of the broader group, beginning with a snapshot of 41 distance learners in 5.1 and 5.2, and then moving on to compare the responses of the group of 26 participants (after attrition) 5 years later, to establish chronologies of continuing learning, and then to trace developments in the feelings and attitudes of the respondents to learning Chinese.

In presenting the data I shall begin with a broad perspective and outline what the data collected consists of and how it falls into different sets or groups. I will then describe these, beginning with a wider and more general view and progressively zooming in to more detail and greater depth with smaller numbers of participants.

My focus for this initial presentation of the data will largely be the individuals, while a later discussion will focus more specifically on themes.

## 5.1 Overview of data sets/groups

The data presented in this chapter are interrelated and spread over time as represented in Figure 5.1 (reproduced from section 4.2.1.)

The outer circle on the left represents the 41 people who were surveyed in 2005. This is a data set which provides a ‘snapshot view’ of people who at that time had been learning Chinese for 2 years or more, and who had undertaken distance learning for some or all of that time, and who had the intention of continuing to learn. This data is presented in the first part of Chapter 5.<sup>1</sup>

Of those 41 respondents, 26 completed the follow-up survey in 2010 (Survey Two). They are represented by the two medium-sized circles on the left and right-hand sides of the diagram. Comparison of the two surveys for the 26 respondents, in conjunction with the retrospective data which forms a significant part of Survey Two, afford a longitudinal view of their learning practices and trajectories over time. These data are presented in the second part of Chapter 5.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the findings reported in this section were previously published in Tasker (2010)

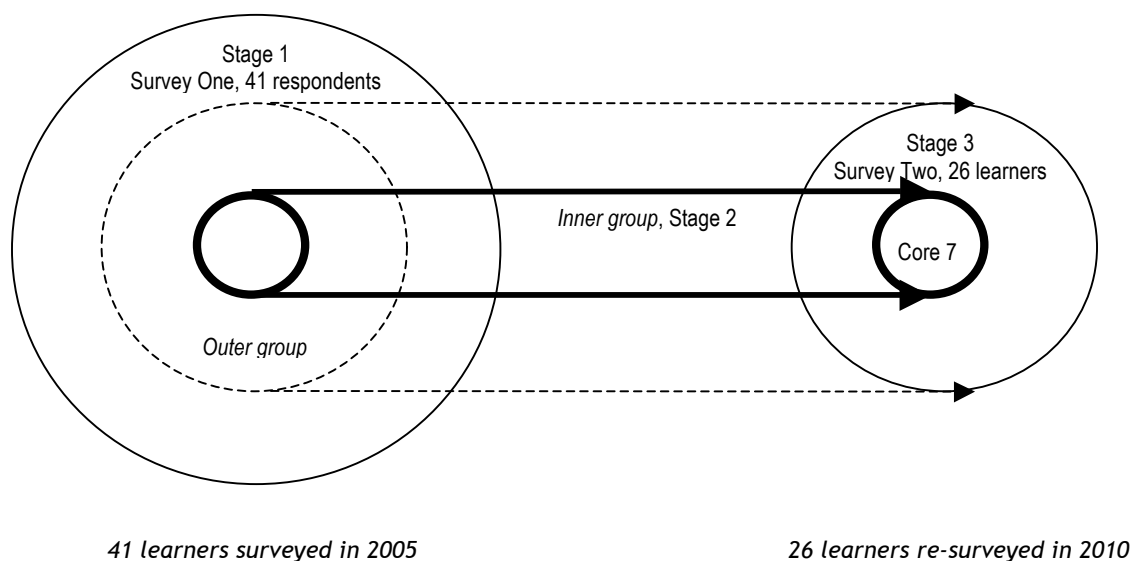


Figure 5.1: Schematic diagram of data collected

## 5.2 Snapshot: 41 learners of Chinese engaged in distance learning

### 5.2.1 Demographic and background details

#### 5.2.1.1 Age and gender

Eighteen males and twenty-three females completed the survey. Chart 5.1 on the next page shows their distribution by age band and gender. It clearly emerges that more of this group of university students are in their thirties, forties and fifties than are in their twenties. This age distribution differs significantly from the age makeup of students enrolled in classroom-based on-campus mode, where the majority are in their late teens or early twenties. (For this reason, the literature on adult education is considered relevant in this study, and participants are sometimes referred to in this thesis as ‘adult learners’.) This balance is reflected in the general statistics for internal and external enrolments across academic disciplines at UNE. Chart 1 also makes it clear that female learners significantly outnumbered males in the 30–39 and 40–49 year old age bands, but that up to thirty and beyond fifty years of age that was not the case.

#### 5.2.1.2 Place of residence

Place of residence was classified as either metropolitan Australia, regional Australia, China, other Chinese speaking country or region, or other overseas country; and the gender of participants residing in each area was noted. Place of residence may have an influence on study in a variety of ways. It is possible that for those students resident in metropolitan areas there was easier access to Chinese-speaking interactions and communities. On the other hand it is also likely that metropolitan residents are more time-poor than regional residents

due to extended time needed to commute to work, and may not necessarily be able to avail themselves of those study opportunities. A striking finding, shown in Chart 5.2, is that in the 2005 survey, all but one of the fourteen learners who were located in the major Australian cities were male, and all but three of the seventeen learners located in regional Australia were female. By 2010, there would be more variety in the women's locations, but not the men's (see section 5.3.1).

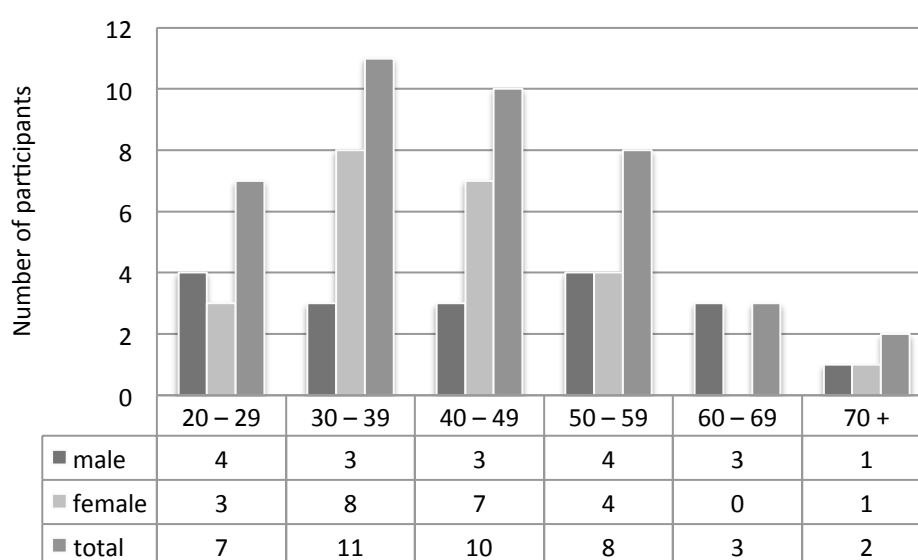


Chart 5.1: Distribution of participants by age and gender

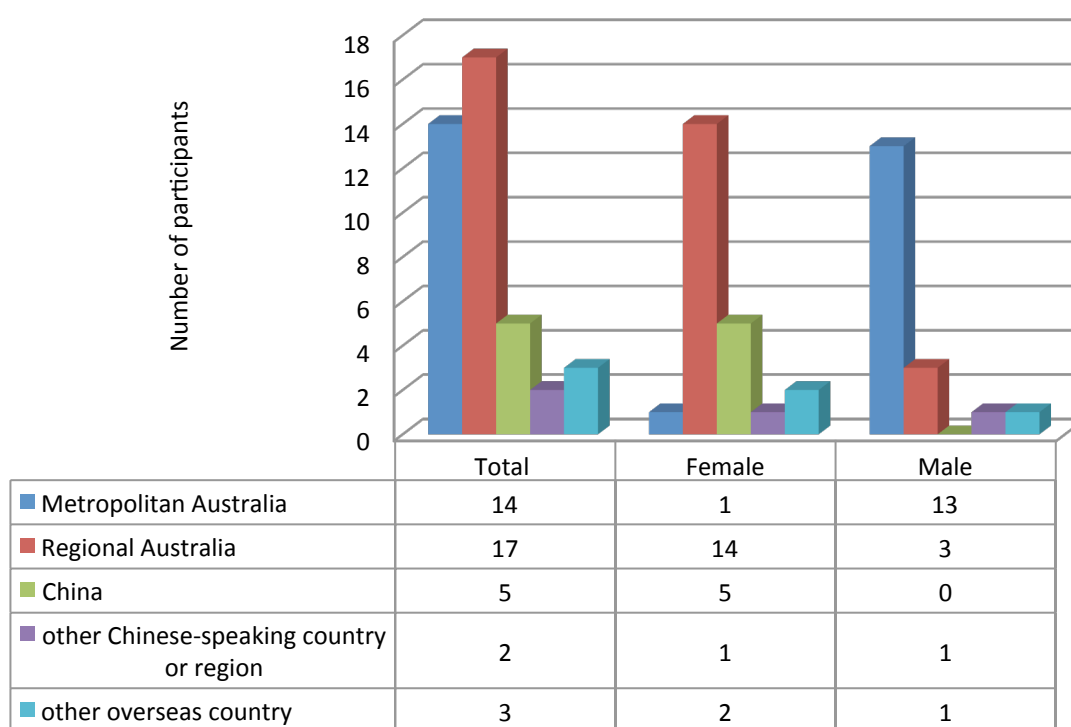


Chart 5.2: Distribution of participants by place of residence and gender

### 5.2.1.3 *Work and home situation*

The participants were asked to self-classify their current working situation in order to get an idea of the demands on their time. Table 5.1 shows that the majority were engaged in either paid or unpaid work. Of the five not in paid work, four were full-time students and one was suffering from ill-health. To add further depth to the picture of the home context and possible associated levels of demands on participants' time, they were asked about their home situation: whether they lived alone, with a partner, with friends and housemates, with dependent children, with grown children or with aged relatives. The responses (detailed data not presented here) were widely distributed across a variety of combinations of these home situations.

*Table 5.1: Current working situation*

Working situation	Number of people
Full-time paid work	18
Part-time paid work	10
Not in paid work	5
Voluntary work	3
Home duties only	3
Unknown	2

### 5.2.1.4 *Full-time or part-time study*

A full-time load usually equates to taking four subjects or courses each semester, which is considered equivalent to 150 hours of study. As pointed out in section 2.5.3, the structure of the university curriculum means that studying in part-time mode does not necessarily slow down the rate of progress of taking language units. Part-time mode is a common choice for distance education students at UNE. An enquiry into the current study mode of the participants in this study revealed that they reflected this distribution, with 28 enrolled as part-time students, 7 as full-time students, and 6 who were not currently enrolled. (Those that were not enrolled at the time of the survey nonetheless fulfilled the criteria for participation in this study, of having studied Chinese for at least two years, some or all of which was by distance learning)

Chart 5.3 drills deeper into the mode of study to look for patterns of age group or gender. The most striking features are the high proportion of women in the 40–49 age group who were studying part-time; and the fact that the only males studying full-time were in the 20–29 age group, whereas that age group was not represented at all amongst females studying full-time. This type of distribution reflects that of the wider population of UNE distance education students. From the standpoint of heterochrony (introduced in 4.1.2), it might be said to reflect gender differences in 'stage of life' timescales.



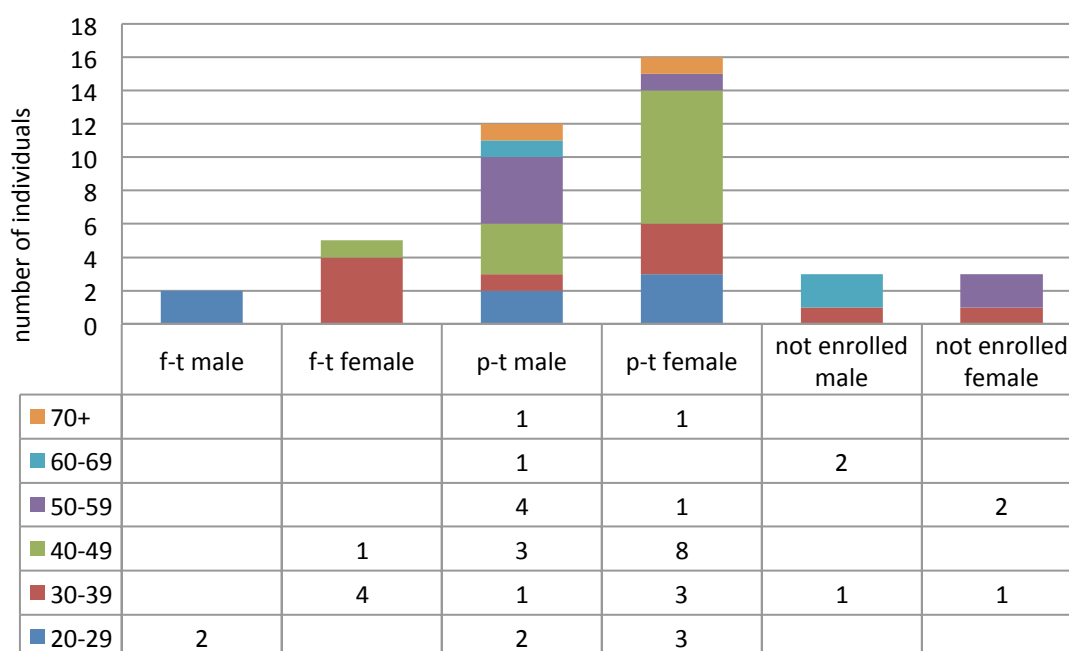


Chart 5.3: Distribution by gender and age group among study modes

#### 5.2.1.5 Language background

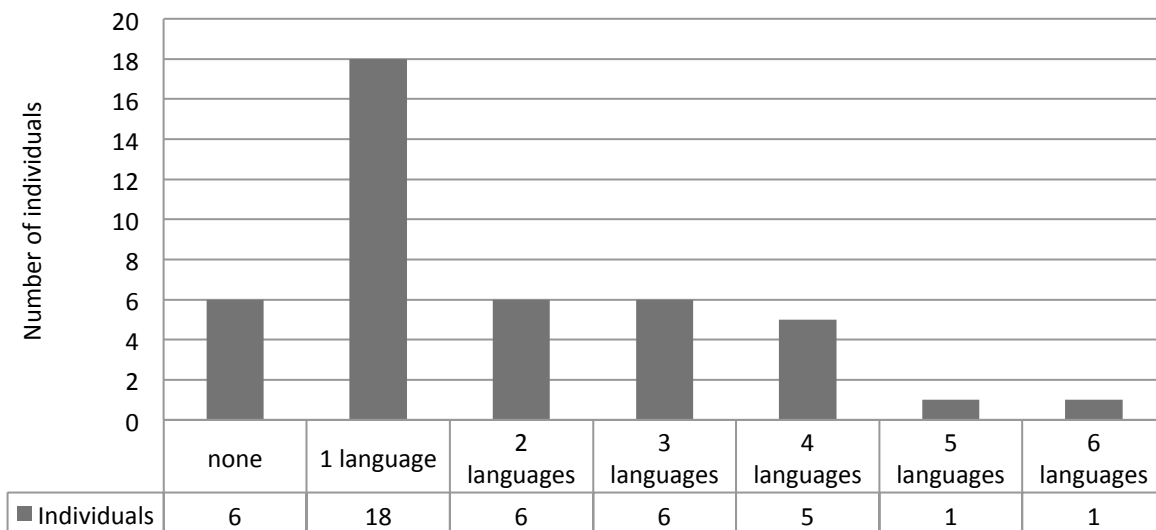
Table 5.2 shows that the language background of the participants, based on their own definition of their first language,<sup>2</sup> was predominantly English-speaking. They were also asked whether they had family connections either with China (nine positive responses), or with the Chinese language (ten positive responses). These connections included grandparents or parents, Chinese in-laws, and adopted children, and included the three participants whose first language was a non-Mandarin dialect of Chinese.

Table 5.2: Language background

Language background	Number of people
English	32
Chinese dialect	3
German	2
Indonesian	1
Arabic	1
Czech	1
Hungarian	1

<sup>2</sup> In the survey instrument this question was carefully worded with a note as follows: the term 'first language' can refer to either the first language you learnt in your life (the chronological sense) or to the language which is most important in your life (the dominant sense). If this is relevant to you, feel free to nominate a first language in both senses of the word. If you feel you have more than one first language in either sense, please specify.

Information was also collected about participants' proficiency in languages other than English and Mandarin Chinese, since these previous experiences would undoubtedly have an influence of some kind upon each individual's personal context for their Chinese learning, in complexity terms, being part of the initial conditions. The number of languages in addition to English and Mandarin with which survey respondents had experience ranged from none to six, as shown in Chart 5.4.



*Chart 5.4:* Experience with languages other than English and Mandarin, by numbers of respondents

For most of the participants, then, Chinese was a second or subsequent foreign language. They were thus bringing to the CFL learning situation experiences with other languages, which can be expected to have an influence upon their approach to and experience of CFL. There were 22 languages which respondents either spoke or had studied. They are listed in Table 5.3.

The first seven languages listed in Table 5.3 are those which have been most commonly taught in Australian schools, and other response data bears out the fact that most (though not all) of the learning experiences of those languages took place in primary or secondary school. In section 2.2.3 it was pointed out that there is a lack of continuity in languages provision in Australian schools which can lead to students having to drop or switch languages part-way through their schooling; therefore it is not uncommon for people to take more than one language at beginners' level without following through to intermediate level and beyond for any of them. Since one of the criteria for selection of respondents for Survey One of this research project was to have been learning Chinese for at least two years (see section 4.3.2.1), and for participation in Stage 2, to have the intention of continuing further with Chinese study, there is a strong suggestion here that for many participants their learning of Chinese has lasted for longer than their learning of other languages has.

Table 5.3: Languages spoken or studied among the group

Language	Number of people	Level (self-specified by respondent)			
		<i>Unspecified</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Fluent</i>
French	17	1	8	2	6
German	11	1	6	2	2 (1L1)
Japanese	10		9	1	
Spanish	6	1	5		
Indonesian	6		2	1	3 (1L1)
Italian	5		4		1
Latin	3		1	1	1
Cantonese	3				3 (L1)
Swahili	2		2		
Swedish	2		1	1	
Korean	2		2		
Afrikaans	1				1
Ancient Greek	1	1			
Arabic	1				1 (L1)
Finnish	1		1		
Hindi	1				
Hungarian	1				1 (L1)
Javanese	1		1		
Malaysian	1		1		
Thai	1		1		
Turkish	1		1		
Urdu	1			1	
<i>Total</i> <sup>3</sup>	77	4	45	9	19 (7 L1)
<i>Total as %</i>		5.19%	58.44%	11.69%	15.58% not L1 9.09% L1

(Note: “L1” means this was a first language)

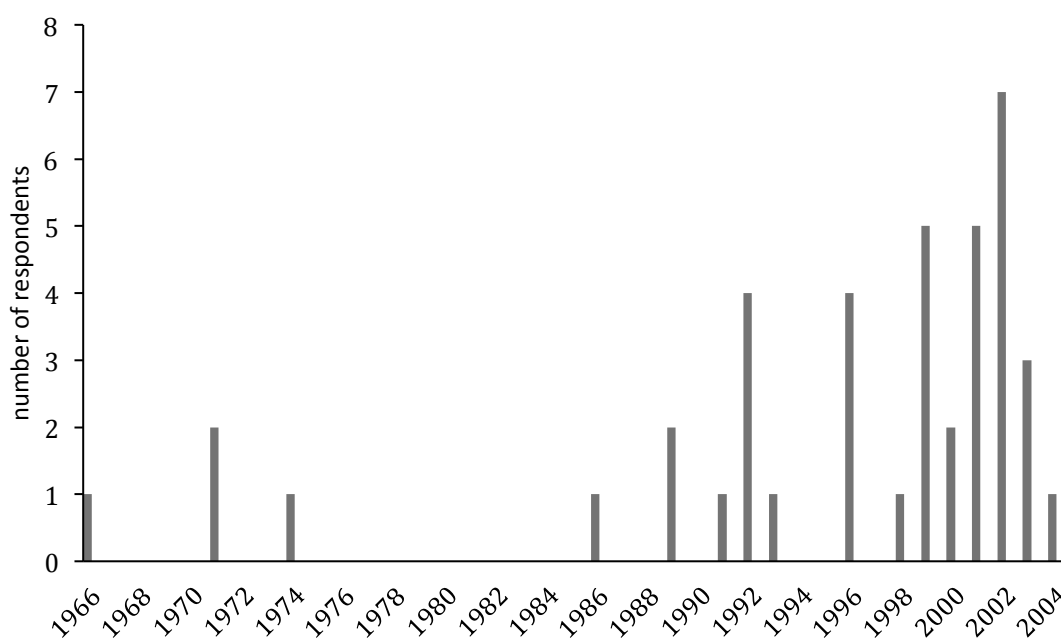
### 5.2.2 Timelines of the Chinese learning experiences for the 41 learners

This section takes an overall look at the chronologies of engagement with Chinese of the 41 participants in this stage of the project.

#### 5.2.2.1 Beginnings – how did their Chinese learning journeys start?

Answers to a question about date of first experience of learning Chinese revealed a very wide range of starting dates. Eighteen of the participants (43.9%) began Chinese within the five years prior to the survey date. That leaves twenty-three participants (66.1%) who first had a go at learning some Chinese between six and forty years previously: sixteen participants began in the 1990s, three in the 1980s, and four as far back as the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>3</sup> Most respondents whose L1 was a language other than English listed their L1 language among their responses to the question “what other languages do you speak or have you studied apart from English and Mandarin Chinese?”, with the exception of the respondent for whom Czech was her mother tongue, and one of those with German as their L1, who did not list them in answer to this question.



*Chart 5.5: Year of first experiences of studying Chinese*

These first experiences included such scenarios as informal community-based teaching or evening classes, independent structured learning using “Teach Yourself” courses, and local tuition during visits to China. This discovery of the early start pattern raises a question to be explored in the following sections: what kind of Chinese learning (if any) occurred between the early start and the enrolment in university Chinese classes?

#### **5.2.2.2 Timelines as a graphic interpretive device**

To capture information about chronologies and episodes of learning from the responses to the first survey, a simple timeline was created for each of the participants showing periods of formal study (distinguishing distance mode and face-to-face mode), visits to China, independent but structured study, and informal Chinese language activities. These initial timelines are characterised as ‘simple’ because they were constructed on a single linear dimension, charting in series the activities which participants listed first for each period they identified. At this stage of working with the data, periods of formal study were taken as the principal indicators of engagement, followed by self-directed study and then informal Chinese-related activities. The intention was to get an initial broad comparative picture of the length and chronological characteristics of each person’s history of engagement with learning Chinese through formal study. When viewed together, the 41 simple timelines, each one different from the next, offer a visual representation of the variety present in the Chinese learning chronologies even of this relatively small group and even at this relatively coarse-grained mono-dimensional level of representation.

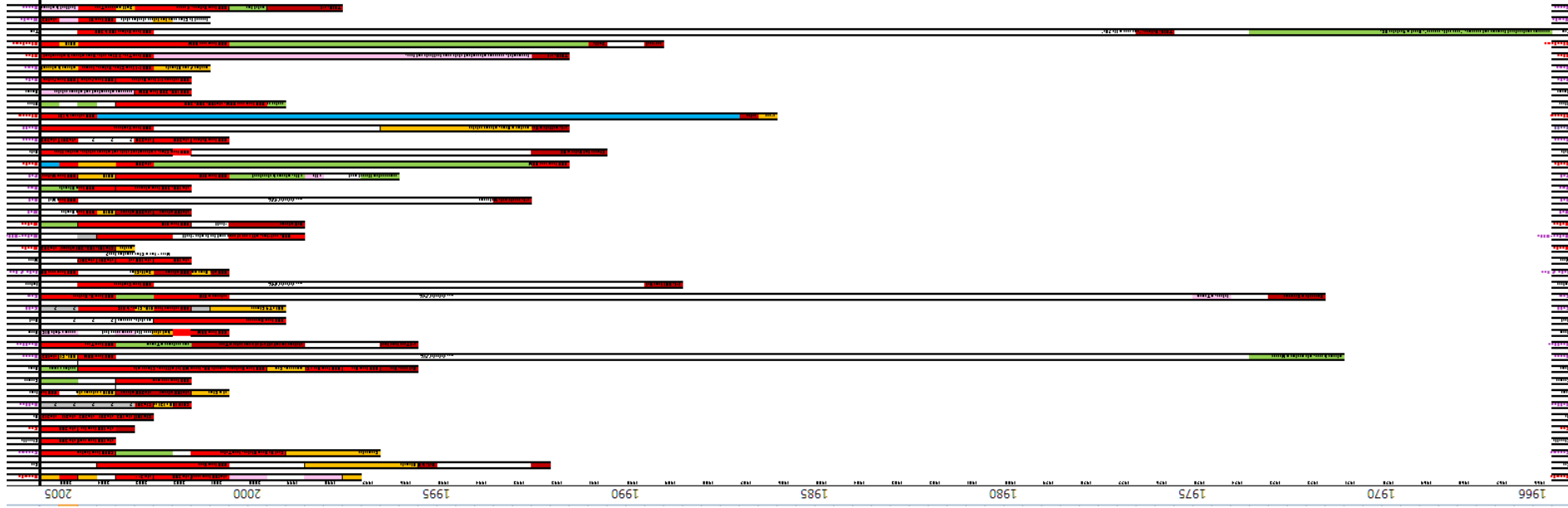


Figure 5.2: The 41 simple timelines compared over their full duration, initial broad view showing only the varied length, and the presence of structured study (red and brown sections)

Figure 5.2 displays all 41 timelines together in a view that deliberately shows no detail, but captures graphically the variety in length and composition of timelines across the whole group. Each line represents one learner. Sections of each line are coloured according to the principal activities of that period. At this scale the reader is asked only to notice the relative lengths of the timelines, and the relative amounts of time that the periods of structured institutional study (denoted by red and brown sections) occupy in each timeline. For the majority of learners represented here, the periods of formal study occupy only a portion of their timeline, and the periods of other activities are of significant length within the timeline.

Figure 5.3 provides a slightly more close-up view of the timelines from 1989 to 2005 (in order to do this it only partially displays the timelines of the four respondents whose engagement with Chinese began in 1966, 1971, 1972, and 1986). The somewhat larger scale allows the reader to see more easily the relative amounts of time that the periods of structured institutional study (denoted by red and maroon sections) occupy in each timeline. It can be seen that for many learners the periods of formal study occupy only a portion of their timeline, and in relation to them, the periods of other activities are of significant length.

Although no two timelines are the same, there are certain commonalities of patterning that can be perceived. One thing which longitudinal study can illuminate is the concept of continuities and discontinuities. A first view of the continuous or intermittent nature of people's histories of involvement in distance learning reveals some broad patterns or groups of patterns:

- A single continuous period of engagement in distance learning, still ongoing in 2005;
- A single continuous period of engagement in distance learning, completed and followed by other activities or no activities;
- Intermittent periods of formal distance learning, separated by gaps in study, or else by visits to China; and
- Two or more separate episodes of study, widely separated in time or else different in nature.

One recurring pattern that is striking is the 'early taste' one. In section 5.2.2.1 the wide range of starting dates was attested; the timelines now add to our understanding. People have an early encounter with learning Chinese, often by community-based learning such as evening classes, or else in the form of a period of time spent in China, and then much later after a considerable gap resume or re-start their learning by a different means. At some point they are drawn to university level study as a way to review, formalise and deepen their understanding in a planned and guided context, and find that distance mode delivery makes it possible on a practical level to fit in around their other life commitments. Whereas 15 respondents began their engagement with Mandarin when they started studying it at university, the other 26 show time gaps between first experiences with Mandarin and commencement of formal study at university ranging from 6 months to 37 years. In complexity theory terms such a recurrent pattern might play the role of an attractor.



Figure 5.3 The 41 simple timelines compared from 1989 to 2005

The discontinuities and intermittencies raise various questions when they are viewed not as problems, through an absence or deficit lens, but rather from a more holistic and ecological standpoint as constituent episodes within an evolving timeline. For example, what combination of influences contribute to emergence and continuation and cessation? And in particular, does absence of involvement in formal study necessarily imply absence of engagement with Chinese or with the idea of learning it? These questions emerged from this first phase of investigation and analysis as areas to be pursued in later, more focussed phases of data collection within the study (as explained in Chapter 4, a complexity framework easily accommodates the emergence of new questions as a study progresses). They will be explored further in later chapters.

Figure 5.3 also points to variety in the presence and position within individuals' timelines of periods spent in China (annotated in orange); of periods when informal Chinese-related activities were taking place (marked in green or blue<sup>4</sup>); and of structured self-directed study (shown in pink). These activities were probed in greater depth in the second survey of 2010, and will be discussed in section 5.3.2.

### 5.2.2.3 *Comments on the data presented so far*

These initial findings about learning patterns and trajectories are interesting for several reasons. First, from a practical and institutional perspective, there are some messages for educators and planners. They show that it cannot be assumed that adult distance learners will follow a continuous, linear trail in their studies of Chinese, and that if teaching institutions can offer students a degree of flexibility to opt in and out of a course it would serve them well. They also demonstrate that adults enrolled in beginner level Mandarin units, particularly in distance mode, are actually quite likely to be false beginners, perhaps with some background knowledge or experience of the language, or fossilised language skills, and some Chinese learning experience which they will bring to the learning situation. A further implication is that such learners may be pursuing or reviving a long-held goal or interest in learning Chinese, which will add a particular flavour to their motivation for study.

Of greater interest to this thesis are the conceptual implications of these initial explorations into learning chronologies. Heterogeneity is a central concept in complexivist thinking. This presentation of data pertaining to the 41 learners has pointed out the variety in their demographic and background details, and the individuality of each person's chronology of Chinese learning up to 2005.

Learners enrolling in first year Chinese are by no means homogeneous: even though they are enrolled in beginners' Chinese, which is classed as an 'ab initio' course, any assumption that they have no prior knowledge or experience of Chinese and are all starting from a similar

---

<sup>4</sup> Different types of informal activities were originally distinguished by blue and green colours, but that distinction is not a relevant one here, so in Figures 5.2 and 5.3 blue and green can be taken as equivalent.



blank slate is misguided. This diversity and heterogeneity is particularly salient among part-time and distance students, who are also likely to be older than full-time on-campus students. For many it is in fact previous encounters of different kinds with Chinese that have led them to choose to study it at university; and any such previous encounter will have an effect upon the attitudes, practices and approaches that they bring to their formal study of Chinese on both conscious and subconscious levels. (Other aspects of their prior experience which are not directly concerned with Chinese will also have an effect, e.g. prior university study, prior experience of learning any languages, learning styles, personality traits, etc.).

Some approaches to SLA see such variability as being part of the area of peripheral interest of ‘individual differences’. In a complexity approach, variability is taken as central, and heterogeneity is also linked to the complexivist concept of ‘sensitivity to initial conditions’. Seemingly unpredictable differences in the behaviour of systems, or of elements within systems, can be caused by tiny differences (sometimes imperceptible or apparently insignificant) in their very initial stages. In this case background demographic variety can be taken as one observable aspect of the ‘initial conditions’. In addition, the range of starting points for people’s learning journeys with Chinese, clearly visible even in these first rather crude and essentialising timelines, will lead to outcomes and experiences which are very different, in unpredictable ways, even for people who may later end up taking the same formal course of study at the same time.

At a later stage of the analysis more complex multilayered timelines were devised, with the scope to represent different levels of concurrent activities: they will be described in due course in section 5.6).

### 5.2.3 Looking back – the lessons of experience

From their vantage point some way along in their journey of Chinese learning, the participants were asked to look back towards their starting point. They were asked what advice they would give someone who was just beginning to learn Chinese; and whether there is anything they now knew, that they wish someone had told them when they started learning. The purpose of such questions is to invite participant/practitioner reflection on the evolution of their attitudes to Chinese learning over time as their learning journey unfolds; and to discover what their views of their own learning are in terms of longitudinal concepts of continuities, development, and transition, as they move through and in most cases beyond the beginner’s stage and become experienced learners. Several salient themes emerge from this part of the analysis, which can be seen as reflecting understandings and awareness acquired by learners through their experience of the nature and requirements of the task of learning Chinese over a number of years.

### **5.2.3.1 *Recognition of the complexity of the task and re-evaluation of time required – acceptance of a long-term commitment***

It comes across strongly that these learners have developed a new understanding of the task of learning Chinese as complex and gradual. There is an emerging acceptance of the fact that it requires a lengthy commitment of time, but that the intrinsic interest of the task makes it worthwhile.

Naively enough, I certainly didn't think it was going to be this difficult when I started and I didn't realise it was a lifetime commitment, especially if you want to be well versed in the culture and language (Keith)

Chinese is a really complex but interesting language. It's not something you can learn immediately and be really good at it. It takes time. (Ruby)

Recognise that it's not going to be easy, but endure and savour the growth along the way. (Shelley)

The responses suggest that perhaps recognition of the scale of the task can only develop as learning progresses, in tandem with learners' discovery of the rewards of continuing study:

If someone had told me [about the difficulty], maybe I would never have started, and I have only benefited from learning along the way. (Rachel)

The learners adjust their expectations and their time frames dynamically as their understanding and experience of what is involved in learning Chinese grow. In complexity terms, this continuous process is a feedback loop, and also an instance of co-adaptation; it exemplifies the view of learning as "continuous dynamic adaptation to context, which is always changing" (Larsen-Freeman, 2009).

### **5.2.3.2 *Recognition of the extent of formal linguistic differences between Chinese and English (and other European languages)***

Learning Chinese, for speakers of English and European languages, tends to involve a gradual challenge to Eurocentric understandings of how a language works. Their comments demonstrate acknowledgement that an awareness of this is developing through the process of learning a non-cognate language. Further comments also suggest that formalised activities encouraging reflective comparison between Chinese and other languages with which they were familiar had helped them to develop these understandings.

Forget all pre-conceptions about structure and form of language. (Lola)

I wish someone had told me the key characteristics NOT to expect, or TO expect. (e.g. "Please accept that a language without articles 'a' or 'the' can be coherent" – dozens of them.) (Hans)

### 5.2.3.3 *Recognition of the importance of developing competence in various skills concurrently*

Just as individuals display different learning styles, they also have different motivations for learning Chinese, which will affect their orientation towards listening, speaking, reading and writing, and the various learning tasks involved. As independent learners with some flexibility about how they organise and tackle their study tasks, distance learners sometimes respond to the significant time demands of their Chinese course by prioritising one aspect of the language at a time. However, looking back over their learning experiences to date, a frequently expressed view was that it was now perceived as counterproductive to focus on particular skills at the expense of others.

I truly wished I had started learning to read and write at the same time as learning to speak whilst I was in Guangzhou, instead of just trying to survive initially. (Caroline)

Learn the correct pronunciation of each and every word and character's tones from the BEGINNING... do not tell yourself they don't matter because people will understand you in a contextual sense... it is very difficult to break bad habits. (Pat)

[T]he importance of listening and trying to learn to speak the language concurrently with other aspects of learning. Each component is only part of the whole, but compliments [sic] the others. To practise them all at the same rate makes learning easier. (Stephanie)

Recognition of the crucial nature of the interrelationship between Chinese characters, meanings and sounds, tends to develop towards the end of the first year of formal study, experience suggests. An understanding of the importance of speaking and listening skills and the central role played by tone (which beginning students tend to treat as if it were an 'optional extra', especially when they are focussing on other aspects of a task) develops in tandem with exposure to situations where authentic spoken interaction in Chinese takes place. For distance language learners of Chinese there is great variation in the extent to which they are able to access such interactive situations, apart from those opportunities built into their course materials and language tasks. The participants demonstrated awareness of this issue and some had developed strategies for addressing it, as will be seen later.

### 5.2.3.4 *Recognition of the benefits of a relaxed, playful, self-nurturing attitude to learning*

Learner anxiety is relatively common among adult distance learners: partly because they are often either commencing tertiary study for the first time, or else returning to it after a long break; and also because their isolation from their classmates exacerbates a feeling of uncertainty about whether their progress and performance is acceptable, together with worries that "I'm the only one that can't understand this". Learner anxiety is an emotional state which can stifle learning as the learner becomes increasingly worried about performance and study outcomes.

Comments arising in this study demonstrate that at this stage of their learning the participants recognise such tendencies, and have developed strategies and self-talk for dealing with the anxiety and cultivating a thick skin. They echo the findings of Hauck and Hurd (2005) on the strategies deployed by distance language learners to reduce anxiety.

Ask questions, especially the ‘silly’ ones. (Lola)

Don’t be shy – go and talk to native speakers and classmates in Chinese! (Donna)

Don’t forget to laugh at your mistakes. (Scott)

Don’t give yourself a hard time if at times it seems too difficult. Slow steady progress is always best. Try to enjoy the journey and keep in touch with fellow students. (Michelle)

Relax and have fun. Keep listening, speaking and watching Mandarin if they can. (Sharon)

For those learners who continue beyond beginners’ level, the acceptance, discussed above, of a lengthy timescale for achieving goals in Chinese learning, contributes towards reducing the pressure of time and allows for the cultivation of a lighter attitude where appropriate.

The themes of these learner reflections appear to be very compatible with Ushioda’s (2009) person-in-context, process-oriented view of motivation as relational and emergent.

Overall, the ‘lessons of experience’ introduced in this section contribute towards a picture of these learners as developing, self-aware and reflective in 2005. How will this trend have evolved after a further five years? This question will be among those addressed in the discussion of the next wave of data, in the next part of this chapter.

### **5.3 Progression: 26 learners followed up 5 years later**

Survey Two follows people as they move beyond the end of their involvement in formal university study, and distance study. This data set is represented by the area bounded by dotted lines in Figure 5.1 in section 5.1. It builds on the data obtained in Survey One. One of its purposes is to find out how, if at all, people continue their involvement with learning or using Chinese after their formal study has ended. (The design and implementation of the survey were explained in section 4.4.2.)

This section focusses on the longitudinal data derived from Survey One and Survey Two. As well as providing ‘point in time’ snapshots, each of the two surveys also elicited both retrospective comments from the participants regarding their Chinese learning journeys up to that time, and also forward-looking commentary as to how they perceived their journeys might unfold from that time on. Figure 5.4 illustrates the sort of longitudinal chain of interrelated data which has been collected for each individual:

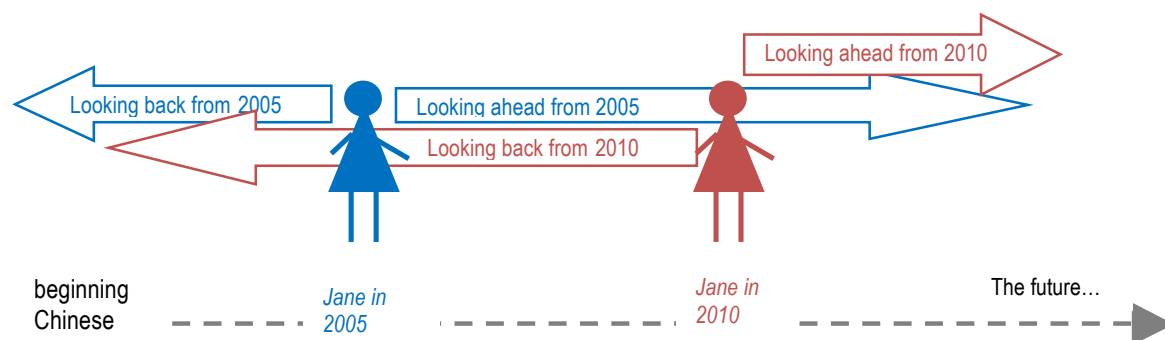


Figure 5.4: Chain of data collected by looking backwards and forwards at different points in time

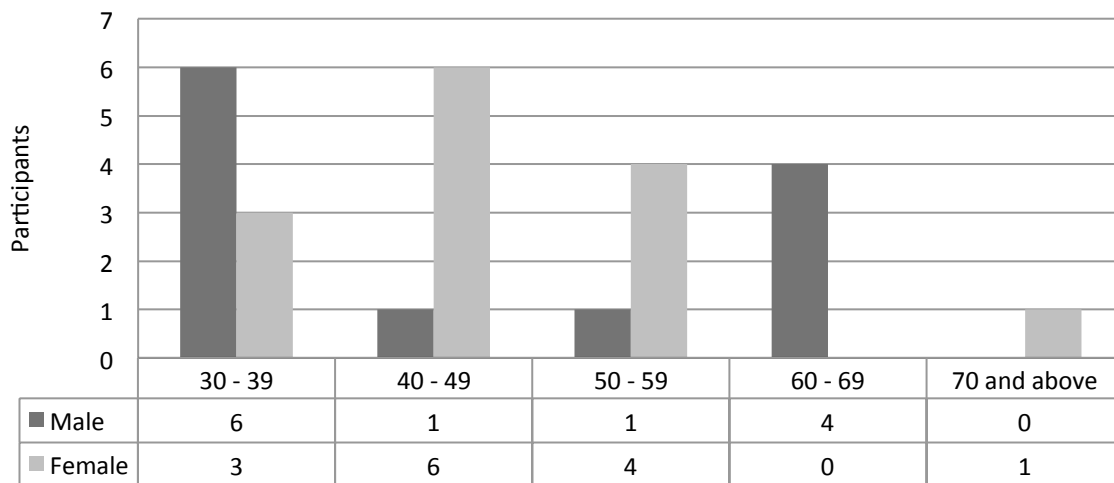
Drawing on these data, this section offers a description of the evolution of various aspects of the participants' Mandarin learning over the course of the five years between 2005 and 2010 (and in the context of what is known of the years preceding and following). The initial focus will be upon developments across the whole group, to see whether patterns or themes of a general nature can be discerned. In a subsequent chapter, a different perspective will be adopted, looking at what can be discovered about the learning journeys of individuals in the context of their own particular situation.

In presenting the data in this section I will be attempting to capture the dynamics of involvement with Mandarin, of beliefs and attitudes to it, and of practices, over time amongst this group of learners. To this end I am interested to identify traces and clues about continuities, discontinuities, development, recurrences, transitions and rhythms (Saldaña, 2003), and to enquire what insights may be afforded by viewing them through a complexity lens.

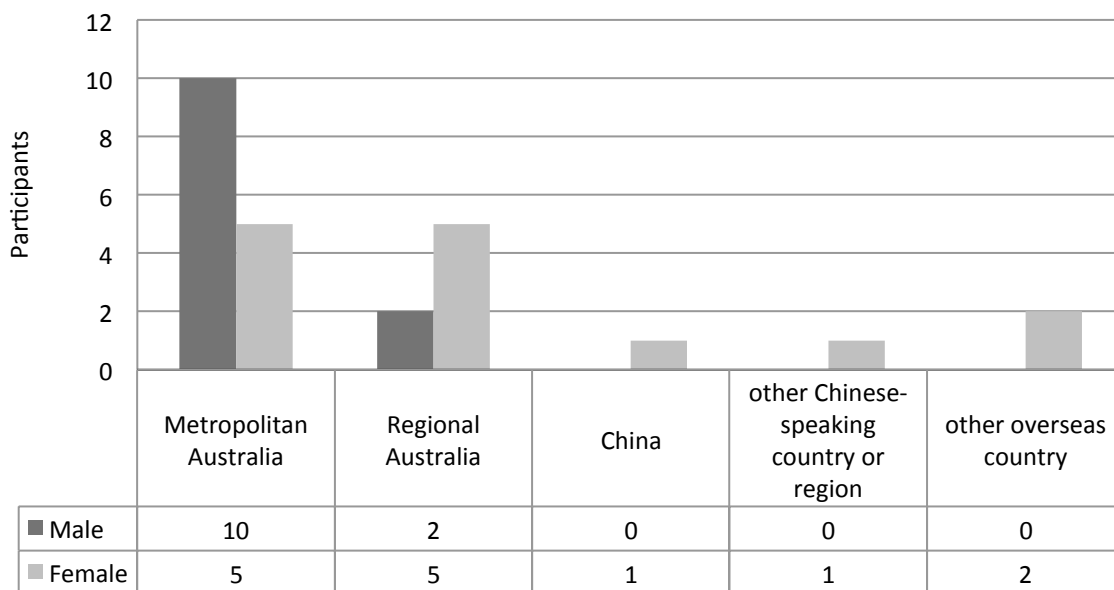
### 5.3.1 Overview of the 26 respondents: update of demographic details

The respondents who provided data for the five year period between 2005 and 2010 were divided roughly equally by gender: there were 12 males and 14 females. In terms of age grouping, there were no longer any participants under the age of 30. The distribution across age groups and gender is shown in Chart 5.6.

In terms of permanent place of residence in 2010, 15 were based in metropolitan Australia and 7 in regional Australia. Of the four participants living overseas, two were in Chinese-speaking countries. The men were predominantly resident in metropolitan Australia (as in the 2005 survey, see section 5.2.1.2), and none were resident overseas; whereas the women were now more evenly divided between metropolitan and regional Australia (in 2005 they had been predominantly regional), and overseas. See Chart 5.7.



