**CHAPTER ONE**

 **INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Introduction**

This opening chapter consists of four parts. The initial section gives brief background knowledge of migration in Ireland**.** The second section introduces a migration history of Chinese people in Ireland. The third section presents the study through a discussion of the research topic, the aims of the research and research questions, and examines the motivation behind this research. In the last section, a brief outline of each chapter is given, thereby presenting the structure of thesis.

**1.2 Background of Migration in Ireland**

Ireland has traditionally been a country of emigration, particularly to Great Britain, the United States and Australia (Krings, 2010). Following the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger in the mid-1990s, Ireland was considered a country of immigration, with a culturally diverse society being the result of this (Ruhs, 2009). As King-O’Riain (2008: 211) states: “migration to the Republic of Ireland reverses historic trends of Irish emigration turning the Irish notion of ‘diaspora’ back onto itself”.

The 2006 Census showed that about ten percent of residents in Ireland were of foreign nationality. Net migration to Ireland increased from 8,000 in 1996 to over 420,000 in 2006 (Central Statistics Office, 2007). Non-EU migrants dominated the migration flows between 2001 and 2004. Among the various groups of non-EU nationals coming to Ireland in the last decade, the great majority have been workers (about 280,000 work permits were issued between 1998 and 2008), followed by asylum seekers (74,000 applications made from 1998 to 2008), students and dependents (Ruhs, 2009: 4). Full-time foreign students from non-EEA countries amount to almost 45,000 in 2008 and about one third of these are English language students, whereas the majorities are in higher or further education (MacCormaic, 2009). Non-European students are considered an attractive source of revenue because they have to pay higher fees than EU students (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2003).

Recent migration flows to Ireland are mainly the result of the opening up of the labour market. All citizens from the EU and EEA are entitled to unrestricted access to Ireland and the Irish labour market (Ruhs, 2009). For immigrants from outside the EU, the Work Visa/Work Authorization scheme came into place in 2000 to handle non-EEA nationals’ migration (Ruhs, 2005). The 280,000 work permits issued between 1998 and 2008 in Ireland were largely in low-skilled occupations (Ruhs, 2009). Spouses of work permit holders can only work if they apply for their own work permits. Non-EEA nationals who come to Ireland for the purpose of studying are entitled to take up casual employment (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2003). The rapid increase in immigration over the past few years is transforming Ireland from what used to be a very homogenous society to a more ethnically diverse and multicultural one (Ruhs, 2009).

**1.3 Migration History of Chinese in Ireland**

Chinese migrated to Ireland in “two main waves” (Wang, 2008: 2). The first wave of migration came mostly from Hong Kong. According to Yau (2007: 49), long before the Celtic Tiger days, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, earlier Chinese migrants, mostly originating from Hong Kong, moved to the Republic of Ireland from Northern Ireland and the UK. Members of the first wave tended to run their own businesses, mostly in the food and catering sector, and most have settled permanently in Ireland (Wang, 2008: 2).

The second wave of Chinese migration to Ireland began in the late 1990s and came mostly from the People’s Republic of China (Wang, 2008: 2). The population of Chinese migrants increased significantly between 2002 and 2006. Statistically, a total of 11,161 Chinese people were living in Ireland in April 2006 - an increase of ninety-one percent on the 2002 figure of 5,842 (Central Statistics Office, 2008). However, there is widespread agreement that in fact there are more Chinese immigrants than this figure reveals in Ireland. Other estimates, based on PPS numbers, work permit and visa data, residency figures and other indicators, show the top three foreign national groupings in 2006 residing in Ireland as: Polish, 150,000; Chinese, 60,000; Lithuanian, 45,000 (Irish Times, 2006). Even though levels of immigration into Ireland have dropped significantly in recent years due to the economic down-turn, there are still more than 20,000 Chinese migrants currently living in Ireland (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Ireland, 2011).

Although Chinese migrants are one of the largest minority ethnic groups in Ireland, very few studies have focused on this community. Some research has focused on Chinese students (Wang, 2006; King-O’Riain, 2008; O’Leary and Li, 2008) and on exploring the sense of identity among second generation Chinese (Yau, 2007). According to the Central Statistics Office (2007), of the 11,161 Chinese who were in Ireland in April 2006, fifty-four percent were male and forty-six percent were female. Although women made up nearly half of all Chinese migrants in Ireland, very little research has been done to analyze the cross-cultural adaptation process of Chinese women migrants. This research aims to begin to fill this gap.