*Chart 5.6: Distribution by age and gender of Survey Two participants*



*Chart 5.7: Distribution by gender and place of residence of Survey Two participants*

Chart 5.7 only captures ‘point in time’ data for 2010; however if the whole period between 2005 and 2010 is considered, then travels to and sojourns in China of varying lengths are present to a significant extent across the group. This will be discussed in section 5.3.2.1.

There was significant heterogeneity in terms of the highest level of formal education completed by participants. One had completed secondary education; one a diploma; 11 had reached the level of bachelor’s degree; 6 had attained a postgraduate certificate or diploma; and 5 had Master’s degrees.

Participants defined their current working situations in 2010 in the following ways: 12 were in full-time paid work, 8 were in part-time paid work, 5 undertook home duties only, 4 worked in the voluntary sector, and one was not in paid work. Some placed themselves in more than one category.

#### **5.3.1.1 Family connections with China or Chinese**

Amongst these 26 participants, in 2005, five individuals had family connections with China or Chinese: two came from families of Chinese origin; two of the men had Mandarin-speaking spouses or partners; and another participant had a son and daughter-in-law who had worked in China for several years before becoming adoptive parents of Chinese children.

By 2010, these connections had expanded and at least ten individuals now have family connections. A further two of the men had become married to Chinese women. In one of their households the fact that a grandson had just started learning Mandarin in Year 7 at high school was commented upon as a source of excitement. Another participant has close relatives who had adopted Chinese children, this time from Taiwan, with whose upbringing she is involved. Also, in two families, the children of participants were learning Mandarin, in one case in a bilingual family environment and in the other as a foreign language. In both cases they had attended school in China for a period. Another participant had a cousin who worked in China.

In a small way this doubling of family connections with China and Mandarin in a group of 26 over the course of five years may be taken as a manifestation of globalisation in progress on a very localised level. In complexity terms this might be taken as an instance of fractal patterning (the same pattern occurring at different levels of organisation).

#### **5.3.1.2 Time spent in China**

Nineteen people in the group had visited China between 2005 and 2010. The patterns of their visits to China vary according to their personal circumstances and the opportunities which suit their lifestyle and commitments. Six people had lived in China for periods of a year or more (in most of these cases they were also working there). Three had spent one or two semesters there engaged in full-time Chinese study at a university or institute. Such study would typically provide credit towards an Australian degree on a 'study abroad' basis. Seven people reported that they went on several shorter visits to China involving either work, family or language study spread over the five year period. Three others had had a single trip to China during that time for study or short-term employment in TESOL.

Of the seven people in this group who had not visited China between 2005 and 2010, at least three had previously had extended stays in China or Taiwan prior to 2005.

### 5.3.2 Extension of timelines through the period 2005 to 2010

A series of questions posed in Survey Two asked respondents to provide summary detail of the stages or periods in their engagement with Chinese over the 5 years following Survey One, from 2005 to 2010. They were asked to identify each time that they began a new phase of Chinese-related activity (or lack of it) as the beginning of a new ‘period’. For each period they identified they were asked a series of simple questions about the extent to which they were using their Chinese for *communication* in various settings; the amount and type of formal *institutional* study that was taking place; types of independent *self-directed* study that they may have engaged in; frequency of different kinds of *informal* activity related to Chinese language or culture; and if none of the just-mentioned activities were happening, how if at all they were thinking about Chinese. From the data thus amassed, the individual timelines described in section 5.2.2 were extended to represent the experience of the 26 Survey Two respondents up to 2010.







Figure 5.5 illustrates the timelines thus created. This graphic deliberately refrains from showing detail at this stage, in preference for giving an overall indication of the principal types of engagement with Chinese reported by respondents in different periods, and allowing for a comparative overview of the variety in the timelines of the 26 individuals.

In the following sections, first the developments in the timelines over the period from Survey One (end of 2005) to Survey Two (mid 2010) will be presented and commented upon (section 5.3.2.1). Then, in section 5.3.2.2, features of the full timelines from their varied beginning points up to 2010 will be examined.

#### 5.3.2.1 Patterns of engagement between Survey One and Survey Two

On initial examination of the 5-year period between 2005 and 2010, various patterns of engagement can be discerned. They are presented in the following 7 subsections. A colour key is provided here to assist interpretation.

*Table 5.4:* Key to interpret the colours on the timeline graphics

 formal distance learning	 informal activities	 In China
 formal classroom learning	 Unknown, or no activity reported	 Independent structured study

#### Combination of formal distance study and periods in China at regular intervals

Regular interspersing of periods of travel or study in China with periods of formal study by distance education is represented by a pattern which looks like ‘running stitch’ in red and orange. As shown in Figure 5.6, there are three people, Brenda, Clive and Stephanie, whose timelines clearly show this pattern.

The regularity of this pattern might lead one to assume a planned approach on the part of these participants. However, whether or not this is the case could not be inferred from the pattern alone, but would be followed up in the interviews.



Figure 5.5: Timelines of group of 26, extended to 2010; broad comparative overview

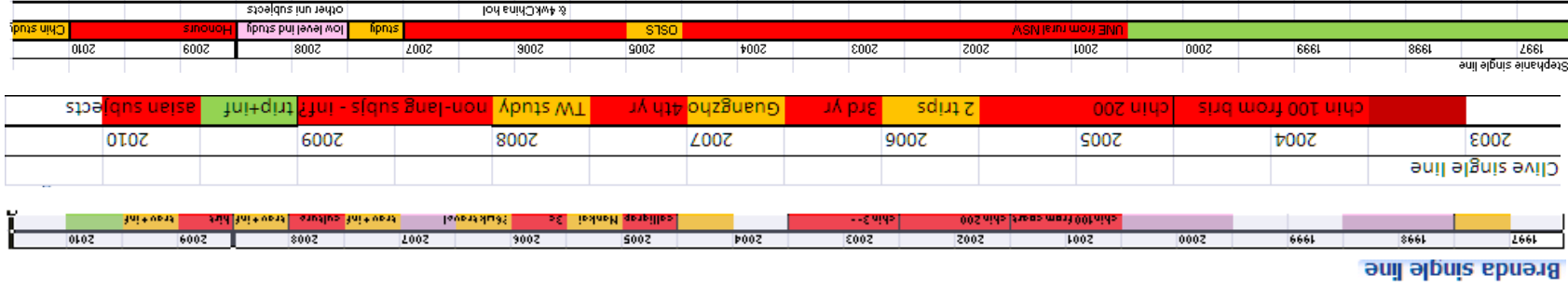
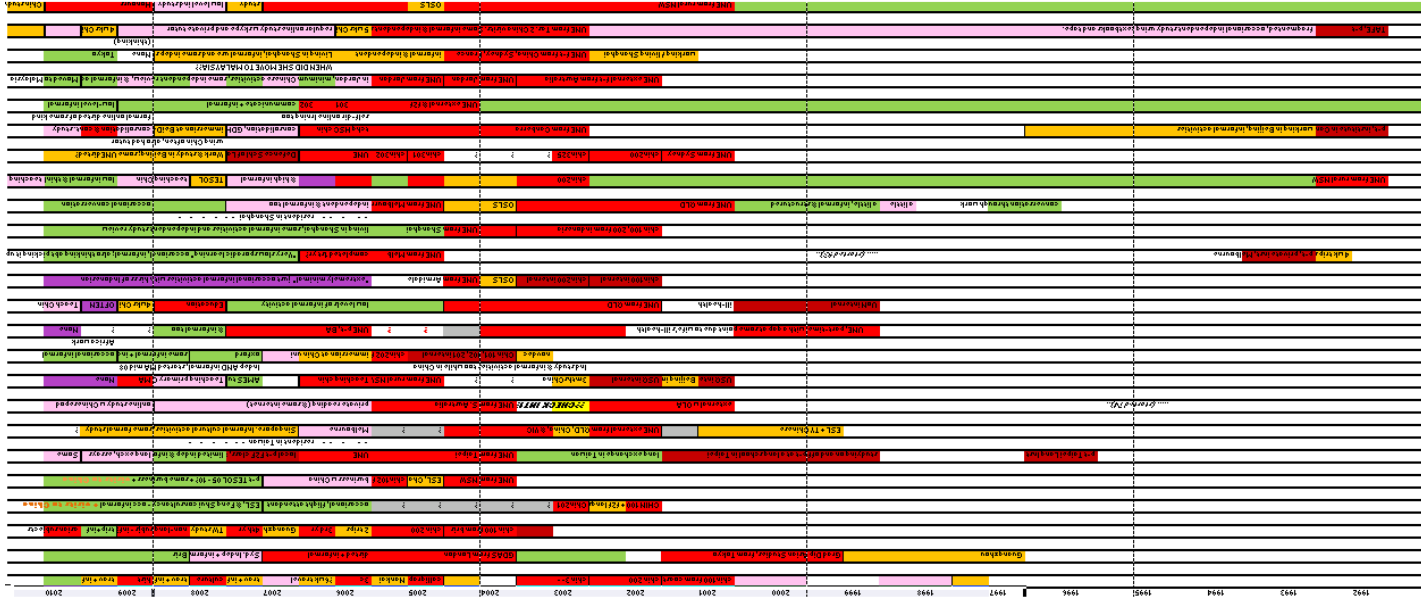


Figure 5.6: Formal distance study combined with periods in China

### Mainly informal activities

Timelines displaying mostly informal activities since 2005 (marked in green) appear in the case of up to eight participants (see Figure 5.7). Two have been involved principally in informal activities – Esther, who had visited Hong Kong and Singapore several times for work purposes and holidays during that time, and Nina, who had been based in Shanghai as a result of her husband's posting there since 2004. Two participants, Wendy and Xavier, having been involved mainly in informal activities over several years, are now about to engage again in formal institutional study; Xavier to use his long-service leave<sup>5</sup> for in-country study in Taiwan to revive his Mandarin skills, and Wendy to resume university-based distance learning and complete a degree. A further two people, Nick and Sharon, appear to have completed a substantial block of formal study and then followed it with engagement in informal activities. In addition, Harry's timeline profile appears to be becoming increasingly like those in this group: after a period of self-directed goal oriented study at first, from mid 2007 he is engaging primarily in informal activities involving Chinese, with regular visits to China for business and family reasons. Marty's activities also show a similar progression after his in-country immersion, to self-directed study and then informal activities. In complexity terms this pattern could be seen as an attractor, towards which Harry and Marty are moving.

These timelines also show that Xavier, Esther and Harry have in common that their long periods of informal engagement with Chinese are a background for short visits to China (or other Chinese-speaking countries).

### Significant engagement in self-directed study

The timelines in Figure 5.8 show that over the five years in question four people engaged in significant periods of independent goal-oriented self-directed study (described to them in the survey as “studying or practising Chinese, with a goal in mind and in a way that you defined to yourself as ‘study’, although you were not enrolled in an institution”). For Ken it was his single principal activity; and for Stella it was a principal activity combined with regular short study visits to China as well. Rachel and Scott recorded timelines which show self-directed study periods occurring at least three times, and for these two respondents there was an association of this activity with teaching as well as study, since both had experience of teaching some CFL as well as teaching ESL to native speakers of Chinese; Rachel used self-directed study to meet the demands of the teaching situation, and Scott used it to consolidate what he had previously studied in the intervals between periods of formal study.

---

<sup>5</sup> An additional employee vacation payable after long periods of service with an employer in Australia and New Zealand.

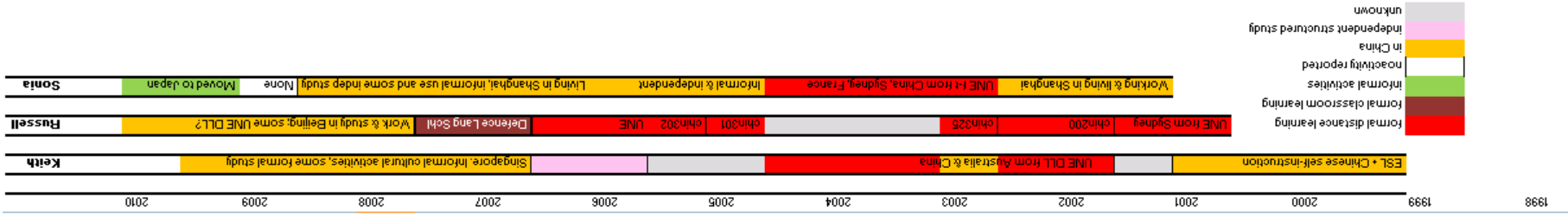


Figure 5.7: Informal activities: Esther, Nina, Wendy, Xavier, Nick, Sharon, Harry and Marty

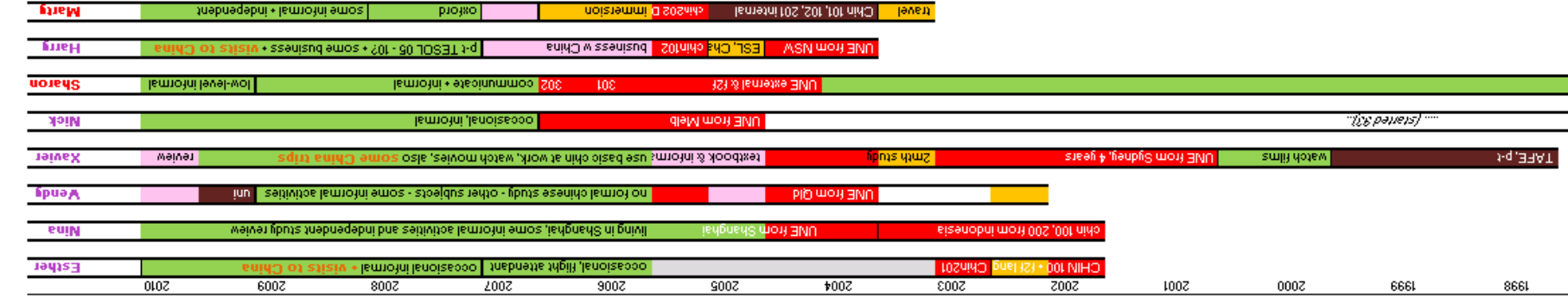


Figure 5.9: Work-related long-term residence in China: Keith, Russell and Sonia

### **Work-related long-term residence in China or Chinese-speaking countries**

The comparative numbers of participants who between 2005 and 2010 had spent time in China (or Chinese-speaking countries) have already been presented in section 5.3.1.2. The timeline perspective allows a view of how such periods are situated in the context of other periods in each individual's trajectory.

Some of the people who were long-term residents in Chinese-speaking countries did not identify this as a defining feature of the periodisation of their engagement with Chinese on their timelines, since, as they explained, the circumstances in which they were living did not necessarily demand learning or regularly using Chinese. Heather and Nina fall into this category. (Nina's engagement in informal activity was described above and the features of Heather's timeline will be mentioned in the coming section on less frequently occurring patterns.)

Three participants noted significant periods of in-country residence and work as definitive in their timelines: Sonia had lived and worked in Shanghai for four years (prior to moving to Japan) during which time she engaged in independent learning and informal activities very regularly; Russell had followed university distance learning with intensive study with the Australian Defence Forces, prior to taking up a posting in Beijing for two years from 2008; and Keith worked for three years in Singapore where he regularly interacted with Chinese speakers and was engaged in Chinese cultural activities as well as some study, both formal and self-directed. These periods of in-country residence are shown in yellow in Figure 5.9.

### **Periods of formal study in China (one semester or more)**

Four participants had, between 2005 and 2010, spent one or two semesters engaged in full-time Chinese study at a Chinese university or institute: Clive, Marty, Scott and Stephanie. This is shown in Figure 5.10. As previously described, Stephanie's and Clive's timelines are also instances of the 'running stitch' pattern of regularly interspersed periods of in-country study and formal distance learning;

Marty's timeline, if viewed only over the period 2005 to 2010, shows a seemingly unusual profile where a full year of intensive study in China is followed by a little independent study and then a rather long period of informal activity only (see Figure 5.7) However, if his full timeline from the beginning of his engagement with Chinese is considered, a perspective emerges of his trajectory as a variation on the more common progression from formal learning to self-directed learning to informal activity (to be discussed in section 5.3.2.2 below).

Scott's timeline has already been discussed in terms of his significant engagement in self-directed study. His year of immersion study in Beijing is preceded and directly followed by episodes of self-directed study, which are in turn preceded and directly followed by episodes of formal distance study.

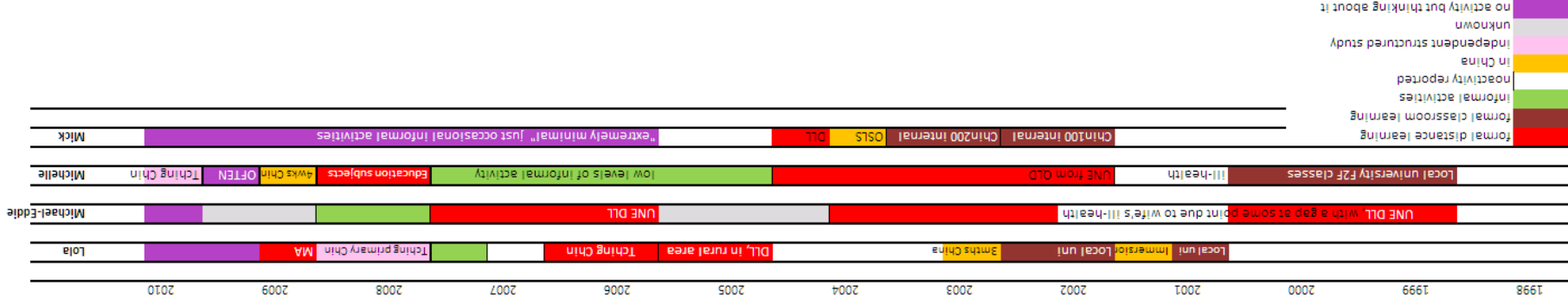


Figure 5.10: Periods of formal study in China: Clive, Marty, Scott and Stephanie

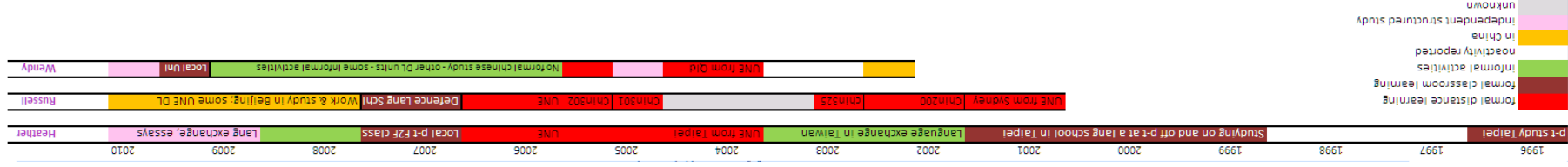


Figure 5.11: Periods of face-to-face study: Heather, Russell and Wendy

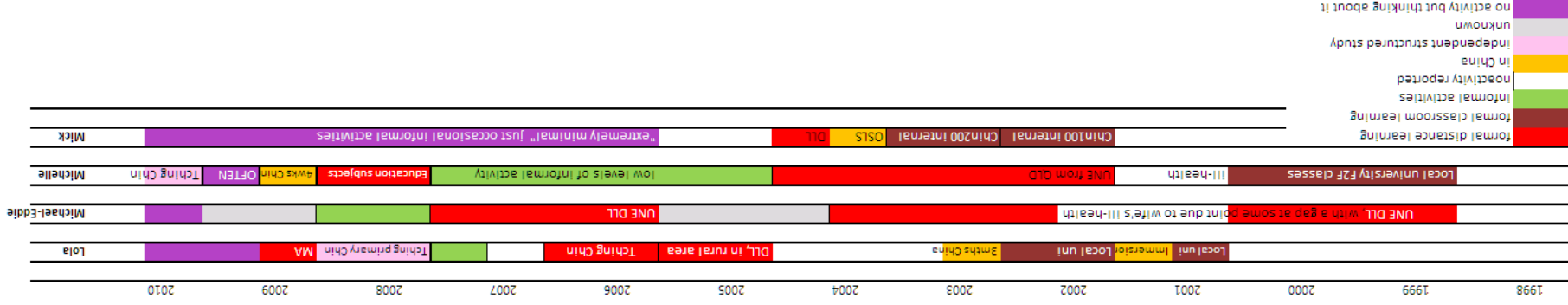


Figure 5.12: Periods of no activity: Lola, Michael-Eddie, Michelle and Mick

The fact that each of the four timelines discussed in this section has features in common with other patterns of engagement is of interest in that it suggests that participation in immersion study in China does not lead to a timeline conforming to a particular pattern, but that rather for each individual there will be factors other than study in China that contribute to the distinguishing characteristics of their timelines. This kind of insight can only emerge from a dynamic pattern-based analysis like this one.

### **Shorter visits to China**

During the period from 2005 to 2010, shorter visits to China were undertaken by several of the participants as follows. First, business and work-related trips, which tended to be taken in addition to trips made for other reasons: Clive made regular business visits as well as his two longer periods of study, and most recently a social visit to a Chinese friend's wedding; and Harry made regular business trips as well as having worked for several months in TESOL in China, and visiting his wife's family. Xavier and Esther had both been in employment as flight attendants and had visited China and other Chinese-speaking countries in the region both in a work capacity and for holidays. Brenda at one point organised and led a small tour group on a trip to China. Rachel followed an earlier semester of study in China with a later contract to teach English at a Chinese primary school for several months. Secondly, some respondents made regular trips of a social and family nature: Keith and Harry to visit their wives' families, and Brenda to travel in China and stay with several Chinese friends. Thirdly, several people made short trips to China to study: Stella organised three visits of several weeks each, of which the main purpose was language study; Michelle gained a scholarship place on a study tour for trainee and practising teachers of Chinese; and at the time of completing Survey Two, Xavier was planning a study visit to Taiwan.

(No illustration is given here because these short visits are not easily represented in the timeline format used in this chapter.)

### **Less frequently occurring patterns**

In longitudinal studies of a qualitative nature, it is necessary to pay attention to what occurs rarely as well as what occurs frequently. In the timelines for the 2005 to 2010 period, two things stand out in this regard. First, there is a relatively low occurrence of periods of face-to-face study in a classroom environment (excluding that which forms part of formal study in China). Episodes of such study only figure in the timelines of three people: Heather, who lives in Taiwan and took a local class there; Russell, who undertook employment-related immersion language training offered by the Australian defence forces; and Wendy, who attended face-to-face university classes at a local campus for one semester, but did not find they suited her as well as external study had (see Figure 5.11). This is of interest; it might be because of lack of availability, or it might reflect a personal preference for DL; or demonstrate

that the original reasons for which people took up DL were still valid. (Alternatively it might be that they had no interest in further formal study.) This will be borne in mind when the discussion turns to participants' feelings and attitudes about distance language learning and their plans for any continuing study or maintenance of their Mandarin skills in future (see section 5.5).

Secondly, periods of no Chinese-related activity, or of only thinking about Chinese rather than engaging in any related activities, are not greatly in evidence in this set of timelines (see Figure 5.12). One timeline, that of Mick, stands out for continued low level involvement since 2005; two others, Michael-Eddie and Lola show several shorter periods of no or little activity amongst other periods of engagement with Chinese; and Michelle was at pains to point out that although there was a lengthy time when she did no Chinese-related activities, she thought about Chinese “often” during that time.

The low level of responses of this type suggest that most respondents are more likely to find a way to maintain some level of commitment and engagement with Chinese language and culture, over several years beyond formal study, than not to do so. This will be further explored below when identity statements in relation to the past, present and future are examined in section 5.5.1. It is of course possible that people who completed the first survey and then had little or no further activity relating to Chinese are likely to be among those who did not respond to the invitation to participate in Survey Two, because they thought they would have nothing of interest to say. In an effort to counteract such an effect, the invitation to participate had been phrased in as friendly and non-judgemental a way as possible, explicitly assuring recipients that ‘even if you have been doing nothing relating to Chinese, your responses will still be of interest to me’.

### **5.3.2.2 Observations afforded by an overview of the full timelines**

The preceding section focussed on patterns of engagement with Chinese for participants in the period between Survey One and Survey Two, to add to the picture previously presented of their timelines up to the time of Survey One. Now, in this section, an overview of the organic wholes of the trajectories from their varied beginning points up to 2010 will be undertaken. This will provide a background against which further more specific details will subsequently be viewed. (The reader can refer back to the graphics in the previous section to consult the timelines of individuals mentioned.)

#### **No two timelines are the same**

No two timelines are the same. The pathway of engagement with Chinese is different for each individual, even when recorded in this relatively coarse-grained format. However a close examination of contiguities and progressions among different types of engagement does allow

certain generalisations to be made. Some have already been pointed out in the discussions of the 2005–2010 period just preceding.

#### **Timelines displaying a high degree of variety**

Some people's timelines are distinctive in that they do not fit any of the commoner patterns which have been pointed out in preceding sections. Rather, they present significantly varied combinations of relatively short episodes of different types of engagement. People whose timelines fall into this category are Lola, Rachel, Michelle, and, to some extent, Xavier. It is possible that variety is the preferred mode for each of these participants; however, it is also possible that the variety may represent what in a complexivist view is an 'instability' which may herald an imminent change or 'phase shift'. This possibility will be explored in the examination of the cases of Rachel and Michelle in greater depth in Chapter 6.

#### **Long timelines**

Fifteen of the respondents in this group had timelines which were significantly long: 2 were over 30 years (Harry and Ken); 2 were over 20 years (Sharon and Stephanie); 4 were over 15 years (Stella, Scott, Rachel and Nick); and 7 were over 10 years (Heather, Pat, Caroline, Brenda, Heather, Michael-Eddie and Michelle). As already intimated in section 5.2.2.2, engagement with Chinese language and culture can be a long-term presence in people's lives, and participation in formal classes is only episodic within that trajectory.

#### **Precursors to periods of self-directed study**

A commonly seen progression, which appears to be an attractor, is from formal study by distance education to self-directed study. It occurs as directly sequential episodes in eight of the timelines (those of Caroline, Harry, Ken, Pat, Scott, Sofia, Wendy and Xavier); furthermore, it occurs as an indirect sequence with an intervening period of another type in ten of the timelines (those of Heather, Brenda, Keith, Lola, Marty, Michelle, Rachel, Stella, Stephanie and Xavier). From a complexity perspective, no direct causal connection can be made; but there may be a suggestion that participation in distance learning is one influence which contributes to learners' undertaking independent self-directed study.

For some respondents, self-directed study is a stage in a progression from formal study by distance education, through independent study, towards informal activity. This is noted where green follows pink which follows red, in Figure 5.5 above. It can be seen in the cases of Caroline, Harry, Pat, Sofia and Xavier.

It also occurs that self-directed study takes place immediately after periods of time spent in China. This can be seen in seven timelines (Brenda, Keith, Marty, Rachel, Scott, Stella and Stephanie).



In a smaller number of cases, periods of self-directed study are directly preceded by periods of informal activities (Heather, Lola, Rachel, (Sofia) and Xavier); or by periods where there has been no activity (Brenda, Keith, Michelle and Pat).

#### **Timelines in which no visits to China are recorded**

Two respondents apparently have not visited China at all in the course of their engagement with the language. They are Michael-Eddie and Sofia.

#### **5.3.2.3 Limitations of the timeline method as used so far**

In the creation of the simplified timelines for the whole group, participant responses about their engagement with Chinese in each period were recorded following an order of priority. So if the first type of engagement was present, then it became the identifier of that period. The order for recording types of engagement is:

1. formal study (classroom or DLL)
2. in China
3. independent structured study
4. informal activities
5. no activity but thinking about it

The purpose of doing it like this is to provide an overview. An overview shows essential aspects of each individual timeline and affords a broad view of the whole group which allows comparison of essential features. By definition an overview lacks detail, however. This overview overlooks detail in the following ways:

- It cannot show types of engagement co-occurring in the same period – it assumes or implies that the activities higher up the list are somehow more significant than the ones below them (which is not necessarily the case);
- it also could be taken to suggest that the activities higher up the list might imply or contain those ranked below (but that is not necessarily the case – for example, someone might be doing formal study and no informal activities);
- it also does not allow for the representation of periods shorter than 6 months;
- it cannot show degrees of intensity of an activity; and
- it does not always distinguish clearly between distance study of Chinese language or of other subjects which form part of a respondent's course or degree. At times what is recorded as formal distance study may be referring to units relating to Chinese culture, history, politics etc.

In these ways the picture of the experience of the learners presented here is flat: it cannot represent subtleties of shading, depth or perspective. These are all issues that I will attempt to address by drilling deeper into the activities of the core group and developing a more detailed representation in Chapter 6.

## 5.4 Retrospection: participants look back on their timelines

So far in the presentation of findings, the approach has been fairly impersonal. Now, the participants' own comments and observations are brought in to add retrospective and reflective insights into the forces, events and attitudes, which they perceive to have had a bearing on the shape of their timelines so far.

### 5.4.1 Participants' views of influences on their timelines

Reminded that learning does not happen in a vacuum, but of course is interwoven with many other aspects of life, participants were invited to reflect on their histories of involvement with Chinese and comment on what they perceived as the external or internal influences, which might have affected the way these histories had evolved. This ties in with the complexivist view that where complex systems are concerned, processes and influences can be traced retrospectively, but prediction of future developments is at best unreliable. Many scholars stress the importance of taking a situated, contingent view of language learning; here I am proposing a way of looking at the dynamics of long-term language learning in such terms. Some of the influences on the learning timelines come from other complex systems which the learners are also a part of, and we may observe processes of co-adaptation taking place, whereby a change in one system is motivated by a change in another, connected system. The work of Merriam and Clark (1991) on 'lifelines' reviewed in Chapter 3 is an example of a similar mapping on a more general scale.

First, **life events** such as marriage, moving place of residence (in some cases to a different country), death of spouse, or serious illness or health problems were significant influences, as would be expected and as the literature on adult education has confirmed. Life events could act to interrupt the learning trajectory, or to change its course:

Becoming involved with a partner then living together and travelling to his work area certainly have had an influence – encouraged to study and teach, but not to go and live in China (of course) which I think I need to cement my learning. (Michelle)

Half way through my first attempt at a degree majoring in Chinese I had a breakdown. [...] When I returned to study, I was a more reserved, anxious girl and I did not grasp the language as well as I previously did. (name withheld)

On the other hand, in some cases life events served to boost or accelerate the learning trajectory, as in the case of marrying a Chinese spouse or being posted to a job in China.

Due to my overseas posting, the intensity of my Chinese language studies increased. (Russell)

Although in general, as might be expected, time spent **in China** for travel, study or work was commented on as a positive influence by many participants, there were some who referred to such episodes with regret in terms of opportunities missed for using Chinese, which affected

the course of their learning journey. The examples below come from one person at an advanced level of proficiency and one at a basic level.

I have many opportunities to speak with Chinese people, but I don't often use them. (Heather)

English language competencies of the Chinese with whom I have been dealing made it easier to default to English language for most communication. (Harry)

Apart from life events, the main external factors seen as having weakened engagement with Chinese were **work-related**. Work commitments significantly affected the time people had available to study or practise Chinese, and to some extent the opportunities they were likely to encounter for using it. In a few cases lack of opportunities to use Chinese in a work context contributed to a loss of momentum. After making the transition to full-time work Marty likened his Chinese learning situation to “an athlete who is no longer professional”. Both Sharon and Lola commented that they had not succeeded in finding work in which they could use Chinese, which resulted in them losing the incentive to continue learning, demonstrating ‘instrumental’ motivation. The dynamically evolving goals and motivations of participants in this study will be examined in section 5.5.

The other factor presented in terms of a negative effect on the timeline was finding that the **mode of study** undertaken, or pedagogical approach, was not fully compatible with their needs. Note that the first two examples illustrate opposite preferences:

I found the [face-to-face] class study at [name of university] inconvenient travel-wise and work-wise and too tiring. (Wendy)

The most significant influence was having to study by distance education, which is the least effective way of learning a language. (Michael-Eddie)

Being a kinaesthetic learner, I think the theoretical approach wasn't the best for me. (Esther)

Some people (for example Esther and Brenda) could trace an **evolution** in their histories from China travel, to language study, to a developing interest in aspects of Chinese culture. Though such a progression had not been planned, with hindsight they were able to perceive connections and patterns of which they had been unaware at the time. Hindsight can be understood as a personal process which parallels that of retrodiction in a dynamic systems perspective.

On the other hand, several people made comments which reflected their own sense of **agency** in creating their personal timelines, in terms of planning and following a strategic approach to their engagement with Chinese, either as a constant or episodically. They recall particular decisions or approaches as having had a significant influence on the development of their engagement with Chinese:

I decided I needed to study overseas to improve my listening and speaking. I felt that my skills in this area were lacking. (Clive)

[A] less formal self directed approach where I set learning goals according to my own interests informed my learning style. (Ken)

When considered from this perspective of strategy and agency, the demotivating effect of not finding full-time work in teaching Chinese reported by Lola, mentioned above, could be seen as disappointment that the strategic approach she had followed had not led to the hoped-for outcome, leading to a frustration of agency.

Similarly, there were some respondents (including Heather and Harry cited above) who, when considering in retrospect the evolution of their timelines, noted and expressed regret for paths not taken or opportunities which did not eventuate. This regret might be considered in terms of feeling prevented by circumstances (either external or personal) from exercising agency.

In hindsight I would not leave such a big gap in studying a foreign language again. (Wendy)

Circumstances beyond my control prevented me remaining in China after Dec 2004. This has been the greatest influence on my motivation to learn Mandarin and had I been able to remain in China for a period no less than a further two years, I would have become almost fluent. (Pat)

A further category of comments from respondents about influences on the evolution of their timelines foregrounded the **personal principles** which they see as guiding or shaping their approach to life on a more general level. For example, Marty cited his religious faith and his beliefs in justice, equality and human rights as having influenced his involvement with Chinese people in refugee centres and detention centres. Both Scott and Rachel feel that it is their love of teaching and sense of identity as teachers which feeds their desire to learn.

I'm a teacher. I see teaching as constant learning, not just about one's subject area, but lifetime learning. I [...] have hopes to teach what I've learnt. (Scott)

Teaching others influences me greatly... this is what impels me to continue. The more I am in a position to teach, the more I study. (Rachel)

Other influences on the timelines include: family commitments and support (or lack of it) from family members; input or encouragement from individuals; and attribution of positive emotions to practising Chinese. These are themes which will be picked up in later sections.

#### 5.4.2 Events, stages and achievements perceived as significant for their timelines

What did respondents perceive as significant events or stages in their learning and use of Chinese? And what did they see as their achievements and rewards in terms of learning Chinese, so far? Responses to these questions revealed significantly similar themes, which will be presented together in this section.

#### 5.4.2.1 Achievements presented as communication-related

For many respondents the most significant events or achievements were related to experiences of understanding authentic Chinese, and of successfully using Chinese for communication. These were recalled as sources of pride and encouragement to continue; it was common for respondents to highlight **emotions** and feelings in association with these experiences:

*The joy of communicating in such a diverse way. (Marty).*

*A real feeling of accomplishment from being able to read and converse in Chinese. (Heather)*

*It makes me feel happy when I can understand a conversation or something on TV, and when I can read a text online or in a book. (Xavier)*

*The amazing experience of hearing Chinese in a film and understanding, or hearing Chinese people speak and understanding. (Wendy)*

For some, the aspect of their communicative achievement which was important to them was a sense of **independence** acquired in the ways they could use their Chinese.

*Being able to have basic conversations that have allowed me to be more independent. (Keith)*

*Reading Han Shaogong's "Maqiao Dictionary" [a modern Chinese novel] on my own from beginning to end. (Ken)*

*I can converse, albeit slowly, on topics other than the weather. (Scott)*

In many cases this independence was linked to the possibilities for **interaction during visits to China**:

*Being able to show friends around China without the need of a native speaker. (Clive)*

*Getting to China and finding that taxi-drivers understand me and that I can make myself understood and make my way around. (Stella)*

*Telling jokes or being silly in Chinese and having people laugh. (Marty)*

*Being able to speak to locals in northern China, and therefore travelling independently. (Mick)*

Some people adopted a more **functional** tone in describing their communicative achievements:

*being able to communicate with the electrician and plumber. (Heather)*

*being able to go shopping and get just what I wanted; being able to go to a table-tennis club and interact with the members during and after games. (Scott)*

*Living for one semester in Tianjin with my own apartment and all the things I needed to maintain it, i.e.: shopping, paying bills and inviting Chinese friends around. (Brenda)*

Any communicative experience which is successful acts as a form of positive feedback loop for a learner on his or her use of the language. However in addition to that kind of intrinsic

feedback, a number of people cited, as being highly significant in the course of their learning, incidents when they received explicit **unsolicited positive feedback** on their Chinese proficiency from native speakers.

My last trip to China, ... our agent there commented on my improvement in Chinese. (Clive)

Praise from my tutor. (Stella)

I was at some traffic lights in Beijing and a man spoke to me in Chinese and I was able to give a simple response. He looked incredibly surprised and then said in English, “My god, your Chinese is so good you sound like a native speaker...” I was glad he didn’t ask me anything else, but I smiled and walked away smugly, quietly euphoric. (Rachel)

In the first two examples above, the praise came from people known to the learners who were in a position to make assessments of their progress. The third example could be seen as the operation of a cultural norm in China whereby native speakers on first encounters with foreigners who can speak any Chinese at all pay them somewhat ritualised enthusiastic compliments. Having spent some time in China by the time the reported encounter took place, it is likely that Rachel was aware of that norm; but for some reason this particular incident made an impression upon her (perhaps because the man switched to English to compliment her) and she chose to interpret it as genuine.

#### 5.4.2.2 *Achievements presented as study-related*

A different category of experience which many respondents highlight as significant relates to the achievement of study-related goals. Some are **institutional milestones**, such as graduating, completing a degree, or achieving good results in particular subjects. Others are **task-related or skill-related**:

I was particularly impressed when I could actually write an essay/passage in one of my exams in Chinese. (Esther)

[M]y big breakthrough came when I started practising writing the lessons, over and over. (Wendy)

I’ve improved my visual memory for characters, my spoken tones have shown improvement. (Scott)

Other achievements in this category relate to a **personal assessment of progress** and improvement which implies some degree of measurement in relation to an external standard:

[T]he ‘buzz’ that you’re getting further ahead – feelings of accomplishment. (Pat)

[E]xperiencing improvements in my language use has been a huge reward. (Stephanie)

Some people recalled a particular **study episode or technique** as being significant for them: for Nick, it was a year of studying Chinese using accelerated learning techniques which he felt contributed to the development of his comprehension and writing skills; and for

Xavier a 2-month summer session in Taiwan towards the end of his studies resulted in his feeling “confident and happy to use my Chinese, without having to translate”; while for Michelle the four day residential schools at university during external study “stand out significantly”.

A smaller number of respondents pointed to the **connection with other learners** afforded by their engagement in formal study as being significant:

Meeting students who were also studying Chinese and shared an interest in China was a highlight. (Michelle)

I really enjoy to learn it with a group. (Sharon)

#### 5.4.2.3 *Achievements presented as new understandings and new connections*

A third category of achievements and rewards identified by respondents as significant to the course of their learning were more personal, and related to new understandings and new connections and their effect on the individual.

The most commonly occurring of these is **new understandings of culture**; both Chinese culture and a reassessment of intercultural issues.

Open-minded, understand people more. (Nina)

I got a great insight into Chinese culture and my studies [...] sparked a lifelong affinity with China and her people. (Esther)

Immersion into a different culture in relation [sic] and reflecting on my own. (Ken)

Broader understanding of culture; a more open mind to others’ perspectives. (Marty)

Others pointed out the **new personal connections** and interpersonal relationships which learning Chinese had led them to.

The new Chinese friends that I have made. The wonderful involvement in the National Trust [Chinese] Temple at [Australian location]. (Wendy)

Making friends where it would have been difficult without the shared language. (Brenda)

For a smaller number of people, **recognition by others** of the effort that goes into learning Chinese, and/or the perceived rarity value of such skills, was considered to be one of the rewards.

Job opportunities and respect from those who recognise the effort required for Chinese. (Marty)

The look on people’s faces when you start chatting to Chinese speakers! (Caroline)

### 5.4.3 *Changing perceptions of challenges and rewards of learning Chinese*

#### 5.4.3.1 *Shifting themes in the challenges reported in the group*

Participant views of the challenges of learning Chinese reflect some of the forces which they themselves have perceived as having had the potential to influence or slow their learning

trajectory. A thematic analysis of the ways that people described the challenges involved in learning Chinese first in Survey One and then in Survey Two revealed that some noticeable changes had taken place in the five intervening years. The responses across the group are presented and compared in Table 5.5 below.

Whereas in the first survey in 2005, the most common way to describe the challenges involved the vocabulary of emotion, by the time of the second survey in 2010 the language of emotion was ranked 6<sup>th</sup> on the list of challenge themes. The issue of tones, cited by nearly one quarter of the respondents as their third most common challenge in 2005, had by 2010 become infrequently cited as a challenge and had dropped to ninth in ranking. By Survey Two, isolation or lack of opportunities for practice had risen from tenth ranking to become the most common challenge theme; closely followed by issues related to speaking and listening (cited twice as many times as in Survey One five years before). Issues involving memorisation were slightly more commonly raised in the second survey than in the first, as were issues of time available for learning; but overall it can be said that characters, memory, and time issues continue to rank in the upper-mid levels of challenges at the time of both surveys.

*Table 5.5: The challenges of learning Chinese, as described in Survey One and Survey Two, 5 years apart.*

Survey One (2005)			Survey Two (2010)		
Rank	Theme	Number	Rank	Theme	Number
#1	Emotions	9	#1	Isolation/lack of practice opportunities	9
#2	Characters	7	#2	Speaking & listening	8
#3	Tones	6	#3	Memory	7
#4	Memory	5	#4	Characters	6
#5=	Time	4	#5	Time	5
#5=	Speaking & listening	4	#6	Emotions	4
#5=	Pronunciation	4	#7=	Persistence	3
#5=	Persistence	4	#7=	Maintenance	3
#5=	Personal growth	4	#9=	Communication	2
#10=	Isolation/lack of practice opportunities	3	#9=	Tones	2
#10=	Vocabulary	3	#9=	Vocabulary	2
#10=	Regular disciplined study	3	#9=	Grammar	2
#13=	Communication	2	#13=	Pronunciation	1
#13=	Grammar	2	#13=	Regular disciplined study	1
#15=	Formal study	1	NA	Formal study	0
#15=	Maintenance	1	NA	Personal growth	0
#15=	Writing	1	NA	Writing	0



An interpretation of these findings suggest that initially, at the time of the first survey the challenges were still seen more in terms of emotional self-management, and in mastery of specific language skills areas. By the time of the second survey the challenges are identified on a more holistic level of language usage – thus a concern for learning how to recognise or produce the tonal aspects of Chinese is replaced by a concern for speaking and listening (in which tone clearly plays an important part, but where the focus is more upon interactivity). The fact that isolation and related lack of practice opportunities top the list of challenge themes in the second survey may demonstrate an increasing understanding of the significance and value of interaction in the target language both as an end in itself and as a vehicle for learning. It also suggests that this is an area of difficulty in making the transition beyond formal institutional study to independent learning or maintenance of Chinese proficiency.

#### 5.4.3.2 *The dynamics of individual perspectives on challenges and rewards*

Whereas the previous section compared responses of the whole group regarding developments in perceptions between the first and second surveys, such a comparison inevitably involves a degree of generalisation. Another way of examining and comparing responses to identical, comparable or related questions posed on different occasions, which is possible in a longitudinal study of this nature, is to search for patterns across the thematic content of consecutive related statements of each individual. (These are a kind of chain of belief statements – see also section 5.5.4)

From an initial consideration of the types of dynamic pattern which could possibly emerge, the following a priori possible dynamic pattern types were identified (see Table 5.6). Though devised independently, they have a significant level of consistency with Saldaña's (2003, p. 64) checklist of descriptive questions to guide the longitudinal investigation of process.

Table 5.6: categories for mapping dynamics

Pattern dynamics	Pattern type	Explanation
Same	<i>Unchanging</i>	a concept recurs and is even worded in the same way
	<i>Consistent</i>	recognisably the same theme recurs, though reformulated using different words
Change or movement	<i>Progressing</i>	the statements are related in theme, but the later ones show a degree of development, progress, or a move through a stage, in a direction which is implied or suggested in the earlier statements
	<i>Evolving</i>	a topic has evolved into or become something else. The two are related, but it is more than a simple progression; rather, a becoming
	<i>Emerging (new focus)</i>	something new and apparently unrelated to what preceded has emerged
	<i>Reversing</i>	a development in the opposite direction to that seen at the earlier stage; an undoing, or return to a preceding stage
	<i>Waning</i>	a theme or impetus is present, but less strongly so
Gone	<i>Absent</i>	a theme that appeared at an earlier stage is absent in later stages

The categories were used to classify and compare the dynamics reflected by each individual set of responses to requests in Survey One, and then again in Survey Two five years later, to describe the challenges and the rewards of learning Chinese.

Table 5.7 shows the kinds of change that were found when comparing respondents' descriptions of the challenges and rewards of learning Chinese at Survey One and at Survey Two, and the number of times that each pattern of change occurred. The waning pattern is omitted from Table 5.7 because no instances of it were recorded.