**1.4 Presentation of the Study**

The current study examines the experiences of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland through 12 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with Chinese women currently living in Ireland. Chinese migrant women arrive in Ireland with a set of very different behavioural traits and values from Irish norms. They straddle two different worlds and cultures because their home country culture is vastly different from the culture of the host country. As Hofstede’s (2005) research indicates, the distance between Chinese and Irish culture is much bigger than the distance between other European cultures and Irish culture, for example, the religious and linguistic dimensions. Chinese women migrants in Ireland may encounter various challenges in general living, social-cultural and personal psychological adjustment. Indeed, the present study indicates that their process of cross-cultural adaptation is extremely complex.

This research investigates factors that influence Chinese migrant women’s adjustment to the host culture including background variables such as motivation, prior-cross-cultural experience, gender, age, visa status and host language proficiency. In addition, it explores situational variables such as length of stay, the information and support provided, social interaction with host nationals, networking with existing co-cultural social groups and newly-established networks. Personality characteristics are also being examined in the current study.

The aim of the present study is to explore, in depth, the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese women migrants living in Ireland. The following research questions were developed to guide the study toward its stated aim:

* What are the factors that facilitate the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland?
* What are the factors that hinder the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland?
* What are the factors which can be both facilitators of and hindrances to cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland?

In answering these questions, this study aims to contribute to existing knowledge in the field of Intercultural Studies, targeting the specific area of cross-cultural adaptation. In adopting a qualitative approach to studying the cross-cultural adaptation experiences of Chinese migrant women, the study aims to let their voices be heard and beyond this, highlight the difficulties they encountered. Through the identification of hindrances to and facilitators of cross-cultural adaptation, the study hopes to identify strategies for migrants aimed at improving cross-cultural adaptation. The intention of this study is to assist the host society to gain a greater understanding of the experiences and feelings of ethnic minorities, thereby encouraging feelings of respect and learning about cultures that differ from the mainstream.

My strong personal interest in the cross-cultural adaptation of migrants motivated me to undertake this study. My personal experiences were also a strong influence in selecting the topic of the study. Based on my own experiences as a Chinese migrant woman living in Ireland, I was inspired to explore other Chinese migrant women’s experiences in Ireland to see whether they shared the same kind of journey as me. It was fascinating to discover the concerns of Chinese migrant women, and to analyze their cross-cultural experiences and cultural identity in relation to my personal experience. It could be argued, of course, that my own bias would influence the research - I feel, however, that it gave me some empathy for these women, and allowed them to be more open in their answers to the questionnaires during the interviews. It is hoped this research will provide an original insight into the real lives of Chinese women living and working in Ireland.

* 1. **Structure of Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a detailed review of literature relevant to the research topic. First, it presents major theoretical approaches in the field of migration that are particularly applicable to the current study. Following on from this, it examines the various ranges of theoretical concepts and models that are relevant to this study of the Chinese migrant women’s adaptation to Irish society. It compares cultural differences between the Chinese and Irish societies by presenting Hofstede’s (2005) ‘Cultural Dimensions Model’. It provides the context for the cross-cultural adaptation process by emphasizing the key differences between the two cultures. This is followed by an investigation of various theoretical approaches which explore the individual process of cross-cultural adaptation. Recent studies about Chinese cross-cultural adaptation are presented in the final part of the literature review.

Chapter 3 details the overall methodological approach of the study. First, it presents the current researcher’s personal link to the research topic. This is followed by the theoretical positioning of the research in a qualitative domain. It explains the reasons for choosing “Thematic Analysis” as specific strategies of inquiry and explains how to apply this methodology in the current study. It then provides an account of the research process from the interview stage to data representation. At the end of chapter 3, some issues relating to the methodological approach are discussed, including the need for researcher reflexivity and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings based on the data which were collected from twelve face-to-face interviews. It concentrates on answering the research questions, which seek to identify facilitators of and hindrances to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women. The interviews highlight the dynamics between the women’s motivation and personal agency and the structural context in which their process of cross-cultural adaptation takes place.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the research findings and conclusion. The aim of Chapter 5 is to reflect on the findings from Chapter 4 with reference to relevant theoretical concepts. It proposes strategies for migrants and gives suggestions for policy-makers. This chapter concludes by introducing the contribution of this study to existing knowledge, and identifies possible topics for further investigation.