*Table 5.7: dynamics in perception of challenges and rewards*

number of times the pattern types below describe →	Challenges	Rewards	Integrated*	Total
<i>Unchanging</i>	4	1	0	5
<i>Consistent</i>	11	4	6	21
<i>Progressing</i>	0	7	4	11
<i>Evolving</i>	0	3	3	6
<i>Emerging (new focus)</i>	6	4	3	13
<i>Reversing</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>Absent</i>	11	6	3	20

\* Integrated through both challenges and rewards

Table 5.7 shows some interesting differences between the dynamics of the way that challenges are perceived across a 4–5 year interval, and the way that rewards are perceived over that time. First, as far as challenges are concerned, it was common for learners to describe them in ways that were unchanged or consistent, even five years apart; and in tandem with that, patterns of progression and evolution were not noted for challenges. Secondly, where the rewards of learning Chinese were concerned, though there were some patterns in the consistent category, it was more common for an individual learner's descriptions to show progression or evolution across the five-year gap. Thirdly, it was found that for individual learners certain themes were absent from the later survey; this was more often the case for the challenges than for the rewards, and they frequently related to linguistic areas such as pronunciation, tones and vocabulary, which were no longer seen as challenges (in line with what the data in Table 5.5 in section 5.4.3.1 suggested. When this finding is set against that recorded in section 5.2.3.2, when learners spoke in the first survey of reaching a realisation of the extent of linguistic differences between Chinese and English, a progression becomes apparent from growing realisation of linguistic difference and struggle with it, to no longer seeing it as a challenge.

## 5.5 Anticipation: looking ahead to continuing engagement with Chinese

In the preceding section the focus was on looking *back* over the course of experiences of learning Chinese. In this section the focus will be on participant views of their current activity

in terms of *continuing* engagement with Chinese. As a necessary preliminary, I will first examine the extent to which participants see themselves as having stopped or dropped Chinese. Then I will look at their reasons for continuing Chinese (and compare those with reasons recalled for beginning it); at how they maintain their engagement; and at evolving perceptions and attitudes towards continuing with Chinese as reflected in choice of metaphor. As well as reporting current and continuing activity, the longitudinal perspective is maintained, by juxtaposing views of ongoing activity as expressed in 2005 and again five years later, where relevant.

### 5.5.1 Stopping or dropping Chinese

Respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to have ‘dropped’ Chinese (including both formal and informal study, and independent activities) to the extent that they felt that it was no longer part of their life. Seventeen people (65%) said that this was not the case, and that they were continuing their engagement with Chinese. No-one responded categorically that they had dropped Chinese for good. Six people said they had stopped Chinese temporarily; and three that they had, but they could not say at this stage whether it was a temporary or a permanent move. There was a noticeable gendered aspect to these responses: altogether 6 of the 9 who had stopped were male; and 5 of the 6 who had stopped temporarily were male. In this particular group of participants, more male learners defined themselves as having stopped or dropped Chinese

Among the reasons given for dropping it, the most common were circumstantial: “other goals took priority”, or “although I had intended to continue with Chinese, other circumstances prevented it happening”. The next most common reasons related to issues of structuring study: “Without the structure and discipline of formal study I found it difficult to continue” and “I didn’t have enough time to do more Chinese”. These demonstrate difficulty in transitioning to independent learning. The third-ranked group of reasons were to do with loss: losing connection with Chinese due to lack of opportunity to use it, and losing confidence in one’s Chinese learning ability. Finally, unavailability of classes at the appropriate level, or of funds to study in the way desired, were cited as minor reasons, and one person cited the intrinsic difficulty of learning the language. It is worth also recording the statements which were *not* endorsed by anyone as reasons for dropping Chinese. None of these nine people who said they had dropped Chinese felt that any of the following statements applied to them: “It was never my intention to continue with Chinese after the university course”; “I have reached my personal goal with Chinese”; “I didn’t know what to do to keep up my Chinese”; “I didn’t enjoy it”; or “I stopped being interested in Chinese”. This can be taken to show that all of them had intended to continue with Chinese in some way after the university course; none of them

stopped it because they felt they had got as far as they wanted to go; and that lack of enjoyment or lack of interest did not contribute to their stopping Chinese.

These questions relate to the identities that people ascribe to themselves in terms of their engagement with Chinese. To capture the dynamics of the ways that people identify their changing relationship with Chinese, they were asked how they saw themselves in the past, the present and the future in relation to the identities of speaker, learner, and user of Chinese, and someone with an interest in Chinese. (Whereas these terms have specific resonances and implications as used by applied linguists such as Vivian Cook (2002a, 2009), it would be unrealistic to expect the respondents to be cognisant of such usage, and they are simply asked to respond to the identity terms as they understand them, and as they are presented in juxtaposition to each other.) The responses are shown in Chart 5.8.

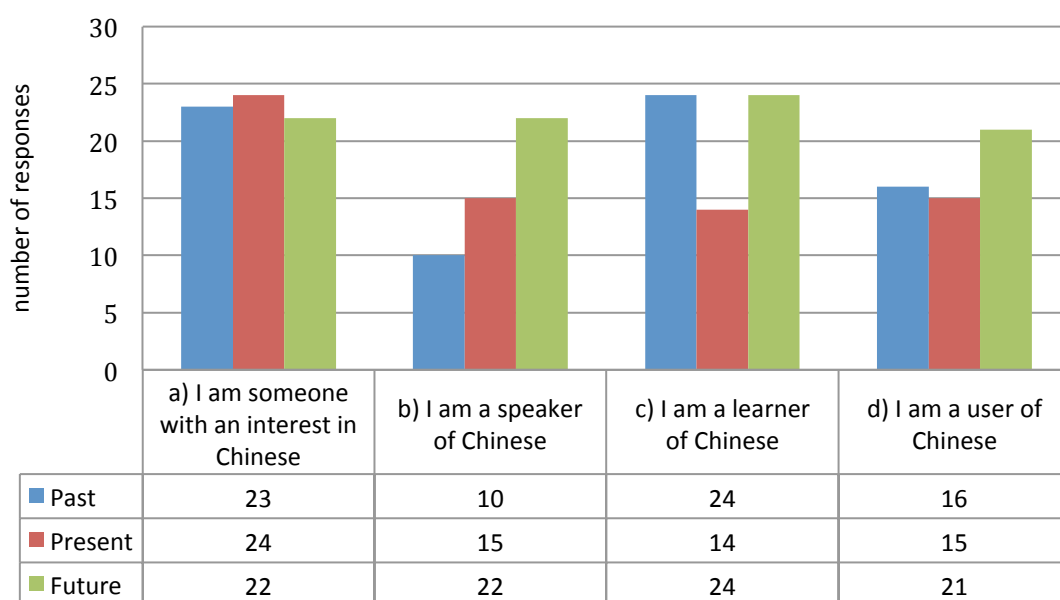


Chart 5.8: Identity in relation to Chinese, past present and future

Each of the identity statements is represented by a distinctive pattern representing the extent to which people accept that descriptor for themselves in their past, present and future.

- The identity of 'someone with an *interest* in Chinese' is sustained by most of the participants through past, present and future. (A consistently high pattern; in the classification of Table 5.6, 'unchanging')
- The identity of 'a *speaker* of Chinese' shows a steady rise. It is accepted by steadily increasing numbers from the past, up to the present, and as an intention for the future. (A steadily rising pattern; in the classification of 5.4.3.2, 'progressing'.)
- The identity of 'a *learner* of Chinese' shows a dipping profile. Twenty four out of the 26 respondents have identified with it in the past and express intention to take on that identity again in the future; however, a much smaller number choose that label for

themselves in the present. (A dipping pattern.) This raises the question of whether perhaps the identity of being ‘a learner’ is associated for these people with formal study, rather than independent self-directed study. This may become clearer on examining in more detail their engagement in different activities involving Chinese over the years.

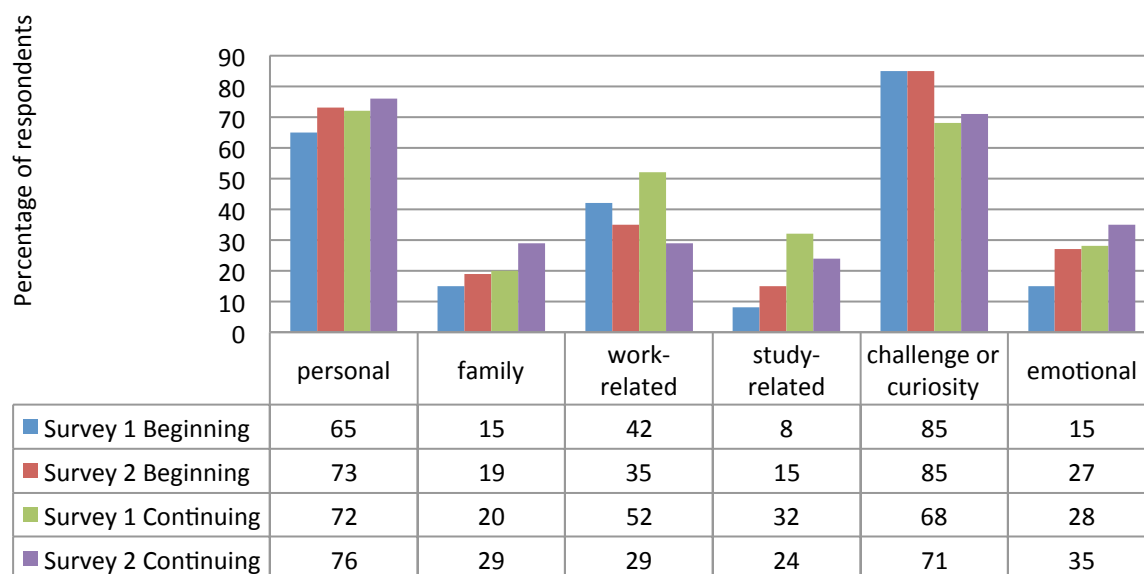
- d) The identity of being a *user* of Chinese – acceptance of this identity in the past and the present is about steady at around 60%; the present level is comparable to present identification with the terms *speaker* and *learner*; the future level is comparable to that of *speaker* but less than that of *learner*. (A mid pattern rising to high.)

The responses show that interest in Chinese remains high and relatively steady; in terms of seeing themselves in the more active roles of speakers, learners or users of Chinese, people tend to have intentions or aspirations to continue to move towards those identities in the future. In other words, whatever their level of engagement at the present, most participants see themselves as increasing their level of engagement in the future. Whether or not these aspirations eventuate, they nonetheless play a role in self-concept in the present, and are likely to function as goals and motivators as a basis for action. This finding relates to the concepts of possible selves and ideal selves discussed in Chapter 3. It will be drawn upon again later in Chapter 6 when I drill deeper to look at the patterns of specific activities and practices reported by learners over their past, present and future.

### 5.5.2 Reasons for beginning and continuing Chinese compared

In the first survey in 2005 participants were asked to describe their reasons for beginning to study Chinese, and for continuing with it, and then to classify the answers they had given according to whether they were personal, work-related, study-related, linked to challenge or curiosity, or emotional. They could specify as many reasons as they liked. In the second survey in 2010 the same questions were posed again. In this study the purpose of these comparisons is not to perform an empirical quantitative analysis, but rather is part of the project to investigate the dynamics of learner trajectories including their beliefs and motivations. Overall, there was a strikingly high degree of consistency in the responses across the 5 year gap; see Chart 5.9 below.

In remembering their reasons for beginning Chinese, there are some slight changes after a further five years has passed. This reflects the fact that recollection of previous states of mind is a fluid and flexible thing, subject to all sorts of influences, and cannot be relied upon as an ‘objective’ measure but is highly individual and contingent. Recall may change in view of intervening experience, for example; even though initially someone had no intention of working with Chinese, if that has now become a goal (or a reality) for them then that might affect the way they retrospectively consider their earlier goals, or it might ‘give permission’ to articulate a goal that was previously not sayable.



*Chart 5.9: Reasons for beginning and continuing Chinese, 5 years apart*

Emotion might also be a factor affecting recall: if someone now regrets that they had not taken their Chinese in a particular direction, that regret may tinge their memory of the reasons they began it. This could be seen as a kind of dynamic adaptation across timescales.

Accepting that recall will be variable, two things stand out as constant and well-attested. First, the relative ranking of the different groups of reasons for beginning Chinese is the same: (in descending order) challenge, personal, work, emotional, family, and study. Secondly, “challenge or curiosity” is significantly the most highly ranked reason in both surveys.

Turning to the reasons for continuing Chinese in the two surveys, challenge or curiosity slightly drops compared to the reasons for beginning, probably because the novelty has worn off, but it is still high, along with personal reasons. The slight increases in personal and family reasons for continuing reflects the new family relationships and friendships with Chinese speaking people that have developed in 5 years, which have also been mentioned in section 5.3.1.1. The rise in emotional reasons for continuing Chinese reflects the growing emotional significance for some participants of their engagement with China and Chinese.

The reasons for continuing that show a drop are the more functional ones. There is a marked drop in work-related reasons here, and there are various possible explanations for this. It may reflect adjusted recognition of the proficiency level required to work with Chinese; or it may point to lack of work opportunities in Australia for NNS of Mandarin; on the other hand, it could reflect the fact that participants are either settled in work in other fields, or that they are at a stage of their life when they are not looking for work. There is also a slight drop in study-related reasons for continuing engagement with Chinese which is likely to reflect the fact that

by 2010 many participants had graduated from formal study and were not yet considering more study.

### 5.5.3 Maintaining engagement with Chinese

Those participants who did not identify as having stopped or dropped Chinese were invited to describe their reasons for continuing their engagement with it, and were asked what helped them to maintain their momentum, in a continuing application of the process view of motivation. A thematic analysis of their responses reveals some themes which echo those identified in relation to influences and stages on their timelines (not unexpectedly), (see section 5.4), and some which are new.

The Chinese language continues to have an intrinsic **appeal to the emotions** of many of the participants. It is their attraction to and enjoyment of Chinese which continues to help to maintain their commitment to ongoing involvement over at least seven years and into the future.

I love the language and culture. (Caroline)

[O]ngoing fascination with all things Chinese. (Ken)

I have fond memories of my studies of Chinese and I think it makes me quite happy to study it. (Michelle)

I simply greatly enjoyed learning this language. (Sofia)

Learning Chinese affords **interpersonal connections** which contribute to continuing activity. For some learners there are new family connections with China which give them reasons to continue and goals to aim towards. Brenda and her husband, both Australian, have made many visits to China and have formed lasting friendships with Chinese families involving relationships of mutual assistance and hospitality, leading Brenda to say “my family’s life is now intertwined with Chinese culture”. Other learners are now connected to Chinese families by marriage:

I need Chinese to communicate with my wife’s family and it’s a language that my children will have to learn. (Keith)

We’d like to see our daughter complete her university study in China. (Scott)

Connection can also be afforded by the working circumstances in which participants have situated themselves:

Improve my [...] business communication skills. (Harry)

[D]esire to interact with Chinese students in my school. (Scott)

and by their community and social networks:

[T]he community in which I live – there are several organisations around me that have Mandarin speakers and I love chatting with them. (Caroline)

I am tired of speaking mostly English to my Chinese friends. (Sonia)

Some participants articulate goals relating to **language proficiency or skills development**, working towards which helps them to maintain a sense of momentum (see also section 5.4.3.2): “I would like to be fluent” say several respondents; “I want to be able to speak with richer vocabulary and to be able to read a newspaper”, said Nina. Others talk about building on prior achievements:

I can now use Chinese, but inadequately. I want to become good at it. (Stella)

I am building on the skill-level I developed in 2008. (Scott)

Finally, there is a clearly emergent theme of “**investment**” (in the sense of an awareness of prior contributions of personal resources such as time and emotion) as a stimulus for continuing involvement with Chinese. “I do not want to lose something I have worked so hard to attain.” (Russell). There is a connection between the concept of investment, and the theme of ‘agency & strategic planning’ (see the discussion of influences on timelines in section 5.4.1): strategic planning involves viewing a proposed trajectory in terms of its leading to an envisioned target or developing a capability for a specific purpose. It requires forward planning involving allocating resources such as time and energy over a period of time in order to achieve a desired outcome in the future. There were some participants (though not a high proportion) who used the notion of investment in this sense in the reasons they gave at the very beginning of this study for having initially taken up Chinese, usually relating to future employment.

However, ‘investment’ in the sense in which it emerges here, is not simply looking ahead to a future goal. Instead, the idea behind it is that it links past and current personal effort to future outcomes. Here I am proposing a dynamic, process-oriented view of investment. As the preceding paragraphs have suggested, the future outcomes could be conceptualised in a variety of ways by the learners. In some cases, they might be externally oriented (e.g. relating to work); in others they are intrinsic to language learning; in some cases they relate to people and interpersonal relations; and in others they relate to self and personal development. In the particular data under consideration, investment is identifiable in the respondents’ words as a retrospective realisation, which may now help to maintain momentum into the future.

I feel that Mandarin is an important language and it is so difficult to learn that I feel it would be a waste if I didn’t continue with it. (Brenda)

I’ve come too far to go back – now have created more specific goals to work to. (Rachel)

I spent so much time with the language – I don’t want to forget it. (Sonia)

[I]t would be an awful waste not to use it somehow after all that study. (Michelle)



In some cases, the resources which participants perceived themselves to have invested in their learning had a strong emotional element of self-concept or identity. This leads to the concept of investment being expressed in more personal terms as pride:

It's also something that I don't want to give up on and feel a need to master. (Keith)

I want to be good at the things I do and that includes Chinese. (Sofia)

#### 5.5.4 Perceptions and attitudes to continuing Chinese – what does it feel like?

It has emerged that for these learners emotional aspects have strong significance within their chronologies. One way of probing more deeply into the feelings which attached to the various stages, and into how participants' beliefs and attitudes might be in a dynamic relation of reciprocal influence with their practices and choices in their Chinese learning journeys, is to examine the metaphors they used to describe different stages of their learning journeys. Metaphors evoke images, and "through the formation of images, our emotions and feelings express the personal meanings that arise for us within any given context, and serve to animate our thoughts and actions" (Chodorow 1999, cited in Dirkx 2001, p. 66). Sentence completion tasks in the surveys (for example, "When I started, learning Chinese was like...") gathered metaphors at different times, reflecting respondents' retrospective and current feelings, and their expectations. In the next section I will present this material from Survey One, and after that in the following section I will trace the dynamics of metaphor use over the 5 years that separate the two surveys.

##### 5.5.4.1 Feelings about beginning and continuing Chinese, recorded in Survey One

An analysis of the reasons given in retrospect in the first survey in 2005 for beginning to learn Chinese reveals a mix of types of motivation, and several major recurring themes. These themes would reflect aspects of the attitude of individuals to their own learning trajectories.

Learning Chinese was seen by some as a challenge:

[I]s Chinese as difficult as people say? (Sofia)

[A] desire to be mentally challenged. (Stephanie)

and by others as an adventure and a new world to explore:

The adventure of it! The feeling of growth, too! (Tom)

It was also frequently viewed as a mystery or riddle to be solved:

[L]ike unwrapping a mysterious present. (Lola)

For some, it was the perceived rarity value of Chinese as a 'foreign' language in Australia which appealed; for others, it was a means of communicating with (and impressing) family members. The aesthetic and cultural world which the Chinese language represents was another attraction drawing people to begin studying it:

Always been drawn to traditional Chinese culture. (Michelle).

The current study is concerned with process: in the first survey, after inviting self-report of reasons for beginning their study of Chinese two or more years previously, participants were asked what it was that kept them continuing with it (and this line of enquiry would be repeated in the second survey).

When the learners' stated reasons for beginning to study Chinese are juxtaposed against those which were impelling them to continue (at the time of the first survey), there is a different atmosphere. Now, the picture that emerges is one of the rewards and challenges of having made progress on a difficult journey:

It's like getting a pay packet: to get the goodies, there has been a lot of work but I feel satisfaction. (Scott)

The challenge of learning Chinese is frequently likened to hard physical effort over an extended period of time in rough terrain, such as climbing a mountain, swimming against the tide, or finding your way through a dense fog or thick forest, but now there is a sense that the rewards experienced or glimpsed ahead keep some of the learners going.

It's like bushwalking in remote areas – sometimes challenging, exhausting and frightening, and other times exhilarating. (Michelle).

It's like walking on a LONG, long road where I'm just starting to see the beautiful views ahead. (Stella)

For some, the mysteries and riddles which sparked their curiosity to commence Chinese study are, at this mid point, beginning to be cracked:

It's like finding the key to a difficult riddle. (Sonia)

For other learners, however, they continue to tantalise:

Now, learning Chinese is like trying to solve a puzzle that becomes more difficult, the closer you get to figuring it out. (Lola)

What is striking about these comments is the intensity of emotion associated with the personal choices to learn and continue learning Chinese. It is not a bland experience, but is associated with feelings of excitement, frustration, fulfilment, extreme effort, etc. A recurring theme expressed at this mid-point in the study is the sense of joy which attaches to the development of skills in communication, and successful attempts to communicate in Chinese:

It's the thrill of understanding the structure of the language and being able to use it – even in a most elemental [sic] way. (Harry)

Work hard, take all the opportunities to chat with Chinese. Practice every week, write Chinese character in a flash card. Write diary... then one day, when you can understand what the Chinese person said and you can answer his questions. That happiness might be one of the reward that I think. (Charlotte).

In section 5.5.4.4 I will pick up this thread again and examine the evolution of perceptions and attitudes to continuing engagement with Chinese as articulated by the same group of respondents five years later.

#### 5.5.4.2 *Introducing metaphor chains*

In both Survey One and Survey Two, respondents were asked to look back and to look forward. (It may be helpful to refer back to Figure 5.4 in section 5.3 to visualise this). In 2005, they looked back to when they began learning Chinese and chose one or two metaphors to describe what it felt like; they also described their then current and future learning of Chinese using metaphors. (See the blue arrows in Figure 5.4.) Five years later, in Survey Two in 2010, participants were again asked to suggest metaphors to capture their views of what learning Chinese was like: and they were also invited to suggest metaphors to describe their ongoing and/or future reality of maintaining or developing their skills in Chinese beyond the end of their formal university course. See the red arrows in Figure 5.4. In this way a ‘chain’ of four or more metaphors was established for each participant.

When taken in a series for an individual, the metaphor chains can contribute to our understandings in two ways. First, they conjure up quite a vivid picture of the development of that person’s relationship with Chinese. This picture has the potential to provide a ‘signature’ or ‘flavour’ which is characteristic of an individual’s particular learning journey. Secondly, the metaphor chains can be considered in terms of the longitudinal dynamics they attest to. They can reflect the ways in which beliefs and attitudes about engagement with Chinese change or remain constant over the course of the learning trajectory.

To illustrate, first a general description of the metaphors will be offered; then, metaphor chains for four of the participants will be presented and discussed, and directions for future study will be identified.

#### 5.5.4.3 *General description of the metaphors*

Over 200 responses to the requests for metaphors were collected. Some were more clearly ‘metaphorical’ than others.<sup>6</sup> Since metaphors are so rich in layers of meaning, there are many different ways that they can be categorised; Kramsch’s (2010) extensive study of the metaphors of American college students for language learning in their first two or three years of classroom instruction classified them in terms of different aspects of embodiment, and many themes in common with those identified in Kramsch’s study can be seen in the data considered here. In the present study the metaphors fall into 9 groups reflecting different aspects or stages of ‘the

---

<sup>6</sup> It was unanticipated (and had not emerged at the trialling stage) that some respondents would not interpret the instructions and stem sentences as a request for a metaphorical or figurative comparison, but instead would parse the stem as if there were a comma between ‘is’ and ‘like’; they then simply responded with a descriptive adjective, for example, “learning Chinese is, like, interesting”.

journey', and emotions they give rise to. They also confirm some of the powerful metaphors analysed by Ellis (2002, 2008) such as LEARNING AS A JOURNEY (introduced above in 3.2.4), along with LEARNING AS PUZZLE, LEARNING AS SUFFERING, LEARNING AS WORK, and LEARNING AS STRUGGLE. The nine groups are listed below with examples.

1) SOMETHING UNFAMILIAR AND "FOREIGN" THAT GIVES RISE TO EXCITEMENT, ANTICIPATION

trying out a new recipe that only contains exotic foods and spices and uses unfamiliar utensils. (Michael-Eddie)

totally foreign and exotic. (Esther)

2) A MYSTERY OR PUZZLE OR PROMISE: SOMETHING THAT EXCITES CURIOSITY AND FASCINATION

unravelling a particularly knotted piece of string. (Lola)

finding a key to difficult riddle... (Sofia)

3) SOMETHING THAT OPENS UP A NEW WAY OF SEEING THINGS

a philosophy class that discusses outlooks on life one has never considered. (Michael-Eddie)

discovering a new world (Xavier)

4) "LABOUR OF HERCULES": AN IMMENSELY CHALLENGING TASK INVOLVING PHYSICAL SKILLS AND ENDURANCE

standing at the bottom of Mount Qomolangma and looking up. (Sonia)

swimming upstream. (Xavier)

The many metaphors in group 4 cluster around four subcategories:

OVERLOAD (too fast or too much):

drinking from a firehose. (Harry);

reading War and Peace and trying to remember the characters who appeared at the beginning of the book and their relationship to other characters, a couple of chapters later. (Nick)

AGAINST THE ODDS (incredible obstacles or an unnatural or impossible task):

trying to walk fast in size 20 boots without shoelaces. (Harry)

teaching a chicken to ride a bike. (Heather)

painting a mural with the smallest brush in the world. (Pat)

THE WAY IS OBSCURE OR CONFUSING:

climbing a mountain that is covered in fallen trees, some are big & some are gargantuan. (Pat)

wandering blindly through a forest. (Sonia)

working my way through a murky swamp. (Michelle)

NO SECURE FOOTING:

walking up a slippery slope - one step forward and then sliding back. (Heather)

diving into water without knowing the depth. (Brenda)

5) SOMETHING THAT IS A BARRIER, OR DIFFICULTY, CAUSING DISCOURAGEMENT OR FRUSTRATION

banging your head against a brick wall. (Sonia)

6) A CHORE: SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL TIRED OR BORED (OR VIRTUOUS?)

pulling teeth – something to be avoided even while I knew it had to be done (Scott);

being in a marathon that never ends (Keith)

7) SOMETHING WHICH CHANGES, WHICH YOU HAVE TO KEEP UP WITH

Something ELUSIVE:

trying to hold on to a handful of sand. It's so hard to retain! (Esther)

something that is GRADUALLY REVEALED:

peeling an onion! the more you peel, the more you learn and appreciate its usefulness! (Caroline)

PERSISTENCE REQUIRED:

trying to grow a garden in the desert, it can be done with time, work and insight (Pat);

chasing butterflies - best done slowly and methodically (Scott);

putting one foot in front of the other (Ken)

8) SOMETHING WHICH IS PLEASURABLE, OR SOMETHING WHICH IS A PART OF YOU

a warm bath, or a nice bed. That may sound silly, but now I find studying Chinese to be very relaxing (Heather);

going through a finished box of chocolates, because I might find some little treasure I missed (Michael-Eddie)

9) A SENSE OF COMMITMENT: SOMETHING GAINED AT GREAT COST MUST BE VALUED AND PROTECTED

something I owe to myself for all my previous effort (Sonia);

exercise, I have to keep doing it or lose it (Nina);

As discussed elsewhere (Tasker, (a.k.a 谭以诗), 2006), an illuminating way of interpreting the imagery attached to these descriptions of the task of Chinese learning, is to use the metaphor of the quest: an arduous journey incorporating challenging tasks and struggles, leading to attainment of an elusive goal and in the process bringing about profound changes or insights. It recalls the noble quest of heroic literature, but it also recalls views of education and learning as transformative, bringing about change and enlightenment (discussed in section 3.2.1).

Similar metaphors and emotional intensity are reported in Kramsch's research with young adults learning another language in a North American university campus setting (Kramsch, 2010) mentioned in section 3.3.4.3.

#### **5.5.4.4 Metaphor chains for four individuals**

In this section I present the 'metaphor chains' of four individuals to gain a picture of the dynamic aspects. In Table 5.8 below, the development of the metaphors can be read down the columns for each individual; and reading across the rows allows a view of whether there are any commonalities between the individuals at particular stages.

Marty's pairs of metaphors show contrasts at each stage, illustrating the multiple realities of emotional matters where contradictory feelings often co-exist, and there is always more than one way to cut the cloth. The beginning was novel and challenging, but by the early mid stage it was habitual and sometimes frustrating. By the third stage there is a more functional sense of guided exploration, sometimes accompanied by the delightful metaphor of Chinese as a pocket harmonica that describes it as a portable skill which can function for relaxation, entertainment and communication. Finally there is a sense of losing the highest level of skill attained, but a trust that opportunities for using that skill will recur. When Marty's narrative is presented in Chapter 7, it will be seen how these metaphors reflect the periodisation of his experience.

Mick's metaphors suggest that his feelings about learning Chinese were most positive at stage 2. At the beginning, and again at stage 3, he sees it as a puzzle and a challenge to meet which he feels he is lacking some essential guidance. Finally, something is created – but only to be locked away in a cupboard. Mick conveys a feeling of lacking opportunity to use his skills.

Scott's metaphor chain shows a progression from seeing learning Chinese as a painful chore, to a perception of receiving a gift or reward in recognition of hard work. Then in stage 3 there is a sense of an elusive reward or treasure, evolving to a view of the future as a lifelong steady but rewarding journey.

Wendy begins with the metaphors of mystery and an endurance task, and then at stage 3 focusses on the necessity for activity to be both regular and paced. Finally, looking ahead, unlike the other three people described here, the feeling of challenge coupled with anxiety about being able to sustain the engagement are expressed.

The progression of metaphor chains show a distinctive character which is very different for each individual. The perceptions and attitudes reflected by the metaphors at different times, can be expected to bear some relationship to the periods and types of engagement with Chinese identified by the participants and recorded onto the timelines. They can be seen as adding a textural layer of context to enrich and inform the simple chronological picture provided by the timelines created so far.

Table 5.8: Metaphors used by four respondents at four stages

		<i>Timeframe supplied</i>	<i>Remainder of stem</i>	Marty	Mick	Scott	Wendy
<b>Stage 1: 2005</b>	learning Chinese was like...	An enjoyable challenge	A new ride	... trying to learn university level maths with only an understanding of basic maths.	... learning one of those make-believe code languages that children often come up with.	—	Learning Pitmans shorthand - at first it doesn't make sense but then little, by little things fell into place. Trying to climb Mount Everest
<b>Stage 2: 2005</b>	learning Chinese is like...	... a way of life	rather tiresome work with little opportunity for use.	... wearing mental glasses, that show what was once so complicated for me, in many ways, "clarified" how I go about learning and understanding other languages	—	Opening a birthday present	Playing a musical instrument - one must practice it every day to improve and not lose momentum. Working out a puzzle
<b>Stage 3: 2010</b>	[No timeframe given] learning Chinese is like...	walking into a jungle with a compass and map but not ever being able to see over the trees. a pocket harmonica you can pull out at any-time anywhere and it gives you great joy.	Learning to read and write all over again.	Putting flat-pack furniture together without a manual.	chasing butterflies - best done slowly and methodically	Gold prospecting - worth it	playing a musical instrument. You have to practice it everyday. pouring water into a bottle, you have to do it slowly otherwise it will not all go in.
<b>Stage 4: 2010</b>	AFTER FINISHING THE UNIVERSITY COURSE, maintaining or developing my Chinese feels like... or sometimes like...	going from being a professional athlete to one that has a full time job and has to fit their training around it. the seasons, they come and go and change, you enjoy the one you are in but know that at some stage the Chinese season will come around again.	Painting a picture that I would then lock away in a cupboard	—	a lifetime journey - one step at a time, but with encouragement.	running through honey - sweet but slow.	snakes and ladders. With intense learning one can achieve a great deal but if one stops, even for a little while it can all slide and slip away through ones fingers.

There is considerable scope to take the investigation of the dynamics of metaphor use further. For instance, the metaphor categorisation, chains and sequences can be directly juxtaposed against the timelines, to look for correspondences between the chronologies which are in operation.

Furthermore, moving away from a focus on the individual to consider the metaphors in parallel for the group, and looking at each stage in turn, it may be possible to see whether at particular stages of the learning journey certain types of metaphor are more or less common. The chains may also reveal something about slightly more general patterns or sequences of perceptions and attitudes over the course of the learning trajectory. Space precludes the inclusion of such analyses in the present thesis, but it is a promising direction for future research.

## 5.6 Elaborated timelines

The value of the timelines presented earlier in this chapter is that they act as a basic graphic representation of the different periods of activity in the chronologies of participants' involvement with learning and using Chinese over periods of several years or many years. As such they allow for an overview of patterns of engagement, salient points, and points of difference and comparison of the chronologies first within the outer group of 41 participants, and then across the continuing group of 26 participants. However, as was pointed out in section 5.3.2.3, these 'single strand' timelines have some limitations; one of which is that the linear timeline format inevitably results in flattening and essentialising the data.

Therefore a further cycle of analysis was undertaken, extracting greater detail from the survey responses, to create elaborated timelines for the focal group of 7 participants in the core group. The rationale behind this was threefold:

1. to afford a differentiated, more nuanced view of the **kind** of engagement with Chinese learning that people had in different phases of their timelines;
2. to allow a perception of **co-occurrence and overlap** of different kinds of engagement; and
3. to provide a basic view of the **relative intensity** of Chinese-related activity at different periods.

The elaborated timelines are reproduced in Appendix 9. The process of creating the timelines from the survey responses was in itself a form of analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) attest the value of graphic organisers to assist in analysis, data reduction and the presentation of results (Duff, 2008); in this case the timeline visuals then contributed to the next stage of the research as they were subsequently refined in the light of interview findings and functioned as prompts for reflection and discussion with the 7 focal participants. A comparable process was used by Skyrme in her rich study of the experiences of students from China in a New



Zealand university (Skyrme, 2008). The elaborated timelines will be referred to in Chapter 6 in the discussion of Activity Pattern analysis, and in the narrative accounts of individual journeys and comments thereon in Chapter 7.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Chapter 5 has presented findings relating to learning trajectories of the wider group coming from the analysis of the data in the two surveys. The presentation was organised into snapshot view, progression, retrospective view and anticipatory view, to reflect dynamic aspects of the development through time of participants' engagement with Chinese and particularly their feelings and experiences of it.

In the first part of the chapter, simple timelines of people's engagement with different modes of learning were devised and then investigated to see what could be learned about patterns of engagement and connections between different modes and settings of learning through an individual's journey. The limitation of the simple timelines was discovered and a more elaborated version suggested.

In the later parts of the chapter a dynamic longitudinal analysis of the evolution of participants' views at different stages of learning Chinese was elaborated. Some patterns of continuity, discontinuity and development were found in this way. In Chapter 6, patterns of engagement will be further analysed using another process to add to the evolving picture of the richness and complexity of Chinese learning journeys.



# Chapter 6. Dynamic contours of engagement with Chinese

---

## 6.1 Past, present and future practice questionnaire: introduction

One of the aims of this enquiry is to establish a dynamic rather than a static picture of people's long-term practices of Chinese learning, as they evolve over time (see section 2.6). To do this it was necessary to probe in some detail what kind of learning activities the participants engaged in, and the extent to which this participation changed and fluctuated over the course of their learning trajectory; and also to ask about their ongoing and imagined or intended future practices.

A questionnaire about past, present and future practice was one of the data collection strategies. It sought to find out more about what kind of activities involving Chinese the learners have tried, or might do in the future. The choice of activities and the design of this 'Activities Questionnaire' were described in section 4.3.2.4. Here, I will describe the analysis of the responses, which was a multi-stage procedure, and the findings.

For each of the 77 activities listed, participants were asked a series of 3 linked questions for which they selected answers on Likert-type scales. The questions were designed to capture dynamic aspects of their past, recent and future practice:

- Have you ever done this, and if so how frequently?
- Overall, over the past few years, have you been doing this more or less often?
- How likely are you to do this in the future?

In what follows I will describe how I looked for changing patterns of engagement across a variety of activities for each individual, to be read in the context of their personal timeline or trajectory of Chinese learning. I sought to identify instances of patterns similar to those described in section 5.4.3.2, of consistency, absence, and change or movement (including emergence, disappearance, gathering frequency and diminishing frequency). The dynamic patterns of engagement could also then be compared across the group of participants to seek insights into common and uncommon patterns, and into the interaction and influence of different combinations of contextual factors. In the case of the core group of 7, the activity patterns discussed here can also be read in the context of the rich data collected over 5 years for these participants. Thus, the investigations of learners' activity patterns serve to link the broader survey data and the personal narratives of the core group which are represented by the 'portraits' (to be presented in chapter 7).

## 6.2 Procedures for processing, and first-stage analysis of responses

For each learning activity, responses to the questions were arranged in order to show first, the trend in frequency over the last few years (had the respondents been doing it more often, less often, or was the frequency about steady?); secondly, the degree of frequency and sporadicity or regularity with which they had been engaging in the activity up to the time of enquiry; and thirdly, how likely they felt it was that they would do it in the future.

Responses to the question about frequency up to the time of enquiry (which for convenience' sake I will refer to henceforth as "Frequency up to now") were categorised into four levels: level 0 for 'never', or 'thought about it but didn't do it'; level 1 for 'not since I was involved in formal distance study' or 'just tried it once or twice'; level 2 for 'sometimes'; and level 3 for 'often'.

Responses to the question 'How likely are you to do this in the future' (the third question above) were also divided among four levels: level 0 for 'highly unlikely'; level 1 for 'somewhat unlikely'; level 2 for 'somewhat likely'; and level 3 for 'very likely'. Grouping participant responses about frequency up to now, and about projected future likelihood, each into four levels allows for a basic comparison of an individual's past, current and future levels of engagement in each of the activities.

It will be noticed that the question about future practice does not use a frequency scale and that in this respect the questions about past and future are not direct matches of each other. The reasons for this are as follows. Asking people 'how often will you do this in the future' is asking them to make a rather definite estimate about actions they will do in the future. This is necessarily a prediction, which might reflect either realistic intentions, or hopes and resolutions, or else fears and lack of confidence. It will reflect the respondent's outlook on life as much as any 'objective' frequency. If such a prediction were made and then juxtaposed against reports of frequency in the past it would set up a false impression of comparison of comparable features against a single scale which would then risk being seen as some kind of 'objective' or externally referenced measurement.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, instead of asking for responses on a frequency scale, the question was phrased in terms of future likelihood, which allowed respondents to make a prediction able to accommodate to some extent the tension between good intentions and eventual outcomes, depending on an individual's level of self-awareness of their own habits and patterns. (There is a greater chance of respondents who are adult long-term learners having a relatively developed degree of self awareness of their behaviour patterns where goal-setting in relation to study practices is concerned: they have been doing it for a while, and by dint of the reflection required by participation in this research project have probably paid extra attention to it.) An individual's assessment of future likelihood can take into account what they would like to do, and what

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact, self-reports of frequency in the past are themselves of course not 'objective' either; and indeed such a measurement approach does not sit with the ontological basis of this research project.

they know about their future study circumstances, and what they know about the extent to which they habitually follow through on their intentions, and combine them into one assessment of probability. The focus on the future recalls the concept of imagined communities in work on language and identity (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007); as well as those of possible and ideal selves and future self guides recently becoming influential in more psychologically oriented L2 motivation work (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) (see chapter 3). However in this case and at this point in the thesis it is people's ideas about their future engagement in specific language learning activities that are the primary focus, rather than identity or motivation.

Once again, it must be observed that likelihood does not necessarily imply frequency. It cannot be assumed that an activity which someone judges 'highly likely' to be undertaken in the future will necessarily be undertaken often; it may for instance be highly likely to occur, but at infrequent intervals (as in the case of someone whose only opportunities to speak Chinese are on a regular annual two week trip to China every year, for example). However, if an activity is judged to be *unlikely* to occur in the future, then (although one could construct a scenario in which an unlikely activity began to occur frequently as a result of unforeseen changed circumstances) it might be more reasonable to assume a correspondingly low probability that it would occur often.

### 6.2.1 Emergence of concept of 'intentional direction'

For each activity for each participant, comparing the levels for reported frequency up to now with the levels for self-estimate of likelihood of future engagement allows for a description of the relation between those two levels as either steady, a rise or a fall. What this reflects is whether a participant's projected likelihood of continuing with the activity in the future represents an increase, a decrease or a steady continuation in relation to their previous and current practice. I have chosen to call this construct 'intentional direction'. The intentional direction for each respondent for each activity was recorded. It represents a possible 'trend for the future' which could be compared with the reported 'trend up to now'.

Intentional direction is an analytical construct which has emerged from and is used in this research project, and to the best of my knowledge has not been used elsewhere. In representing the relationship between a learner's current practice and their projected future practice, this construct captures a significant aspect of the dynamics of engagement with learning over time.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> In a report published during the later years of this enquiry, Macintyre et al. (2009) develop a scale to 'measure' future selves and their 'predictive validity' which relies on learner estimates of likelihood and frequency. Their study differs from this one in terms of purpose, focus and its methodology (being quantitative and positivist in orientation); nonetheless there is some comparability in the focus on the relationship between learners' conceptions of their present and future plans, which I take as an expression of synergy which can endorse the value of this line of research.

### 6.2.2 Emergence of the analytical construct of dynamic activity patterns

The next stage of the analysis was to establish a simple progressive profile for each person's activities through the stages of previous practice, current practice and estimates of future practice. Each profile shows the direction of the preceding trend, the reported frequency on a four-point scale, the intentional direction, and the estimated future likelihood on a four point scale.

As the profiles for each participant for all 77 activities were established, recurring profiles were identified and each one given a brief descriptive label. They reflect patterns of activity over several years as reported by the participants in terms of frequency and degree of regularity of previous practice, and intention of anticipated future practice. This idea of profiles or patterns of engagement in particular activities over time is an analytical construct created in this research to capture and represent dynamic, longitudinal aspects of learners' language activity; to reflect this purpose, the pattern profiles identified will therefore be referred to generically as "dynamic activity patterns" (as foreshadowed in section 4.3.2.4). As an example, Table 6.1 shows the first stage of analysis of Clive's responses to the group of questions about reading activities (the first of the 8 groups of questions). Five pattern profiles were found in Clive's reading activities, and they are identified in the right-most column.

This table is included simply as a representative demonstration (with only a small sample of data) of a stage in the development of the more comprehensive analysis process that would follow. Identifying dynamic activity patterns in Clive's reports for the nine reading activities enables various aspects of his practice to be discussed. It can be seen that there are 4 instances of pattern A, 2 instances of pattern B, and one each of patterns C, D, E and O. The frequency of most of the reading activities had been decreasing to 'infrequent' (pattern A emerges for reading news media, study texts, readers and online documents) or 'sometimes' (pattern B emerges for browsing books or magazines in Chinese, and websites designed for learners of Chinese), and most were considered by Clive as 'somewhat likely' to continue in the future. Two activities were consistent in their levels of previous and projected engagement: reading written Chinese in the linguistic landscape was consistently high (pattern C, often up to now, and very likely to continue in the future). This was the only reading activity confidently reported as very likely to continue into the future; while reading webpages created for a Chinese readership was consistently mid-level (pattern D, sometimes up to now, and somewhat likely to continue in the future). The instance of pattern E for reading fiction in Chinese shows that this is an activity which Clive has never undertaken in the past and considers there to be only a slim likelihood of him doing in the future.

Table 6.1: Dynamic activity patterns, worked example

[CLIVE]	Trends up to now (2010)	Frequency up to 2010	Intentional direction	Projections for the future	Pattern shape*
	↗ increasing → steady ↘ decreasing	0 - never, or just thought 1 - not since UNE, or just tried once or twice 2 - sometimes 3 - often	Intending to do more or less?	0 - highly unlikely 1 - somewhat unlikely 2 - somewhat Likely 3 - Very likely	
Read fiction in Chinese	N/A	0	↗	1	Pattern E
Read newspapers or magazines in Chinese	↘	1	↗	2	Pattern A
Read textbooks or study texts in Chinese	↘	1	↗	2	Pattern A
Read readers or children's materials in Chinese	↘	1	↗	2	Pattern A
Browse or flick through books, magazines etc. in Chinese	↘	2	→	2	Pattern B
Read written Chinese as you encounter it in your environment (signs, shops etc.)	→	3	→	3	Pattern C
Read or browse webpages or sites written in Chinese for Chinese readers	→	2	→	2	Pattern D
Read or browse webpages or sites designed for learners of Chinese	↘	2	→	2	Pattern B
Access online Chinese documents for your work or study	↘	1	↗	2	Pattern A
Other reading activity?		0		0	Pattern O

- \* Pattern A: Decreasing to infrequent, rising to somewhat likely  
 Pattern B: Frequency has dropped to sometimes, somewhat likely to continue in future  
 Pattern C: Consistently high (often up to now, and very likely to continue in the future)  
 Pattern D: Consistently mid (steady at sometimes up to now, and somewhat likely to continue in the future)  
 Pattern E: Never up to now; somewhat unlikely (but not ruled out) for the future  
 Pattern O: Never, or N/A

Altogether, when each of the 77 activities was charted for the seven individuals in the core group (a total of 539 profiles) 35 identifiable dynamic activity patterns emerged. The patterns were found to cluster according to various shared features in ways for which meaningful descriptive characterisations could be established. They are listed in Appendix 8 and will be further discussed in section 6.3.2.2. The brief example presented above regarding Clive's reading activities is intended to intimate how the more comprehensive process of grouping all of an individual's reported activities (see Appendix 4) into definable patterns allows for

the emergence of a detailed, ‘close-up’ description of that person’s evolving and intended practice in learning and using Chinese.

The process can also facilitate the development of a broader overall picture of an individual’s emerging, continuing, increasing, decreasing and discontinuing practice in terms of types of language activities, which can then be considered in mutual relation with the background of that individual’s personal narrative and their timeline. The findings for individuals are reported after the presentation of each individual’s portrait in chapter 7.

So far, I have described the data collected and procedure followed for handling the data initially in the first stage of analysis. Two analytical constructs have emerged from this phase, that of intentional direction, and that of the dynamic activity pattern. Next, I will describe the second stage analysis of activity patterns, across the group of seven.

### **6.3 Analysis of activity patterns, comparing individuals across the group**

The second stage of the analysis of the activity patterns was to reflect upon the kind of insights which the dynamic activity pattern concept can contribute to understandings of such longitudinal aspects of a learning trajectory as continuity, discontinuity, development, recurrences or rhythm. (These aspects of the dynamics of the learning trajectories appear to be compatible with the complexity-inspired conceptual framework of this research, and that issue will be further explored in chapter 8.) For this stage of the analysis, the focus is on the seven individuals who form the ‘core group’ and for whom rich data is available (Brenda, Clive, Marty, Michelle, Rachel, Stella and Stephanie). The elaborated timelines for each of them (described in section 5.6) which give an overview of the different episodes and types of engagement with Chinese that constitute their stories, can be consulted in Appendix 9, and provide useful context for the discussion that follows.

In this section I make considerable use of the strategies discussed in section 4.4.2 of “transformation of qualitative data into proportions as a quantitative tactic for charting category frequency and thus discerning change” (Saldaña, 2003, p. 47; see also Miles & Huberman, 1994). To emphasise that my focus is on comparative proportions rather than quantitative numerical statistics, I make plentiful use of bar charts with blocks of colour which allow the reader to grasp an overall comparative picture of the variety present in the group.

There are two parts to this discussion: in the first, I focus on single elements in the activity patterns, and in the second part I examine some composite aspects.

#### **6.3.1 Second-stage analysis: drawing out *single* elements of the activity patterns**

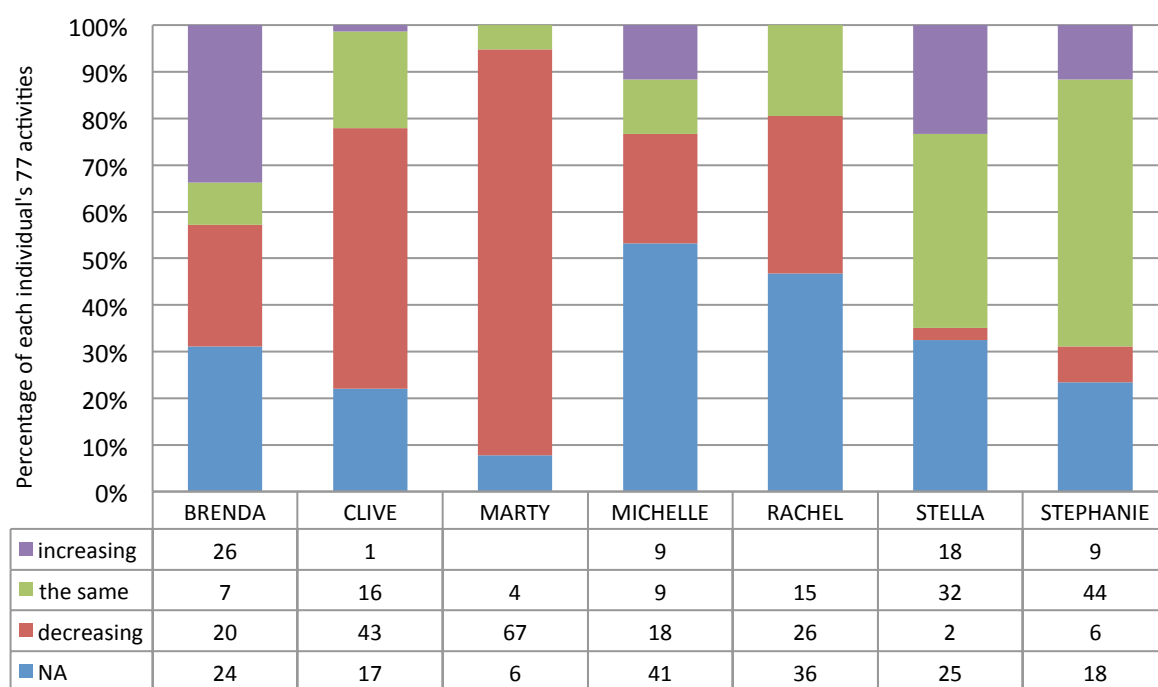
The four single elements of the activity patterns are: frequency up to now; trend up to now; intentional direction; and likelihood for the future. For each of these single elements, the



overall distribution of that individual's practice was established. The seven members of the core group of respondents were then compared in relation to each of these aspects. The purpose of comparing across the group in this way is first, to see whether these dynamic aspects are characterised by variety or by uniformity; and secondly, if variety is present, then to explore its extent and nature in the dynamic aspects of individuals' overall ongoing engagement with Chinese. (Frequency up to now will not be addressed separately in this section, but it will be a part of the third-stage analysis presented later in this chapter.)

### 6.3.1.1 Trend up to now

The trends for each participant's overall engagement in Chinese-related activities as reported for the years up to the time of enquiry, are shown in Chart 6.1. The distribution is very different for each participant.



In this composite chart, the table in the lower half shows the actual count of activities and the bar graph above it shows that count as a percentage (on the vertical axis).

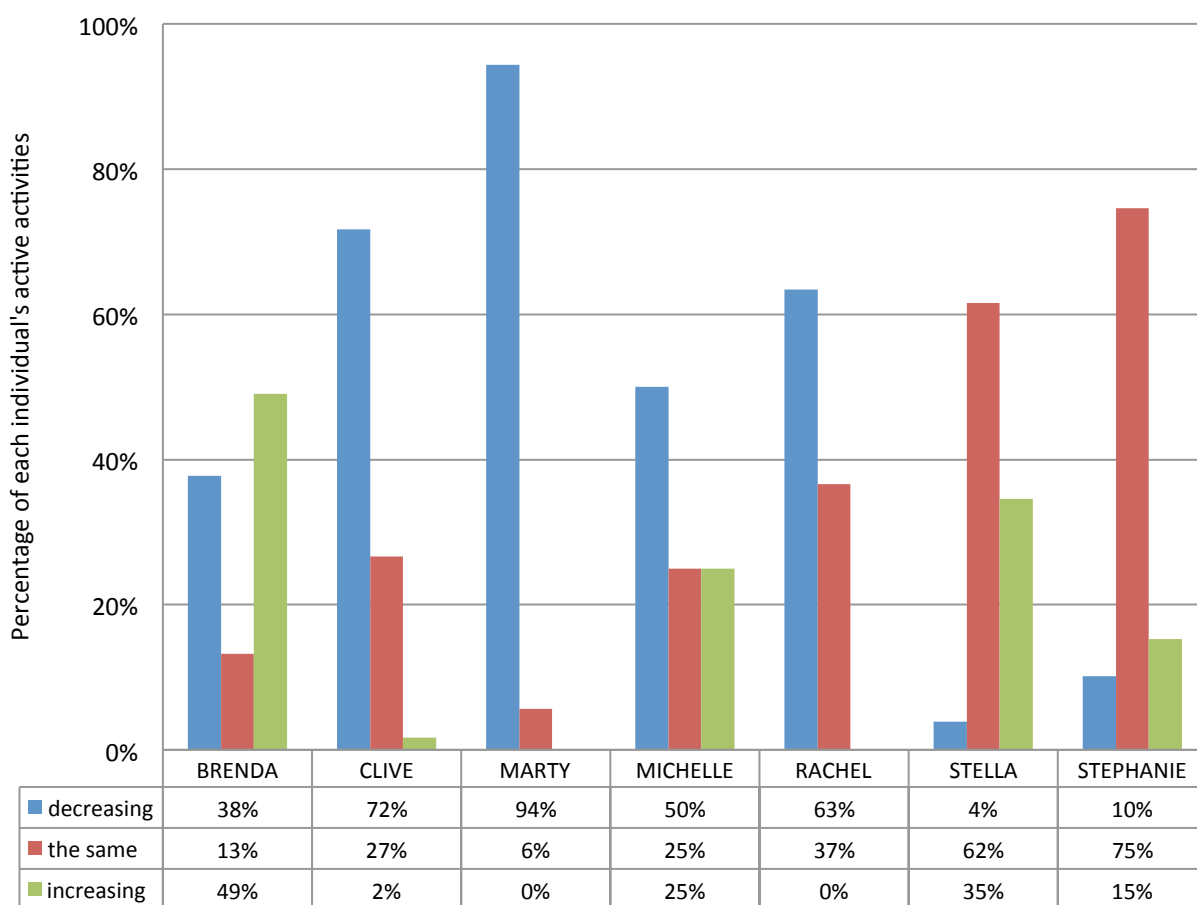
Chart 6.1: Trends up to now

### Range of activities engaged in

The proportion of activities simply never done (the blue section at the base of each column) ranges from just under 8% for Marty to 53% for Michelle; and the lower that proportion is for an individual, the broader is the range of activities engaged in to some degree by that individual. Thus we can see that Marty, Clive and Stephanie all had quite a wide range of activities (75% or more), while Michelle on the other hand had the smallest range, under 50%, and Rachel was only a little over 50%. Brenda and Stella were in between with just under 70%.

**Relative proportions of increasing, decreasing and steady trends.**

Simply looking at the number of activities engaged in does not tell the whole story, however. The data in Chart 6.1 also showed the relative proportions of the 77 activities that have been reported by each participant as increasing, decreasing, and remaining the same. Drilling a little deeper, the next chart (Chart 6.2) shows the patterns for the same data when those activities ‘Never done’ (the ‘not applicable’ section in Chart 6.1) are excluded: in other words it shows the *relative* proportions of increasing, decreasing and steady trends amongst the activities in which each participant engages, regardless of the actual numbers of activities. Both charts are considered in the following description and commentary.<sup>3</sup>



*Chart 6.2:* Trends reported for activities actually done leading up to 2010 (excluding those recorded as never done)

What do these charts show us? In the interpretation below I will, where relevant, connect the findings to what has already been established from other data sources such as the surveys

<sup>3</sup> The reader is alerted to the fact that the colours representing categories are not the same in the two charts.

and timelines, to gain a fuller picture. Marty's profile stands out for showing *no* activities which are increasing, and only 5% (4 activities) remaining steady. The vast majority of his activities show a decreasing trend; however within the group he also displays the smallest proportion of activities classed as N/A. Taken together these data show that Marty has in the past tried out more activities than anyone else in the group, but that currently his level of Chinese activity is dropping off quite dramatically. They reflect the fact that Marty had several years of concentrated full-time study including a year's immersion in China, before deliberately shifting his focus to further study and then to work in an area not directly involving Chinese. They hint at the possibility of someone who may be ceasing to engage with Chinese; this interpretation will be revisited and reassessed, however, later in this chapter. Clive's reported trends show a similar profile to Marty's, though with less dramatic contrasts, and with a considerably higher proportion of activities remaining at a steady level of frequency.

The profiles of Stella and Stephanie are distinctive for having high proportions of activities which have remained at steady levels of frequency; this suggests a broad ongoing commitment to continuing engagement with Chinese. This conclusion may connect to the fact that both these participants have been engaged in ongoing and highly disciplined study of a formal and semi-formal nature for most of the period under study. (However Clive, who had also been studying consistently, displayed very different trend patterns as reported above. This may reflect the fact that in the years preceding the collection of this data his study had been less in the area of formal language units. On the other hand it may reflect some other difference in Clive's individual context, yet to emerge from the analysis.) For Stella and Stephanie, the very low counts of activities which are decreasing in frequency suggest that, particularly for Stella, once participation in an activity type has commenced, it is maintained. One possible interpretation of this is as an indication of persistence and of strategically oriented choices: engagement in new activities is undertaken with forethought and with an intention to continue, rather than in a more experimental mindset of trying something out before making a commitment to continue it. Such an interpretation requires checking against the richer picture of Stella's narrative (section 7.6).

The profiles of Michelle and Rachel share the feature of having engaged in a relatively small range of all the possible activities. Rachel did not report any activities as being on the increase at all, and had more activities that were decreasing than were steady. As in the case of Marty, an initial assessment might be to see this as an indication of an overall waning trend in terms of engagement with Chinese; this interpretation will be revisited later. Michelle reported equal proportions of activities which were steady and those which were increasing. This may point to a shift happening in Michelle's practices, which will be explored in due course.

Brenda's profile displays a different set of characteristics. It is distinctive for showing the highest overall number of the 77 activities which have been reported as increasing in frequency (26). Amongst her reported activities, the proportion remaining steady is comparatively low; in fact she is the only person in the group who reports a greater proportion of activities increasing than remaining steady. Michelle, who has equal balance between increasing and steady activities, is the closest to Brenda in this respect, while the other 5 show the reverse (more activities steady than increasing). It seems that the range of Brenda's activities relating to Chinese is undergoing expansion.

#### **6.3.1.2 Likelihood for the future**

Chart 6.3 summarises responses to the question asked for each of the 77 activities about how likely the respondent was to do it in the future, on a four-point Likert-like scale.

While each case is clearly different, the variety is not so great as it is in some of the other charts. I will select a couple of cases for commentary. Michelle's profile is notable for the very high range of activities recorded as either 'somewhat likely' or 'very likely', pointing to a planned future period of high activity, and supporting the possibility of a shift in her practices, which was foreshadowed in the presentation of 'Trends' data in section 6.3.1.1. Stephanie is rather similar. We know from the previous section, however, that Stephanie's and Michelle's histories of engagement are very different. Stephanie displayed a much broader range and stronger trends in activities up to now than Michelle, and so the strong future likelihood expressed reflects more of a continuation than a sudden increase.

Marty's profile demonstrates his intention to continue engagement with Chinese activities in the future, despite the fact that they may be fairly low now. The dynamic perspective of looking at the future as well as the past allows this to be seen. Perhaps in this respect his position might be compared to earlier periods in the trajectories of someone like Michelle, who in the past went through a long period of very little overt engagement with Chinese but reported that she was thinking about it a great deal, and is now beginning to do more. Periods of lesser activity can look different when considered in the context of the longitudinal journey, rather than as isolated 'snapshots in time', which might lead one to think that an individual was gradually stopping engagement with Chinese.

The profile of Brenda in Chart 6.3 displays the most even distribution amongst levels of likelihood, and the highest proportion of activities listed as highly unlikely. This suggests that Brenda shows some certainty about a number of activities in which she thinks it is unlikely she will ever engage in future. Taken in conjunction with the findings in the previous section that the range of Brenda's activities is undergoing expansion, this suggest a richer view of someone with a degree of self-awareness or confidence of the kind of things she wants to do with her Chinese and the kind of things she is not interested in doing.

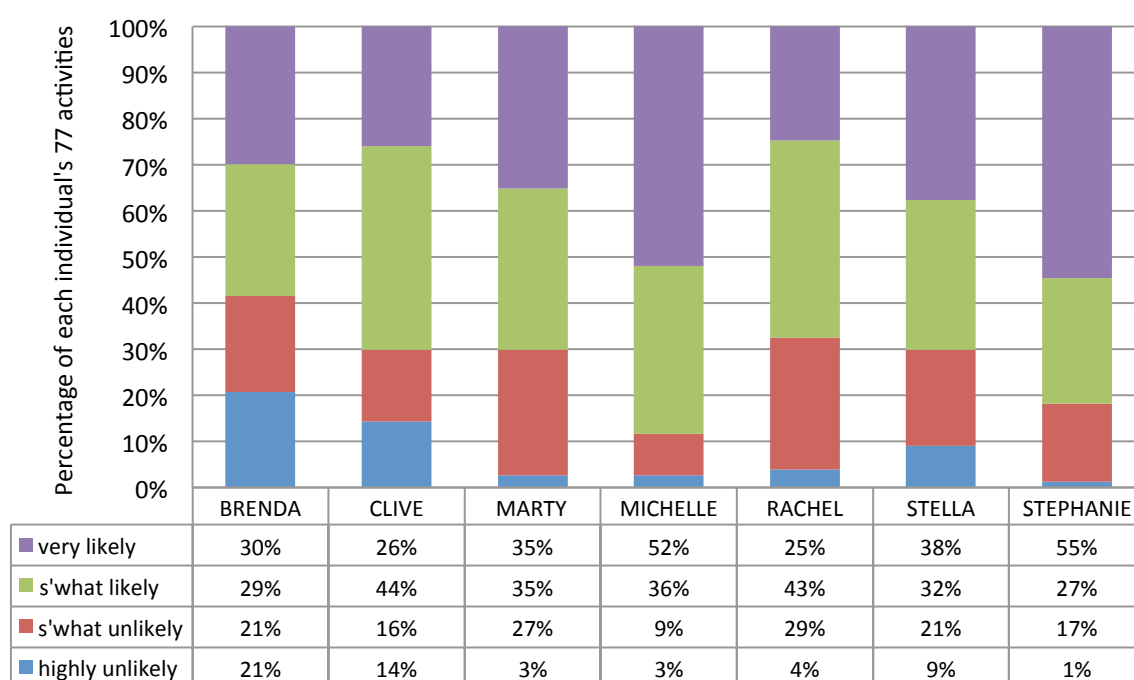


Chart 6.3: Future likelihood

### 6.3.1.3 Intentional direction

The concept of intentional direction was introduced in section 6.2.1. It stands for the dynamic relationship between the recorded current frequency of each activity, and the reported projected likelihood of future engagement with that activity (both introduced in section 6.3.1.2), and it is expressed in terms of being 'less strong', 'steady', or 'stronger'.

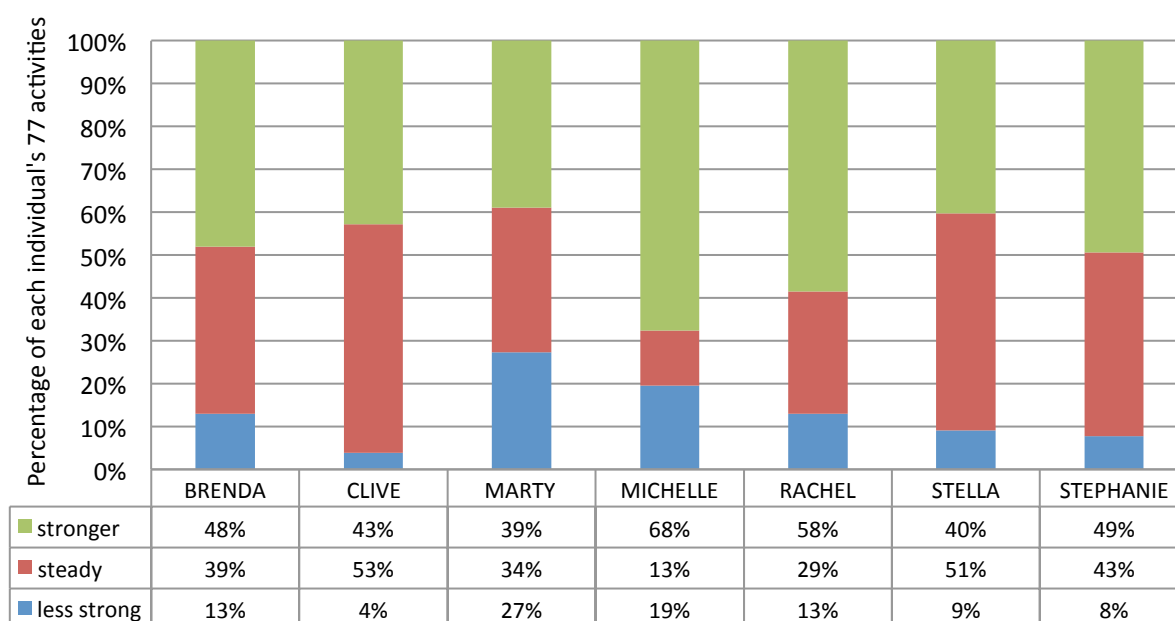


Chart 6.4: Intentional direction

Overall, Chart 6.4 shows that participants have intentions for increased intensity of future engagement in at least 39% of the 77 activities. This is interesting to consider in comparison with the results shown in section 6.3.1.1 about trends reported for activities leading up to the time of the survey, where for 5 of the 7 individuals the activities that were actually recorded as increasing were only 12% or less of the total. Perhaps this reflects a human tendency for good intentions, emphasising the ‘ideal’ aspect of ideal selves. From another perspective it demonstrates that an individual’s learning trajectory does not end at the present but also includes the imagined future. The imagined future not only shapes the present, and is shaped by the past, but also shapes an individual’s ongoing re-interpretation and re-presentation of the past. Looking at the profiles for Clive and Rachel in Charts 6.1 and 6.2 without any other context could easily lead one to conclude that they were two people whose engagement with Chinese was tapering off and would probably stop. But the intentional direction shown here demonstrates strong intentions to continue in the future, which are reinforced by the interview data.

Chart 6.4 also shows that ebbing or weakening intentional direction is much less evident than steady or strengthening intentional direction. The most extreme case is that of Clive, for whom only 3 activities (4%) display weakening intentional direction.

The profile that stands out most from the others in this set is that of Michelle. It was noted in the preceding section that she marked many activities as highly likely for the future. It is consistent with that, therefore, to find a high proportion of her activities which show intentional direction that is rising or becoming stronger (68%); and also to find a relatively low proportion of her activities that show a steady intentional direction (13%). This reflects that in her case there is some kind of strong intention, desire or plan to engage in a wider range of activities. A shift of intention is taking place; a strong resolution is apparent. This is borne out when taken in context with her narrative.

Marty’s profile is also somewhat different from the others in that he has the smallest proportion of stronger intentional direction, and the highest proportion of weakening intentional direction; and overall his activities are the most evenly distributed between the three categories. It was established in section 6.3.1.1 that the level of Marty’s involvement in Chinese-related activities had been high but was now dropping off considerably; and here we can see that the profile of degree of intention for engagement in the future might be interpreted as demonstrating a level of acknowledgement or acceptance on his part that the intensity of his engagement is likely to continue dropping off. The thicker description in his narrative bears this out.

Both Clive and Stella are notable for showing an intentional direction that is steady or unchanged for more than half of their activities, showing a consistency in the intensity of their approach. (Brenda and Stephanie show similar patterning, though slightly less marked.)

What this data chart does not show, though, is the *level* at which the intentional direction is steady. An activity reported to be of a low intensity up to now, and also of low likelihood of continuing in the future, would be recorded as ‘steady’ here; but an activity reported to be taking place frequently up to now, and of high likelihood of continuing in the future, would equally appear as ‘steady’. Thus this single measure, though useful, has its limitations since it can mask significant variety. Section 6.3.2.1 below discusses a way of looking at the data which may capture that variety.

### 6.3.2 Third-stage analysis of activity patterns: comparing composite aspects

The analyses presented in section 6.3.1 focus on *single* aspects of the of the learners’ dynamic activity patterns. Moving on to the third stage of the analysis of overall dynamic engagement with Chinese over time, the focus now shifts to the patterns as a whole, and to interaction between combinations of their constituent aspects, to get a richer characterisation of the dynamics of each individual’s learning profile, and to draw together some of the findings and interpretations presented in the previous section. Two useful composite aspects were identified, and as before were examined for each individual and across the group of seven individuals. The point of looking at the patterns across the group is not so much to make generalisations, as to see if there are significant differences in distribution and occurrence and if so, what those differences reflect. If they tie in with knowledge of the context gathered by other means, that would suggest that they are capturing some meaningful aspect of diversity or a meaningful difference between individuals. In that case, it can then be claimed this is a useful construct which serves to capture a meaningful aspect of the situation. This interest in the patterning of diversity sits comfortably in a conceptual framework of complexity theory.

The two composite aspects, which will be presented in turn below, are: overall level of intensity of Chinese related activity; and dynamic contour of ebbing and flowing engagement.

#### 6.3.2.1 Overall level of intensity of Chinese related activity

This view of the data takes into account both the degree of frequency up to now and the degree of likelihood in the future, to characterise patterns according to a composite ‘level of intensity’. This grouping provides information and insights about the degree of importance or priority that an activity has held or will hold in an individual’s practice, reflected by their assessments of the frequency with which they have done it in the past and the probability of their doing it in the future. Looking at the ensemble of an individual’s practices in this way affords a view of the intensity of their engagement with Chinese-related activities over time.

The six levels of composite intensity combining frequency up to now and likelihood for the future are: low; both low and mid; mid; both mid and high; high; and both high and mid and also low. They are explained in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2:** Descriptions of the six levels of composite intensity

Level of intensity	Corresponding combinations in activity patterns	
	Frequency up to <b>now</b> :	Likelihood for the <b>future</b> :
Low	Infrequent or never <i>combined with ...</i>	... unlikely
Mid	Sometimes <i>combined with ...</i>	... somewhat likely
High	Very often <i>combined with ...</i>	... highly likely
Low and mid	<i>Either</i> : infrequent or never <i>combined with ...</i>	... somewhat likely
	<i>Or</i> : sometimes <i>combined with ...</i>	... unlikely
Mid and high	<i>Either</i> : sometimes <i>combined with ...</i>	... highly likely
	<i>Or</i> : Very often <i>combined with ...</i>	... somewhat likely
Low, mid and high	<i>Either</i> : Infrequent or never <i>combined with ...</i>	... highly likely
	<i>Or</i> : Very often <i>combined with ...</i>	... unlikely or highly unlikely

Each individual's patterns for the activities they engaged in (those characterised throughout as 'Never' or 'N/A' were excluded from this section) were characterised into one of the six groups according to the level of the intensity spectrum which each pattern occupied.

The layout used in Chart 6.5 arranges the data to offer a visual correspondence to the concept it represents. The coloured bars representing high, medium and low levels of intensity for each individual are positioned in corresponding high, medium and low positions related to each other within the horizontal band of the page for that person. This allows for an easy overview of whether someone's activities are predominantly at high, mid or low levels of intensity; for example, if for one individual the longer bars are lower down, that represents the fact that her activities are more commonly at lower levels of intensity. The three bars showing combinations of levels (Hi+Mid, Mid+Low, Hi+Mid+Low) represent dynamic profiles of change between levels, but in this particular representation, the direction of that change is not apparent (that was the focus of sections 6.3.1.1 and 6.3.1.3, and will be returned to in section 6.3.2.2).

One of the areas in which there is a great deal of distinctiveness is the proportion of each person's activities containing a High component. A separate analysis pulled out the proportion of activities where the intensity level included a zero component, and these two groupings are compared below in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3:** Comparing proportions of activities with a high component and with a zero component for each individual

Person	Patterns with a High component (hi, hi+mid, hi+mid+low)	Patterns with a zero intensity component (zero, zero+low, zero+low+mid, zero+low+mid+high)
Marty	78%	15.6%
Stephanie	57.2%	20.8%
Michelle	52%	32.5%
Clive	44.2%	45.5%
Stella	37.7%	32.5%
Brenda	29.9%	49.4%
Rachel	26%	48.1



(percentage of each individual's activities)

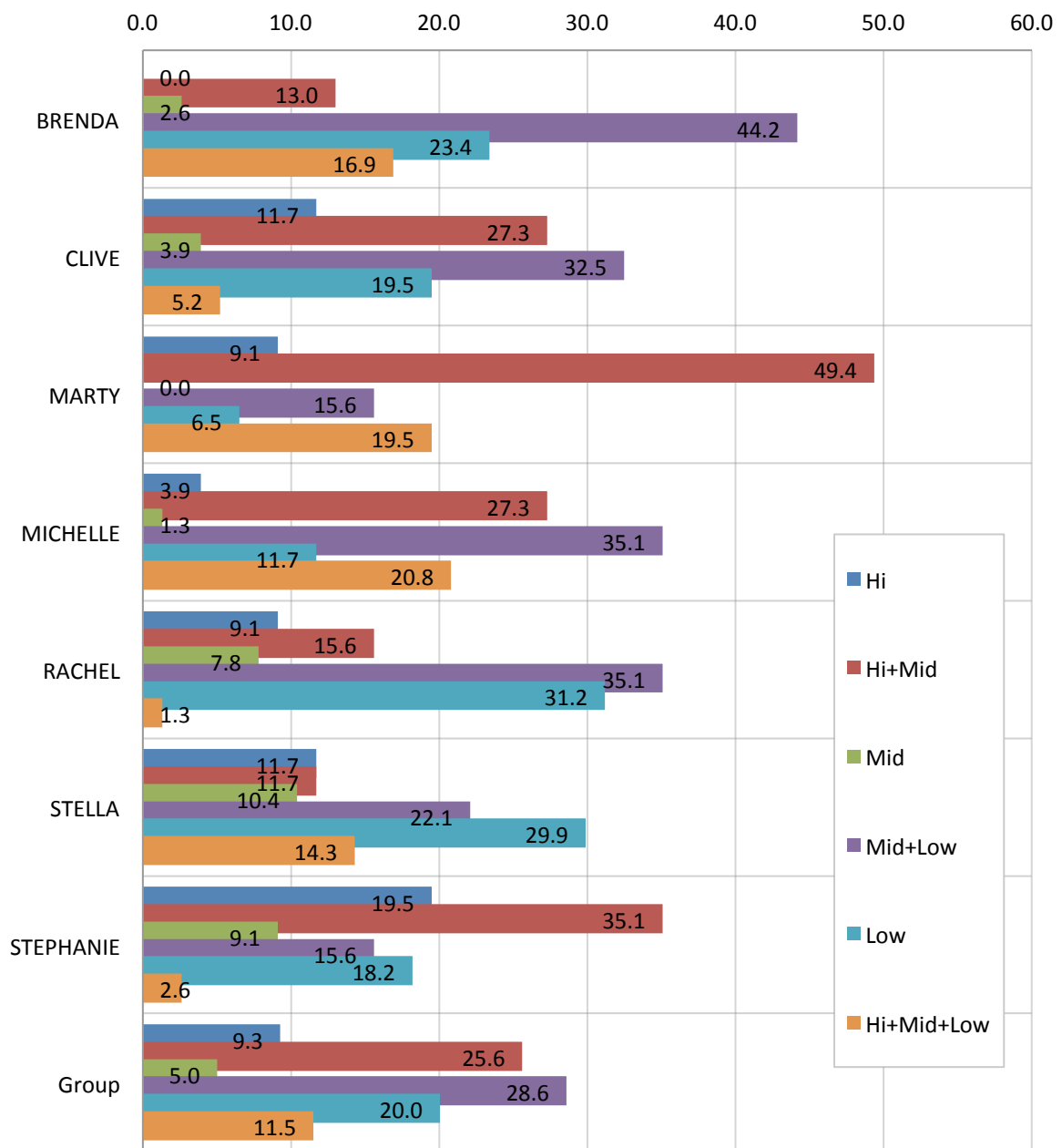


Chart 6.5: Levels of Intensity

In the following paragraphs I will simply describe in words what the Chart 6.5 shows about levels of intensity across the different activities; the further interpretation will be kept for Chapter 7.

Brenda is distinctive for having no rankings in the single category High intensity, and for a strong weighting in the category which denotes movement between Mid and Low levels of intensity. Overall only 30% of her activities have any High component at all.

Marty stands out because he has by far the highest proportion (nearly half) in the High+Mid intensity category. Nearly 60% of his activity patterns are in the High and High+Mid levels, and overall a massive 78% have a High component.

For Clive, his levels of intensity are concentrated in the middle area. They are primarily in the two movement categories of High+Mid and Mid+Low. In this respect his intensity profile is like that of Michelle. Michelle, however has comparatively fewer High rankings than Clive, but significantly more in the dynamic High+Mid+Low category, meaning that altogether Michelle has 83.2% of her activities in the combined categories which reflect change in intensity. This seems to suggest that the intensity of Michelle's Chinese-related activity is shifting and dynamic in its character.

Rachel's strongest category of intensity is Mid+Low, which is at a similar level to Clive and Rachel. However, overall her pattern of intensity level is different to theirs because it has a smaller High+Mid category, but the highest proportion of the whole group in the Low category, showing that the range of activities which she engages in at low levels of intensity is the broadest among the whole group. Overall Rachel's activities are more commonly at lower levels of intensity.

The profiles of intensity for Stella are different again; they display fewer extremes than anyone else. Although the proportion of her activities in the Low category (her most common category) is only slightly less than that of Rachel, it is the lowest maximum of anyone in the group, and she also shows the the highest minimum proportion of anyone in the group (10.4% for Mid). The proportions of activities at the three upper levels of High, High+Mid, and Mid are notable because they are almost equal. Overall the distribution of Stella's activities among the levels of intensity is the most even for the whole group.

Finally, Stephanie's profile presents the highest proportion of High intensity patterns, and the second highest proportion of High+Mid movement patterns. The proportion of her activities at Mid level of intensity is comparable to Stella's. Taken together, the proportion of her activities with a Low intensity component is the smallest of anyone in the group at 36.4%. Overall Stephanie's activities are more commonly at higher levels of intensity.

#### **6.3.2.2 *Dynamic contour of ebbing and flowing engagement (past, current, future)***

The final part of this analysis looks at prior, current and future levels of activity as contingent and interlinked.

The purpose of this part of the exercise was to find a way to capture, describe and then compare and reflect upon participants' engagement with Chinese activities as they evolved over time. As has been described in section 6.2.2, the data gathered about each respondent's involvement with the 77 Chinese activities was grouped according to the shape or contour of individual engagement from the period preceding the survey, through the time of the survey, and looking ahead into the future. The 35 dynamic activity patterns which emerged were considered carefully and found to fall into five principal categories (two of which were further subdivided into 3 subcategories) based on the contours of waxing and waning intensity of

engagement over time.<sup>4</sup> In the brief descriptions below, the strings of symbols (similar to those presented in Table 6.1 in section 6.2.2) are miniature schematic maps representing these contours, in which the first arrow shows the direction of the trend up to now, the first number denotes the level of frequency at the time of response, the second arrow(s) show intentional direction, and the second number shows estimated future likelihood.

Table 6.4: Dynamic contour categories

Contour category name	Characteristic	Description (levels range from 0=absent to 3=high)
'Consistent'	A steady contour in which future likelihood is at the same level as frequency up to now	includes $\rightarrow 0 \rightarrow 0$ , consistently absent; $\rightarrow 1 \rightarrow 1$ , consistently low; $\rightarrow 2 \rightarrow 2$ , consistently mid; $\rightarrow 3 \rightarrow 3$ , consistently high.
'Waning'	An overall falling contour	a) "fall-fall": frequency up to now is dropping, and future likelihood is even lower, e.g. $\searrow 2 \searrow 1$ ; or $\searrow 3 \searrow 2$ b) "fall-level": frequency up to now has been dropping, and future likelihood remains at the level it has dropped to, e.g. $\searrow 2 \rightarrow 2$ ; or $\searrow 3 \rightarrow 3$ c) "level-fall": frequency up to now has been steady, but in future it is judged comparatively less likely, e.g. $\rightarrow 3 \searrow 2$ ; $\rightarrow 2 \searrow 1$
'Rising'	An overall rising contour	a) "rise-rise": frequency has been increasing, and future likelihood is even higher, e.g. $\nearrow 1 \nearrow 2$ ; or $\nearrow 1 \nearrow 3$ b) "rise-level": frequency has been increasing, and future likelihood remains at that increased level, e.g. $\nearrow 2 \rightarrow 2$ c) "level-rise": frequency up to now has been steady, but the reported future likelihood is at a higher level by comparison, e.g. $\rightarrow 1 \nearrow 2$ ; $\rightarrow 0 \nearrow 2$
'Dipping'	A fall - rise contour	A drop in frequency up to now is followed by a higher likelihood for the future. Includes $\searrow 1 \nearrow 2$ ; $\searrow 1 \nearrow 3$ , etc
'Peaking'	A rise - fall contour	Frequency up to now has been increasing but the intention is to do it in future is comparatively less, e.g. $\nearrow 2 \searrow 1$

Across the 7 focal participants, for all activities, the distribution is as follows: 44% are rising contours, 21.2% are consistent, 18.7% are dipping, 16% are waning, and a mere 0.2% (1 activity) is peaking. The rising contour is significantly the most common, and the peaking contour barely figures. The representation of consistent, dipping and waning contours are at comparable levels of half or less that of the rising contours.

However when each individual's contours of dynamic engagement are considered they are all distinctively different from each other, as shown by Chart 6.6 below. Because the rising

<sup>4</sup> There is a significant degree of convergence, though not a complete correspondence, between these terms for dynamic categories of engagement and those used to classify respondents' descriptions of their feelings about the learning process in section 5.4

contours constitute a proportion which is significantly different from the others, they bear closer examination. I have drilled deeper to look at how the subcategories of rising contours are represented, as shown in the Chart 6.7.

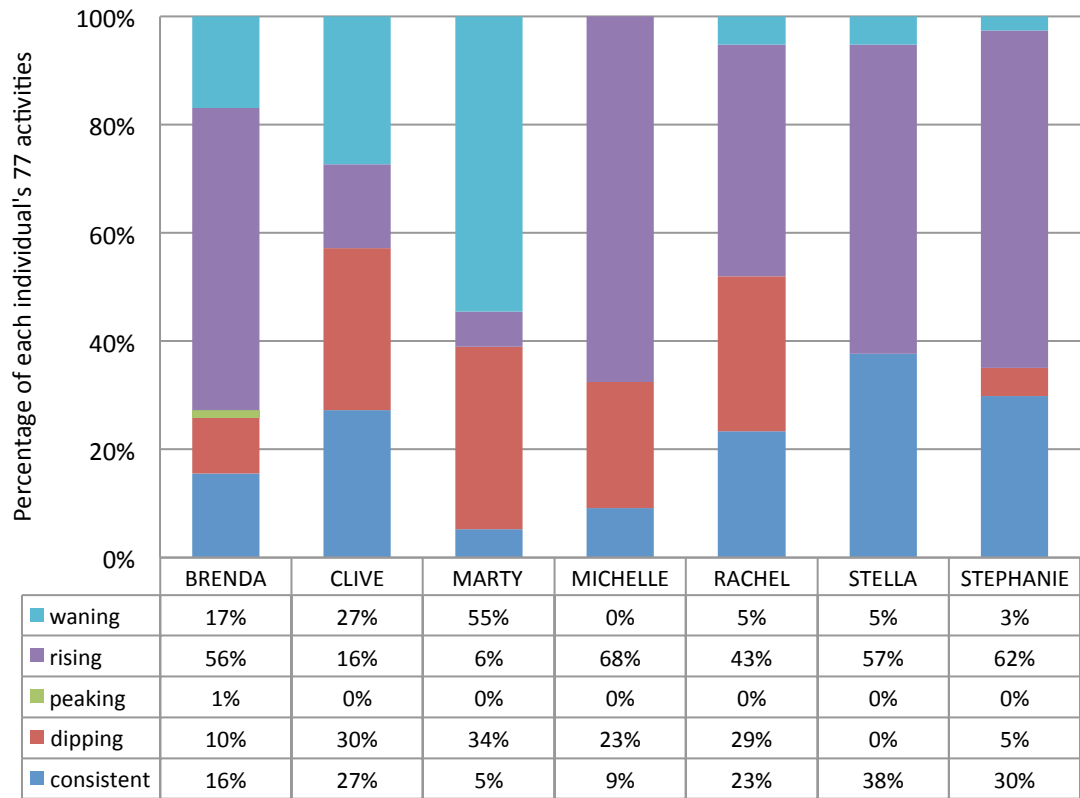


Chart 6.6: Dynamic profiles of engagement in Chinese activities

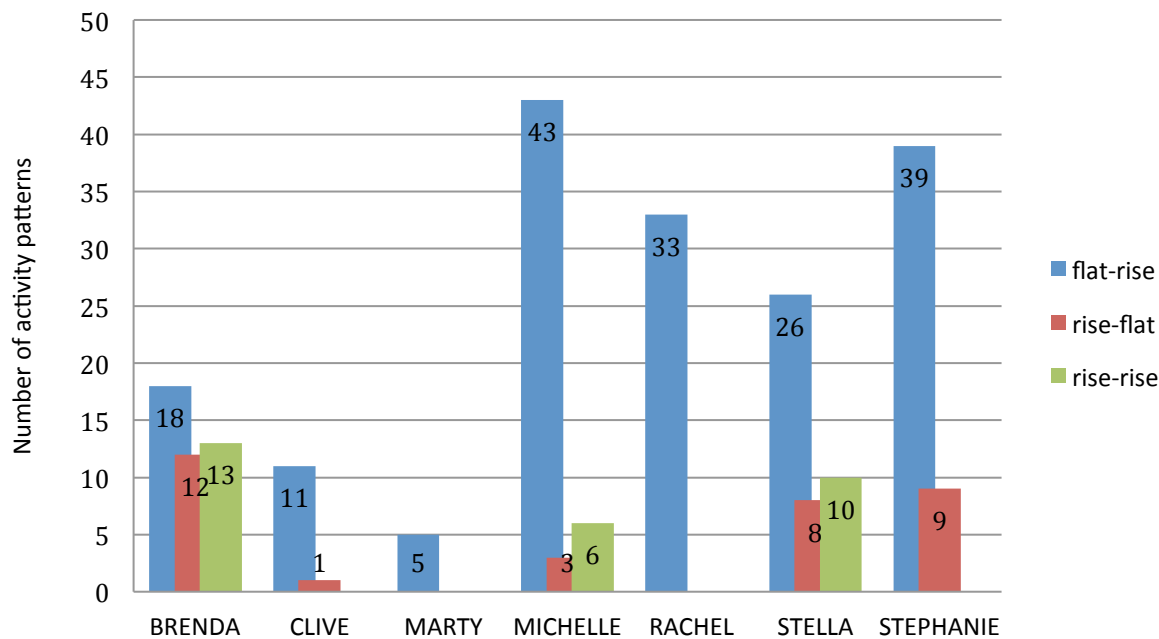


Chart 6.7: A closer look at the rising profiles

This chart shows that overall the rising contours are dominated by the ‘flat-rise’ shape, denoting patterns of steady activity up to now but with a relatively stronger likelihood of being done in the future; it also shows how in terms of quantity of activities with that ‘level then rising profile’, the learners seem to fall into two distinct groups, with Brenda, Clive and Marty having far fewer, and Michelle, Rachel, Stella and Stephanie having distinctively more.

In Brenda’s case, over half of her patterns are rising contour (55.8%); the patterns which are consistent, and those which are waning each account for between 15 and 17%. A relatively low 10% are dipping, and she records the only instance of a peaking pattern in all the data for this group of 7 (the activity was ‘translate from spoken English into Chinese as an exercise for yourself’, which rose to medium frequency and then dropped again to low likelihood of continuing). Amongst her rising patterns Brenda shows the most even distribution between the three subcategories. Together, the rise-rise and rise-flat contours account for more than half of Brenda’s rising contours; there are 25 instances altogether, significantly more than any of the other 6 people (the next being 18 instances in Stella’s case, and 9 for Michelle and Stephanie). This highlights that Brenda has reported more activities as having been increasing over the past few years than anyone else in this small group. As an example in this case, to help the reader to maintain the connection between the abstraction of the patterns being discussed and the realities of the actual activities they refer to, included in Table 6.5 is a list of those activities for Brenda.<sup>5</sup> Taken in conjunction with her narrative (to be presented in section 7.1), it can be seen how the kinds of activities which have been on the rise for her fit with the place of Chinese in her life at that stage of her learning journey. From a method perspective, this is significant as an instance of complementary evidence from separate sources (questionnaire responses and interviews) enhancing understanding.

Clive shows a very balanced distribution compared to the others in Chart 6.6, with comparable proportions of dipping, waning and consistent contours. The most common contour in his activity patterns is a dipping one (just under 30%) but both consistent and waning patterns are almost as common at 27% each. The least common contour among Clive’s activity patterns is the rising one (in strong contrast to the rest of the group except Marty, who has an even lower number of rising profiles). Chart 6.7 shows that those rising profiles which he does record are almost all flat-rise, with just one instance of rise-flat; notably, Clive does not record a single activity as being done increasingly often over the last few years. Clive’s timeline and narrative reveal that he has had a longish period without formal language study which in his individual case may coincide with many of his patterns dipping or waning.