 **CHAPTER TWO**

 **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the range of relevant theoretical approaches to cross-cultural adaptation for this study. Initially, it explores the push and pull factors that influenced Chinese migration to Ireland. This is followed by a discussion of three major theoretical approaches in the field of migration that are particularly applicable to the current study: social networks, institutional completeness, and ethnic identity. The next section introduces an acculturation framework and Berry’s (2008) acculturation strategies on the process of migration at individual and group level. Acculturation stress also forms part of the discussion. This chapter discusses both macro-level and micro-level factors relating to the cross-cultural adaptation process. On a macro level, it attempts to understand cultural differences between Chinese and Irish society in a cross-cultural context by presenting Hofstede’s (2005) ‘Cultural Dimensions Model’. On a micro level, various theoretical approaches which explore the individual process of cross-cultural adaptation are investigated. These theoretical approaches include Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation, Intercultural Communicative Competence and Intercultural Adjustment (Kim 2001; Bandura 1997; Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven 2000, 2001). For the purpose of my research, these theories are particularly useful in illuminating the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese women migrants. A wide range of factors that influence intercultural adjustment, such as previous cross-cultural experiences, preparation, host-language proficiency, attitudes and social support are examined. Recent studies about Chinese cross-cultural adaptation will be presented in the final part of the literature review.

**2.2 Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Migration**

In the “age of migration”, there has been an increase in the number of people migrating internationally (Castles and Miller 2003: 4). People are more inclined to leave their country of origin in search of a higher standard of living, such as better employment opportunities, education, and quality of life. The percentage of women in the migrant population (both permanent immigrants and temporary migrants) has been increasing in the last half century, and now women comprise the majority of international migrants (Oishi, 2002: 1). According to Zlotnik (1998), the number of women that migrated internationally underwent a rapid increase of sixty-three percent - from 35 million to 57 million- between 1965 and 1990, an increase of eight percent greater than that of male migrants. Over the course of the last fifty years, factors such as immigration legislation, gender-specific demand for labour and changing gender relations in the sending and receiving countries have influenced the gender balance of international migration flows. Various factors have worked together to raise the share of women in migration flows. As a result, the feminization of migration has been noted as a trend at a global level (Castles and Miller 2003: 67; cited in Carling 2005: 2).

Social scientists have studied the trend of migration, including female migration, to provide theoretical interpretations of migration patterns and the individual experiences of migration. Kofman (1999: 269) states that “prior to the mid-1970s, women had been largely invisible in studies of international migration because women were always regarded as accompanying dependants of male spouses”. However, during the latter part of the 1980s, the dominant concern was to raise the issue of migrant women (Morokvasic 1983, Boyd 1989, Chant and Radcliffe 1992). Researchers emphasized that not only did women constitute a significant proportion of many migration flows, but they were often primary migrants themselves. In addition, the experiences that migration offered to men and women were found not to be identical (Kofman, 1999; Mahler 1999). The following section is going to explore the push and pull factors that influenced Chinese immigration to Ireland, which are relevant to understanding the main motivations for migration of the Chinese women in this study.

**2.2.1 Pull and Push Factors**

The situations and conditions that influence migration are generally tested in terms of push and pull factors (Kofman, 1999; Borjas 2001; Castles and Miller 2003). Push and pull factors are those factors which either forcefully ‘push’ people into migration or attract them. Push factors are generally negative factors tending to force migrants to leave their countries of origin, and these can include poverty, unemployment, and political repression. Pull factors are positive factors which attract migrants to destination countries with the expectation that their standard of living will be improved (ibid.). These “push-pull” factors provide a useful model for understanding why people migrate.

Various factors have been cited as motivating Chinese people to come to Ireland. The main push factors that have encouraged Chinese migrants to leave their home country are directly linked to the living standard in China. China is a developing country and wage rates are much lower than in Western European countries (Ashenfelter and Jurajda, 2001). The Chinese government has recently unrestricted its immigration legislations and this could be another push factor that has encouraged Chinese people to migrate (Wang 2008: 3).

The pull factors that have led to Ireland becoming a popular destination for Chinese migrants are largely linked to the Irish economic boom. Ireland’s economic boom during the 1990s brought extraordinary levels of prosperity to Ireland (Ruhs, 2009). Another pull factor that attracted Chinese migrants to Ireland is the state-level education co-operation between the Chinese and Irish governments. The Irish government’s new ‘Asia strategy’ encouraged Irish third level institutions to reach out to the Chinese student market (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2003, cited in Wang 2008: 3). Most young people in China seek undergraduate education in the west opted for English-speaking countries and Ireland is very popular for English language learning among the students (Wang 2008: 3). In addition, Ireland became an attractive destination for Chinese students because of the availability of work and employment opportunities in Ireland, and the fact that students are legally entitled to work up to twenty hours per week (Immigrant Council Ireland, 2003). As a result, there ensued a large inflow of Chinese students to Ireland from mainland China. In 2006, forty-three percent of Chinese migrants in Ireland were on student visas (Central Statistics Office, 2008).