---

<sup>5</sup> Space precludes the inclusion of this level of detail for other cases in this section of the thesis

Table 6.5: Rising contour activities for Brenda

Activities increasing over the past few years, deemed likely to rise further or remain steady in future		Rising pattern:		
BRENDA		rise-flat	rise-rise	Total
<b>About China</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
Read fiction that has a Chinese theme but isn't written in Chinese			1	
Read non-fiction that has a Chinese theme but isn't written in Chinese		1		
Talk to people about China or about Chinese in conversation or in your work or study, etc		1		
Write about Chinese language/culture for other people to read (e.g. blog, letters and emails, journalism, etc)			1	
<b>Listening</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
Listen as a part of having conversations in Chinese			1	
Listen in to Mandarin as you overhear it in your environment (transport, workplace, campus, shopping etc)		1		
Listen to songs in Chinese		1		
<b>News &amp; Media</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>
Follow the news about China (but not in Mandarin) - in audio or video on the web			1	
Follow the news about China (but not in Mandarin) - in newspapers and other print media		1		
Follow the news about China (but not in Mandarin) - in written form on the web			1	
Follow the news about China (but not in Mandarin) - over radio or TV		1		
Follow the news in Mandarin - in newspapers and other print media			1	
Follow the news in Mandarin - over radio or TV			1	
On DVD or video (or in the cinema), watch films, documentaries, soap operas or any other programmes in Chinese		1		
Watch films, documentaries or any other programmes in Chinese when they are shown on free-to-air TV in Australia		1		
Watch TV channels which broadcast in Mandarin (e.g. cable or satellite)		1		
<b>Reading</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>
Read written Chinese as you encounter it in your environment (signs, shops etc)		1		
<b>Speaking</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Talk in Mandarin with native speakers, socially & in your daily life			1	
Talk to yourself in Mandarin (either out loud or silently!)		1		
<b>Study tools</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Browse a paperbased Chinese dictionary			1	
Browse an online or computer-based Chinese dictionary			1	
Look up characters and words you've come across in your daily life		1		
Make vocabulary lists			1	
<b>Translation</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Translate from written Chinese to English at other people's request			1	
<b>Writing</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Write personal letters, emails or journal entries in Chinese			1	
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>

It is noticeable that it is the two males in the group who have significantly fewer rising profiles, and the females all have much higher proportions of rising profiles. It can be conjectured that this may attest to gender differences about the setting of intentions for the future, however, it is beyond the scope of this enquiry to follow up this aspect. Other aspects of gender differences will be further discussed in section 8.8.

Rachel shows some similarities to Clive in that for both, over half of their activity contours are either consistent or dipping. However in terms of the balance between their rising and waning contours Rachel and Clive contrast: Rachel has significantly more rising than waning, and Clive has more waning than rising. All Rachel's rising profiles are flat-rise (like Marty), which means that as with Clive and Marty, *no* activity is flagged as having been done increasingly often in the few years preceding the survey. Seen in relation to her elaborated timeline, and as will become clearer in her narrative portrait, at that time Rachel was experiencing considerable upheaval in other areas of her life and frustrations around her Chinese study which led to her deliberately distancing herself from Chinese-related activities for a while.

The overall picture for Marty is quite different to the rest of the group (almost the opposite, in fact) in that over half of his profiles are waning, and few are rising. One third of his activities show a dipping profile, demonstrating that they are estimated more likely to happen in the future than they are at present, and the small number of rising profiles are flat-rise ones, which have the same implication. The low level of consistent profiles in Marty's practice is evidence of a hiatus or change of direction in his Chinese activities. In terms of complexity theory this may suggest the period of instability that can precede a phase shift. It is reflective of his characteristic practice (revealed in the interview narratives) of focussing on different goals in turn, and executing an intentional plan of intensive Chinese study followed by a period of prioritising other goals and putting his Chinese on the back burner. His approach can be characterised as one of serial single goal-setting. In this respect his profile is different to some of the longer-term learners who keep the thread of their Chinese running through and alongside other ongoing life projects. A further possible interpretation of Marty's contours is that the low proportion of his rising profiles may show an attitude of confidence, in that he apparently does not feel the need to motivate himself by setting goals or intentions of doing more of certain activities. Since I am not motivated by any goal of making causal links or isolating single explanatory factors, I believe it is quite possible that various such explanations can coexist over a period of time, even if there are elements of contradiction there.

Michelle's profile is notable for the very high proportion of rising profiles (68%, the highest in the group), no waning profiles at all, and a relatively low proportion of consistent contours. This distinctive pattern ties in with earlier patterns, and may be seen in complexity terms as evidence of a phase shift, to be discussed in section 7.3.1 .

Stella's profile is very distinctive. As well as a high proportion of rising contours (which include more in the 'rise-rise' category than anyone else in the group except Brenda), she shows the highest level of consistent contours (37.7%), pointing to steady established habits of Chinese-related activities. Only 4 activities, or 5%, have a waning contour, and she shows no dipping contours at all – in other words there are no activities which she is currently doing less of but says she is likely to do more of. Her profile can be interpreted as illustrating the commitment to Chinese which was eloquently expressed in her personal interviews, and it also suggests a possible expansion of activities. This may link to a life stage related desire to 'do it now while I can'. The influence of age and stage of life on people's learning trajectories will be discussed in section 7.6.2.

Stephanie's contours of engagement appear to be distributed very similarly to Stella's, except that she does show a small proportion of dipping contours and has even fewer waning patterns. There is a difference in their rising patterns though – Stephanie has no instances of the 'rise-rise' pattern. This may be partly explained by the fact that many of her activities have been found to be already at the highest level and therefore could not rise further. The overall picture is one of consistency and increase, which fits with Stephanie's story of persistence and commitment over many years, and with her stable study habits and her feeling of being "led by the language". It also is consistent with the way that both she and Stella in different ways place value on progression and achievement in terms of external and academic, curricular proficiency measures (completion of university units, working through textbooks in a series, etc.).

The intention of the analysis in this last section has been to capture and reflect upon dynamic contours of individuals' reported ebbing and flowing engagement with Chinese learning in the past, present and future. The concept of dynamic contours of engagement is an original idea emerging from the work undertaken for this thesis. I hope that it might contribute to the available toolkit of ideas for the study of language learning careers, and be developed if it is considered to have merit.

## **6.4 Dynamic patterns of engagement: summary**

In this chapter I have described how information gathered from participants about their past, present and future activities relating to Chinese has been organised and analysed in a three-stage process. I have explained how the concept of 'intentional direction' has been elaborated and has then itself contributed to the development of the concept of 'dynamic activity patterns' and 'dynamic contours of engagement'. The patterns can demonstrate how people's learning activities change and develop over time, when viewed through a longitudinal and dynamic lens. They capture dynamics such as emerging, developing, or waning trends, and



interesting relations between current frequency and future likelihood. In this way they complement the patterns identified in chapter 5 to characterise the dynamic relations between learner statements in the two surveys.

The aim of this part of the analysis has been to find a way to capture and describe in a systematic way some aspects of the complexity and variety of individual Chinese learning practices as they evolve over time. In the broader context, though, these pattern descriptions both gain and add value when contextualised and interpreted within the context of the rich individual portraits created from other aspects of the data. It is to that narrative portion of this research report that I will turn next.



# Chapter 7. Individual learning stories

---

## Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the core group of 7 who were followed in depth. Apart from completing both surveys, over the 5 year period between 2005 and 2010-2011 they also participated in 3 in-depth interviews, maintained contact by various methods including phone, email and online discussion forum, and contributed learning diaries and other documents, and samples of their written and spoken Chinese.

In the previous two chapters, there has been a considerable amount of ‘fracturing’ of the material and looking across the group of individuals at themes, variety and patterning. By contrast, the focus of this chapter is a more holistic one, examining the whole Chinese learning journeys of individuals, in the context of the other strands of their lives. The procedure will be to present each participant’s portrait separately, looking at the person and their own individual journey, to identify characteristics of their unique trajectory. These narratives have been co-constructed by the researcher and participants drawing on the process-oriented approach outlined in Chapter 4, and aim to capture the complexity of their shifting circumstances. I make no apology for the fact that the narratives require telling at some length to do justice to their content, because I think they really make the personal nature and intensity of emotion associated with long-term Chinese learning journeys come alive. Following each story, attention is drawn to salient themes emerging for the individual. (In the case of the narratives which have been presented earlier in this thesis, only the accompanying commentary and themes are in this chapter.) As the portraits accumulate, some initial comparisons between individuals may be drawn, in cases where to do so helps to clarify the portrait which is the current focus of attention; however points arising from a more general cross-analysis of themes is reserved for a later chapter.

At the end of Chapter 5 I pointed out the drawback of the single strand timelines and described the creation of elaborated timelines for the core group of 7. The elaborated timelines for each participant (in Appendix 9) add a graphical representation of each person’s journey and will be referred to in this chapter. As I shall show, when an individual’s engagement with Chinese is considered in detail, the picture is much more complex than that which can be represented on a unidimensional scale. Rather, it is one of co-existing and overlapping types of engagement at multiple levels; and one of ongoing change, adjustment and adaptation.

## 7.1 “It has given me another life” – Brenda’s story

In 2011, at the end of this study, Brenda turned 61. She had studied a little Chinese history in her BA degree completed at 31, but she traces the start of her journey with Mandarin to 1997, when she won a holiday to Hong Kong as a prize in a competition. She was then living in a small coastal town and doing some part-time work while caring for her disabled child. It was her first trip outside Australia; before that: “I never entertained the thought of ever travelling over and really didn’t want to go outside Australia”.

During the Hong Kong holiday she and her husband and then 11 year-old son spent two weeks backpacking in China, armed with a phrase book in Cantonese and Mandarin so that she could try and communicate with people. (She laughs as she recalls how bad her pronunciation was.) The trip left her with a desire to go back to China in the future and “to be able to be understood” and to learn more about the culture.

On her return to Australia Brenda purchased a tape and book for learning Chinese, but she found that it was little more than a list of words and didn’t sustain her interest for long. Then, when Brenda spent the year 2000 taking a tourism-guiding course at her local TAFE<sup>1</sup> college, she made an arrangement with a Chinese student on that college campus to tutor her in conversational Mandarin. After a while, though, Brenda began to find it frustrating because she “wasn’t learning much”. After a chance meeting with someone who recommended a university distance education course in Chinese, Brenda enrolled in that course in 2001. She chose distance mode because she was geographically distant from the campus, and she felt that distance mode would give her flexibility and control of her time, and the structure of exams and assignments would force her to study: “It was really hard and I still don’t know why I enjoy it but I enjoy it”, she recalled in 2005.

Once she had started Brenda took Chinese language courses (all by distance education) for three years without interruption. She reports studying quite obsessively and systematically, and was thrilled to get a High Distinction after the first year. From early in the course Brenda developed the habit, which would continue throughout her learning journey with only minimal interruptions, of watching the Mandarin news on television and Chinese films on television and on DVD. Midway through her second year of study, at one of the annual residential intensive schools at university, a social gathering was held bringing together a group of students from Taiwan who were studying English with the Australian students studying Chinese, and there Brenda made friends with a young woman called Jade;<sup>2</sup> that friendship would be maintained through correspondence, phone calls and visits, right through to the end of the period of this study and beyond.

During her third year of study Brenda had some health problems and struggled with her study, especially the end of year exam. She only just passed, and felt demoralised and ready to give up

---

<sup>1</sup> TAFE colleges are Australian government owned colleges offering a wide range of vocational education and training in local areas.

<sup>2</sup> pseudonym.

Chinese. However she clung to her goal of going to China to study, and took a break from formal study for the next 6 months (though following her own programme of revision and preparation) while she organised to go on a 6-week intensive language course at Beijing Language and Culture University in July-September 2004, following this with several weeks' travel on her own in China and then a week's visit to her penfriend Jade and her family in Taiwan. The trip marked a turning point: it increased her confidence, not only in her language but also in her "ability to just go somewhere completely alien and cope for a number of weeks".

Nonetheless on her return to the university and her study she was still suffering from the lack of confidence caused by her bad experience with the previous exam, so she chose a unit in Chinese calligraphy which was not based on assessment of language proficiency - and thoroughly enjoyed it. (When I visited her at home for one of our interviews, her calligraphy artwork from that unit was hanging on the wall.) At the same time she was reviewing her previous textbooks in order to prepare herself for her next study trip to China, which she was already planning; this one would be for a full semester in 2005-2006, at a university in Tianjin. There she found a flat to rent and her husband and son (neither of whom spoke Chinese) came to join her. She found the program of daily classes challenging and also exhausting, especially when combined with her family responsibilities. But she noted many highlights, including being invited to her friend Lily's wedding, and also coping with the linguistic challenge of taking her son to hospital when a health emergency arose. Brenda seemed to make friends easily, and did so as a result of various chance encounters, to the extent that when she held a party on Christmas Eve in her Tianjin flat there were 20 or 30 guests and "when I looked around I thought that most of the friends I had made there were Chinese, which is good". In the years to follow Brenda would continue to use Chinese to communicate with her close friends by phone from Australia (though their emails would be more likely to be in English).

By the end of the full semester of combining studying and living in China, though, she felt 'burnt out' and decided that on future trips she'd prefer to just travel or work in China, rather than combining it with study as well. Before returning to Australia she visited Lily's family in a provincial Chinese city, and then travelled to Taiwan to spend Chinese New Year with her friend Jade.

A new goal emerging for Brenda around this time was to use her Chinese in a business context, perhaps in terms of guiding tour groups in China. Of her language level she said in 2005: "I think it's viable now... I'm not a fluent speaker, but I have the confidence now to just try harder just to use it and the words I don't know, to learn them and use them that way".

Back in Australia she took one further Chinese language unit at university, followed later by a unit in Chinese culture and later still by one in Asian history. She continued to have frequent contact with her friends in China (for example, during her study of the Chinese culture unit she would call her friend in China and discuss views of Chinese history with her), and to engage in informal activities relating to Chinese language and culture such as watching TV and DVDs, keeping abreast of news from the region, and reading books about China. In 2007 she began tutoring the children of a local Chinese family in English, and became friends with their family, who ran a local restaurant.

She kept up some structured independent language study until 2008; after that she continued to think about doing so sometimes.

She made four further trips to China at roughly yearly intervals, mostly with her husband; these trips were increasingly adventurous ones incorporating visits to Chinese friends and their families in their homes, sometimes in very rural areas. In 2006 they went to Mongolia and northern China, and stayed with Lily's husband's family on their farm. Then, following up on her earlier goal, Brenda and Lily jointly organised and ran a China tour for a small group of Australians which took place in September 2007. In 2008 Brenda realised another long-held ambition and went with her family to Beijing for the Olympics. Afterwards they visited the family of Chinese friends in Shijiazhuang and then went to stay with Jade in Taiwan and travel there. The following year, 2009, they went to China again, this time travelling in Mongolia before visiting Lily in time to be there for the birth of her baby. The defining aspects of Brenda's trips to China in each case were the friendships and visits.

In late 2009 Brenda graduated with her Bachelor of Asian Studies after 9 years of study by distance education. We had dinner to celebrate, and she told me that she was feeling that she'd "had enough" of China for a while and was planning a trip to Malaysia. After her return from her trip to Malaysia, Singapore and Borneo in 2010 she was stimulated by the extent to which she had used her Mandarin there (and also on a separate trip to Fiji for her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday), and she is now planning to visit China again in 2011 when she would like to go to the area inhabited by the Naxi people in Yunnan Province in south-west China, in whom she has developed an interest having written an essay about them in her unit of study on the history of Asia. Her study feeds into her travel plans, and she is once again excited at the thought of the variety of places to visit in China.

Her goals for using Chinese in the longer-term include possibly helping to teach in a school, and helping her friend Lily's daughter to learn English in Australia. Asked whether she has any plans for further study of Chinese in the future, the most likely scenarios are of study in China and also of online web-based learning; followed by some likelihood of study by distance education or classroom attendance. Although she has not follow a structured program of independent study since 2007, in the run-up to each trip she focusses on reviving and practising her language skills; and she consistently communicates with her Chinese-speaking friends, and maintains engagement in informal Chinese-related activities. The list of her activities recorded as increasing in frequency, and likely to continue, (shown as part of the analysis of dynamic activity patterns in section 6.3.2.1) reflects this characterisation of the current position of Chinese in her life. Her assessment of her own level of Chinese is "between elementary and intermediate". As to her reasons for continuing with Chinese, Brenda says:

I love Asian culture and intend to take trips to parts of Asia where Chinese is used. I have friendships with people in Mandarin- speaking countries that I intend to maintain. I feel that Mandarin is an

important language and it is so difficult to learn that I feel it would be a waste if I didn't continue with it. Also my family's life is now intertwined with Chinese culture.

Looking back over her Chinese learning journey she reflects how it has opened a new world for her and brought her new friendships and connections. She states simply "it has given me another life".

### 7.1.1 Commentary on Brenda's timeline

The representation of Brenda's timeline in visual format as a graphic (elaborated timeline, Appendix 9) reveals a clear patterning and shows developments and shifts in the types of activity she has engaged in at different times in her learning journey. The overall pattern of her timeline falls into three distinct phases. First, there is a phase of experimenting with independent study methods after the initial trigger of the first holiday in China (periods 1–3). Then there is a phase of steady continuous study and the establishment of regular patterns of informal activity and communication with penfriends (periods 4–6). Period 7 represents a complete break. It is followed by a third phase (periods 8–24) in which a new pattern emerges which bears a resemblance to tapestry – regular short visits to China like a fine running stitch are interspersed with longer 'stitches' of non-contiguous semesters of study. In this tapestry the threads of using Chinese to communicate, and of informal activities involving Chinese are constantly visible, and their varying degrees of 'thickness' represent greater or lesser frequency. The thickness of these threads increases to 'often' during the China visits and drops to 'sometimes' or occasionally 'low frequency' when not in China. It is interesting that the triggers for Phase 1 and 2, and for Phase 3 are of the same nature. They are Brenda's first and second trips to China respectively, separated by seven years.

In terms of the complexity concept of 'initial conditions' which have had an influence on the way her trajectory has developed, two incidents stand out: the first is the random serendipity of winning the trip to Hong Kong back in 1997, when she had never even considered travelling to Asia; the second is the university social gathering with students from Taiwan in 2002 when she met Jade and began the friendship which has lasted to now.

The transition between the end of period 6 and period 8, when the new pattern emerges, can be seen in complexity terms as evidence of a phase shift. Brenda herself emphasises repeatedly the setback of the health problems and consequent poor exam performance, and describes the impact of the study visit to Beijing in 2004 (period 8) which marked the beginning of the new pattern as: "A defining moment... I found it challenged my confidence and in doing so realised my own strength. It also gave me the confidence to travel by myself in China. This has also had a flow on effect for me on other things I do and other places I go to".

### **7.1.2 Themes in Brenda's story**

#### ***Consistent tone and flavour***

In a way the serendipitous 'trigger' of her first trip to China in 1997 sets the tone and the theme for all her subsequent continuing involvement with Chinese: it is about travel, exploring, and communicating with people.

#### ***Increasing confidence***

Brenda speaks about her first study trip to Beijing in 2004 as a "defining moment" in building her confidence; that increasing confidence is evident not only in the chronology of the years that followed, and Brenda's increasingly adventurous independent travels, but also in the way that Brenda positions herself as she talks about it.

#### ***Independence and openness***

Independence when travelling and openness to encountering new experiences and meeting people is something that comes across very clearly in the way Brenda talks about her experiences.

#### ***Friendship and personal connection***

Brenda's non-judgemental attitude about herself and her level of Chinese, and about the people and places she encounters, is striking. This and the openness referred to above have contributed to the ease with which she has made friends. The friendships mean that her engagement with China is based to a large extent on personal relationships, and takes her to stay with families in areas and circumstances that are not experienced by many western visitors to China.

## **7.2 "Hopefully in the future it does help my business but originally it was a personal choice" – Clive's story**

Clive is based in a major Australian city and port. He works with his parents and other long-term close colleagues in a small family company handling customs brokerage, international freight forwarding and trade consultancy, which has a significant amount of business in relation to China trade. He had completed a degree in Business in 2000, aged 21, before starting to work in the company as a shipping agent. He had been on a few business trips to China and Taiwan, and had learned a few words of Mandarin. He wanted to learn a language for his personal development: "I always wanted to be bilingual because everyone else in the world is"; and he knew that his work would offer opportunities to use Chinese, but that was "a bonus" rather than the main reason for choosing it. In August 2003 he enrolled in a Chinese evening class in his home city. Finding it frustratingly poorly organised, he also took a weekly private tutor. Still unhappy with the lack of structure, the following year he



decided to enrol in a university course in Chinese. He chose distance education over classroom attendance at a local university because he needed the flexibility to fit his study around his work.

Apart from following the formal study curriculum, Clive also continued to employ a succession of tutors to support him in his study: “If you don’t have someone to correct you you’re just going to learn bad technique”. He also engaged in informal activities relating to Chinese: he would scour the TV guide for Chinese movies and programs with Chinese-related content; and at some point he started to use Skype to connect to Chinese conversation partners and found it a fantastic resource. He wanted to be able to use the language appropriately in various situations on his business trips to Taiwan and China: “That’s a real buzz I guess. Being able to use it, otherwise there’s not much point”. He frequently mentioned spending time in bars and trying out his Chinese there: “Bars are the best places... because it’s the opportunity to sit down and talk about anything, that’s the situation where I’ve learnt the most. Not so serious, or anything like that”.

At the time of beginning participation in this study Clive had just completed 2 years of formal distance study, and was looking forward to a 3 week holiday travelling in China on his own. It was his first trip to northern China and first independent travel there outside the business environment: “Before when I’ve been to China I’ve always been babysat, but this time I was more on my own”. Many of his comments on the successes and limitations of his language use reflected the daily concerns of a tourist: understanding menus, making himself understood to taxi drivers, and avoiding situations in which he felt he might be vulnerable to being tricked or cheated of money.

After that holiday Clive continued with distance study at university. He supported his study with a tutor and focussed mainly on developing his writing and reading skills. He aimed to take every unit of study available in Chinese, and was prepared for it to take time to develop proficiency: “I want to have it so that I can go there and talk properly. It’s not a fleeting thing”. He continued to go on short business trips to south China, Hong Kong and Taiwan about twice a year.

After one of his two-week business trips to south China in mid-2006, Clive noticed how he was making progress: “When I came back I felt I was just starting to come along with my speaking and listening, which I felt I was severely lacking, I just had this craving”. Consequently, he negotiated with the company to get partial release from work to study in China, and spent the first semester of 2007 at a university in Guangzhou in south China. The timing was chosen to fit in with company requirements, the second half of the year always being too busy with imports for him to be out of the country; and the Guangzhou location was chosen for the connections there with business contacts (local agents) and proximity to the office. He continued to do some company work while studying, as well as taking a distance education Chinese unit for his Australian university course. It was his first experience of sustained classroom study of Chinese. He found it particularly challenging in terms of listening and speaking, but felt by the end that he had made progress in those areas. In the work and social context he looked for opportunities to use Mandarin, and practised it with “the girls in the office”, and in restaurants and bars; but he was often in environments where English was spoken, and commented that: “if the opportunity is there to speak English, you tend to do it”.

By this time he had completed his Diploma in Modern Languages and enrolled at the same university in an MA (Asian Studies), continuing Chinese language and other subjects by distance education. On his return from Guangzhou he took a unit in advanced Chinese, and in his free time began to use instant messaging to communicate in Chinese with people whom he had met in Guangzhou. He bought a cookbook in Chinese and used that to learn both language and cooking skills.

Then, unexpectedly, an opportunity arose through the university to apply for funded Mandarin study in Taiwan. Having visited Taiwan for business it did not feel an unfamiliar culture and he was comfortable with the idea of studying there and interested in the chance of learning to recognise full-form written characters. Thus, in 2008, Clive had another semester of study overseas, this time at a university in a regional city in the southern part of Taiwan, where he mostly had one-to-one tuition. His goal for that time was to improve his “thinking and speaking Chinese on the run” (rather like Marty’s aim (see 7.5) to speak Chinese “like a reflex”). He practised conversation as much as possible though it took some time to establish relationships within which he could practise, because of the prevalence of the local dialect, as well as people’s eagerness to practise English. He considers that trip to be a turning point: “it brought me up to a level where language acquisition is a lot easier... from that point, my focus/abilities changed from reading and writing to speaking and listening”.

From mid-2008, following his return to Australia, Clive continued his distance education study, but had to focus on the non-language subjects necessary to fulfil course requirements. He chose subjects related to China such as ‘Globalising Asia’, Chinese politics, and Asian religions. In mid 2009 he began an advanced unit in Chinese translation but withdrew, finding he had forgotten a lot of his Chinese after 18 months of no formal study, and the level was too demanding, which was “a little bit disheartening”.

In the absence of formal Chinese study, during this period he began to do some independent but more goal-oriented study, reviewing his previous texts and practising reading, characters, listening and conversation. He tried some free online classes but “wasn’t a fan”; however he continued informal Chinese language practice on his business trips to China and by using Skype and instant messaging when in Australia: “That’s the most practice I get is on MSN, writing sentences and having to read”. He was also by now beginning to access Chinese webpages to plan his travel to China: “this is good as sometimes the Chinese versions have bigger discounts than the English ones”.

In Sept-Oct 2009, Clive made a 2-week trip to Taipei, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Hong Kong which he felt was a significant one in terms of his learning. The main purpose was social - to be best man at a Chinese friend’s wedding. He used Chinese frequently in the associated social contexts where there were few English speakers; he also fitted in a few business meetings. He remarked that having got a new mobile phone he was now able to send and receive text messages in Chinese to friends and contacts, and did that a lot. He was using Chinese frequently in work and social contexts and “this time I got right into it”. That trip was clearly a significant one for him in terms of the extent and variety of his use of Chinese, and the confidence that gave him. He was able to show some friends around without the need for assistance from a native speaker, which represented reaching a long-

held aim for him and also acted as motivation to continue. In mid-2010 he made another trip during which he visited the Shanghai World Expo, and a further significant encouragement was when his Chinese business agent commented on the improvement in his Mandarin.

His regular Chinese-related activities when in Australia by now consisted of: reading MSN, emails, menus and recipes in Chinese; conversation with Chinese friends and work colleagues, some in Chinese and some in English; and informal activities such as listening to podcasts, translating recipes, talking to friends and asking them to explain words.

Looking back over the years between 2005 and 2010, during which he had completed 4 years of formal part-time distance study and two 5 month periods of in-country immersion study (and had 2 years of no formal courses), Clive's self-assessment was that he had improved somewhat in listening and speaking, and that in-country learning and access to native speakers such as agents and other business contacts were significant contributors to that. He felt that he had forgotten a lot of Chinese too, particularly in the areas of character recognition, grammar, and the vocabulary which doesn't occur in everyday, common conversations. He found it difficult to maintain his Chinese when far removed from situations where he could use it, although he was pleasantly surprised that it would come back to him on visits to China and Taiwan.

Clive plans to do further formal study of Chinese, finding that the discipline and structure of a curriculum and assessed work are helpful motivators. He completed his MA (Asian Studies) in 2011 and has now enrolled at a local university for on-campus study of Chinese and business subjects. Whereas in the past he could not take time off work to attend formal classes, he is now in a position in the company where "I can decide to give myself time". He has enrolled in subjects in Business Chinese translation (where "99% of the students are of Chinese-speaking background") for 2012, and in preparation for that linguistic challenge will join a 5 week immersion course in China (organised by his previous university) at the end of 2011.

Clive's longer-term language goals are entwined with his business goals: "I think being able to speak Chinese is going to help maybe speed up processes of improving *guanxi*<sup>3</sup>". He may end up spending more time in China, but that will depend upon the fortunes of the family company: "I'll end up taking over here... It's going to be worked in on a personal and work level what I do, but you just don't know where that's going at this stage". On a personal level, his goals remain the same as when he started: to speak it fluently and to function independently in a Chinese context.

### 7.2.1 Commentary on Clive's timeline

Overall Clive's engagement in formal study of Chinese language, and later of Chinese culture and society, has been more or less constant from mid 2003 to the end of 2010. He has had

---

<sup>3</sup> The Chinese system of social networks and influential relationships that facilitate business and other dealings.

two semester-long study trips and regular shorter business trips (mainly to south China). In the later years when he was not doing formal language study he felt that his proficiency level had dropped; however his levels of use of Chinese for communication, and of informal activities involving Chinese, increased during those years.

### 7.2.2 Themes in Clive's story

#### *Integration between work and personal aspects of life*

There is a high level of integration between work, Chinese learning, and family aspects of Clive's life; and his identity is clearly quite tied up with his work. He works with his parents and other long-term close colleagues in a small family firm of customs brokerage, international freight forwarding and trade consultancy, which has a significant amount of business in relation to China trade. The language he uses to express his opinions reveals a belief system based on business principles. His Chinese learning is his own idea but he receives support for it in terms of finances and time-release from the business. His parents, who are proud and supportive of his endeavours, are also his employers and his business colleagues. Work provides opportunities for travel to China and contact with Chinese speaking agents in various countries; his work thus feeds the development of his Chinese skills and the skills he acquires are directly useful in relation to work. In complexity theory terms this is an instance of co-adaptation between the two systems.

#### *Business relations as a context for learning*

Some of Clive's very functional aims in learning Chinese can be characterised as wishing to operate appropriately in the situations with which he's familiar as a young western businessman in Asia.<sup>4</sup> For example, he wants to learn Chinese so as to be more in control on business trips, not get served food he doesn't like, and not "get ripped off". He also uses those contexts and connections when possible as sites to practise and support his learning, sometimes in original ways such as asking the "bar girls" to be his conversation partners, or exchanging text messages in Chinese with his Chinese agents and random contacts. Despite the stereotyped views of the Chinese 'Other' reflected here, it is nonetheless clear that in this way Clive exercises *agency* in finding and adapting contexts to support his learning.

#### *Evaluative and adaptive approach to planning his study*

Clive operates an ongoing process of reflection and self-assessment to check which areas of his Chinese skills he feels are most in need of development at any one time. He tends to see reading and writing proficiency, and speaking and listening proficiency, as developing

---

<sup>4</sup> See section 8.8. I am very much aware that there is far more to be said from a gendered and critical perspective about this, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

separately and being separate foci of study. As one skill or group of skills falls behind he devotes more effort into developing it, and then as the other one falls behind he switches attention to that one. Talking about his goals he says: “Throughout the whole thing my goal is just to be fluent. I don’t have steps, I just look at the end”. This monitoring and adjustment contributes to the patterns in his timeline. From a complexity perspective this could be explored as an instance of a system self-organising.

### *Recurring theme: food*

A recurring theme through Clive’s words is food. His story has many anecdotes and references about ordering restaurant food and reading menus, functioning in restaurants, talking and drinking in bars, recipes for soups, recipe books and cooking. He described his desire to study in China in 2006 as a feeling of hunger and craving for more. In food, an important part of the context of doing business in China coincides with a personal interest of Clive’s, and the two reinforce each other to create a meaningful environment for learning.

## **7.3 “My momentum fluctuates. There is this underlying fascination with the language and culture that never goes away, then it’s sparked by an event or an opportunity”. – Michelle’s story**

Michelle’s story was positioned earlier in the thesis as an interlude between Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. The commentary follows here.

### **7.3.1 Commentary on Michelle’s timeline**

Michelle’s elaborated timeline shows that in earlier periods, when formal study was taking place there were only low levels of other activities. The years for 2005 to 2008 in Period 4 constitute a long period when there was only low level informal activity, but that was a time when she held the idea of Chinese learning in her mind and fostered it. As I pointed out in section 5.3, from a more static, external perspective that period of low levels of Chinese-related activity could have been taken as evidence of non-continuation with Chinese. However, the longitudinal view and the insights this research offers into the participant perspective, offer a different view of it as a fallow period within the context of ongoing engagement, and a potential precursor to further development. Period 5 shows a burst of activity in new areas, which I initially saw as evidence of a phase shift in complexity terms, and which peaked with her visit to China in Period 6. However when Period 7 revealed the same lower level engagement of Period 4 repeated, I revised my understanding and saw that the system appeared to have been drawn back to a situation of low-level engagement as an ‘attractor basin’ in the landscape of possible spaces it can occupy. From period 8 onwards the presence of a series of short periods with a high degree of variation of patterns, contrasts

significantly with the long periods of consistency in the first part of the timeline, and this contrast suggests an impetus towards another phase shift.

When this is set against the analysis of Michelle's dynamic activity patterns (the process described in Chapter 6), which relates to Period 5 onwards in her timeline, it is found that in terms of 'current frequency and intentional direction' her active patterns could be characterised as "Mid, with strong rising tendencies". These rising tendencies in intentional direction are a further indication of a gathering momentum for change.

Tracing Michelle's different statements of her goals for learning Chinese at different times in the research period reveals dynamics of progression and evolution. At the beginning her goals were general and there was an interest in "ancient China". In the middle, she was "open to all possibilities but yet to establish a direction". By the second survey she is following the teaching direction, and wishing in the longer term to redevelop her speaking, reading and writing skills, but uncertain how to do so. In our last exchange of emails she told me how the move to the city afforded her the opportunity to pursue structured, institutionally led study to refresh her language skills to the level she feels teaching requires.

### **7.3.2 Themes in Michelle's story**

#### *Periods of activity interspersed with rest and recuperation*

Michelle's attitude demonstrates recognition of the dynamic process and an acceptance of flux and of uneven pathways in her Chinese learning career. She values and is prepared to foster her underlying interest in Chinese language and culture, which she sees like a continuous tiny flame, a pilot light which ignites a bigger fire at various times when increased fuel is made available. Reflection is strong, and inner thoughts about Chinese and its place in her life are ongoing at times when there are few actual activities going on. She displays hope and trust in future involvement.

#### *Practical challenges of geography and employment*

Michelle's story conveys the practical challenges and struggles of maintaining proficiency in Chinese for someone living and working in more isolated areas of Australia. It also reflects the complex interactions between desires to learn, and personal, domestic, health, geographical and work-related circumstances.

#### *Imagined community*

Her 'ideal community' or 'imagined community' of 'traditional China' is different to what she perceives modern China to be, and she is aware of that. It is as if there is a gap or a discrepancy or a conflict between what she is drawn to and her mental picture of what is actually available to her. She worries about that gap. This concept is also discussed in regard to the effect of

American discourses of France on the student Alice's imagination of France before she went there to study (Kinging, 2004).

Partly because of this conflict, Michelle's first visit to China is very late in her trajectory. An interesting follow-up study would be to investigate changes in her imagined community following that visit. It appears that following the visit the theme of feeling less attracted to modern urban China than to 'traditional China' has not been expressed, whereas from time to time she does now mention possibilities of travelling or working in China.

### *Intense unexplained attraction*

A recurring theme in Michelle's narrative is her sense of an unexplained but sustaining attraction to Chinese, and her feeling that it is in some way connected to her life path and life direction. Adopting the metaphor of the challenging journey through difficult terrain (chosen in different forms by many of the participants, as reported in Chapter 5) Michelle likens learning Chinese to wilderness bushwalking, and emphasises an associated spiritual dimension "sometimes offering glimpses of a deeper connection to something innately familiar and yet greater than myself... . You realise it was a journey you needed to take and it is part of you".

The 'unexplained attraction' theme comes through from other participants as well: "I don't know why I love it but I just love it"; "I'm just following in the footsteps of the language" (Stephanie).

## **7.4 "It's like two forward, one back, two forward, one back. But that's okay as long as it's always still forward" – Rachel's story**

Rachel traces the time when she first became aware of China, and of Chinese, back to watching TV broadcasts of the Tian'anmen Square protests in 1989 at a time in her late 20s when she was feeling very fragile emotionally. She felt a connection with these unfamiliar people and culture, "that had an impact on me at that particular moment, seeing those people and what they were suffering, and thinking for some reason I feel really drawn to have an emotional attachment with this place as well, because when I was suffering, they were suffering at the same time".

When, a few years later, with young stepchildren and recovering from a breakdown, she decided she wished to study a language at university as part of a plan "to bring order and discipline into my life", she drew on that experience and chose Chinese rather than French.

She did not live close to university, so enrolled as a distance education student and took first-year Chinese in 1992, and found it stimulating and enjoyable: "incredibly interesting", "different to anything I'd done before" and "like brain food". By the beginning of the second year, though, a new baby had arrived and she did not have time to continue to study. In fact, it was to be ten years before she would continue formal study of Chinese. However, during that time Rachel maintained a strong emotional commitment (rather like Michelle) to the goal of learning Chinese and going to

China one day; she held on to these goals as a way of maintaining self-esteem and a positive attitude: “if I let go of that, I could fall down into that hole again, and maybe next time I can’t climb out”. She also incorporated simple Chinese into the homeschooling of her children, which made her feel that she was constantly revisiting in her mind what she had learned.

It was 2003 when Rachel resumed Chinese study at university. By that time she had moved to a small town not far from the university campus, but family responsibilities limited the number of on-campus classes she could attend, so she enrolled as a distance education student again, and attended classes when she was able. During that time, although she would occasionally meet Chinese people, she was too embarrassed to admit to them that she was learning Chinese or to try speaking Chinese. To her amazement she won a scholarship to study at a university in China for 6 months the following year, and went with her husband (who took 3 months leave from work) and her two daughters, who were then 11 and 12. She was placed in a class at a level which was very challenging and difficult for her, and although she persevered with it, at the time she felt that she learned more through her daily life experiences of renting a flat and living in a Chinese neighbourhood, eating in restaurants, organising for her daughters to attend a Chinese school several days a week, continuing to teach them some Chinese herself, and exploring with her family at weekends (similar to Brenda). Overall, the experience was so positive that when the 6 months of formal study was up, she and her daughters stayed on living in China for another 3 months; through a series of unlikely coincidences she was offered (and took up) work in a newly established English-medium preschool for a while.

After returning to her small country town in Australia, Rachel continued her course on a part-time basis, managing to fit, around her other family commitments and part-time work commitments, one semester-long Chinese language unit by distance education during 2005, and another in 2006. Rachel considered that engagement in the formal study of university Chinese units was a positive, structured experience and hoped to do it more continuously. However over the next few years it was not possible for her to find the time to do so. It seemed to her that “every time I try to resume my studies some drama happens in the family”, or there were other unexpected setbacks, such as a failure of a new computer system at the university leading to cancellation of her enrolment one year; and the financial necessity of taking on a succession of part-time jobs (in retail, catering and hospitality) each requiring her to develop a new skill and leaving her with less time than she felt was sufficient for focussing on formal, structured university study.

However, beginning after her return from studying in China, Rachel began to engage in new informal activities using Chinese. Through their religious activities as Jehovah’s Witnesses she and her husband would visit people and participate in Bible study groups, and she would meet some Chinese people in those contexts. Whereas before going to China she had not wished to disclose that she was learning Chinese because she was not confident to speak it, now she started to use it. At first this was in the context of informal socialising after a group meeting, sometimes over the shared preparation of Chinese food, and by 2006, at the request and urging of some Chinese friends, she began reading some of the Bible translations and religious pamphlets in Chinese out loud during



their small group Bible study sessions. Despite finding this “very very scary” she would study the texts to prepare carefully, and persevered with it because she found it a valuable exercise, and a way of incorporating a level of involvement with Chinese in one of the other continuing active channels of her life, even in the periods when she was unable to find time for continuing formal university study. After those particular friends moved to another part of the country, Rachel made efforts to continue studying the Bible in Chinese on her own, though it was not always possible to sustain it as regularly as she hoped. The continuous threads of informal and social practices related to Chinese, which are evident on her timeline from 2005 on, reflect these ongoing activities. The levels fluctuate according to whether the Chinese people she associated with most at any time were more keen to practise their English or to encourage her to practise her Chinese; and according to the other pressures in her daily life.

In early 2008, four years after her study period in China and at a time when she was seriously considering giving up Chinese due to lack of progress, a series of chance circumstances led to Rachel taking up an opportunity to go to China for four months to train and then work in TESOL in a school, together with her two daughters and another relative. Her daughters were by now 14 and 15 years old, and studying Chinese themselves in High School by distance education because there was no local teacher. (Rachel had made representations on their behalf to state and federal politicians for their right to have an opportunity to study Chinese.) While teaching in China Rachel had to use English at work but would use Chinese in her daily life and would help the other English speakers to learn to say a few things.

On her return to Australia she was approached to assist with classroom tutoring of beginners’ Chinese at the university for the second semester of 2008. This involved her in intensive independent study: “teaching someone else requires me to become a more focussed, active and progressive student”, she reported, “I was all eyes and ears in this period, and felt as though I was learning for the first time, things I already knew”. Her informal activities involving Chinese and her use of Chinese for communication were all at high levels during this period (see periods 10 and 11 on the timeline).

In the first semester of 2009, a full three years after her last previously completed unit of formal Chinese study, Rachel enrolled in a university unit in Chinese calligraphy, and began to practise calligraphy every day. During that semester and the rest of that year she also became involved in a recent scheme to introduce Chinese into a couple of local state primary schools (an instance of global changes in the discourse of Chinese learning extending their influence to country-town Australia), and she would fill in as a substitute teacher there when required. Once again she found that familiarisation with different texts and preparation for teaching required her to engage in independent structured study and review.

In her personal life, during this time Rachel was going through the upheaval of divorce. Apart from the occasional work in the primary schools, from mid-2009 through to mid-2010 her engagement in Chinese-related activities, either formal or informal, dropped significantly. She found this frustrating, but then “made a conscious decision not to frustrate myself any longer” and ‘deliberately pushed

[Chinese] away from me'. Instead she focussed on other units of study, in Linguistics and other subjects, which she needed to take in order to complete her degree. Her contact with native speakers of Mandarin at that time was just occasional, and decreasing. Nonetheless when she had any exposure to Chinese, after initial anxieties she found it “refreshing” and “fantastic”. The attraction was still there: “my brain is really hungry for learning Chinese... I really need to prioritise [other things] and Chinese keeps wanting to move to the top of the list”. Having not managed to complete one of her linguistics units because she didn't feel she could do it justice, she decided to resume a previous practice of reading one verse from the Bible each day in Chinese, and made plans to review her old Chinese textbooks.

Just at that time, Rachel was once again offered work tutoring first year Chinese classes at the university for the remainder of 2010. She postponed her goal of completing her degree, and threw herself into this work, making use of her recently acquired TESOL skills, and found it a positive and rewarding experience: “I really love teaching and it really is the best way to learn”.

In the future Rachel wishes to continue studying Chinese “because I want to be good at it. I don't want to be just okay at it”. (Stella phrases her goal in a similar way.) She thinks she is very likely to engage in independent study of Chinese, and other activities using Chinese, and just somewhat likely to do further formal study of Chinese with an institution. She is more likely to engage in distance education and study in China than in online learning or study with a private tutor. Her longer-term goal is to get employment in which she could use and learn more Chinese. She hopes that if she cannot get work in China she might move to the city where she could become part of a Jehovah's Witness Chinese congregation, and participate in the various language learning and training activities that it would offer.

Rachel is very aware of the length of her Chinese journey since it began shortly before the birth of one of her daughters (who at the time of writing is herself already a university student). Though sometimes she feels discouraged by perceived lack of progress, Rachel recognises that this is a familiar rhythm or pattern for her: “there's been a few different things I've done over years and then I don't do it for years and then I'll pick up again somewhere along the track. But eventually when you look back you still have made progress and [...] I try not to give up”. Looking back, Rachel likens learning Chinese to “knowing a friend for many years. At times you are close, at times distant, and at times you even forget they exist. But then when you pick up the ringing phone, you can't help but say ‘Hi’ with a smile and wait to see what happens next”. Sometimes, however, it feels like “a persistent nagging neighbour who you wish would just go away and give you some peace”. These comments reflect the embedded status of Chinese in her life, since both friends and neighbours who might be irritating are of course an integral part of life's rich tapestry!

#### 7.4.1 Commentary on Rachel's timeline

The representation of Rachel's timeline in visual format gives a graphic view of its 19-year length and of how half of it is taken up by the interval between her first and second periods of

formal study. It also shows how, during that interval, Rachel maintained Chinese-related activity and interest which sustained her emotional connection with her goal and with the identity she was striving to create outside the sphere of household management and motherhood.

The first visit to China (periods 4 and 5) marks the beginning of Rachel's use of Chinese as a communicative tool, and of high levels of involvement in informal activities relating to Chinese. The second trip to China also precedes high levels of independent study and use of Chinese for communication, and maintains a pre-existing high level of informal activities.

The timeline shows how the periods of formal study are discontinuous, and that Rachel was maintaining an ongoing engagement with Chinese by other means, including periods of structured independent study, which fill some of the gaps between occasional semesters of formal study. In this regard Period 9 (and to a lesser extent, 8) mark 12–18 months in which there is no formal study, and no residence in China, and yet significant levels of informal and independent activity.

The periods of teaching work (Periods 11, 12 and 14) are the ones in which Rachel's reported levels of structured independent study, and use of Chinese for communication, are the highest in recent years. In some sense, though, Rachel had been practising teaching Chinese to a certain degree over much of her earlier timeline, through incorporating it into homeschooling and then continuing to encourage and support her daughters in learning Chinese during on their trips to China together and during their high school years.

Period 13 marks a full year period when activity levels drop significantly. Taken out of context, this might be interpreted as evidence of dwindling interest or commitment. However, in the context of the rest of the timeline and particularly the lengthy early phase of 'low level maintenance' before formal study was resumed, such a conclusion is not necessarily justified. A longitudinal view of an individual's learning trajectory can provide a different perspective which allows for any 'present' to be seen in the context of previous patterns and histories.