Having discussed the push and pull factors that influenced Chinese migration to Ireland, the following section is going to present three major theoretical approaches in the field of migration that are particularly applicable to the current study: social networks, institutional completeness, and ethnic identity.

**2.2.2 Social Networks**

Migration is defined by Massey and Espana (1987) as the movement from a country of origin to a host country for an extended period of time that causes an individual to undergo changes both psychologically and sociologically. Mirsky (1990, cited in Narchal 2007: 55) states that, “as migrants depart, leaving their family and social networks in the country of origin, they pursue their goals of educational and economical fulfillment. This departure can cause them to experience a deep sense of loss - loss of family, homeland, friends, culture and language”. According to Grinberg and Grinberg (1989: 23), in migration “one ceases to belong to the world one left behind, and does not yet belong to the world in which one has newly arrived.” Indeed, newly arrived migrants are in a state of flux, having left the support of their family and social networks behind and not having yet connected to a new network system. They are often confronted with the difficulties of vastly different languages and social norms, causing day-to-day living problems (ibid.).

Researchers give attention to the issue of loneliness and its implications for migrants (DiTommaso, Brannen, & Best, 2004). Weiss (1973) points out that this loneliness arises out of social isolation associated with the absence of an engaging social network and also notes that social loneliness can be characterized by boredom and a sense of exclusion. Weiss (ibid.:150) states the following:

Social networks provide a base for social activities, for outgoings and parties and get-togethers with people with whom one has much in common: they provide a pool of others among whom one can find companions for an evening’s conversation or for some portion of the daily round. Social loneliness removes these gratifications; it very directly impoverishes life.

According to Weiss (1973), feelings of social loneliness can be remedied by integrating into a pre-existing or newly created social network. A definition of migration network is as follows (Massey et al. 1993: 448):

Migrant networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and potential migrants in origin and destination areas through the connections of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin. They increase the likelihood of international movement because they lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration. Network connections constitute a form of social capital that people can draw upon to gain access to foreign employment.

The role played by social networks in facilitating and encouraging migration has garnered interest since the 1980s. Boyd (1989) states that it is the intention of migrants to join established groups of settlers who assist in creating transitional arrangements for them in host countries, while maintaining links with their country of origin and with groups of other migrants. Phizacklea (1999) highlights that existing social networks are often influential in the decision to migrate, linking people in different regions. Castles and Miller (2003) claim that social networks affect migrants in both the pre-migration and post-migration phase, in that prior to migration they provide financial support, accommodation or employment information and contacts, information regarding social services, recreation and emotional support; while, following migration, migrants are aided in settling and re-creating homes in the host country.

In terms of facilitating cross-cultural adaptation, Bochner (1982) highlights the source of social network support and its function. According to Pearson-Evans (2000: 113), cross-cultural researchers commonly distinguish between two types of social networks: “ethnic networks” (comprising members of one’s own culture) and “host networks” (comprising members of the host culture). Kim (1988, cited in Pearson-Evans, 2000: 114) points out that ethnic networks tend to be more vital in the early stages of adaptation, while long-term integration into a new culture is accompanied by the development of host networks.

On the one hand, the existence of ethnic social networks and organizations could help migrants to “soften their landing” in the destination countries (Portes and Rumbaut 2006); on the other hand, the intensity of social networks could also limit the level of integration into host society (Kim, 2001). Therefore, the following section will discuss the concept of institutional completeness and explore the relationships between institutional completeness and cross-cultural adaptation.

**2.2.3 Institutional Completeness**

Breton (1964) is generally credited with introducing the concept of institutional completeness to explore how immigrants integrate in host societies. According to Breton’s (1964: 194) research conducted in the United States:

Many (ethnic communities) have developed a (…) formal structure and contain organizations of various sorts: religious, educational, political, recreational, national, and professional. Some have organized welfare and mutual aid societies. Some operate their own radio station or publish their own newspapers and periodicals. The community may also sustain a number of commercial and services organizations. Finally, it may have its own churches and sometimes its own schools.

As said by Goldenberg & Haines (1992: 304, cited in Dunne 2008: 301), institutional completeness refers to how the network of ethnic peers in a host society can satisfy the needs of migrants. At a societal level, these ‘needs’ can be regarded as ‘institutional services (e.g. religious, educational, political, welfare and mutual aid, communication)’.

Many researchers have investigated the relationships between institutional completeness and cross-cultural adaptation (Breton 1964; Inglis and Gudykunst 1982; Ward and Kennedy 1994). Breton (1964) found that integration into the host society was inversely proportional to the level of institutional completeness of the immigrant community, whereby low levels of institutional completeness would necessitate migrants to integrate into the host society in order to gain access to both essential and non-essential services, while a high level of institutional completeness would guarantee continued participation in their cultural in-group, reducing their integration into the host society and increasing their separation from the host society. Consistent with this study, Inglis and Gudykunst (1982) realized that the institutional completeness of an ethnic community is also inversely proportional to communication acculturation of migrants, and that migrants who experience less institutional completeness generally integrate better with the host society than those who have more institutional completeness. On the other hand, the level of institutional completeness is also proportional to general levels of satisfaction in the host country (Inglis and Gudykunst 1982). However, Nesdale and Todd (2000: 354, cited in Dunne, 2008: 303) suggest that:

Members of the dominant (and, typically, numerically larger) group feel threatened by the presence of cultural minority groups, especially as the size of the cultural minority groups increases. As might be expected, the result is that there are systematic negative effects on the extent and quality of intercultural contact.

As stated by Nesdale and Todd (2003), migrants may be discouraged from participating in the host society due to a high level of institutional completeness. This may also negatively affect the host society. Ward and Kennedy (1994) suggest that immigration communities with high levels of institutional completeness are more likely to allow the separation strategy to prevail and have the potential to cause acculturative stress. Within the area of Intercultural Studies, Kim (2001) has discussed institutional completeness as ethnic group strength, which will be discussed in section 2.5.1.

**2.2.4 Ethnic Identity**

Arriagada (2006: 6) explains that “ethnic identity is a multifaceted concept that refers to a set of ideas about one’s own ethnic group participation”. Ichiyama (1996, cited in Chow 2001: 3) states that “ethnic identity is determined by a complex interplay of social, cultural, developmental, personal, and situational influences that help shape any individual’s sense of self”. In general, ethnic identity refers to how the individual views himself in terms of participation and involvement in the ethnic group (Liebkind, 1992, 2001; Phinney, 1990). Phinney et al. (2001: 496) declare that “ethnic identity is generally seen as embracing various aspects, including self-definition, feelings of belongingness and commitment to a group, a sense of shared values, and attitudes towards one’s own ethnic group”.

According to Phinney (1992), ethnic identity revolves around the knowledge an individual obtains from participation in a social group regarding his or her membership of that group, manifested as a component of self-concept. This membership offers the individual both emotional support and values. Phinney (1990) highlights that ethnic identity consists of the following components: ethnic self-identification in terms of membership of a group, participation in and commitment to the group, possessing both positive and negative attitudes towards the group, a feeling of common attitudes and values, and the practicing of ethnic and cultural traditions. Self-identification refers to the self-assignment of an ethnic label. Phinney (1990) states that the attitude concerning an individual’s group membership can affect their ethnic identity. It is commonly accepted that ethnic identity is reinforced by positive attitudes and contentment with a person’s own ethnic group. Negative attitudes towards a person’s own ethnic group could lead to a denial of one’s ethnic identity (ibid.). The components frequently used to evaluate ethnic involvements are language, friendship, social organizations, religion, cultural traditions and politics (Phinney, 1990). Fishman (1977) points out that language is one of the most significant markers of ethnic identification. Chow (2001: 4) echoes that language can be considered a core aspect of identity and culture.

Social Identity Theory states that membership of a group offers individuals a sense of belonging that enhances a positive self concept (Phinney 1990). It was Lewin (1948) who first emphasized how critical the ability to identify with a group was to maintain a sense of well-being, thus establishing the importance of social identity. Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that the mental health and stability of ethnic group members is reliant on a sense of group identity. As ethnic group members value their ethnic group and extract self-esteem from their sense of belonging, it therefore can be stated that ethnic identification may play an important role in the self-concept (ibid.).

Ethnic identity can be affected by contact with another ethnic group (Yamada & Singelis, 1999). Phinney (1990: 502) states that strong identification with both groups (the ethnic group and host-culture group) is indicative of integration or biculturalism. Yamada & Singelis (1999) include self-construal patterns in their research on biculturalism involving individuals drawn from four groups: bicultural, Western, traditional/collectivist and culturally alienated. They discovered that bicultural individuals had integrated both an independent self and an interdependent self. Some scholars in the field of intercultural studies have discussed the changing identities that include both the home and host culture and that result from cross-cultural contact (Kim 2001; Petkova 2007). Kim (2001) points out that hybridization of identity emerges from the simultaneous engagement in both the home culture and the host culture, which resembles the development of a larger intercultural identity as a result of engaging in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Petkova (2007) declares that most sojourners have developed a hybrid identity in the process of cross-cultural adaptation although they struggle to confirm their identity. Petkova (2007: 16) writes that sojourners: “on the one hand, (they) stick to their native traditions, customs and values. On the other hand, they have been influenced by the values of the new culture and thus they have modified to one or another extent their social behavior”.