#### 7.4.2 Themes in Rachel's story

##### *Self-development*

Rachel initially took on Chinese learning as a tool for changing or challenging her attitude to life; it was linked to recovery from illness, development of identity and self-esteem, an arena for self-development and a source of lessons in these same areas for her children. It has strong emotional links for her but she is also capable of being very analytical about the process.

Rachel set very high standards for herself; and there were periods of dissatisfaction when she felt that she was not doing enough and may as well give up. There is a pattern of determination,

fluctuating with feelings of discouragement that it was hopeless to try because she could not do herself justice. Parenting and wishing to be a positive role model for her children, in setting, pursuing and achieving goals, was one of the things that kept her going. She comments at times that she does now receive feedback and affirmation from her children that they recognise and value the example she sets in this regard through her persistence with Chinese.

### *Time pressures*

Rachel makes frequent reference to not being able to prioritise herself or her Chinese study due to family responsibilities and demands, for example: “I feel that I am being carved up between too many things, each of which needs my full attention, none of which are getting it”. (Stephanie and Stella report similar pressures.)

### *Intentional integration with other aspects of life*

Rachel finds ways to incorporate her interest in or personal need to continue with Chinese, with other important aspects of her life, in particular with her role as parent, and with her religious activities as a Jehovah’s Witness. The fact that she does this as a way to combat the pressured feeling she has of too many responsibilities and not enough time, demonstrates a creative use of agency in crafting her trajectory to suit her circumstances, her needs, and her limitations. She is identifying learning opportunities which are personally meaningful and motivating.

### *Open to the unexpected*

Coincidences and unexpected opportunities and events have played a large part in shaping Rachel’s trajectory, and she is referring to them when she says: “I pick up the ringing phone and wait to see what happens next”.

## **7.5 “I gave myself a decade. It would be a skill to add to my life in different capacities” – Marty’s story**

Marty was 25 when he began his Chinese study at university in 2003. After finishing school he had done other studies in art school, and then in theology, and then worked in Sweden for 18 months as a youth worker. Learning Swedish there, he felt, “helped me to start learning and thinking outside my English box”; later he would say retrospectively that it helped to train him into a pattern of learning language which then was helpful when he began Chinese.

His reasons for beginning Chinese were both personal and work-related, and also arose from challenge or curiosity. The following remarks show a strong sense of strategic planning and looking to the future:

I had travelled around the world and saw the importance and value of learning other languages and understanding other cultures. I chose Chinese because it was the most different, most challenging, most

interesting language and culture in our wide world. I also thought it would prepare me well for learning other languages (the logic being that if I could learn Chinese then I could learn anything). Chinese was spoken by the most people in the world and so I thought there was a good chance I would use it in the future even if I wasn't sure what my future looked like.

Marty's experience of Chinese culture at that time was limited to western reflections of it. He had seen the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and "people were just starting to get Chinese characters as tattoos, ... like Chinese was a cool thing to do and have". But his early interest was in learning the language, not in exploring the history and culture. There was also a playful sense of attraction to what he perceived as the rarity value of being a Chinese-speaking westerner, evident in his recounting of an incident in a fast-food restaurant when he met an Australian who had been working in China for ten years, and who started a conversation in Chinese with some Chinese people who were eating there. This "dumbfounded" the other people in the restaurant and intrigued Marty: "made me think it would be good to be a white Australian who looks nothing like, you know, the people who normally speak this language and then be able to come out and speak the language". (This theme was also evident amongst the early attractions to learning Chinese for other participants; it was less evident at later stages of their trajectories.)

To confirm his choice of Chinese as a study focus, he travelled independently in China for 6 weeks in late 2003, to make sure he liked the language and culture, and while away took a few lessons and learned some very basic Chinese.

In 2004 Marty began studying on campus at university in Australia for a degree in International Studies. Having already experienced immersion environments in Sweden and China, his expectations for university language study in Australia were that: "I'm probably not going to learn to speak Chinese very well"; but that he would get a good grounding in the grammar and how to read and write, and "it's what I wanted because I probably wasn't going to get it just by sitting in China on my own". He then planned to return to China after 2 or 3 years and "pick up my spoken Chinese at that point".

Marty did 3 semesters of classroom study of Chinese. He supplemented his formal study by sometimes reading the Chinese newspaper in the library, watching movies, and taking up occasional opportunities to chat to Chinese students. In the second half of 2005 he spent a semester as an exchange student in the USA, but continued with the Chinese course from his Australian university by distance learning (his first experience of study in this mode). He anticipated that learning in this way would be difficult and prepared for it by taking extensive study materials, installing programs for learning characters on his hand-held computer, planning how to allocate time to study, and (because it was important to him to get good grades in order to progress to the next stage the following year) identifying the assessment requirements and focussing on what needed to be done to get the marks. He employed a private tutor on a weekly basis as a way to force himself to study regularly and was very proactive in working to structure the tutorials so he could get as much out of them as possible. He showed a strategic awareness of the distinction between "doing the things that were going to help me learn Chinese the most" and "at university you've got to put the

emphasis on getting the mark” and with that awareness, chose the latter at that time, knowing that in the following period he would be able to focus more on the former.

Marty spent the whole of 2006 studying at a university in China (as part of his Australian degree course). One of his goals for the year was to reach a level where he could use Chinese in a work context. This was a year of intense Chinese language focussed life. He attended classes daily, choosing classes in which the majority of students were from Asian backgrounds, at a level that stretched and challenged him; he also had some African classmates from Ghana (his conversations with them about Chinese aid and investment in Africa were to be significant for later choices Marty would make). He followed his own rigorous Chinese study schedule as well. However, he found it unexpectedly difficult to socialise in Chinese with Chinese people, partly because he was ten years older than the Chinese undergraduates and their concerns were very different, and partly because other people who wished to speak with him wanted to practise their English (Clive had had a similar issue in Taiwan); one of the ways he got around that was to chat online in Chinese on QQ (a popular instant messaging service in China); another was to participate in sporting and musical activities.

Marty also engaged in informal activities to further his use of Chinese at every opportunity, and commented that: “a really key thing in studying while I was there was trying to pick as many avenues as I could to study my Chinese in... If you can try to transform your downtime into Chinese time as well, then you’re doing Chinese all the time. You’re going to learn a lot faster”. So for example, when tired from studying he would “just be zonked out but have the TV on... As a new word popped up I’d write it down. I’d try to use it in the rest of the day”; or else he would choose to play basketball with Chinese students instead of going for a run alone.

By the end of the year he realised that he was not going to reach his goal of a level of proficiency suitable for employment in a business or trade context; on the other hand he was able to sustain lengthy conversations in Chinese with native speakers “about general things”. Assessing his conversational ability after his return, he said: “I think there’s a couple of hills that when you get over them you can hold that level. I felt like I did that to a level where I could hold it together. It’s my belief I’ll hold my conversational Chinese, if I keep using it every so often, for the rest of my life”.

For the first 6 months after his return to Australia, Marty continued with a limited amount of independent reading, listening, conversation and email correspondence in Chinese. He was enrolled in a Masters degree in Social Development at a university in Sydney, with an initial focus on refugee issues which led him to involvement through his church group with the Chinese-speaking refugees who were living in the Villawood Detention Centre<sup>5</sup>: “We ran a regular Sunday service in the centre and I would just chat to the people who didn’t speak any English. I helped some of them work on their asylum cases”. That was good for his Chinese but he nonetheless felt that he lost fluency

---

<sup>5</sup> The enforced mandatory detention of unauthorised overseas migrants has been an Australian government policy which is the source of much controversy. Another research participant, Stella, has also been involved in advocacy campaigns for the rights of refugees in such centres.

during those six months. Whereas before leaving China he felt: “you don’t even know if you’re going to be saying the right thing but it comes out anyway”, now he noticed that: “I’ve got to think about it. ... And my pronunciation is worse. I’m still okay, but I probably sound more like an Australian speaking Chinese”.

In talking about future plans, by this time Marty spoke less in terms of using Chinese in a business or trade context; but rather about being interested in working on some kind of aid and development program. He viewed Chinese as one amongst several career-related skills, explaining:

I’ve tried to grab a lot of skills so I can use them when I need them rather than just picking one and using that only. I’m trying to be flexible. Instead of locking myself into a job in China I’m looking at development, but maybe part of it has a focus on China. I can also use other things I’ve learnt, such as working with youth.

He also felt that the time was approaching to make the transition from full-time study to work:

“I think I’m getting to the end of study. I feel like I need to get out and make some money. I’ll turn 30 next year when I finish my Masters. I’ll be in a lot of debt, and that’ll be it. So I’ve set myself to get some kind of paid work that’s going to start paying off debts.”<sup>6</sup>

In this respect Marty’s experience is different from that of some of the other participants: his study as a full-time student was more concentrated but shorter-lived than people like Stephanie and Rachel, for example; and therefore was linked to more significant financial pressures. He likened maintaining his Chinese after completing his formal study of it to “going from being a professional athlete to one that has a full time job and has to fit their training around it”.

On receiving a scholarship to study at Oxford University, Marty switched courses and moved to England in 2007. There he took a Masters degree in Forced Migration focussing on Chinese development in Africa, and wrote a dissertation on the topic of Chinese development-induced displacement. It was a significant time of integration for him: “I really felt I had found somewhere I could use my Chinese in relation to my social welfare/community development background... I also joined a Chinese/Africa club and swapped ideas and information”. He took occasional Chinese language classes to complement his Masters study, some with a tutor and some in a group, and he used his Chinese sometimes at school and in his social life, and continued with some informal Chinese-related activities. He would sometimes connect with people over the internet to practise Chinese, although he felt a little uncomfortable about it: “I feel that I’m using them, and I don’t like it because that’s how I felt when I was there [in China]”.

For the year after his Masters’ he worked with the Refugee Legal Centre in London where he represented asylum seekers at tribunals and sometimes took on Chinese clients with whom he would converse in Chinese. He did some independent study and informal activities with Chinese. He then

---

<sup>6</sup> Australian students can receive government loans to support their university study, which have to be paid back after graduation when their income reaches a certain threshold.

returned to Australia mid-2009, to take up a job with an aid and development agency dealing particularly with projects in African countries. By 2010, about 7 years since he began his involvement with Chinese, Marty felt that he had improved a lot (especially during the in-country year) but also had forgotten a lot:

By far the most prominent losses are my ability to write, followed by my ability to read. My speaking and listening are also failing me but I can still engage in them. I do feel that if I were to submerge myself in China again that these would all return fairly quickly though.

He said he had temporarily dropped any level of study of Chinese, because work-related goals took priority and he didn't have enough time. However when in Sydney, chance meetings with Chinese people in everyday life (he cites contexts such as restaurants, national parks, trains and art galleries etc.), kept him in contact with the language. Also, he does sometimes bring his Chinese into play in the context of his work: he travels frequently to Africa (where, as China's economy develops, China sends increasing amounts of aid) and on his African trips he regularly finds Chinese in his linguistic landscape, for example:

there are quite a few shops and items that come from China and many of them have characters over them. I sometimes try and read them when I see them around. They can readily be seen on the backs of trucks, buses, boxes carrying goods, and supermarkets.

Marty believes that his engagement with Chinese will increase at some point in the future: "at some stage the Chinese season will come around again". He estimates it is somewhat likely that he will be involved in formal study and in independent study of Chinese in the future: classroom attendance, web-based learning and study with a private tutor are more likely scenarios for him than distance education or formal in-country study. He would definitely like to spend time in China again and revive his language skills. One possibility is to do some kind of Christian ministry work there. Also, his interest in the Africa-China connection continues to be very strong: "I think China can play a really positive role in Africa and hope that one day I might be able to use my Chinese in this manner a little".

### 7.5.1 Commentary on Marty's timeline

Marty's timeline (see Appendix 9) clearly shows the higher levels of activity at the time of both his initial 6-week China trip and then the full year of immersion in 2006. The latter stands out in the timeline as an intense thickening of all aspects during the year in China. Although there is no formal study in the years following, the level of informal and communicative activities continues at a higher level than before the trip to China for the next 2½ year period, and an independent study habit which was little evident prior to the trip to China is now sustained. The drop in levels of Marty's communicative activities and the ceasing of independent study then coincide with the commencement of his new job mid-2009; but his narrative shows that in Marty's perception this is not the beginning of a tapering out of engagement with Chinese, but a "low season" which will pass.



When I showed him the drafts of his timeline and story, Marty commented how the idea of different periods resonated with him and gave him insights into his Chinese learning career:

Now I can see that I worked hard but kind of broke it into chunks. I think that really helped [...] If I had tried to work that hard on Chinese in one place and one classroom with one teacher I would have died. I think I was able to work at it for such a long time because I thought of it a bit like running a marathon, where you focus on getting to the next drink station, rather than thinking of how far away the finish line is the whole time.

### 7.5.2 Themes in Marty's story

#### *Strategic approach*

Marty demonstrates a high level of strategic planning and organisation; he sets goals, plans ahead, and more or less follows those plans. This can be evidenced by his travel in China before commencing formal study, to check that he was making the right choice of language; by his plan to allocate 10 years of his life to learning Chinese; and by his plan to collect a grab-bag of skills to use in future employment. This organisational theme carries through to his disciplined approach to his study, evident in his description of strategies he used to create an immersion environment to optimise his learning in China. Reflecting on his timeline, he said: “I find it intriguing how strategic I was in everything I did. ... I really like setting goals and coming up with a combination of strategies in order to accomplish a challenge”.

Although open to what might come up, his trajectory has a significantly more planned feel than, say, that of Brenda or Stephanie or Rachel.

#### *Collecting experiences as tools for life*

Marty approaches his Chinese learning as a kind of investment of time and effort in the sense that it is a training in a life-skill, which will become useful at some time in the future. Chinese is just one of a collection of skills and experiences which will stay with him and he will draw upon throughout life. His harmonica metaphor (see section 5.5.4.4) demonstrates that he sees it as a source of pleasure as well: “learning Chinese is like a pocket harmonica you can pull out at anytime anywhere and it gives you great joy”; he clearly sees it as a portable skill, for relaxation, entertainment and communication. It is also clear that Marty seeks to integrate his Chinese with other aspects of his life.

#### *Principles and beliefs*

Marty's principles and beliefs influence his choices around Chinese as they clearly do in other aspects of his life. Asked about their impact upon his timeline he suggested three ways:

My Christian faith perhaps also influenced my involvement in Chinese, in a state where practicing faith is contentious and to some extent illegal; my beliefs in justice and equality also probably influenced my involvement with Chinese in seeing China as a burgeoning economy with a growing impact on Africa and

an opportunity to assist the impoverished; and my beliefs in human rights also would have impacted my interaction with Chinese and my work with Chinese people in Villawood Detention Centre and the Refugee Legal Centre.

## 7.6 “I would classify it as a lifetime’s ambition: I would like to be able to speak it really, really fluently and really well. I sort of feel I might be half way there”. – Stella’s story

Stella’s story was positioned earlier in the thesis as an opening interlude between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. The commentary follows here. (The elaborated timeline is in Appendix 9.)

### 7.6.1 Commentary on Stella’s timeline

Four very distinct phases are evident in the elaborated graphic timeline for Stella:

1. The first ten years: early experiences of learning Chinese, and first visits to China – periods 1–3;
2. 2002–2006: from self-guided study to university-based distance learning – periods 4–5;
3. 2007–2009: individualised learning with a distant tutor in China – period 6; and
4. 2009–10, independent study visits to China – periods 7 and 8.

Looking along the length of the timeline it can be seen clearly how her independent formal study of Chinese has gradually increased and has been steady at a high level for the last four of the recorded years. It is also striking that her use of Chinese for communication has been a constant from the time she began formal distance learning; this strand on the timeline record illustrates Stella’s conviction that “conversation with Chinese people themselves is one of the best ways of learning” and the strong theme of connection and friendship which runs through her story.

Although 2008 was a year of major life events which changed the shape of Stella’s life, it does not show up as different from the surrounding years on her timeline. This suggests that through that time of upheaval, Stella chose, either consciously or unconsciously, to keep her Chinese learning practice constant.

The timeline also shows the spacing of Stella’s several short-term visits to China, which is like an interrupted version of the ‘running stitch’ pattern noted in the timelines of Clive, Brenda and Stephanie in section 5.3.2.1.

### 7.6.2 Themes in Stella’s story

#### *Connections and friendships*

Stella’s warmth and her genuine enjoyment and appreciation of making connection with Chinese people come through clearly. Connections and friendships are lasting, and continuity

is evident as they are woven through her timeline and strengthen its fabric. (In these respects there is some similarity between Stella and Brenda, though a distinctive flavour to each.) Stella speaks frequently and warmly of her Chinese friends and their place in her life, including, for example, Chinese speakers who were her early conversation partners and have become family friends; her long and developing relationship with the tutor Lina; and the graduate student whom she had been introduced to in Australia who took her out every weekend of her study trip in Beijing, including visits to his parents in his home city. Her wish to make connections is also evident in her hopes to use her Chinese to help Chinese visitors to her hometown.

### *Evolution towards an identity of advanced learner*

Stella consistently classifies learning Chinese as her major interest, and her story demonstrates that it has become an integral part of her life and her identity. She studies for the love of it; her motivation feeds itself, in that the more she studies the more motivated she becomes. She aims high and has a steady and solid pattern of study: her learning goals are serious ones of advanced proficiency and fluency; and over the course of her learning trajectory she has evolved towards an identity of an advanced learner. In most of Stella's speech this can be somewhat obscured by her humility and modesty in describing her achievements, but it is revealed in her choice of metaphor: when towards the end of the study she compares herself to an athlete wanting to train to be the best, and to a writer who has a need or compulsion to write, it is notable that these are professional roles, rather than apprenticeship ones.

### *Strengthening agency: distance learning leads to self-tailoring further learning experiences*

The advanced learner identity is connected with agency and self-direction. Stella was already a self-aware, independent learner when she began Chinese; she has continued to strengthen her identity of independent learner and 'responsible agent', designing her own learning trajectory and making choices to meet her recognised needs. Stella's 'pre-Chinese' language-learning career shapes her self-awareness and her preferences in choosing and responding to her Chinese-learning experiences.

She says that her university distance language learning "taught me to, or enhanced my ability to, study as an independent student after the university course". Her four years of independently organised individual Skype tuition and study visits to China demonstrate a high level of agency and responsibility in shaping her continuing learning trajectory. Her advice for other students finishing their university course in Chinese reflects this: "Continue, don't give up. There are many ways of continuing to learn more Chinese. Everywhere you go, you can meet Chinese people. They're always pleased that you are studying their language, and willing to help you".

It would be possible to view the Skype tutoring arrangement as ‘distance learning’ of a different kind: Stella’s own location remained the same, and the geographical separation from her teacher remained. The teacher’s location was China rather than Australia, and the interaction changed from being largely asynchronous and written to being synchronous and spoken. The interactional context changed from being group-based to being individual-based. The internet was used as a channel for real-time communication rather than a platform

for accessing interactive study materials. The following table compares some primary distinguishing features of these two modes of learning:

Table 7.1: Comparison of individual Skype tutoring with university DLL

	University DLL	Skype tutoring (individual)
<b>Learner location:</b>	Home	Home
<b>Teacher location:</b>	Australia	China
<b>Real-time:</b>	No, not in this case	Yes
<b>Asynchronous:</b>	Yes, mostly	No
<b>Content:</b>	Prescribed, fixed	Individualised, potentially adaptable
<b>S-T interaction:</b>	One to one	One to one
<b>T-S interaction:</b>	One to many; some one to one	One to one
<b>Student peer group:</b>	Yes, possibilities for peer support	No

Table 7.1 allows a view of the contrasts and similarities between these two ‘modes’ of learning along various parameters. Taking the perspective of the learner’s long-term experience has allowed for the finer differences to be identified in a situated context. In sections 2.3.4, 2.4 and 3.3.5, I described the relation between some of the different modes of language learning; this is just one example, but it is indicative of the growing diversity and hybridity between established learning modes. Other hybrid modes could be added to this matrix, and might result in refining it, to gain a more nuanced picture of the choices available to learners (which could subsequently help to assist learners to exercise their own agency in choosing a mode of learning that suits their circumstances at the time).

### *Learning across the life course: ‘approaching elderliness’*

Older learners of Chinese have been little studied;<sup>7</sup> and little is known of how learning Chinese may be incorporated in the life plans of someone in the later stages of life. In Chapter 2 I pointed out how life stage is one of the temporal dimensions affecting the landscape of

<sup>7</sup> From a classic SLA perspective, age is treated as a ‘variable’ which can affect language acquisition; and from a lifelong learning perspective, the way that learning contributes to life and health in old age is a focus. The perspective I explore in this section is different to both of those.

learning. As a learner's circumstances change, their learning of Chinese is likely to change as well, in a process of dynamic co-adaptation. Stella's story is the unique story of one individual, but it shows such an adaptation taking place. Early in this study Stella said: "I have two major interests. One is skiing and one is learning Chinese, and both don't really give themselves to approaching elderliness". She may be right about skiing, but her subsequent activities suggest that in her case Chinese "gives itself to approaching elderliness" rather well. It seems to play an important part in the new stage of her life as she adapts to living alone, after the death of her husband. Later in the study, Stella feels she is moving beyond the stage of visiting China again (due to the high cost of insurance for those aged over 75) but her drive to continue learning is just as strong, and she has continuing goals, and Chinese speakers around her. The postscript to her story shows how, as health issues limit her capacity for some other activities, her interest in Chinese is something that she calls upon, which she fully intends to sustain, and which sustains her too.

## 7.7 "I am just following in the footsteps of the language" – Stephanie's story

Stephanie lives in a small university city in regional NSW. She remembers, in her childhood, wishing she could get to know people of Asian background and "find out about where they came from and how it was different to how I've grown up". In adulthood this became a fascination with how much alike people are no matter what culture they are from, and an attraction to Chinese language and culture because of its long history. Her first encounter with learning Chinese language came 17 years before our first interview for this research project, in August 1989, when an adult education class in Chinese started up locally. Wanting to pursue an interest "that took my thoughts outside the home and gave me an opportunity to extend my mind", and encouraged by her husband, Stephanie went along. Although that class was short-lived because after 6 weeks the teacher returned to China, it did however "spark more interest in the language and its relationship with the culture". Two years later something similar happened when another Chinese lady started informal weekly lessons, initially intended for children, but then also attended by a small group of adults; once again, though, after two months the teacher returned to China. The 'early taste' pattern identified in section 5.2.2.1 is evident here.

It would be ten years before Stephanie made another attempt to begin formal study of Chinese. She was busy at the time with family duties, raising and home-schooling her seven children, but in retrospect commented that she had "a subconscious desire to keep it [her interest in learning Chinese] there until the time came I could just have a bit more time to do it". (Michelle and Rachel were similar). She fostered her interest in Chinese, "although it wasn't a continuous thing that I did, I just didn't leave it alone... just wanted to keep in touch a little". To this end she would sometimes revisit the books and worksheets from her earlier classes and practise writing simple phrases. She also found out words in Chinese that suited the domestic context "like table and cooking and that

sort of thing, so I could say to the children ‘have you cleaned your teeth yet?’ or just little things like that”. She did this not with a view to teaching her children Chinese, but “so that it just wouldn’t leave me”.

In 2001 at the age of 44, deciding that she needed a formal study situation, with goals to reach and something to aim for, Stephanie enrolled in the first year undergraduate Chinese course at her local university. She chose to study in distance education mode for several reasons. First, it allowed her to study from home and to fit her study time around the ongoing needs of family and home-schooling the five younger children, which for Stephanie always took first priority:

I found that if I tried to study at any time when the children were around I would end up frustrated and quite crabby because of the interruptions and that sort of thing and I thought ‘no, that’s not fair both ways’. Not fair for my study but it’s not fair for the kids either.

Stephanie dealt with this issue by developing a routine of studying between 11.30pm and 3am at night, when there were no other demands on her time, “and I’ve always been a night person anyway”. This was a positive choice, made to give herself the best chances of carrying on with her Chinese learning; she knew that if she began to feel guilty or “self-indulgent” in studying Chinese, in the sense that it was taking her away from being available to attend to the needs of her family, she would be likely to give up, “so I haven’t allowed that to happen”. Stephanie adapted her behaviour (at some cost) to give herself the best chance of attaining her personal goals in the context of her family responsibilities (an instance of adaptation in complexity terms).

The other main reason for Stephanie’s choice of distance learning as a mode of study arose from her awareness of her own personality and learning style: she acknowledges that she has always been extremely shy and painfully self-conscious in classroom situations, and therefore studying externally removed that pressure and fear (except at the occasional residential schools, which she found “traumatic: I was petrified of not knowing what I should know and of making mistakes”). She realised the limitations of that shyness and fear, and described it as nuisance value and a challenge to overcome: “I knew that if I’m going to achieve anything, I’m going to have to overcome it like I have done previously”. In complexity terms the shy behaviour operates as an attractor basin, which requires a push or perturbation for the system to climb out of and move on across the landscape of possibilities.

After about two years of study Stephanie met a Chinese lady, T, locally who she began to see on a regular basis for help with her Chinese. (At that time she was feeling frustrated with what she perceived as the slow progress she was making in her study, despite getting good marks for her units each semester.) However, although she took on the tutorial arrangements with the express purpose of “trying to overcome my inhibitions because I knew that was holding me back”, she nonetheless acknowledged that in those early years of meeting her tutor she “would try and avoid it [speaking Chinese] at all costs”.

Stephanie worked her way through a sequence of university units in Chinese over 4 years. She would take her study books with her when accompanying her children to extra-curricular activities such as music and sport, and made sure she did some Chinese every day. She particularly enjoyed working

at home on learning characters and writing, and the sense of making gradual progress in expressing her ideas in written Chinese helped her to keep going. During this time her informal Chinese-related activities included watching Chinese films when shown on television as well as other educational programs on TV or video.

After four years of study, Stephanie began to make plans to go and study for a semester in China. In preparation, she went with her husband and four of their children on a 3 week tour to China in September 2004, during which they visited the university where she planned to study, to make preliminary enquiries about accommodation arrangements and accompanying family members.

Her first study trip to China, in first semester 2005, challenged her shyness and helped her to gain confidence: “now I’m quite happy to make more mistakes and learn by it, rather than not try. I’d prefer to try and just have a go. Yeah, but it has taken quite a while to get to that stage”. Stephanie’s previous distance education mode focus on reading and writing had offered her the possibility, by careful time management, of slow careful study in which she could aim to reach an understanding of every word; in contrast the immersion experience in the Chinese classroom caused her great anxiety at the beginning (as she had anticipated) because it directly challenged those personal study preferences and habits. The pace was beyond her control and there was “maybe 90% to start with that I didn’t understand”. Gradually she let go of the need to understand every word and she recalled it as a significant realisation to “actually understand that you can do that”. On that first study trip Stephanie was accompanied by her husband (“it was a huge thing for him because he didn’t really want to go at all”) and their three youngest children, aged 13, 11 and 8, and they lived in a flat on campus because they wanted to mix with Chinese families living there. The children made friends through soccer; they had a Chinese tutor and also continued their Australian school curriculum work through homeschooling. For Stephanie, full-time classroom study allowed her to allocate daytime hours to her Chinese study for the first time since she had begun learning it; it also afforded her time to herself: “I had a 15 minute walk to school and it was my time and it was just great. I loved it”.

These time arrangements inspired her to try to reorganise her time for her continuing distance education study of Chinese on her return to Australia: “I just want to send everyone to school and see how I can go getting myself into a routine that is not in the dead hours of the morning”. So drawing on the way she used to organise her time when she had 5 or 6 children at home homeschooling, she would do the household chores in the evenings “so that I wouldn’t be sitting studying, worrying that I hadn’t got the washing out, or whatever... and then everything is done and it’s lovely, the house is quiet”. She studied for an hour in the morning and an hour and a half in the afternoon. The change in her study habits and the prioritising of her need for daytime study represented a new practice that could emerge after the ‘shake-up’ or perturbation of the semester in China had acted to tip the system out of old patterns. It also represented a strengthening of her identity as a student of Chinese. She characterised that year following the sojourn in China as a good one, study-wise. It included a return visit to the university in China for a month’s holiday in early 2006, when she enjoyed the feeling of cementing relationships: “it was like going home in a way”.

A further effect of that first semester in China was that it had “brought the language into reality”; it brought home to her that “these things that I’ve only just learned in a book actually are real... you can use them and people understand what you mean”. Stephanie saw that as “a huge boost for learning” that would carry forward into her study after her return from China, because “then whatever else you read, you can make real also”.

Another result of Stephanie’s first sojourn in China was that she noticed she was less inhibited in trying to speak Chinese when she resumed her informal weekly study sessions with T. In addition to the university curriculum, she also continued to work on her writing skills. T suggested she write in Chinese about her experiences and she found this exercise “brilliant” and encouraging: “It’s just so good to be able to sit down and think more in Chinese rather than translating in my head which was another step I guess in overcoming”. In the course of doing this she became aware of her progress and encouraged by it: “I know I’ve got a long way to go but that’s fine, it doesn’t matter. It’s just really exciting to be able to progress bit by bit and see it happening”. (Stephanie normally speaks in calm, measured tones, but the excitement in her voice was striking when she spoke of this.) This is a nice example of dynamic motivation (Dörnyei, 2009; Ushioda, 2009) occurring as a feedback loop; Stephanie’s observation of the dynamics of her learning feeds her motivation and encourages her to make further progress.

The following year was very different. Her husband was made redundant from his job and her mother required her care. The interruptions and extra demands on her time meant that she was unable to establish a study routine, and then was disappointed in her examination results. Her tutor T was largely away in China caring for her own father, and on her return had a heavy workload which made her less available. Despite these setbacks Stephanie did pass her study unit and she did continue to engage in informal Chinese-related activities. For a few months she was involved in a language exchange with a Chinese speaker; also, she began accessing spoken and written Chinese on the internet, she watched some Chinese DVDs, and she corresponded in Chinese by email with a Korean boy who had been in her class in China. She continued to use simple Chinese about domestic matters with her children, who understood but continued to respond only in English. Similarly, as she went about her life she would rehearse Chinese: “I wonder how I could have said that in Chinese?”; and check her ideas in the dictionary if she could get to it. She used these strategies to incorporate Chinese into the sphere of her daily life: “always I try to have it in the forefront of my mind”. Her perception of her own proficiency at the end of that year was that “I have had some language loss since returning from China”, but she could also perceive that bit by bit she was making progress, and that she could now, for the first time, claim to have “a very basic level of fluency”, and could understand when T spoke Chinese quite quickly. She also noticed that increasingly, when thinking of how to say something in Chinese, she was becoming able to correct herself mentally. In terms of writing, an achievement that Stephanie was proud of was deciding to write the invitations to a social gathering in Chinese, which she sent to some Chinese friends. By this time she was now prepared to articulate her goal of going on to do an Honours degree in Chinese, and to write her thesis in Chinese as well as English.



In the second half of 2007 Stephanie returned to China for another scholarship-funded semester of study at the same university (this time accompanied by her school-age children but not her husband). She phrased her goals for the semester in terms of construction and consolidation. She wanted to “soak up”, to “reinforce” and to “cement”; and to develop a greater facility with formal and informal styles of Chinese. Once again, she found it a very positive experience. Although in Australia Stephanie avoided classroom learning situations because she still suffered from paralysing shyness and fear of being called on to speak and making mistakes, she had previous experience of the classroom in China and she did not feel like that there. This time they rented a flat some way from the campus. One of the activities she would do with her children on weekends was to pick a bus route number at random, and then ride the bus to the end of the line to see where it took them, and go exploring. When she told me this it reminded me of her metaphor “I am being led by the language”.

On her return, in order to complete her Bachelor of Asian Studies degree, Stephanie had to spend a year studying subjects other than Chinese. This was a frustrating experience for two reasons: first, because she would rather have been studying Chinese, and secondly, because she felt it involved a continual rehashing of other people’s ideas with no opportunity offered to express her own. Interestingly, this judgement implies by contrast that Stephanie sees Chinese language study not as ‘rehashing’ but as allowing her to express her own ideas, which indeed emerges from the data as an increasingly strong theme and aim for her over the years; in this way her Chinese learning is strongly connected to an expression of self and to her existing and evolving identities.

Not having the opportunity to engage in formal institutional study of Chinese in 2008, Stephanie began, at this stage, to engage in systematic independent goal-oriented study, based around reviewing her previously used Chinese texts and audio, and continuing sessions with her tutor. She also continued with informal activities using Chinese, such as recreational reading and listening, a little private tutoring for a high school student preparing for a Chinese exam, and social activities.

Stephanie completed her Bachelor of Asian Studies degree after 8 years of distance mode study. She chose not to attend the degree ceremony on the university lawns (only a few kilometres from her home). Instead, some months later, she organised a private graduation ceremony with friends, family and teachers, which she felt was more appropriate to her circumstances. Dressed in academic cap and gown she waited at her mailbox, in front of which a friend had unrolled a small strip of red carpet, for the guest of honour to arrive. This was the postman, who came in his uniform, presented to her the certified mail envelope containing her degree certificate, and shook her hand to general applause and merriment. In this way Stephanie celebrated that, as a distance education student, her home was the context for learning, and over the years the mailbox had been the site, and the postman (who was now a friend) the messenger, for all her assessed work and important communications from the university. Her graduation party acknowledged and celebrated the true context and support for her learning. It did not in any way signify an end to that learning journey, however.

Stephanie began studying for an Honours<sup>8</sup> degree in Chinese in 2009. She chose to do this for a number of reasons: because she wanted to continue with formal study (and she had quiet hopes of continuing later to do a PhD); because she wanted to read primary sources and learn to express her own opinions in Chinese; for her love of writing in Chinese; and because of an interest which had arisen during her sojourns in China in what she felt was the misrepresentation in the western media of the Catholic religion in China. Her Honours study initially consisted of wide background reading on the topic area in English, and she missed the structure of a formal language study curriculum and felt that she was using Chinese less than she would have liked. She did, however, continue to meet her tutor T for weekly conversation practice, which gave her confidence, until T moved to a different city leaving Stephanie feeling more isolated in terms of trying to learn Chinese. Later, she moved on to reading Chinese commentary and source material (during this period she began for the first time to read Chinese on the internet) and had to produce a 6000 word literature review in Chinese, which was an immense challenge and then a significant achievement, since it involved doing what she had been aiming at for years in terms of expressing her own opinions in written Chinese: “I feel like I’m getting my teeth into it”.

Reflecting on the transition between studying in curriculum-based units in Chinese, and studying for Honours based around a personal research project, Stephanie was aware of a sense of loss of opportunities for positive feedback, and her comments show how involvement in formal study had served the purpose of building self-esteem for this intelligent and articulate woman whose principal context was that of home and parenthood:

I think one of the motivations for me with doing classroom type activity, assignments and things like that, and this is really sad, Isabel [spoken with a wry self-deprecating twinkle], if you work really hard you get a good result and somebody says, good on you. I’ve just found over the years, when you stay at home with the kids you’re not in a position where anybody says that and so that was a real positive of being at university, suddenly you feel, oh wow somebody said well done.

Having moved on to Honours, she now felt “outside the comfort zone of the classroom, where people are saying ‘Yes this is right’ and ‘Good on you for learning that’... that’s finished now and in a way I find it a bit sad”. However she was also prepared to move on: “I’m keen to look at things and challenge myself” and to set and reach her own goals “which is a lot harsher I think, but in a way more rewarding because I have to work harder for me to be happy”. These significant statements demonstrate how in Stephanie’s case there is a clear progression from ‘dependent’ to independent learning. In psychological terms this could be examined in terms of other-regulation and self-regulation; and in the distance-learning literature it ties in with the concept of locus of control as used by White (1999, 2003).

---

<sup>8</sup> In the Australian university system, Honours is a separate program requiring one year of full-time study (or the equivalent part-time) after completion of a Bachelor’s degree. It is an elementary research training program involving, in Stephanie’s case, both individually tailored coursework and a dissertation of 14–16,000 words.

At our interview in August 2010, Stephanie was just about to go on a third study trip to China (accompanied by her two youngest children and her husband). She would be based back at the same university and follow language courses there, but at the same time she would be working on data collection for her Honours dissertation, gathering source material, making contacts and conducting exploratory interviews. Her goal in terms of language proficiency was to improve her skills in listening to natural Chinese, and “feel that I jump forward”. She also hoped to visit Harbin and Hong Kong.

Her immediate goal after she has completed Honours is to resume a focus on language proficiency: “I just want to sit down and learn and learn so that I can be better at it”, and to rewrite her Honours thesis in Chinese. She hopes in ten years time to have a PhD in Chinese studies and to have written that thesis in Chinese. By that time her youngest children will have left home and then “who knows - I might run away to China”. She views her engagement with learning Chinese as a lifelong endeavour: “I feel just as motivated as I did early on, I just really love it, and I love it because I love it, not for any other reason”. When people ask her what she plans to “do with her Chinese” she does not consider that a relevant question. Her goals unfold as she progresses: “I am just following in the footsteps of the language. It seems to provide me with the motivation as I go”. Her experiences of studying Chinese and of what she refers to as “catalytic China” make her feel that “life has endless possibilities”. She feels that her learning of Chinese has gone way beyond the learning of a language. One of the most important outcomes, she says, is that it has offered her an alternative cultural perspective: “learning Chinese has taught me to look at the opinions of many ‘western’ people in a different light. I hope I never forget to think differently”.

The metaphors used by Stephanie at different stages to describe her Chinese learning offer a summary of her story so far: from being “like a heavy fog”, and “pushing a barrow of bricks which is getting lighter”, it becomes “discovering a new way of looking at the world & discovering something about the way you think yourself”, and then is expressed as “an uncertain goal, which will lead me somewhere, I don’t know where, and I’ll follow”. This ‘chain’ of descriptive phrases (see section 5.5.4.4) captures the sense of evolution in her story.

### 7.7.1 Commentary on Stephanie’s timeline

Stephanie’s timeline (in Appendix 9) shows the pattern of an early start followed by a long ‘fallow’ period, which can also be seen in the timelines of Rachel and, to a certain extent, Stella.

The use of Chinese to communicate was not recorded in her earlier years of study, and this probably reflects Stephanie’s shyness and avoidance of situations where she might have to talk; there was no gradual build-up; rather her first study trip to China in 2005 appears to have been the catalyst for moving straight into medium levels of using Chinese to communicate.

## 7.7.2 Themes in Stephanie's story

### *Children and family*

Family is Stephanie's principal context. The complex system that is her family is both backdrop and actor within her Chinese learning story; and is also itself significantly affected by her learning. Thus family affects the time Stephanie has available for study, as well as the spaces where she studies (on the sidelines at her son's cricket and soccer practice, for example). At times Chinese can be an escape from the family context: "it's a good place to bury yourself sometimes". She works her Chinese learning around their needs, but their lives have also been affected by her learning of Chinese: in small ways, as when she uses Chinese for simple domestic communication with them; and in large ways, as when members of her family accompany her on three semester-long trips to China. She notes: "The younger kids have grown up with me studying Chinese, it's always been a part of their life in a way that it wasn't with the older ones". They affect her learning in positive ways too; she describes, for example, how her 9-year-old son quickly learned to bargain in Chinese markets and insisted on doing so, and "that was really good for me because it actually made me feel a bit more confident too to have a go".

Stephanie vividly described the impact of her learning Chinese on her family (which is a very large extended one) in a recent email:

I feel immensely grateful that at least part of my family have had the experience of living in China. We have all come away from these experiences with a strong knowledge of the differences between our two cultures and an appreciation of the similarities of our two cultures. In addition, we have all established a strong friendship base, which hopefully will be lifelong. Those family members who have not been to China always show enthusiastic interest in our adventures! Our travels have given all of the family confidence and motivation to take their children overseas to live in a different culture and learn a new language. Had I not studied Chinese, would this still be the case?

I read this as a demonstration of how Stephanie's learning of Chinese has effects on other people, not just those closest to her, but spreading further through their various networks. Thus, what could be seen simply as the personal hobby of a woman in her middle years busy with child-rearing in a country town, in fact can have ripples of influence and intercultural significance well beyond her immediate circle. This theme of the impact of individuals' Chinese learning on others, over time, is a significant one and will be taken up again in Chapter 8.

### *Thinking and cognitive management*

Thinking is a strong theme in Stephanie's story and clearly something important to her. She began Chinese so as to "take her thoughts outside the home", and later comments how it "expands the mind" and "helps her to think differently". She talks of managing her emotions

(e.g. the fear of speaking out) with her thoughts. She demonstrates agency in making deliberate decisions to challenge her fears and difficulties by putting herself in situations where she has to deal with them.

### *Chinese as a vehicle for self-expression*

Stephanie sees Chinese as offering her a voice, both openly, and also for private thoughts. She talks about using Chinese as a private language to ‘write out’ her feelings about difficult domestic situations: “to be able to do that in Chinese would feel like I’m not carrying it - I don’t have to carry that around any longer”.

One of her goals is to be able to express her own opinions in Chinese, and here she turns to writing, and the many years of writing practice she has done with her tutor, T: “Learning Chinese has taught me that I can use my love of writing to say whatever I want to say, without being held immediately accountable. I don’t have to be ‘quick on my feet’ because I have time to think”. These are the thoughts that are attracting her towards PhD study in Chinese. Over the lengthy time span of her learning journey, Stephanie is developing a voice in Chinese which contributes also to a changing sense of identity.

### *Developing self-confidence*

Over the course of her learning, during the period of this study, Stephanie has become increasingly confident. Looking back, she recognises this growth:

Learning Chinese has not only taught me a new language; it has taught me significant aspects of my own capabilities. I CAN manage time issues concerning multiple tasks, I CAN acquire new concepts in learning, I CAN overcome difficult facets of my personality and I CAN use a computer.

This theme of growing self-confidence has been noted for Brenda and Rachel also. Of course, this is a feature of adult learning in general; but specific examples of learning Chinese having this effect have not to my knowledge been recorded before, since this ‘non-traditional’ cohort has not been studied in the context of learning Chinese.

## **7.8 Summary**

This chapter has used the narratives of the seven core participants, together with the elaborated graphic timelines and some of the dynamic activity patterns of Chapter 6, to show how individual Chinese learning journeys can develop over time, and to describe the variety of contextual influences and the diversity of patterns of participation in different modes of learning. Where appropriate I have shown how some aspects of these influences and patterning might be described in a complexity framework. The focus has been on the longitudinal view and the dynamics which taking such a view can reveal, which can be missed when the focus is shorter. I have identified salient themes for each of the seven. In the

following chapter, where I draw together what has emerged from the enquiry, some of those themes will be taken up again.

Overall, the value of these narrative portraits is that they take us away from an essentialised view of 'the learner' to look at people learning Chinese in the context of their full, varied and different lives. They give a voice to the experience of people other than young adult students in the classrooms and lecture halls of large metropolitan universities, with a focus on people who are older, who are predominantly based in country areas, who choose distance learning and who study part-time or independently for many years. In doing so the stories not only add to our understanding of learning Chinese, but also contribute to our understandings of learners.

# Chapter 8. Insights from the long view

---

## Introduction

In this chapter I begin with a discussion of the value of the complexity framework adopted. Following that, some of the most striking themes that have arisen from the overview of all seven detailed individual narratives presented in the previous chapter have been selected for discussion. These themes are discussed in the context of the whole study, and against the background of the data presented in Chapters 5 and 6. The themes will help to illuminate distinctive aspects of the experience over time of these adult, part-time, distance learners in comparison with other groups of learners studied previously.

## 8.1 Contribution of the complexity framework

Complexity theory has proved itself useful in this enquiry as a framework for presenting ideas which arise from the focus on longitudinal and dynamic aspects of learners' engagement with Chinese learning over time. CT demands a focus on change through time and an openness to variety, while permitting a view of patterning and tendencies, and offering flexibility to encompass the unexpected, the unexplained and the coincidental. Because of the descriptive, interpretive and grounded nature of this enquiry, there was no goal of building a full CT model of the focal research area (indeed it is doubtful such a goal could be achievable); however CT concepts have been useful in guiding understanding of the situation and offering a persuasive way of describing some of its complex aspects. In this section some instances where complexity concepts have proved helpful in reaching an interpretation of the data will be outlined.

### 8.1.1 Multiple levels of organisation

The concept of interrelated multiple levels of organisation has allowed this enquiry to adopt a tactic of switching between close-up views and wider views in various dimensions. The metaphor of the zoom lens helps in describing this process. Repeatedly zooming in and out affords a way of maintaining continual awareness of context and of the place of the detail within the broader picture.

- on the temporal scale, I have taken a wide view to perceive the long story of individuals' learning journeys and create graphic timelines; and I have also adopted a close-up lens to look at the detail of how individuals organise their learning activities at certain times.
- in terms of the focal level or context, a wide-angle lens captured the broad perspective of CFL in the world and in Australia; a standard lens captured the flavour of individuals' lives and the contexts of significance within which they operate (family, business,

church etc.); zooming in further allowed a view of their individual choices and practices around learning; and zooming in further still revealed the detail and patterning of their learning activities.