Phinney (1990) highlighted that ethnic identity is only relevant when two or more ethnic groups are exposed to each other over a period of time. Acculturation literature has broadly dealt with groups in contact. In the following section, acculturation will be discussed as a framework for studying ethnic identity.

**2.3 Acculturation and Berry’s Acculturation Strategies**

Acculturation is the process which modifies the behavioral characteristics and attitudes of individuals as a result of contact with an alternative culture (Moyerman and Forman 1992). The classical definition of acculturation was presented by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936: 149):

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups.

Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) suggested that as people are regularly exposed to another culture, modifications to the original cultural patterns and behaviors of the group occur. This is the process of acculturation. These changes are a mechanism whereby individuals adapt to the new culture in an effort to reduce the risk of conflict.

Berry (2005: 698) defines acculturation as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members.” Berry (1990) posited three stages of acculturation: (1) contact - meeting of two cultures: (2) conflict - the struggle of choosing values belonging to either the host culture or the heritage culture: and (3) adaptation - strategies to minimize conflict and maintain balance between the two cultures. Berry (1990, cited in Phinney et al. 2001: 495) asked two questions: Is it considered to be of value to maintain one’s cultural heritage? Is it considered to be of value to develop relationships with the larger society? The answers to the questions would highlight acculturation strategies used by immigrants to facilitate the process of acculturation. Berry (1997) further listed four strategies for acculturation: (1) assimilation – replacing one's ethnic identity and original culture's value with those of the host culture; (2) integration – functionally balancing the original culture's value and the host culture's by maintaining one's ethnic identity, coupled with contact and participation with the host culture; (3) separation - little or no interaction with the host culture and a burning desire to maintain one's ethnic identity; and (4) marginalization - maintaining no contact with either home or host culture, experiencing alienation, loss of identity, and stress. Table 2.1 is an illustration of Berry’s Acculturation Strategies.

**Table 2.1 Berry’s Acculturation Strategies (Berry 1997: 10)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Acculturation Attitudes** | **Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity?** |
| **Yes** | **No** |
| **Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?** | **Yes** | **Integration** | **Assimilation** |
| **No** | **Separation** | **Marginalization**  |

Berry’s (1997) model of acculturation can be effectively used to understand various forms of ethnic identity. An individual with a bicultural identity can be viewed as one who has simultaneously maintained a strong ethnic identity while managing to identify with a new culture. In contrast, one who has maintained a strong ethnic identity but failed to identify with the new culture can be classed as having a separated identity. One who relinquishes their ethnic identity and replaces it fully with the new culture has an assimilated identity. Finally, if the individual can identify with neither culture, he/she is said to have a marginalized identity (ibid.).

Ward and Kennedy (1994) advise migrants to adopt integration strategies because integration is synonymous with an efficient balance of original culture and host culture, so there will be less of a risk of difficulties in socio-cultural and psychological adjustment areas. Migration is a complicated process which involves changes at the social, emotional, cultural, and economic levels; it often results in acculturative stress which is often related to adjustment difficulties (Sodowsky, Kwan and Pannu, 1995). In the next section, the concept of acculturative stress will be introduced together with factors relating to acculturative stress.

**2.3.1 Acculturative Stress**

Berry et al. (1987) view acculturative stress as the experiences of groups or individuals adjusting to a new culture. Acculturative stress is a “reduction in the health status of individuals, and may include physical, psychological, and social aspects” (ibid.: 493). Thomas (1995) echoes that migration is a challenging experience for immigrants and some serious conflicts may arise out of acculturative stress. Acculturation stress is an individual’s negative response to conflicts in values, attitudes, and behavior between two autonomous cultures during the process of acculturation (ibid.). The similarities and differences between the host culture and the migrant’s original culture usually determine the level and intensity of acculturative stress. Berry (1986; cited in Thomas, 1995) points out that acculturative stress experienced by migrants, increases as the cultural gap increases between the host culture and the original culture. Cox (1987) also suggests that a higher level of cultural difference between the host culture and the migrants’ native culture will cause a greater level of acculturative stress.

**2.3.2 Factors Relating to Acculturative Stress**

Scholars have attempted to identify factors relating to acculturative stress in Asian immigrants (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Berry et al. (1987) identified social and linguistic predictors such as family cohesion, social networks, and language proficiency as the primary factors of acculturative stress. Thomas (1995) identified the following stressors following a review of the concept of acculturative stress experienced by immigrants in the host country: language, employment and economic status, education, family life, and immigration status. Studies indicate that fluency in English is related to lower acculturative stress for Asian-Canadians (Pawliuk et al., 1996) and Chinese sojourners in Canada (Zheng & Berry, 1991). In addition, social support that comes from family life acts as a safeguard to acculturative stress (Balcazar et al., 1997). Sodowsky and Lai’s (1997) study showed the inverse relationship between acculturation and acculturative stress. They found that the younger the migrant and the larger duration of time in the host country, the higher the acculturation and the lower levels of stress. Berry et al. (1987) found that a variety of social and demographic factors can influence the acculturation-stress relationship on the basis of a series of studies on acculturative stress in Canada. The factors include age, gender, level of education, language proficiency and prior intercultural experience.

Several scales have been proposed and developed as a tool to measure acculturative stress. The Societal, Attitudinal, Familiar, and Environmental (SAFE) Acculturation Stress Scale devised by Mena et al. (1987) was used to measure acculturative stress. The SAFE Acculturation Stress Scale measures the acculturation stress of immigrants in four broad contexts in the host country: quality of immigrants’ social life, attitude of immigrants towards the homeland, family relations of immigrants, and quality of environment (Mena et al., 1987). The factors related to acculturative stress include fluency in English, social economic status, social network and social support, length of immigration, immigration status, and racial discrimination. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) measures the perceived level of social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant other. Suinn et al. (1987) designed the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA). This scale reflects the multidimensionality of acculturation in the following areas: language, identity, friendship choice, behaviours, generation history and attitude.

The duration of residency in a host country affects the levels of acculturative stress experienced by migrants (Cox 1987). Cox (1987) states that migration could be further divided into five stages: the pre-migration stage, decision-making, transition, reception and initial resettlement, long-term adjustment and integration. Among them, the period of arrival and initial resettlement is a critical phase in which immigrants experience physical, social and cultural changes or losses. To be more specific, Cox (1987) suggests that the first few months are very critical for immigrants and have strong implications for long-term adjustment. Hurh and Kim (1990) identify the first one or two years of the initial stage as “exigency” years, characterized by problems with the language barrier, unemployment, social isolation, and culture shock in general.

Zheng and Berry (1991) found that an inverted curvilinear relationship existed between duration of residence and levels of acculturative stress experienced by Chinese sojourners in Canada. Zheng and Berry (1991) measured acculturative stress in three periods: Pre-departure to four months, five to twelve months, and one year to five years after arrival. Their studies found that a high stress level was experienced during the first year followed by a decrease in stress levels during the subsequent year.

Gil and Vega (1996) reported a curved relationship between duration of residence and acculturative stress experienced in their study of Cuban and Nicaraguan families in the United States. Their results showed that high levels of stress were experienced during the initial two years of residence in the United States followed by lower stress from the third to the tenth year. Then, stress increases again to a higher level following eleven years of residence. In their research, Gil and Vega (1996) found that the high levels of acculturative stress during the initial years of migration could be as a result of a limited social network and support and poor facilities in obtaining help. However, the increase in stress levels that migrants experienced in the period following the eleventh year of residence was left unexplained. Balcazar et al. (1997) reasoned that as migrants begin to increase interactions with the host society over time, they may encounter barriers or discrimination in areas such as employment, or career advancement, thus causing an increase in their levels of acculturative stress. Ward, Okura, Kennedy and Kojima (1998) examined the psychological and sociological challenges individuals face with their new environments in a longitudinal study and they found that adjustment problems were greater at the beginning of a new experience and decreased over time.

Perceived discrimination is associated with acculturation stress (Neto, 2002). Perceived discrimination negatively predicts psychological well-being (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi, 2006). Horenczyk (1996) theorized that inconsistent and negative treatment of migrants results in their vulnerability to anxiety and related disorders. The ESRI (2011) reported that skin colour plays a very important role in discrimination, for example, black immigrants are nine times more likely to be unemployed than Irish nationals and are seven times more likely to be discriminated against when seeking a job. Barry and Grilo (2003) found that East Asian migrants perceived both individual and group discrimination in their host community and this perception negatively influenced their functioning. Chun (1995) pointed out that, in comparison with European migrants, visible minority migrants are vulnerable to potential stressors such as racial stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and therefore they endure a more turbulent acculturative process. It is very easy to identify Asian migrants from the colour of their skin, whereas, the same cannot be said of East European migrants. Chinese migrants were radicalized as ‘not white’ and clearly a ‘visible’ minority in Ireland so they are more likely to experience discrimination than East European migrants (King-O’Riain, 2008: 214). Lentin and McVeigh (2006) write about state racism in Ireland. According to Lentin (2007), the limits of visas and work permits to immigrants could be viewed as a form of state racism.