- I have also combined the different viewpoints of the longitudinal (development and change through time, e.g. establishing chronologies and timelines) and the cross-sectional (patterning across individuals or across the group, e.g. comparing patterns of activity (as in section 5.2.2.2)).

This CT approach allows a view of multidimensional patternings and instances of adaptation and reciprocal influence both between different levels of the same system, and between similar levels of different systems. It has been helpful as a means of holding a flexible awareness of the interrelation of the general and the specific.

### 8.1.2 Non-linearity

The idea of non-linearity, in terms of development and of timescales, has been flagged at various points in this thesis as central to complexity theory. It has been useful for understanding aspects of continuity and discontinuity in learning trajectories and representing them within the timelines. Periods of seeming inactivity do not necessarily signal that an activity has ceased. The related idea of heterochrony allows one to see the influence of multiple timescales which follow different rhythms and affect individuals' Chinese learning in different ways: for example health, family, institutions, seasons (these affect Stella and her farmwork, for example), and business (there are certain times in the business year when Clive cannot take time off to study in China, for example).

### 8.1.3 Sensitivity to initial conditions

This feature of complex systems relates to the way that a tiny detail early in the life of a system can result in extremely wide degrees of diversity in later stages; it therefore connects to the idea that complexity of systems can never be fully explained or accounted for, because the detail of initial conditions can never be fully known. Indeed in qualitative research approaches a full explanation or account would not be considered a desirable or attainable goal. However the mixture of retrospective and longitudinal method in this enquiry, and the combination of both survey-based data and narrative data collected at different intervals, has enabled a process of retrodiction to be used to identify some likely instances of initial conditions which have had a considerable influence on the subsequent trajectory of the system. Three illustrative examples demonstrate this feature operating at different levels of organisation:

- the landscape of features, choices and influences relating to learning Chinese in Australia (described in Chapter 2) can be seen as the conditions affecting the state space of learning Chinese around the focal time-span of this enquiry. (Some of these



conditions are themselves contiguous interrelated systems.) Different aspects of those conditions affect the ensuing paths of individual agents within the system.

- At the level of the group, the ‘early taste’ pattern identified through the collation and comparison of the 41 trajectories of Stage 1 (and discussed in section 5.2.2.1), can be seen as contributing, for those particular individuals with their particular combinations of circumstances and personalities, to their commencing and persisting with formal structured study of Chinese by DLL later, after many years had elapsed.
- At the individual level, in Brenda’s case, had she not entered the competition which resulted in her winning the prize of a trip to Hong Kong in 1997, she would not have embarked on her journey of learning Chinese when she did and the strong mutual connections she has developed with Lily and Jade and their families would not have emerged.

Having outlined the contribution of some complexity principles, the rest of this chapter is focussed on the more general themes which have emerged from previous chapters.

## 8.2 Capturing dynamic trajectories

In focusing on adult learners’ trajectories and the long-term development of their learning journeys, this enquiry has aimed to capture and portray the patterns, shape and dynamics of learning Chinese for adults based in Australia. One of the things that is very clear is that they are not steady progressions, and they do not necessarily match the ‘standard’ institutional pattern of an uninterrupted progression of study through a series of university subjects or units. Fluctuations of pace and intensity are the norm; and I have attempted in various ways to identify and describe them.

One of the phenomena which the detailed examination of the learning journeys of the participants in this research has uncovered is the existence of ‘fallow periods’. During these fallow periods, no formal study or structured learning of any kind takes place, but the imagined identity of being a learner of Chinese is maintained, sometimes over many years, and consciously fostered, until learning is resumed sometimes much later. This concept offers a way of looking at pauses and periods of apparent inactivity as a part of the trajectory, as interludes, rather than as an end to a trajectory. The long-term focus reveals instances of patterns in which people resume learning after a sometimes lengthy fallow period.

Taking the long view also makes it clear that many people who engage in learning Chinese by distance mode choose to intersperse periods of formal institutional study with periods of other activities and learning in other settings, spacing out the formal learning. The simple and elaborated timelines created in this enquiry enable a view of the patterning of episodes of formal and informal learning and engagement with Chinese, and fallow periods. The longitudinal approach has enabled a view to be gained of different patterns of distribution of

visits to China in a learner's trajectory, and of their impacts (both in advance and in retrospect) upon the learning journey. Understanding of such patterning is illuminated by the complexity perspective, which takes non-linearity and heterochrony or the co-existence of multiple timescales as central.

The focus on dynamic trajectories of learning Chinese, and the identification of instances of patterning such as the ones just described, contribute a usefully enlightening dynamic dimension to Benson's (2011) characterisation of the language learning career, which was discussed in section 3.3.3.4.

### 8.3 Ripples of influence: the learner in social context

A situated view of learners that takes the sociocultural and economic context of their learning lives into account is central to this thesis. Nel (2008, p. 56) has pointed out the need to be attentive to the influence of family, social and work-related connections of learners:

[Learners'] social lives with their partners and friends, their family lives with their parents and siblings, and their economic lives with their employers and fellow workers influence their learning in significant ways. These factors tend to be played down [...] and should be addressed in future research.

By taking a complexity theory approach, in which the context is seen as an integral part of the system, my examination of the data has attended to those factors identified by Nel. Many instances of people who have an influence on the system or trajectory of individuals' learning have been identified, including children, spouses, tutors and conversation partners, business agents, office staff, friends in China, landlords, taxi drivers, chance encounters and acquaintances, and even the postman. Diverse ways in which the influence of other people in the learner's worlds can operate and can be integral to the development of the learning journey have been demonstrated.

This is not, however, a one-way process. The Chinese learning ventures of the individuals followed in this study, themselves have significant effects upon other people in a variety of contexts. The influence can extend to other systems, and cause unexpected results within them. Such an effect may never be known to the individual who caused it, or not until much later; for instance several participants related tales of discovering many years later that their own learning endeavours had been the impetus for others to follow up an interest in Chinese. Other personal connections evolve into significant reciprocal influences. By taking a process-oriented longitudinal approach, grounded in data collected over more than five years, this study has gained a new level of insight into the kind of connections that learners make with others. Stella, for example, fostered and maintained a long-lasting tutoring arrangement with Lina; and Brenda's friendship with Lily has progressed from her being a guest at the wedding,

to making several visits to her parents and in-laws, and to being involved with the education of her children. From a complexity perspective, a process of co-adaptation is taking place between the two systems of Brenda's and Lily's families. Connections like these can develop mutually over the long course of learning journeys and extend their influence in multiple ways into other contexts and systems which are part of the worlds which each person inhabits.

There is within-family impact as well. The developing identities and practices of the learners of Chinese in this study have significant effects upon their family units and family members. Rachel's two daughters, who were born around the time when she first started studying Chinese, have grown up with their mother learning Chinese, accompanied her to China, and are now studying it themselves at university, with one of them planning to train as a teacher of Chinese. In Michelle's case, her partner, who initially had no interest in China at all, is now considering a visit there. Both Stephanie and Rachel used their own persistence in learning Chinese as life-lessons for their children; in this regard Stephanie told me, for example: "it's been really good to be able to say to the kids, never close your mind off to anything, because things can be possible. You can do things and make things happen".

The findings of this study reveal that people's long-term commitment to learning Chinese has a significant level of influence and impacts on others. In most cases it has become more than simply a personal project. The stories show how people's Chinese learning ventures have ongoing multiple ripples of influence, a concept which is compatible with a complexivist interpretation. They may have been catalysts for other people to learn (overlapping systems influencing each other), in which case, in complexity theory terms, they contribute to the 'initial conditions' for another person's development in the direction of Chinese. Whether or not they are aware of it, long-term learners have contributed to the development of intercultural awareness and understanding of China within regional communities and within their wider family networks beyond those communities. They may have had an influence locally in education, either by teaching, tutoring privately, or via their own children, some of whom have had experience of living in China and then re-entered their local schools. They are likely to act as role models of successful long-term learners of Chinese to encourage others to take it up. They also model sustained learning through and beyond the institutional perspective of completion of semesters or courses of formal study; hence their experiences offer an alternative to the discourses of Chinese being "too hard" and taking "too long" for western learners. In these various ways they have contributed to counteracting the "monolingual mindset" in Australia (Clyne, 2008), referred to in Chapter 2.

Indeed these trajectories do stretch over many years, and taking a process orientation rather than an outcome orientation shows the depth of experience and engagement that takes place along the way. The stories also demonstrate vividly how the benefits of being engaged with

learning Chinese go far beyond those of ‘product’, or attainment of a certain level of proficiency, and extend into other areas of learners’ lives and even sustain them through challenging life events and major upheavals. There are instances of divorce, health breakdown, bereavement, life transitions, career decisions, and moving internationally and interstate in the data; throughout, for many of the learners in this study, their Chinese learning identity project offers continuity, and refuge or escape if required, while developing confidence and offering possibilities of alternative imagined futures.

#### **8.4 Alignment of learning opportunities with ‘contexts of significance’**

Amongst the participants who are persevering ongoing learners and users of Chinese, one aspect of their practice, which appears to contribute to the success of their endeavours, is their use of the contexts of personal significance to them as contexts for their language learning. They find ways within what they know, and what is meaningful to them, in the communities of practice to which they have access, to incorporate their language learning and language use. Some of the participants began doing this from the beginning of their formal study, such as Stephanie speaking to her children (who knew no Chinese) with simple household phrases in Chinese. Others only began it after a year or two of structured distance learning. People learning Chinese in distance mode (at the time this study was conducted) have fewer opportunities to interact with classmates, but those who become long-term learners are both inventive and also agentic in seeking and creating varied opportunities for practice and use in their environment that have value and personal relevance to them; and their effective participation in those practice and use opportunities contributes to their motivation to continue in an instance of an ongoing feedback loop.

Examples include: Marty deliberately choosing to participate in team sport rather than individual sport at Chinese university so that he could chat to his team-mates; Rachel attending her bible study group with Chinese speakers and pushing herself to work with Chinese versions of the religious texts and tracts; Michelle investigating the language of Qi Gong and teaching it to her Qi Gong classmates; and Brenda organising and leading a tour to China in collaboration with her Chinese friend. Further examples include Marty, again, finding ways to practise Chinese with refugees and migrants that also expressed his guiding humanitarian and social justice principles; Stella, enjoying conversations with the curious bystanders in the park in China when she took her two adoptive granddaughters there; and Clive seeking conversation practice in the bars he would frequent on business trips. People find and create contexts and communities for using and practising their Chinese which are meaningful for them personally; by aligning their learning with their personal interests these long-term learners give themselves the best chance of fostering their learning and nurturing their learner-user identities.

## 8.5 Attitudes to developing speaking skills

All participants in this enquiry had experience of studying Chinese in distance language learning mode, and have opinions about it as a mode of study. There were many comments in the data about their expectations and experience of learning a language by DLL, expressing a variety of views on what that means in terms of the development of oral skills. Many of the comments reflected the opinion that distance learning cannot possibly develop speaking skills to the same extent that classroom learning does. For some participants a realisation of the need for further speaking and listening practice to develop conversational interaction skills developed only as a result of experience with and engagement in distance language learning, and was part of a process of readjustment of expectations and adapting timeframes (see section 5.2.3.1). Often that readjustment would be triggered by a first study trip to China. The individuals who would become long-term learners and users of Chinese generally found their own ways of developing their conversational interaction skills (see section 8.4). However, there were some for whom speaking was not a priority, such as Ken, whose goal was to be able to read modern novels in Chinese, and by the end of this study reported with satisfaction that he had read his first novel, which is a major achievement for any learner of Chinese; and other participants whose main interest was to learn about traditional aspects of Chinese culture and philosophy.

Two members of the core group serve to illustrate motivations for choosing DL mode, which, though widely different, both see the lack of spoken classroom interaction as an advantage.

For Stella, practising speaking skills in the classroom with other learners was something she found tedious and frustrating, and for her one of the positive aspects of her choice of DL was that it did not involve that. She was one of the few who reported genuinely enjoying using audiotapes for corrected practice of pronunciation and spoken expression. Her experience of, and approach to, language learning meant that she never had any expectations that distance learning would either include, or take the place of, direct individual conversational interaction with a native speaker, but always saw the latter as something she would organise herself. Her timeline shows the constant presence of that interaction, at first in tandem with her distance learning and then expanding to become her principal method of study after the DL ended. Her preference reflects her deep interest in making connections with people.

For Stephanie, intense shyness about being called upon to speak in a classroom situation was one of the factors that contributed to her choice of distance learning in the first place. Although over the course of her study (and particularly as a result of studying in China and experiencing a lack of fear in the classroom context there) she has become better able to face this fear, she nonetheless feels it still has some force over her. Through her Chinese learning journey, though, she has found a voice (Kramsch 2010; see also section 3.3.4). She has discovered that

it is writing that gives her joy, and a sense of freedom to express herself: “learning Chinese has taught me that I can use my love of writing to say whatever I want to say, without being held immediately accountable. I don’t have to be ‘quick on my feet’ because I have time to think”. When I first met Stephanie, at an intensive course for distance education students of Chinese in 2002, she was literally speechless, but in the intervening 9 years she has found a voice through Chinese, and that voice is also available to her in English.

These examples demonstrate the complex and personal nature of individual learners’ choices of modes and settings of learning within their language learning careers. What may be considered a drawback of the DL mode for one learner can be seen as an advantage for another.

## 8.6 Aspirations, intentions and rethinking success

A theme that has become evident over the course of this study is the interrelation between how people aspire to use their Chinese, and the choices they make, are constrained to make, and continue to make, in constructing and tailoring their learning journeys and their independent study activities to fit those aspirations. Participants in this study, by virtue of the initial selection criteria, had all completed at a very minimum something over two years of study, which would have taken them to a basic level of general Chinese, and which could be used as a foundation for continuing learning and developing use. Their retrospective comments at the time (presented in section 5.2.3) showed that they were re-evaluating the complexity and length of the Chinese learning task, and also that they had come to recognise a need to develop competence in different macroskills concurrently. The previous paragraphs have touched on the variety among their learning goals in relation to speaking; their communicative goals and their goals for literacy in Chinese may also vary widely. Only a few participants wish to use Chinese directly for work-related activity, though several would like to use it to converse with native-speaker work colleagues. Some aspire to advanced or even ‘native-like’ proficiency; for some communicative ability is crucial; for others, it may be the activity of study itself, the ongoing personal project, which attracts them. This diversity reflects the variety of what Chinese represents to them and what it means to them to learn Chinese; in other words, the diversity of their desires (Kramsch, 2010) and imagined communities (Anderson, 1983; Kanno & Norton, 2003; Pavlenko and Norton, 2007) or ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2009; Ushioda, 2009).

This diversity is reflected in the shapes of their individual timelines, and in their varied dynamic patterns of engagement. It also relates to their identity as multicompetent (having the knowledge of two languages in one mind) users of Chinese (Cook, 2002a). As Larsen-Freeman notes (2010, p. 56), in restating the distinction between acquisition and participation metaphors for language learning, the acquisition view implies some assessment of proficiency

in terms of conforming to NS usage, but “conforming to NS use may not be the learner’s goal at all”, and that certainly is true of many of the participants in this study. The participation metaphor, on the other hand, “rejects the idea that there is a clear endpoint to the process of learning” (p. 56); it is a view which sits more comfortably with the evolving timelines containing many different levels and periods of activity, which have been presented in this study. To accommodate the dynamic aspect and allow for incorporation of the process of change over different timescales, a complexity perspective sees that “learners’ language resources are always dynamic ensembles, expanding and contracting with time, place and circumstances. Yet [...] adult learners are seen as multicompetent, attaining different levels of mastery, accomplishing what they intend...” (Larsen-Freeman, 2010, p. 67).

The comments above reinforce the approach taken in this study in which proficiency has not been a focus, given that the criteria for initial selection were time-related rather than attainment-related; rather, rich data has been collected and analysed regarding participants’ feelings about their learning past, present and future, and their estimates of past, present and future intensity of various learning activities. This kind of data captures aspects of their intentions, their practices and their accomplishments. It allows for a view of the ‘successful’ learner or user which is not related to measurement against an external standard, but to using the language in intended ways. I suggest that such a view is an appropriate one to be fostered in contexts of teaching adults, particularly as the end of a formal course is approached and the learners are preparing to continue their engagement with Chinese in other ways of their choosing. In preparation for that stage, an exercise reflecting on past learning preferences and looking ahead to continuing future learning and use of Chinese might be helpful.

### 8.6.1 Learner and user: dynamic, fluid identities

Cook suggests that if a multicompetence view is adopted, then the term ‘L2 learner’ might be restricted to formal contexts of instructed learning, and the more neutral term ‘L2 user’ can be used to describe “people who know and use a second language at any level” (Cook, 2007, p. 240; see also section 3.3.1). The data presented in this study have shown how, in individual learning journeys, in the perceptions and practices of the individual, there is a dynamic interplay between learning and using Chinese. Over the course of time, they can be integrated, separate or alternating. Since first proposing the learner/user distinction, Cook has more recently endorsed a dynamic systems view of multicompetence: “L2 users may be acquiring the second language or may be losing it through attrition: all is change. Individual multicompetence in a sense builds this in through the changing relationship between the two languages in the same mind on the integration continuum” (Cook, 2009, p. 56). I believe that the multicompetence concept becomes (even) more powerful when combined with a dynamic perspective and that the focus on dynamic learning journeys taken in this thesis supports that view.



A small question I am left with relates to nomenclature: during the fallow periods when individuals might not outwardly be engaged in activities to learn or use Chinese, but are ‘holding it in mind’ could they still be characterised as L2 users? In section 5.5.1 when I presented the identity statements chosen by the survey respondents, in addition to ‘speaker’, ‘learner’, and ‘user’, another category offered was ‘someone with an interest in Chinese’. Unremarkably, identification with that category was high, but what is interesting in the context of the current discussion is that it was significantly higher for the then ‘present’ than any of the other three categories, but not very different from the other chosen identities for the future. I therefore suggest it is very likely that it represents a number of people who were themselves in a ‘fallow period’ at that time as far as Chinese learning and use is concerned (though they may have still been engaging with other aspects of Chinese culture).

Wondering about the appropriate way to describe people in this situation leads me to suggest that ‘being a learner’ is not an on/off state, but something that is dynamic, variable, and can be present to greater or lesser degrees at different points in a trajectory. It is an identity that is fluid, responsive to situations (situated), and to contexts (contingent). It can be dormant during fallow periods, and it can be triggered by unforeseen events or circumstances and then re-emerge. Having been a learner of Chinese in the past can create a disposition towards further learning of Chinese that can re-emerge after long periods; rather like an ember which smoulders and can be revived, either intentionally by the individual, or by unexpected circumstances. The same dynamic and variable qualities can likely be ascribed to the identity of ‘L2 user’ as well. ‘L2 user’ has several dimensions to it, including: level of proficiency; frequency of using or engaging with the language; and emotional identification with this identity (the strength with which you hold onto it, and also the degree to which it figures as an intention or a future self). If, however, a person is going through a period of no observable learning or using activity, but still holding on to the idea and maintaining connection with the culture in other ways, then it might be helpful for that individual to have a word to reflect that identity state. Phrases such as ‘dormant learner’ or ‘inactive user’ have the drawback of defining in terms of lack, therefore I suggest it would be preferable to choose terms like ‘potential user’ or ‘intermittent learner’ which reflect the dynamic aspects of history, continuing interest, and potential for re-engagement of people who are currently in a fallow period as far as their learning or use of Chinese is concerned, but who maintain an interest.

## 8.7 Desire

In Chapter 3 I referred to the work of Kramsch (2010) on desire. Kramsch studied young adult learners engaged in full-time on-campus study and speaks of the role of language learning in “adolescents’ desire for escape and possibilities of the self in the real and imagined encounters with others”, linking it to their stage of life, which is one of rebellion against the



limitations imposed on them by the constraints of their social environment (2010, p. 14). The present study shows that desires that are somewhat comparable lie behind the Chinese language learning of some women in mid-life whose contexts are to an extent constrained by gendered circumstances within their particular social and cultural environment. For example, Stephanie, Rachel and Stella are taken away from the domestic sphere into their world of learning, creating spaces to pursue it late at night or early in the morning or on the sidelines of the children's soccer game. A further illustration is that Brenda, Stephanie and Rachel's desires lead them to assume big responsibilities in taking their non Chinese-speaking family members with them on study trips to China, and through meeting these challenges they develop self-confidence to plan more travel and move further beyond the domestic sphere. Tellingly, Stephanie speaks of "running away to China" in the future, and Brenda of "breaking loose".

Desire is a dynamic concept which fits the long view of the learning journey well. It incorporates the past (the role of history and memories) as well as the present and future (projection and anticipation); and it has duration. As described, during the fallow periods, outwardly there appears to be little or no activity related to Chinese learning and use. In fact, at an inner level there persists an interest in Chinese and an intention to continue engagement with it, which are emphatically maintained. Over those long fallow periods it is desire which continues to smoulder, keeping the dream of possible and imagined selves alive; and the words used by participants to describe this are themselves the language of desire: "don't want it to leave me", "wanted to keep in touch", "didn't leave it alone".

The data attests to a strong presence of emotion and desire in people's feelings about their learning journeys, for example in the metaphor chains discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, several of the narrative portraits in particular tell of the emergence and subsequent development of a passion: from an initial curiosity, a spark of interest, or else an unexplained attraction, through to its being an integrated part of people's lives (to a greater or lesser extent). In those cases, learning Chinese goes from being something 'outside' to something woven through people's lives and a part of their history and an available identity. Ushioda (2011a) has described how, in motivation studies, the concept of 'integrative motivation' is being reassessed and has shifted from an external focus of integration with a community or culture 'out there' to an internal focus on integration with current identities as well as with future self representations. The stories of the seven core participants reveal rich details of the ways in which individuals achieve such an integration, to varying degrees, and continue to be led by their desire for further integration. Such integration could be seen as another indicator of 'success' from the perspective of the long-term learner. It links past experience with future intention in a dynamic and shifting relationship. As pointed out in Chapter 3, adopting a

complexity framework affords a relational and co-adaptational view, which sees a learner as affected emotionally by her involvement with language learning, and her language learning in turn affected by the emotions she is experiencing.

## 8.8 Gender

There is a strongly gendered aspect to what has emerged from the trajectory view, particularly in the core group, where some findings pattern differently between the two males and the five females. Though not planned, the gender contrast between the two male and five female participants in that group also aligns with other dimensions of contrast. In terms of stage of life, the two males are the youngest participants, they do not have children and they do not talk about partners being part of their lives. The discourses of the domestic environment and of parenting which are very strongly present in the narratives of 3 of the female participants and present at mid-level for the other two are not present in the talk of Marty and Clive. Their expressions of the purpose of their learning of Chinese, and their orientation to the future are also rather different. Clive is in city-based full-time work during most of the research period, and Marty is in full-time study followed by city-based full-time work. A further difference is that both of the young men have shorter, more condensed trajectories with fewer breaks between periods of institutional study. These factors are all linked, and clearly rich material arises from the data for further analysis from a gendered, critical perspective in a future study.

Just a couple of further points will be made here in respect of gender. First, the theme of juggling family duties with the desire to study emerges very strongly from the narrative data for the female participants in the core group of seven, and has been mentioned already in section 7.7.2.

Secondly, it emerges that the in-country study experience of the mature women in the core group is very different from that reported in much of the research into study abroad which is based around young, single tertiary students. Particularly for Stephanie, Rachel and Brenda, taking their family members with them on a study trip and taking responsibility for the necessary domestic arrangements represented a major challenge, stretching their language skills, but it also was a rare and highly valued opportunity for dedicated study time. Interestingly, in the Chinese society in which they found themselves, although at the classroom level some felt conspicuous on account of their mature age, on the social level there is a noticeable difference in the ease of making friends and practising Chinese: whereas Marty found some challenges in doing this, for the older women with their families, contacts and friendships came easily and were an important part of their in-China experience, which for several would last well beyond the duration of the in-country sojourn. The literature reports

that the experience of younger single women in study-abroad circumstances can sometimes be one of reduced agency, identity conflicts, lack of access to certain domains of language use, and even sexual harassment (Block 2007b; Kinginger & Blattner 2008). In contrast, in this study, for these women in mid-life, having their families living with them in Chinese university communities seemed to afford them rich access to domains of language use and personal connections with individuals and community networks. They would look back on these sojourns as challenging and empowering experiences for identity development and personal growth as well as linguistic and cultural understanding.

## 8.9 The global and the local

In small ways, the individual trajectories of these learners reflect the ongoing changes in relation to the position of Chinese in the world, which were outlined in Chapter 2. Conceptually this can be seen as an instance of the complexivist concept of fractal patterning whereby the same patterning is reflected at different levels of organisation of a system. I will point out four instances of this, taken from the core group of seven participants. In Stella's case her son and his partner's adoption of Chinese daughters is one instance of an increasingly common trend; her family has now become one of many ethnically diverse and culturally blended ones in Australia. The little girls' strong reluctance to learn Chinese is probably representative of a drama played out in many family situations (though particularly poignant in Stella's case given her own intense commitment to the language).

In the case of Clive, his business world is increasingly China-oriented and the Chinese culture that he encounters is that of trade and business. His work in shipping and trade connects him very directly to the rapidly increasing flow of goods between China and Australia and the rapidly developing economic opportunities between the two countries; the strength of his connection with southern China, Hong Kong and Taiwan reflects the traditional strength of those areas in shipping and trade.

Michelle's experience in training to be a teacher of Chinese in Australia is reflective of the increased attention to that area and the growth and promotion of Chinese as a foreign language in Australian schools. It also highlights some of the issues in provision of teachers and staffing outside the major metropolitan areas and the issues for non-native speaker teachers of maintaining their language skills when the opportunities for teaching the subject are irregular or discontinuous, and in situations where the importance of continuity for school learners of a language is less than perfectly grasped.

In the case of Marty, his engagement with refugee support and with the detention centre is demonstrative of the human side of issues around global population movement and border

control, as they affect people from China; and his interest and work in Chinese development in Africa reflects an important developing axis in global relations of economy and power.

In sum, the in-depth understanding afforded by the present research with the core group affords a view of how global issues touch the worlds of ‘ordinary’ people in regional Australia and how they, by the actions and involvement that their Chinese language learning has led them to, themselves become active agents in relation to those issues at a local and personal level. There are indications that similar and comparable reflections of global China-related change are reflected in the experience of the participants in the larger ‘outer’ group as well.

### **8.10 Summary**

Chapter 8 has drawn attention to some of the significant themes emerging from this enquiry. First, the ways in which three general principles of the complexivist approach have assisted in analysis were outlined. Then, the themes of dynamic trajectory, ripples of influence, alignment of learning opportunities with personally significant contexts, attitudes to developing speaking skills, rethinking notions of success and identity, desire, gender issues, and the relation between global and local, were presented. Taken together they show that the engagement of individuals in long-term learning of Chinese in some fairly quiet corners of Australia, which has hitherto gone unremarked, is of significance at personal, local and global levels, and moreover can contribute to our understandings of the complexities of foreign or additional language learning when viewed from a learner-centred, long-term perspective.

## Chapter 9. Conclusion

---

The final chapter draws together this enquiry. It revisits the research questions and explains how the different parts of the thesis have combined to address those questions. The significance of the findings is made clear. Limitations and areas of future research are flagged, and applications and recommendations are suggested.

### 9.1 Synthesis

This thesis has investigated the long-term learning journeys of people who learn Chinese as a foreign language in Australia, but who do so by means other than full-time attendance at university. In post-secondary education in Australia the most common pattern for foreign language study is a 3–4 year period of full-time study at university, possibly including a sojourn in-country. Yet in addition there are many adult learners who choose to undertake formal study on a part-time basis, and find, moreover, that studying part-time in distance mode offers them the flexibility that they seek to fit their study around work and family responsibilities.

However, enrolment in formal language courses by no means represents the only aspect of their participation in language learning. People learn languages by a variety of means and through engagement in varied learning contexts. Adults undertaking the study and use of Mandarin as an additional or foreign language have trajectories of learning that include not only part-time and intermittent formal study, but also various other types of self-directed study as well as informal language practice and use. Though people who study in part-time and distance mode come from both urban and rural areas, a prime focus which has emerged in the course of the research is on learners who, in an Australian context, might be considered ‘non-mainstream’ in that their formal study and/or their place of residence is not in the large cities where over two-thirds of Australia’s population is based, but in rural and regional areas of the country. Little is known about the characteristics of long-term engagement in Mandarin for learners in rural and regional areas of Australia.

This enquiry has followed a group of people who have at some time been engaged in distance learning of Chinese, and, having reached at least second year level, can therefore be considered to have experience of formal study and to have persisted past the initial dropout hurdles. The conduct of a longitudinal enquiry with these participants, over the years extending beyond their basic formal study by distance learning, has revealed insights into undocumented individual language learning activities that formal enrolment statistics fail to reveal. It has

also afforded a view of ongoing learning in the lives of people who are more likely to represent those living outside Australia's main metropolitan areas. In this way the enquiry has uncovered the richness of people's individual endeavours to learn Chinese, and the significance that their endeavours have for them, both on a personal level, and also outwards into the world.

By taking a view that is both learner-centred, longitudinal and dynamic it has been shown that defining a learner primarily by a setting in which they learn is inadequate to capture the richness and variety of their learning journeys.

At the end of the second chapter three research questions were posed, and the remainder of this section will summarise how they have been addressed.

Question 1:

At a time of significant development in the global prominence of Chinese, what is the nature of the learning journeys and experiences of adult long-term learners of Mandarin in regional Australia who engage in distance education and independent study modes?

The whole thesis stands as a description of the nature of their learning journeys and of the varied aspects of the learners' perceptions and experiences of their journeys as they develop over time. The complexivist orientation adopted emphasises interconnection on many levels, and the thesis chapters represent approaches to the question which are complementary and linked on many levels to produce a rich and multilayered representation.

Since a journey is always grounded in and defined by the landscape through which the traveller passes, a detailed description of the features of that landscape was developed in Chapter 2. After a sketch of the linguistic features of Chinese of relevance to the learner, the rapidly developing options and official and popular discourses regarding learning Mandarin world-wide and in Australia were presented. Three dimensions which have an effect upon the context and practices of adults learning Chinese were then analysed in turn: first, the spatial dimension, which relates to issues of location, distance and contiguity between learner, teacher and linguistic resources; secondly, the learning modality dimension, which relates to structure and informality in settings and modes of learning; and thirdly, the temporal dimension, which relates to age and stage of life, experience in learning and pace of study.

In Chapter 3, relevant areas of scholarship which could contextualise the enquiry and contribute to developing a deeper understanding of the concept of a learning journey were identified and consulted. First, the fields of life course research and adult education were surveyed to develop an understanding of approaches to the concepts of trajectories and learning through adulthood, the learning journey, lifelong learning and learning careers. Turning to research in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition, both longitudinal research into

language learning, and language learning history research were examined as sources of insight into the dynamics of individual learning journeys. Some key concepts in SLA of relevance to this enquiry were identified as being identity, agency, investment, autonomy, emotion and motivation: these concepts were discussed in terms of their relevance to a longitudinal and dynamic perspective on learning journeys. Existing studies of long-term language learning beyond the institution in either a temporal or a spatial sense were considered, and research into learner perspectives and experience of learning Chinese was also discussed.

Before continuing to summarise findings regarding question 1 in relation to the data specifically generated by this study, I bring in the second research question for consideration.

#### Question 2:

How can the dynamic complexity and variety of people's long-term trajectories of learning Chinese be described, represented and interpreted?

This question was initially addressed in terms of considerations of methodology and design in planning the empirical part of the study, described in detail in Chapter 4. A two-tier research design was elaborated based on a larger 'outer' group of participants who completed two detailed surveys separated by an interval of 4–5 years, and among them a smaller 'core' group of 7 who, between the two surveys, participated in in-depth interviews and other data collection activities at more frequent intervals and in greater depth. This design was chosen in order to achieve both breadth and depth in the empirical materials.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7, which present, analyse and interpret the empirical materials collected, constitute a very detailed response to the second research question. Significant use is made of graphics and visuals for the purposes of both presentation and analysis. The findings reported in these three chapters are of direct relevance to the first question also.

Basic demographic information about people who choose to study Chinese by distance learning has been discovered, and their initial and continuing reasons for doing so and their experiences of this mode of learning Chinese have been probed. Their journeys have been described in terms of the beginnings of their interest in Chinese, the choices they made along the way, and the timeframe of their learning. Chronologies of learning have been constructed, in the form of simple and elaborated timelines, which offer new insights into the way that different modes and settings of learning (including but not limited to distance learning) are sequenced within an individual's learning journey; and these have been used to look for commonalities of patterning to be found among the variety of individual efforts.

The complexivist perspective has proven to be helpful in guiding design decisions and analytical choices that allow for a view of the interrelation of past, present and future. It is also valuable in a study of this type because it accommodates, even expects, a view of the interrelation

between temporal dimensions and contextual ones. As explained by Biesta and Tedder (2007, p. 138), this assists us “to understand differences between individuals in similar contexts, and differences ‘within’ individuals in different situations”.

In seeking to maintain a dynamic perspective on learners’ perceptions of and emotional attitudes to the course of their own learning journeys, a method of juxtaposing participants’ retrospective and anticipatory views of aspects of their learning expressed at different times has been devised. This method has enabled the creation of ‘chains’ of ideas reflecting changing perspectives on learning that can then be analysed in terms of longitudinal concepts such as continuity, discontinuity, consistency, progression, appearance and disappearance. It is a unique method grounded in the context of this enquiry, but which may be of value to other longitudinal studies of learner perspectives.

The two-tier research design adopted allowed the development of both a picture of a broader group, and then also pictures of a smaller number of individuals followed in more depth and in greater detail; it was then possible to juxtapose those two views so that each could inform each other. In-depth contact with the core group helped to sustain a focus on the situated nature of people’s engagement with Chinese learning so that it is not seen in isolation but rather in the context of other aspects of their lives and situations.

Participants were surveyed regarding the nature and extent of their participation over time in a wide range of activities involving studying, using and engaging with Chinese, and their responses analysed in depth. As one stage of the analysis, their reports of frequency of activities and future intentions have been combined, to create a construct of ‘intentional direction’, which emerges as a useful way of conceptualising the link between what people have been doing up to now and what they plan to do in the future. Taking that further, the notions of ‘dynamic activity patterns’ and ‘dynamic contours of engagement’ have been elaborated to offer a way of conceptualising the changing and evolving shape of people’s engagement with particular aspects of learning Chinese over time.

The investigations of learners’ activity patterns and dynamic contours of engagement serve to link the broader survey data and the personal narratives of the core group. Taken together, these three sets of data (surveys, dynamic contours of engagement and personal narratives, presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively) illuminate and contextualise each other to provide a multi-dimensional representation. The surveys provide rich information about learners’ perceptions and beliefs about their Chinese learning, and enable the creation and comparison of chronologies and timelines of their Chinese learning trajectories. The narratives constructed from the in-depth interview data and other materials convey a feeling of each individual’s unique context and learning story, with its constants and its developments; the activity patterns (derived from survey responses) offer a more close-up view of what the



participants actually do to engage with Chinese, and of the shifts and trends in how their habits and practices have changed, or may be in the process of changing. I believe the value of this work lies to a large extent in the combination of these different perspectives and approaches. It represents a response to Larsen-Freeman's (2011, p. 61) recommendation for conducting research into complex systems: "One factor will be more influential at one time, but less so at another. This leads to the conclusion that researchers have to find new, functional ways of viewing our 'objects of concern', reconceptualising them in terms of processes, change and continuities".

### Question 3:

What insights can be gained from taking a dynamic and holistic perspective of people's long-term learning of Chinese?

Taking a dynamic, learner-centred, longitudinal view of individuals' language learning journeys, to the degree of detail described above, affords instructive insights of various kinds.

It places individual learner-users (rather than the institution, or language proficiency, or the class group) at centre stage and shows the ongoing dynamic process by which they create and shape their journeys in response to their personal contexts and the social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves. They are the agents who make the choices about how to combine different threads and episodes of learning activity; but they are also members of many other networks, and affected by many other intersecting systems, which can all impact upon the possibilities that are open to them at any time. In presenting a closely-textured longitudinal view of the journeys of this particular group of learners of Chinese, this study points out the diverse and creative ways in which people continue their Chinese learning, participation and use beyond the classroom to suit their individual needs, circumstances and interests.

The findings of this study can be helpful in promoting the value of language learning and languages education. Kramsch (2001, 2010) has done highly significant work to claim the value and significance of foreign language learning for young adults and adolescents in the early years of university. Though different in nature to Kramsch's study this thesis can claim some parallels in that it serves to identify the value of foreign language learning for older adult learners and people studying part-time, at a time when a great deal of research is on teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), and second language learning.

In particular, this study suggests that long-term Chinese learning has played an important role in opening up new possibilities for women in their middle years whose lives have been centred around family and home duties and associated expected roles. It is a project which, facilitated by distance learning, can be sustained through those years and then can lead these women into worlds far beyond the domestic sphere; while at the same time having a significant impact upon their domestic sphere.

A further contribution made by this study is to offer some background understanding of the possible needs and concerns of learners of Chinese in middle and later stages of their lives, at a time when the number of such learners is likely to increase. As Griffiths (2008a, p. 46) has recently pointed out, “today’s mature learners are often [...] in a position to take advantage of learning opportunities in a way which their own parents often could not [...]; research into all aspects of the mature learner is urgently required”. Current population profiles in Australia show a significant rise in ‘baby-boomers’, the proportion of the population now moving through middle and towards old age. Many decide to undertake learning new skills in later stages of life, and given the current discourses of the popularity of Mandarin, they can be expected to swell the numbers of learners of Chinese. The study reported here goes a small way towards understanding their needs.

## 9.2 Limitations, and areas for future research

Though some data on participants’ language usage was collected during this study, the analysis of it has been little incorporated into this thesis, for reasons of space and focus. It would be interesting to analyse participants’ use of Chinese at different stages of their trajectory against the background of what has been learned about the many contextual influences.

The dynamic activity pattern construct is just one among several component investigations in this multiple case study; I believe much of its value in this study derives from its integration and contextualisation with the other types and levels of data. Whether or not it can be useful as a ‘stand-alone’ concept is a subject worth further investigation; and indeed whether it can be more useful in combination with different types of data apart from those represented here. Further work would be required to check how robust and how effective the activity pattern construct might be in other research contexts.

In terms of the narrative parts of this study, there would be much to be gained from conducting a more discourse-oriented analysis of the interview data and other contact data, taking the ‘small story’ approach (Georgakopoulou, 2007) which was discussed in Chapter 4. The emerging small stories could be juxtaposed against the bigger stories reported in this thesis. Such an endeavour would also align with the conceptual approach of moving between close-up focus and broader view which has informed this enquiry; and it would be interesting to look at the small and large stories in terms of complexity principles, for instances of fractal patterning (patterns of organisation recurring at different levels of scale) taking place.

Although this particular research project has come to an end, the learning journeys of the participants have not. As Bell (2011, p. 576) puts it: “we as [narrative] researchers believe that humans re-story their lives constantly, reinterpreting events in the light of the stories that are currently available and important to them”. Having gained such rich data up to this

point, it would be highly desirable to revisit the participants' stories in future to find out how they unfold, and how they are being re-storied.

### 9.3 Applications and recommendations

For institutions, there may be ways in which they can assist individual learners in an administrative way, by recognising that the institutional phase is only one part of a trajectory, and adopting a supportive and enabling attitude to help learners with issues such as taking time to complete a course of study, moving on, and returning to study. A recent paper by Barnett (2010) on life-wide learning has some related recommendations.

Educators, in Chinese and other languages, are urged to consider and value learning 'beyond the course', and then to incorporate into the curriculum and teaching activities encouragement for learners to acknowledge that they are on a trajectory of learning which extends beyond the academy. For example, learners could be encouraged both to reflect upon and share their current engagement with Chinese beyond the class context, and also to consider and articulate imagined futures of engagement with Chinese, in preparation for independent, self-directed or informal learning during and beyond the course.

In this regard, information and activities might be provided in an online environment that would create a community of learners linked by their prior experience, but extending beyond the course. Such a site might allow for the sharing of stories. It is currently a limitation of institutional online learning that the subject or unit websites usually cease to be available at the end of the semester of teaching, even though great effort may have gone in to building up a class online community prior to that. The reader is referred to Voychenko, Synytsya & Manako (2011) for arguments about supporting distance learning students after graduation, and a proposal for a technical solution.

The stories of long-term learners of Chinese can also be used to provide inspiration and encouragement for beginning learners.<sup>1</sup> They provide models of successful learners, and a realistic view of the length of time over which learning Chinese can extend, together with encouragement to persevere. They have potential to spark ideas of the many and varied ways in which learners use Chinese and incorporate it into their lives, and the ways it can enrich their lives, extending the range of possible imagined futures. Access to such stories would build a sense of belonging to a community of past and present learners.

The findings of this research are also of value for teacher trainers. Since increasing numbers of teachers of Chinese in Australia are coming from China, they may not have an understanding of the personal realities of learning Chinese for Australian learners, particularly older learners

---

<sup>1</sup> Subject, of course, to obtaining the necessary permissions and ethics clearances.

in regional areas and those learning by distance learning. It therefore would be helpful to incorporate learners' stories such as these into the many new and emerging teacher training courses for CFL.

## 9.4 Closing remarks

To summarise, this thesis represents an original contribution to knowledge in a number of ways. In its substantive focus it concerns a group of learners who have not been identified or studied before. Taking complexity theory as a guiding metaphor, it adopts a dynamic, process-oriented view of learning Chinese as a long-term personal journey through a landscape of contextual features. It uses an emergent methodology, grounded in rich data, which allows the combination of established approaches with a 'tailor-made' method of analysis to represent and interpret the ways that engagement with learning Chinese evolves over time. Conceptually, it follows the lead set by scholars such as White, Benson and others in combining perspectives from adult and independent learning with applied linguistics concepts to explore the rich world of language learning beyond the institution. Within the disciplinary field of CFL, it contributes new insights into the learner perspective of learning Chinese.

The result is a richly textured and holistic view of the dynamics of Chinese learning journeys which has brought to light hitherto unnoticed features of interest, many of which would merit more focussed in-depth investigation. The study provides a broad descriptive and conceptual characterisation with the aim of triggering further questions and providing a solid basis for future research.

## References

- Agar, M. (2004). We Have Met the Other and We're All Nonlinear: Ethnography as a Nonlinear Dynamic System. *Complexity*, 10(2), 16-24.
- Albarn, K., & Smith, J. M. (1977). *Diagram: The Instrument of Thought*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Allen, H., & Herron, C. (2003). A Mixed-Methodology Investigation of the Linguistic and Affective Outcomes of Summer Study Abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 36(3), 370-385.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Atkinson, D. (Ed.). (2011). *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2007). *Patterns of Internet Access in Australia, 2006*. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/PrimaryMainFeatures/8146.0.55.001>.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). Population Clock. Retrieved 01-11-2011, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/1647509ef7e25faaca2568a900154b63?OpenDocument>
- Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the Standard Interview: The Use of Graphic Elicitation and Arts-Based Methods. *Qualitative Research*, 9(5), 547-570.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bamberg, M. (2004). Narrative Discourse and Identities. In J. C. Meister, T. Kindt, W. Schernus & M. Stein (Eds.), *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism* (pp. 213-237). Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Barfield, A., & Brown, S. (Eds.). (2007). *Reconstructing Learner and Teacher Autonomy in Language Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barkhuizen, G. (2011a). Narrative Knowledging in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 391-414.
- Barkhuizen, G. (Ed.) (2011b). *Special Topic Issue on Narrative Research in TESOL*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 391-590.
- Barnett, R. (2010). *Life-Wide Education: A New and Transformative Concept for Higher Education?* Paper presented at the Enabling a More Complete Education Conference, University of Surrey. <http://lifewidelearningconference.pbworks.com/E-proceedings>
- Barron, B., Martin, C., & Lewis, S. (2007). *Following Learners in School and out in the World: Constructing Technobiographies from Interviews at Multiple Time Points*. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois.
- BBC. (2007). Mandarin Learning Soars Outside China 01-09-2007. Retrieved 10-01-2012, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/6244763.stm>
- Belcher, D., & Connor, U. (2001). *Reflections on Multiliterate Lives*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bell, J. S. (1998). *Literacy, Culture and Identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Bell, J. S. (2002). Narrative Inquiry: More Than Just Telling Stories. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 207-218.
- Bell, J. S. (2011). Reporting and Publishing Narrative Inquiry in TESOL: Challenges and Rewards. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 575-584.
- Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. Harlow: Longman Pearson.
- Benson, P. (2004). (Auto)Biography and Learner Diversity. In P. Benson & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Learners' Stories: Difference and Diversity in Language Learning* (pp. 4-21). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Benson, P. (2006). Autonomy in Language Teaching and Learning (State-of-the-Art Article). *Language Teaching*, 40, 41-40.
- Benson, P. (2009). Mapping out the World of Language Learning Beyond the Classroom. In F. Kjisik (Ed.), *Mapping the Terrain of Learner Autonomy* (pp. 217-235). Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Benson, P. (2011). Language Learning Careers as an Object of Narrative Research in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 545-553.
- Benson, P., & Lor, W. (1999). Conceptions of Language and Language Learning. *System*, 27, 459-472.
- Benson, P., & Nunan, D. (Eds.). (2002). *The Experience of Language Learning*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics.
- Benson, P., & Nunan, D. (Eds.). (2005). *Learners' Stories: Difference and Diversity in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Besemeres, M., & Wierzbicka, A. (2007). *Translating Lives: Living with Two Languages and Cultures*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- Biesta, G. (2008). Learning Lives: Learning, Identity and Agency in the Life Course *Teaching and Learning Research Briefing* (Vol. 51). London: TLRP/ESRC.
- Biesta, G., & Tedder, M. (2007). Agency and Learning in the Lifecourse: Towards an Ecological Perspective. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(2), 132-149.
- Block, D. (2000). Problematizing Interview Data: Voices in the Mind's Machine? *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(4), 757-763.
- Block, D. (2003). *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Block, D. (2007a). The Rise of Identity in SLA Research, Post Firth and Wagner (1997). *Modern Language Journal*, 91(Focus issue), 863-876.
- Block, D. (2007b). *Second Language Identities*. London: Continuum.
- Block, D. (2008). Narrative, Identity and Interviews: A Personal Reflection on Key Constructs and Analytical Practices. In M. Solly, M. Conoscenti & S. Campagna (Eds.), *Verbal/Visual Narrative Texts in Higher Education*. Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Block, D. (2009). Identity in Applied Linguistics: The Need for Conceptual Exploration. In W. Li & V. Cook (Eds.), *Contemporary Applied Linguistics, Volume 1* (pp. 215-232). London: Continuum.
- Bloomer, M. (1997). *Curriculum Making in Post-16 Education: The Social Conditions of Studentship*. London: Routledge.
- Bloomer, M., & Hodkinson, P. (2000a). *Learning Career: Conceptualising Transformations in Young People and Their Learning*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), New Orleans. eric.ed.gov, number ED440278.
- Bloomer, M., & Hodkinson, P. (2000b). Learning Careers: Continuity and Change in Young People's Dispositions to Learning. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26(5), 583-598.
- Bloomer, M., & Hodkinson, P. (2002). Learning Careers and Cultural Capital: Adding a Social and Longitudinal Dimension to Our Understanding of Learning. In R. Nata (Ed.), *Progress in Education, Volume 5*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.
- Boss, B. (2008). Exploring the Acquisition of German Verb Morphology by Instructed Learners. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31(2), 14.11-14.13.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London & Beverley Hills: Sage Publications.
- Bown, J., & White, C. (2010a). Affect in a Self-Regulatory Framework for Language Learning. *System*, 38, 432-443.
- Bown, J., & White, C. (2010b). A Social and Cognitive Approach to Affect in SLA. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 48(4), 331-353.

- Boyd, R. D. (1991). *Personal Transformations in Small Groups: A Jungian Perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Breen, M. P. (2001a). Introduction: Conceptualization, Affect and Action in Context. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research* (pp. 1-11). Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Breen, M. P. (2001b). Postscript: New Directions for Research on Learner Contributions. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research* (pp. 172-182). Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Breen, M. P. (Ed.). (2001c). *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research*. Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2001). Human Development, Bioecological Theory Of. In N. J. Smelser & P. J. Battles (Eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 6963-6970). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). The Bioecological Theory of Human Development. In U. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development* (pp. 3-15). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brown, T. P. (2002). Auto-Communal Language Learning of Mandarin Chinese and Samoan: A Chronicle and Comparison. *Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 122-135.
- Bruner, J. (1966). *Towards a Theory of Instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard University Press.
- Byrne, D. (2005). Complexity, Configurations and Cases. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22(5), 95.
- Campbell, E., & Storch, N. (2011). The Changing Face of Motivation: A Study of Second Language Learners' Motivation over Time. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 34(2), 166-192.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1996). From Critical Research Practice to Critical Research Reporting. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(2), 321-331.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). TESOL at Forty: What Are the Issues? *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 9-34.
- Candlin, C. (2001). General Editor's Preface. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research* (pp. xv-xxi). Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Capra, F. (1996). *The Web of Life*. London: Flamingo.
- 'China Threat' Fear Countered by Culture. (2006). *China Daily*. Retrieved from [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200605/29/eng20060529\\_269387.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200605/29/eng20060529_269387.html)
- Chodorow, N. (1999). *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Clyne, M. (2008). The Monolingual Mindset as an Impediment to the Development of Plurilingual Potential in Australia. *Sociolinguistic Studies, Special Issue on Monolingualism*, 2(3), 347-365.
- Coffey, S. (2007). Discursive Worlds of the Language Learner: A Narrative Analysis. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 18(2), 145-160.
- Coffey, S., & Street, B. (2008). Narrative and Identity in the "Language Learning Project". *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(3), 452-464.
- Cole, M., Engeström, Y., & Vasquez, O. (Eds.). (1997). *Mind, Culture and Activity: Seminal Papers from the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Commonwealth of Learning. (2000). An Introduction to Open and Distance Learning. Retrieved from [www.col.org/ODLIntro/introODL.htm](http://www.col.org/ODLIntro/introODL.htm)
- Complexity and Education website. (n.d.) Retrieved July, 2010, from [www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca](http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca)



- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative Inquiry. In J. L. Green, G. Camillia & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Complementary Methods for Research in Education* (pp. 477-487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cook, V. (2002a). Background to the L2 User. In V. Cook (Ed.), *Portraits of the L2 User* (pp. 1-28). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cook, V. (Ed.). (2002b). *Portraits of the L2 User*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Cook, V. (Ed.). (2003). *The Effects of the Second Language on the First*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cook, V. (2007). The Goals of ELT: Reproducing Native-Speakers or Promoting Multicompetence among Second Language Users? In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International Handbook of English Language Teaching, Part 1* (pp. 236-248). New York: Springer.
- Cook, V. (2009). Language User Groups and Language Teaching. In V. Cook & W. Li (Eds.), *Contemporary Applied Linguistics* (Vol. 1, pp. 54-74). London: Continuum.
- Cooksey, R. W. (2001). What Is Complexity Science? *Emergence*, 3(1), 77-103.
- Cotterall, S. (2008). Passion and Persistence: Learning English in Akita. In A. M. F. Barcelos, P. Kalaja & V. Menezes (Eds.), *Narratives of Learning and Teaching English as a Foreign Language* (pp. 113-127). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cotterall, S., & Murray, G. (2009). Enhancing Metacognitive Knowledge: Structure, Affordances and Self. *System*, 37(1), 34-45.
- Creanor, L., Trinder, K., Gowan, D., & Howells, C. (2006). *Who's Learning and How? Researching the Learner Experience*. Paper presented at the 23rd Annual Ascilite Conference, University of Sydney.
- Creswell, J. (2011). Controversies in Mixed Methods Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.), pp. 269-284). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.
- Crilly, N., Blackwell, A. F., & Clarkson, P. J. (2006). Graphic Elicitation: Using Research Diagrams as Interview Stimuli. *Qualitative Research*, 6(3), 341-366.
- Crossan, B., Field, J., Gallacher, J., & Merrill, B. (2003). Understanding Participation in Learning for Non-Traditional Adult Learners; Learning Careers and the Construction of Learning Identities. *British Journal of the Sociology of Education*, 24(1), 55-67.
- Csizer, K., & Dörnyei, Z. (2005). The Internal Structure of Language Learning Motivation and Its Relationship with Language Choice and Learning Effort. *Modern Language Journal*, 89(1), 19-36.
- Daloz, L. A. (1999). *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Darlington, Y., & Scott, D. (2002). *Qualitative Research in Practice: Stories from the Field*. Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin.
- de Courcy, M. (1997). Four Adults' Approaches to the Learning of Chinese. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20(2), 27-93.
- de Courcy, M. (2002). *Learners' Experiences of Immersion Education: Case Studies of French and Chinese*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- de Weerdt, S., Corthouts, F., Martens, H., & Bouwen, R. (2002). Developing Professional Learning Environments: Model and Application. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 24(1), 25-38.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.) (pp. 1-19). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2008). Regional Australia. Retrieved 10-01-2012, from [http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/regional\\_australia.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/regional_australia.html)



- Dewaele, J.-M. (2005). Investigating the Psychological and Emotional Dimensions in Instructed Language Learning: Obstacles and Possibilities. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(iii), 367-380.
- Dirkx, J. (2001). The Power of Feelings: Emotion, Imagination, and the Construction of Meaning in Adult Learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2001(89), 63-72.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2000). Motivation in Action: Towards a Process-Oriented Conceptualisation of Student Motivation. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70, 519-538.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2003). Attitudes, Orientations and Motivations in Language Learning: Advances in Theory, Research and Applications. *Language Learning*, 53(Suppl. 1), 3-32.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 Motivational Self System. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self* (pp. 9-42). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2010). The Relationship between Language Aptitude and Language Learning Motivation: Individual Differences from a Dynamic Systems Perspective. In E. Macaro (Ed.), *Continuum Companion to Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 247-267). London: Continuum.
- Dörnyei, Z. (in press). Researching Complex Dynamic Systems: 'Retrodictive Qualitative Modelling' in the Language Classroom. *Language Teaching*. doi: 10.1017/S0261444811000516
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (Eds.). (2009). *Motivation, Language Identity, and the L2 Self*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Duff, P. (2008). *Case Study Research in Applied Linguistics* New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Duff, P. (2010). *Current Issues and Approaches in Research on Learning Chinese as an Additional Language*. Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics, Atlanta. Slide presentation retrieved from [http://www.lled.educ.ubc.ca/crcle/documents/AAAL\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.lled.educ.ubc.ca/crcle/documents/AAAL_presentation.pdf)
- Duff, P. (2012). Identity, Agency, and Second Language Acquisition. In S. Gass & A. Mackey (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 410-426). London: Routledge.
- Duff, P., Anderson, T., Ilnyckyj, R., Lester, E., Wang, R., & Yates, E. (2009-2011). CRCLLE Research. Learning Chinese: Linguistic, Sociocultural and Narrative Perspectives. Retrieved 24 Oct, 2011, from [http://www.lled.educ.ubc.ca/crcle/CRCLLE\\_research.html](http://www.lled.educ.ubc.ca/crcle/CRCLLE_research.html)
- DuFon, M. A. (2002). Video Recording in Ethnographic SLA Research: Some Issues of Validity in Data Collection. *Language Learning and Technology*, 6(1), 40-59.
- Effective Language Learning. (2011) Retrieved 10-01-2012, from <http://www.effectivelanguagelearning.com/language-guide/language-difficulty>
- Elder, G. H., Johnson, M. K., & Crosno, R. (2003). The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the Life Course* (pp. 3-20). New York: Kluwer Academic.
- Ellingson, L. L. (2011). Analysis and Representation across the Continuum. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.) (pp. 595-610). Los Angeles etc: Sage.
- Ellis, E. (2003). *Bilingualism among Teachers of ESL: A Study of Second Language Learning Experience as a Contributor to the Professional Knowledge and Beliefs of Teachers of ESL to Adults*. PhD, Griffith University, Brisbane. Retrieved from <http://www4.gu.edu.au:8080/adt-root/public/adt-QGU20040618.172404/>
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2001). The Metaphorical Constructions of Second Language Learners. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Contributions to Research*. (pp. 65-85). Harlow: Pearson Longman.

- Ellis, R. (2002). A Metaphorical Analysis of Learner Beliefs. In P. Burmeister, T. Piske & A. Rohde (Eds.), *An Integrated View of Language Development: Papers in Honor of Henning Wode*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag.
- Ellis, R. (2008). Learner Beliefs and Language Learning. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(4), Article 1.
- Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What Is Agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(4), 962-1023.
- Erard, M. (2006). The Mandarin Offensive. *Wired Magazine*, 14.
- Firth, A., & Wagner, J. (1997). On Discourse, Communication and (Some) Fundamental Concepts in SLA Research. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, 285-300.
- Fletcher, M. (2003). Intelligence, Motivation and Self-Efficacy: Authors and Traditions Retrieved 10-01-2012, from <http://www.pacrimcross.com/IDT/overview.htm>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. T. (2003). *Educational Research*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Gallacher, J., Cleary, P., Crossan, B., Mayes, T., Smith, L., & Watson, D. (2006). Doing Collaborative Research to Enhance Teaching and Learning in Community Based Further Education. Glasgow: Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning.
- Gao, X. (2010a). Autonomous Language Learning against All Odds. *System*, 38(4), 580-590.
- Gao, X. (2010b). *Strategic Language Learning. The Roles of Agency and Context*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small Stories, Interaction and Identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gil, J. (2008). The Promotion of Chinese Language Learning and China's Soft Power. *Asian Social Science*, 4(10), 116-122.
- Gil, J. (2009). Hysteria Clouds Confucius Debate, *The Australian*, 29-09-09.
- Gillham, B. (2000). *Case Study Research Methods*. London, New York: Continuum.
- Gorard, S. (2005). Learning Trajectories: Reconsidering the Barriers to Participation. In P. Jarvis & S. Parker (Eds.), *Human Learning: An Holistic Approach* (pp. 195-208). London: Psychology Press.
- Gorard, S., & Rees, G. (2002). *Creating a Learning Society? Learning Careers and Their Relevance for Policies of Lifelong Learning*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Gorard, S., Rees, G., Fevre, R., & Furlong, J. (1998). Creating a Learning Society? Learning Careers and Their Relevance for Policies of Lifelong Learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 17(6), 400-410.
- Granger, C. (2004). *Silence in Second Language Learning: A Psychoanalytic Reading*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Griffiths, C. (2008a). Age and Good Language Learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from Good Language Learners* (pp. 35-48). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Griffiths, C. (Ed.). (2008b). *Lessons from Good Language Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haggis, T. (2005). Linking the Global and the Local in Educational Research: Some Insights from Dynamic Systems Theory. In J. Satterthwaite & E. Atkinson (Eds.), *Discourses of Education in the New Imperialism* (pp. 97-112). Stoke on Trent: Trentham.
- Haggis, T. (2006). *Problems and Paradoxes in Fine-Grained Qualitative Research: An Exploration of 'Context' from the Perspective of Complexity and Dynamic Systems Theory*. Paper presented at the Higher Education CloseUp 3, University of Lancaster.

- Haggis, T. (2007). Conceptualising the Case in Adult and Higher Education Research: A Dynamic Systems View. In J. Bogg & R. Geyer (Eds.), *Complexity, Science and Society* (pp. 38-43). Oxford, New York: Radcliffe.
- Haggis, T. (2008). 'Knowledge Must Be Contextual': Some Possible Implications of Complexity and Dynamic Systems Theories for Educational Research. In M. Mason (Ed.), *Complexity Theory and the Philosophy of Education* (pp. 150-168). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Haggis, T. (2009). *How Can We Move Forward When We Know So Little About Where We've Been? Questions About Assessment from a Five Year Longitudinal Study into Learning in Higher Education*. Paper presented at the ESRC Research Seminar Series: Imagining the University of the Future, University of Sussex. <http://hdl.handle.net/1893/1739>
- Halliday-Wynes, S., & Beddie, F. (2009). *Informal Learning*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia Retrieved from <http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nd08022.pdf>
- Hanban. (2011). About Hanban. Retrieved 10-01-2012, from <http://www.hanban.ca/hanban.php?lang=en>
- Hanson, A. (1996). The Search for Separate Theories of Adult Learning: Does Anyone Really Need Andragogy? In R. Edwards, A. Hanson & P. Raggatt (Eds.), *Boundaries of Adult Learning*. London: Routledge.
- Harklau, L. (2008). Developing Qualitative Longitudinal Case Studies of Advanced Language Learners. In L. Ortega & H. Byrnes (Eds.), *The Longitudinal Study of Advanced L2 Capacities* (pp. 23-35). New York & London: Routledge.
- Harré, R. (1987). *Personal Being: A Theory for Individual Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hauck, M., & Hurd, S. (2005). Exploring the Link between Language Anxiety and Learner Self-Management in Open Language Learning Contexts. *European Journal of Open, Distance and E-learning*, (II). Retrieved from [http://www.eurodl.org/materials/contrib/2005/Mirjam\\_Hauck.htm](http://www.eurodl.org/materials/contrib/2005/Mirjam_Hauck.htm)
- Hawking, S. (1998). *A Brief History of Time*. Toronto: Bantam Books.
- Higgins, E. T. (1987). Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect. *Psychological Review*, 94(3), 319-340.
- Hodge, R. (2007). Life, Chaos, and Transdisciplinarity: A Personal Journey. *World Futures: Journal of General Evolution*, 63, 209-222.
- Hodkinson, P., Hawthorn, R., Ford, G., & Hodkinson, H. (2007). *In/Formality in Lifelong Learning Careers*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association (BERA). <http://www.learninglives.org/papers/Phil%20Hodkinson%20Learning%20Careers,%20BERA,%202007-2.doc>
- Hoffman, E. (1989). *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning* (first published 1979, Strasbourg: Council of Europe) Oxford: Pergamon.
- Holliday, A. (2003). Social Autonomy: Addressing the Dangers of Culturism in TESOL. In D. Palfreyman & R. C. Smith (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy across Cultures* (pp. 110-126). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holmberg, B. (1986). *Growth and Structure of Distance Education*. London: Croom Helm.
- Holmberg, B., Shelley, M., & White, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Distance Education and Languages: Evolution and Change*. Clevedon/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Hunter, J., & Cooke, D. (2007). Through Autonomy to Agency: Giving Power to Language Learners. *Prospect*, 22(2), 72-88.
- Hurd, S. (2000). Distance Language Learners and Learner Support: Beliefs, Difficulties and Use of Strategies. *Links and Letters*, 7(Autonomy in L2 Learning), 61-80.

- Hurd, S. (2001). Managing and Supporting Language Learners in Open and Distance Learning Environments. In Mozzon-McPherson & R. Vismans (Eds.), *Beyond Language Teaching Towards Language Advising*. (pp. 135-148). London: CILT.
- Hurd, S. (2007). Distant Voices: Learners' Stories About the Affective Side of Learning a Language at a Distance. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(2), 242-259.
- Hurd, S. (2008). Affect and Strategy Use in Independent Language Learning. In S. Hurd & T. Lewis (Eds.), *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings* (pp. 218-236). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Iino, M. (1996). "Excellent Foreigner!": *Gaijinization of Japanese Language and Culture in Contact Situations - an Ethnographic Study of Dinner Table Conversations between Japanese Host Families and American Students*. PhD Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- James, D., & Bloomer, M. (2001). *Cultures and Learning in Further Education*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association, Leeds.
- Jegede, O. (2000). The Wedlock between Technology and Open and Distance Education. In T. Evans & D. Nation (Eds.), *Changing University Teaching: Reflections on Creating Educational Technologies*. London: Kogan Page.
- Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (2002a). Inquiry into Experience: Teachers' Professional and Personal Growth. In K. E. Johnson & P. R. Golombek (Eds.), *Teachers' Narrative Enquiry as Professional Development* (pp. 1-14). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, K. E., & Golombek, P. R. (Eds.). (2002b). *Teachers' Narrative Inquiry as Professional Development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, F. R. (1998). Self-Instruction and Success: A Learner-Profile Study. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(3), 378-406.
- Jones, R. G. (2001). Identifying Higher Education Students from Low Socio-Economic Status Backgrounds and Regional and Remote Areas. Retrieved from [http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eipo2\\_4/index.htm#Contents](http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/eippubs/eipo2_4/index.htm#Contents)
- Kalaja, P. (2003). Research on Students' Beliefs About SLA within a Discursive Approach. In P. Kalaja & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs About SLA: New Research Approaches* (pp. 87-108). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Kalaja, P., & Barcelos, A. M. F. (Eds.). (2003). *Beliefs About SLA: New Research Approaches*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Kalaja, P., Menezes, V., & Barcelos, A. M. F. (Eds.). (2008). *Narratives of Learning and Teaching EFL*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kanno, Y., & Norton, B. (2003). Imagined Communities and Educational Possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 2(4), 241-249.
- Kaplan, A. (1993). *French Lessons: A Memoir*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Karmel, P. (1975). Open Tertiary Education in Australia: Final Report of the Committee on Open University to the Universities Commission. Canberra.
- Kasworm, C. (2003). *What Is Effective Collegiate Involvement for Adult Undergraduates?* Paper presented at the Symposium: What does research suggest about effective college involvement of adult undergraduate students? Chicago.
- Kennett, B. (2003). *Resourcing Identities: Biographies of Australians Learning Japanese*. Ph.D., University of Queensland, St. Lucia.
- Kerka, S. (2003). Learning Careers / Learning Trajectories. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education, Trends and Issues Alert*, (45). Retrieved from [www.ericacve.org/pubs.asp](http://www.ericacve.org/pubs.asp)
- Kiefer, K. (2006). Complexity, Class Dynamics, and Distance Learning. *Computers and Composition*, 23(1), 125-138.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1996). *Papers and Journals: A Selection* (A. Hannay, Trans.). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical Constructivism Primer*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Kinginger, C. (2004). Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Foreign Language Learning and Identity Reconstruction. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (pp. 219-242). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Kinginger, C. (2010). Foreign Language Learning. In B. McGaw, E. Baker & P. Peterson (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (pp. 382-386). Oxford: Elsevier.
- Kinginger, C., & Blattner, G. (2008). Histories of Engagement and Sociolinguistic Awareness in Study Abroad. Colloquial French. In L. Ortega & H. Byrnes (Eds.), *The Longitudinal Study of Advanced L2 Capacities* (pp. 223-246). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kinginger, C., & Whitworth, K. F. (2005). Gender and Emotional Investment in Language Learning During Study Abroad. *CALPER Working Papers*, 2.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*. New York: Association Press.
- Knowles, M. S. (1990). *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (4 ed.). Houston: Gulf Publishing Company.
- Kohonen, V. (2003). Fostering a Collegial Culture in Language Teacher Education. In D. Little, J. Ridley & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy in Foreign Language Classrooms: Teacher, Learner, Curriculum and Assessment* (pp. 147-163). Dublin: Authentik.
- Kouritzin, S. (2000). Bringing Life to Research: Life History Research and ESL. *TESL Canada Journal*, 17(2), 1-35.
- Kramsch, C. (2001). *Beyond the Second Vs. Foreign Language Dichotomy: The Subjective Dimensions of Language Learning*. Paper presented at BAAL 2001 Conference: Unity and Diversity in Language Use, UK.
- Kramsch, C. (2002a). Introduction: "How Can We Tell the Dancer from the Dance?". In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language Acquisition and Language Socialisation: Ecological Perspectives* (pp. 1-30). London & New York: Continuum.
- Kramsch, C. (Ed.). (2002b). *Language Acquisition and Language Socialisation: Ecological Perspectives*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Kramsch, C. (2003). Metaphor and the Subjective Construction of Beliefs. In P. Kalaja & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs About SLA: New Research Approaches* (pp. 109-128). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Kramsch, C. (2009). Third Culture and Language Education. In V. Cook & W. Li (Eds.), *Contemporary Applied Linguistics, Volume 1: Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 233-254). London & New York: Continuum.
- Kramsch, C. (2010). *The Multilingual Subject: What Foreign Language Learners Say About Their Experience and Why It Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C., & Whiteside, A. (2007). Three Fundamental Concepts in Second Language Acquisition and Their Relevance in Multilingual Contexts. *Modern Language Journal*, 91(s1), 907-922.
- Kuhn, L. (2007). Why Utilize Complexity Principles in Social Inquiry? *World Futures: Journal of General Evolution*, 63(3), 156-175.
- Kurlantzick, J. (2007). *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Lai, L-k., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2001). Different Learning Patterns in Self-Access. *RELC Journal*, 32(2), 63-79.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1989). *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lamb, M. (2011). Future Selves, Motivation and Autonomy. In G. Murray, X. Gao & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Lamb, T., & Reinders, H. (2008). *Learner and Teacher Autonomy: Concepts, Realities, and Responses*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Lamy, M.-N., & Hassan, X. (2003). What Influences Reflective Interaction in Distance Peer Learning? Evidence from Four Long-Term Online Learners of French. *Open Learning*, 18(1), 39-59.
- Lane, B. (2011, October 26th 2011). Central Government May Fund Course, *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/central-government-may-fund-course/story-e6frgcjx-1226176616516>
- Lantolf, J. P., & Genung, P. B. (2003). "I'd Rather Switch Than Fight": An Activity-Theoretic Study of Power, Failure and Success in a Foreign Language Classroom. In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language Acquisition and Socialisation: Ecological Perspectives*. London and New York: Continuum Press.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Pavlenko, A. (2001). (S)econd (L)anguage (A)ctivity Theory: Understanding Second Language Learners as People. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner Contributions to Language Learning: New Directions in Research* (pp. 141-158). Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2006). The Emergence of Complexity, Fluency, and Accuracy in the Oral and Written Production of Five Chinese Learners of English. *Applied Linguistics*, 27(4), 590-619.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2009). *The Contributions of Chaos/Complexity Theory to Applied Linguistics, Lecture 6, 2 July 2009*. Lecture presented at the 2009 Graduate Summer Institute in Applied Linguistics, Pennsylvania State University.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2010). Having and Doing: Learning from a Complexity Theory Perspective. In P. Seedhouse, W. S.; & J. C (Eds.), *Conceptualising 'Learning' in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 52-68). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2011). A Complexity Theory Approach to Second Language Development / Acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 48-72). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Freeman, D. (2008). Language Moves: The Place of "Foreign" Languages in Language Teaching and Learning. *Review of Research In Education*, 32(1), 147-186.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Le, J. (2004). *Affective Characteristics of American Students Studying Chinese in China: A Study of Heritage and Non-Heritage Learners' Beliefs and Foreign Language Anxiety*. PhD, University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from <http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/1352>
- Lemke, J. (2002). Language Development and Identity: Multiple Timescales in the Social Ecology of Learning. In C. Kramsch (Ed.), *Language Acquisition and Language Socialisation: Ecological Perspectives* (pp. 68-87).
- Lewontin, R. (1998). The Evolution of Cognition: Questions We Will Never Answer. In D. Scarborough & S. Sternberg (Eds.), *An Invitation to Cognitive Science, Volume 4: Methods, Models and Conceptual Issues* (pp. 107-132). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Denzin, N. K. (2011). Toward A "Refunctioned Ethnography". In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Los Angeles etc: Sage.
- Little, D. (2007a). Language Learner Autonomy: Some Fundamental Considerations Revisited. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 14-29.
- Little, D. (2007b). Reconstructing Learner and Teacher Autonomy in Language Education. In A. Barfield & S. Brown (Eds.), *Reconstructing Autonomy in Language Education* (pp. 1-12). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Liu, G.-Q., & Lo Bianco, J. (2007). Teaching Chinese, Teaching in Chinese, and Teaching the Chinese. *Language Policy*, 6, 95-117.

- Livingstone, D. (1999). Exploring the Icebergs of Adult Learning: Findings of the First Canadian Survey of Informal Learning Practices. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 13(2), 49-72.
- Livingstone, D. (2001). Adults' Informal Learning: Definitions, Findings, Gaps and Future Research. *NALL Working Paper*. Retrieved from <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/retrieve/4484/21adultsinformallearning.p>
- Lo Bianco, J. (2007). Emergent China and Chinese: Language Planning Categories. *Language Policy*, 6, 3-26.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2009). Second Languages and Australian Schooling. *Australian Educational Review*, 54.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Mackinnon, S. P., & Clément, R. (2009). Toward the Development of a Scale to Assess Possible Selves as a Source of Language Learning Motivation. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, Language Identity, and the L2 Self* (pp. 193-214). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Macmillan, R., & Eliason, S. (2003). Characterising the Life Course as Role Configurations and Pathways. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the Life Course* (pp. 529-554). New York: Kluwer Academic.
- Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and Personality* (2nd ed.). New York: HarperCollins.
- Mason, M. (2008a). Complexity Theory and the Philosophy of Education. In M. Mason (Ed.), *Complexity Theory and the Philosophy of Education* (pp. 1-15). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mason, M. (Ed.). (2008b). *Complexity Theory and the Philosophy of Education*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Matsumoto, M. (2009). Persistence in Japanese Language Study and Learners' Cultural/Linguistic Backgrounds. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 32(2), 1-17.
- Mayer, K. U. (2008). New Directions in Life Course Research. *Center for Research on Inequalities and the Life Course, Working Paper 2008(07)*.
- Mayes, T. (2006). LEX: The Learner Experience of E-Learning. Methodology Report: Open Learning / Glasgow Caledonian University.
- McLaren, A. (2008). Asian Languages Enrolments in Australian Higher Education. 2006-7. *Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) commissioned report*.
- Menezes, V. (2008). Multimedia Language Learning Histories. In P. Kalaja, V. Menezes & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Narratives of Learning and Teaching EFL* (pp. 199-213). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Menezes, V. (2011). Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Second Language Acquisition from the Perspective of Complex Adaptive Systems. In G. Murray, X. Gao & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning* (pp. 42-72). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (2 ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2008). Adult Learning Theory for the Twenty-First Century. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2008(119), 93-98.
- Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R., & Baumgartner, L. (2007). *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Clark, M. C. (1991). *Lifelines: Patterns of Work, Love, and Learning in Adulthood*. San Francisco and Oxford: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Simpson, E. L. (2000). *A Guide to Research for Educators and Trainers of Adults*. (2nd ed. with updated material). Malabar: Krieger.
- Merrill, B. (2009). *Learning to Change: The Role of Identity and Learning Careers in Adult Education*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., Timewell, E., & Alexander, L. (1995). *In-Depth Interviewing : Principles, Techniques, Analysis* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Longman.
- Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating Participation and Identity in Second Language Academic Communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 573-603.
- Morrison, K. (2008). Educational Philosophy and the Challenge of Complexity Theory. In M. Mason (Ed.), *Complexity Theory and the Philosophy of Education* (pp. 16-31). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- MS. (2011, 08-09-2011). Chinese - the Language the Whole World Wants to Learn, *The Independent*.
- Murphy, L. (2011). "Why Am I Doing This?" Maintaining Motivation in Distance Language Learning. In G. Murray, X. Gao & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning* (pp. 107-124): Multilingual Matters.
- Murray, G. (2003). *Two Stories of Self-Directed Foreign Language Learning*. Paper presented at the Inaugural conference of the Independent Learning Association, Melbourne.
- Murray, G. (2008). Pop Culture and Language Learning: Learners' Stories Informing EFL. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(1), 2-17.
- Murray, G., Gao, X., & Lamb, T. (Eds.). (2011). *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Ndarala Group. (n. d.). Regional Living Australia Retrieved 01-11-2011, from <http://www.regionalliving.com/index.cfm?p=2129>
- Nel, C. (2008). Learning Style and Good Language Learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from Good Language Learners* (pp. 49-60). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norman, J. (1988). *Chinese*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norrie, J. (2011, February 20, 2011). Confucius Says School's in, but Don't Mention Democracy, *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/confucius-says-schools-in-but-dont-mention-democracy-20110219-1b09x.html>
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Norton, B., & McKinney, C. (2011). An Identity Approach to Second Language Acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 73-94). London and New York: Routledge.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, Language Learning, and Social Change. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 412-446.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social Identity, Investment and Language Learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9-31.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- OECD. (2005). The Role of the National Qualifications System in Promoting Lifelong Learning: Report from Thematic Group 2 - Standards and Quality Assurance in Qualifications with Special Reference to the Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning. Retrieved 10-01-2012 <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/27/34376318.pdf>
- Ortega, L. (2011). SLA after the Social Turn: Where Cognitivism and Its Alternatives Stand. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 167-180). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ortega, L., & Byrnes, H. (2008a). The Longitudinal Study of Advanced L2 Capacities: An Introduction. In L. Ortega & H. Byrnes (Eds.), *The Longitudinal Study of Advanced L2 Capacities* (pp. 3-20). New York & London: Routledge.
- Ortega, L., & Byrnes, H. (2008b). Theorizing Advancedness, Setting up the Longitudinal Research Agenda. In L. Ortega & H. Byrnes (Eds.), *The Longitudinal Study of Advanced L2 Capacities* (pp. 281-300). New York, London: Routledge.



- Ortega, L., & Byrnes, H. (Eds.). (2008c). *The Longitudinal Study of Advanced L2 Capacities*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Ortega, L., & Iberri-Shea, G. (2005). Longitudinal Research in Second Language Acquisition: Recent Trends and Future Directions. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 25, 26-45.
- Ortner, S. (2005). Subjectivity and Cultural Critique. *Anthropological Theory*, 5(1), 31-52.
- Ortner, S. (2006). *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Orton, J. (2008). The Current State of Chinese Language Education in Australian Schools. (3rd ed.). Melbourne: The University of Melbourne.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
- Oxford, R. L. (2003). Toward a More Systematic Model of L2 Learner Autonomy. In D. Palfreyman & R. C. Smith (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy across Cultures* (pp. 75-91). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Palfreyman, D. (2003). Introduction: Culture and Learner Autonomy. In D. Palfreyman & R. C. Smith (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy across Cultures: Language Education Perspectives*. (pp. 1-19). Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Palfreyman, D., & Smith, R. C. (Eds.). (2003). *Learner Autonomy across Cultures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pallas, A. M. (2003). Educational Transitions, Trajectories and Pathways. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the Life Course* (pp. 165-184). New York: Kluwer Academic.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patty, A. (2011, July 13, 2011). Call to Scrap 'Biased' Chinese Culture Classes, *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <<http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/call-to-scrap-biased-chinese-culture-classes-20110712-1hcdcf.html>>
- Pavlenko, A. (2001). "How Am I to Become a Woman in an American Vein?": Transformations of Gender Performance in Second Language Learning. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller & M. Teutsch-Dwyer (Eds.), *Multilingualism, Second Language Learning and Gender* (pp. 133-174). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Pavlenko, A. (2002). Poststructuralist Approaches to the Study of Social Factors in Second Language Learning and Use. In V. Cook (Ed.), *Portraits of the L2 User* (pp. 277-302). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Pavlenko, A. (2007). Autobiographic Narratives as Data in Applied Linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(2), 163-188.
- Pavlenko, A., & Norton, B. (2007). Imagined Communities, Identity, and English Language Learning. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International Handbook of Language Teaching* (pp. 669-680). New York: Springer.
- Pellegrino Aveni, V. (2005). *Study Abroad and Second Language Use: Constructing the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pennycook, A. (1997). Cultural Alternatives and Autonomy. In P. Benson & P. Voller (Eds.), *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning* (pp. 35-53). London: Longman.
- Phelps, R. (2005). The Potential of Reflective Journals in Studying Complexity 'in Action'. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 2(1), 37-54.
- Phelps, R., & Hase, S. (2002). Complexity and Action Research: Exploring the Theoretical and Methodological Connections. *Educational Action Research*, 10(3), 503-519.
- Phipps, A. (2007). *Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival: Languaging, Tourism, Life*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications.
- Phipps, A., & Guilherme, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Critical Pedagogy: Political Approaches to Language and Intercultural Communication*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

- Piller, I., & Takahashi, K. (2006). A Passion for English: Desire and the Language Market. In A. Pavlenko (Ed.), *Bilingual Minds: Emotional Experience, Expression and Representation* (pp. 59-83). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Polanyi, L. (1995). Language Learning and Living Abroad: Stories from the Field. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second Language Acquisition in a Study Abroad Context* (pp. 271-291). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Postmus, M. A. (1999). *Metalinguistic Thinking and Learner Strategies During the Early Acquisition of a Foreign Language: A Comparative Study of Monolingual and Multilingual Tertiary Students Learning Mandarin Chinese in an Australian University*. M. Ed. thesis, The University of Western Australia.
- Postmus, M. A. (2005). *Differences between the Beliefs of Monolingual and Multilingual Language Students and Their Approaches to Language Learning*. Paper presented at the ALAA conference, University of Melbourne.
- Ramzy, A. (2006). Get Ahead, Learn Mandarin. *Time Magazine, Asia Edition*, 167.
- Reason, P., & Hawkins, P. (1988). Storytelling as Inquiry. In P. Reason (Ed.), *Human Inquiry in Action: New Developments in New Paradigm Research*. London: Sage.
- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Richardson, K., & Cilliers, P. (2001). What Is Complexity Science? A View from Different Directions. [Special Editors' Introduction]. *Emergence*, 3(1), 5-23.
- Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. (2005). Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (Third Edition)* (pp. 959-978). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rogers, C. R. (1983). *Freedom to Learn for the 80s*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Rotter, J. B. (1954). *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Ryan, S. (2009). Language Learning Motivation within the Context of Globalisation: An L2 Self within an Imagined Global Community. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 3(1), 23-45.
- Sade, L. A. (2011). Emerging Selves, Language Learning and Motivation through the Lens of Chaos. In G. Murray, X. Gao & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning* (pp. 42-56). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Saldaña, J. (2003). *Longitudinal Qualitative Research: Analyzing Change through Time*. Walnut Creek: Rowman Altamira.
- Sataporn, S., & Lamb, M. (2005). Accommodation Zone: Two Learners' Struggles to Cope with a Distance Learning English Course. In P. Benson & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Learners' Stories: Difference and Diversity in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidt, R., & Frota, S. (1986). Developing Basic Conversational Ability in a Second Language. In R. R. Day (Ed.), *Talking to Learn: Conversation in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Schuller, T. (2004). Visual Imagery, Lifecourse Structure and Lifelong Learning. *Studies in the education of adults*, 36(1), 72-85.
- Schumann, J. H. (1997). *The Neurobiology of Affect in Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Seedhouse, P. (2010). Locusts, Snowflakes and Recasts: Complexity Theory and Spoken Interaction. *Classroom Discourse*, 1(1), 4-24.
- Shedivy, S. L. (2004). Factors That Lead Some Students to Continue the Study of Foreign Language Past the Usual 2 Years in High School. *System*, 32(1), 103-119.
- Shoaib, A., & Dörnyei, Z. (2004). Affect in Lifelong Learning: Exploring L2 Motivation as a Dynamic Process. In P. Benson & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Learners' Stories: Difference and Diversity in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skyrme, G. (2008). *Expectations, Emerging Issues and Change for Chinese International Students in a New Zealand University*. PhD, Massey, Palmerston North. Retrieved from <http://muir.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/10179/793/1/02whole.pdf>

- Sligo, F. X., & Tilley, E. (2011). When Words Fail Us: Using Visual Composites in Research Reporting. *Visual Communication*, 10(1), 63-85.
- Solomon, J. (2003). *The Passion to Learn: An Inquiry into Autodidacticism*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Somerville, M. (2007). Postmodern Emergence. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(2), 225-243.
- Spencer, S. (2010). *Language Teacher as Language Learner: A Diary Study of a Language Learner's Perspective of Independent Learning of German*. PhD thesis, University of South Australia.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strijker, A. (2010). *Learning Trajectories and Repositories*. Paper presented at the EdReNe conference, Copenhagen. <http://www.slideshare.net/allardstrijker/strijker-a-2010-1006-learning-trajectories-and-repositories>
- Swain, M., & Deters, P. (2007). "New" Mainstream SLA Theory: Expanded and Enriched. *Modern Language Journal*, 91(s1), 820-836.
- Talmy, S. (2010). Qualitative Interviews in Applied Linguistics: From Research Instrument to Social Practice. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30, 128-148.
- Tanggaarda, L., & Elmholdtb, C. (2007). Learning Trajectories among Educational Psychologists. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 29(3), 295-314.
- Tasker, I. (2002). *Fostering Reflection in Language Learning Online*. Paper presented at the 'Language Learning is Everybody's Business' Conference, Flinders University, Adelaide.
- Tasker, I., (a.k.a 谭以诗). (2006). *Learning Chinese Entails a Metamorphosis: The Personal Significance of Chinese Language Study for Adult Australian Distance Learners and Independent Learners*. Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Chinese Language Teaching, Shanghai 2006, Shanghai, China.
- Tasker, I. (2010). Intermediate Distance Learners of Chinese Look Back: A Survey Study . In M. E. Everson & H. H. Shen (Eds.), *Research among Learners of Chinese as a Foreign Language*. (pp. 153-177 ). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, National Foreign Language Resource Center.
- Taylor, J. C. (2001). Fifth Generation Distance Education *Higher Education Series*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Taylor, J. C. (2001). Fifth Generation Distance Education *Higher Education Series*. Canberra: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Teddle, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2011). Mixed Methods Research: Contemporary Issues in an Emerging Field. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.) pp. 285-300. Los Angeles etc: Sage.
- Tennant, M. (1988). *Psychology and Adult Learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Tennant, M., & Pogson, P. (1995). *Learning and Change in the Adult Years: A Developmental Perspective*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Todeva, E., & Cenoz, J. (2009a). Multilingualism: Emic and Etic Perspectives. In E. Todeva & J. Cenoz (Eds.), *The Multiple Realities of Multilingualism* (pp. 1-32). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Todeva, E., & Cenoz, J. (Eds.) (2009b). *The Multiple Realities of Multilingualism: Personal Narratives and Researchers' Perspectives*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Toohey, K. (2007). Autonomy/Agency through Sociocultural Lenses. In A. Barfield & S. Brown (Eds.), *Reconstructing Autonomy in Language Education* (pp. 231-242). Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Toohey, K., & Norton, B. (2003). Learner Autonomy as Agency in Sociocultural Settings. In D. Palfreyman & R. C. Smith (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy across Cultures* (pp. 58-72). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Tsung, L., & Cruickshank, K. (2011). Emerging Trends and Issues in Teaching and Learning Chinese. In L. Tsung & K. Cruickshank (Eds.), *Teaching and Learning Chinese in Global Contexts* (pp. 1-10). London & New York: Continuum.
- Turnbull, S. (2004). *Almost French: A New Life in Paris*. North Sydney: Bantam.
- Turner, J. (1998). Turns of Phrase and Routes to Learning: The Journey Metaphor in Educational Culture. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, VII(2), 23-36.
- Tusting, K., & Barton, D. (2003). Models of Adult Learning: A Literature Review of Models Applicable to Skills for Life. London: NRDC Publications.
- Umino, T. (2002). *Foreign Language Learning with Self-Instructional Materials: An Exploratory Study*. Ph.D. thesis, University of London, London.
- Ushioda, E. (2006). Motivation and Autonomy in Language Learning. *Investigating and Facilitating Language Learning. Papers in Honour of Lienhard Legenhausen*, 283-295.
- Ushioda, E. (2009). A Person-in-Context Relational View of Emergent Motivation, Self and Identity. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self* (pp. 215-228).
- Ushioda, E. (2011a). Language Learning Motivation, Self and Identity: Current Theoretical Perspectives. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 24(3), 199-210.
- Ushioda, E. (2011b). Why Autonomy? Insights from Motivation Theory and Research., Vol.5 (No.2). Pp. 221-232. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 5(2), 221-232.
- van Geert, P. (2008). The Dynamic Systems Approach in the Study of L1 and L2 Acquisition: An Introduction. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(2), 179-199.
- van Lier, L. (2004). *The Ecology and Semiotics of Language Learning*. Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- van Lier, L. (2005). Case Study. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 195-208). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Vasquez, C. (2011). TESOL, Teacher Identity, and the Need For "Small Story" Research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(3), 535-545.
- Voychenko, O., Synytsya, K., & Manako, A. (2011). *Web 2.0 Based LMS Extension for Lifelong Learning Support*. Paper presented at the The 7th International Scientific Conference on eLearning and Software for Education, Bucharest. [http://adlunap.ro/eLSE\\_publications/papers/2011/1738\\_1.pdf](http://adlunap.ro/eLSE_publications/papers/2011/1738_1.pdf)
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Watson, L. (2003). Lifelong Learning in Australia. Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training.
- Watson, C. (2007). Small Stories, Positioning Analysis, and the Doing of Professional Identities in Learning to Teach. *Narrative Inquiry*, 17(2), 371-389.
- Watts, L. (2011). *The "Life Map" as an Implicit Cognitive Structure Underlying Behavior: A New Tool for Psychological Understanding*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Wenger, E. (1999). Communities of Practice: The Key to a Knowledge Strategy. *Knowledge Directions*, 1(2), 48-63.
- White, C. (1999). Expectations and Emergent Beliefs of Self-Instructed Language Learners. *System*, 27, 443-457.
- White, C. (2003). *Language Learning in Distance Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White, C. (2005). Towards a Learner-Based Theory of Distance Language Learning: The Concept of the Learner-Context Interface. In B. Holmberg, M. Shelley & C. White (Eds.), *Distance Education and Languages* (pp. 55-71). Clevedon/ Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- White, C. (2007). Focus on the Language Learner in an Era of Globalization: Tensions, Positions and Practices in Technology-Mediated Language Teaching. *Language Teaching*, 40, 321-326.

- White, C. (2008). Language Learning Strategies in Independent Language Learning: An Overview. In S. Hurd & T. Lewis (Eds.), *Language Learning Strategies in Independent Settings* (pp. 3-24): Multilingual Matters.
- White, C. (2011). *Enquiry into Individual Emotion within the Complex Dynamics of Language Learning: Significance, Challenges and Prospects (Keynote Address)*. Paper presented at the TESOL Research Network Colloquium, University of Sydney.
- Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for Language Teachers: A Social Constructivist Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Woods, D. (1996). *Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