Having discussed factors relating to acculturative stress, such as length of stay and perceived discrimination, the following section is going to focus on theoretical approaches to cross-cultural adaptation due to the significant role that culture plays in the migration process.

**2.4 Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

**2.4.1 Definition of Culture**

Kitayama and Cohen (2007: 616) define culture as being integrated systems consisting of widely shared social ‘norms’ (‘rules,’ ‘theories,’ ‘grammars,’ ‘codes’, ‘systems,’ ‘models,’ ‘worldviews’ etc.). According to Jandt (2001: 499), culture can be viewed as “the sum total of ways of living, including behavioral, norms, linguistics expression, style of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over the course of generations”. Van Oudenhoven, Ward and Masgoret (2006: 647) highlight that “culture is a complex construct and may be seen as encompassing artifacts, social institutions, languages, customs, traditions and shared meanings”.

Hofstede (2001) argues that personal values (also referred to as national values) are those beliefs that are commonplace in a person’s land of birth and learned by the age of ten. According to Hofstede (2001), cultures are the belief systems that different social groups display, evaluated at a national or geographical level. They show “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group from another” (Hofstede, 2001: 21). People of a particular culture generally maintain the same value systems, so it can be viewed as an important part of culture (ibid.). It is important to investigate the culture of a societal group in order to gain an insight into how members of a group respond to their environment. The following segment is going to discuss the relationship between cultural identity and self-esteem.

**2.4.2 Cultural Identity and Self-Esteem**

Cultural identity was defined by Hall (1996, cited in Braziel & Mannur, 2003: 236) as follows:

Cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provide us, as ‘one people,’ with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.

According to Hall (1996), various traits of the self are molded by culture: how people view themselves, what they aspire to be, and when they feel positive (or negative) regarding themselves. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that culture influences the views people maintain of themselves - whether they feel they are autonomous and independent of others or whether they feel they are overly reliant on and connected to others. It is apparent that an individual’s reported feelings of self-esteem are influenced by the cultural differences in the self-conceptions of an individual (ibid.).

Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999) claim that members of East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Japanese) and Western cultures are unique in the manner in which positive feelings of self-esteem are valued and encouraged. In Western cultures, members are encouraged to enhance their independence by utilizing self-engagement strategies as the self is viewed as separate from others. Chinese and Japanese cultures view the self as bonded with and reliant on others and as such members are encouraged to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships using self-effacement strategies. In contrast, Western individuals usually have a positive view of themselves, whereas Chinese and Japanese often view and present themselves in a negative manner (ibid.). Heine et al. (1999) reported that levels of self-esteem tend to be lower among Chinese and Japanese than among North Americans.

Tsai, Ying and Lee (2001) conducted research among 174 Chinese American male and 179 Chinese American female college students to examine how self-esteem was affected within the categories of cultural orientation (language, social affiliation and cultural pride). Tsai et al. (2001) found that self-esteem could quite accurately be forecast by cultural orientation, to a greater extent than the measures of age, gender, and socio-economic status. Specifically, proficiency in English and Chinese languages and pride in Chinese culture were found to benefit self-esteem, although being associated with Chinese people was found to have a detrimental affect on self-esteem. The cultural characteristics which could be used to predict self-esteem were found to be different for Chinese American men and women. Pride in Chinese culture was found to be the main influence on self-esteem for Chinese-American women, however, ability in the English and Chinese languages was found to be the main influence on self-esteem for Chinese American men.

Cultural differences are a leading cause of culture shock (Petkova, 2007). Cultural differences and culture shock emphasize the reasons for cross-cultural difficulties. In the following section, the concept of culture shock and cultural distance will be introduced.

**2.4.3 Culture Shock and Cultural Distance**

Oberg (1958) defines “culture shock” as the distress that the migrant experienced as a result of losing all familiar indications, signs and symbols from their physical and social environment. Culture shock arises from having to adapt to a new set of cultural surroundings and bearing the loss of a familiar landscape (Rhinesmith, 1985). Symptoms known to arise from culture shock are feelings of a loss of importance, confusion, anxiety, depression and feelings of stress (Furham & Bochner, 1986). Hodge (2000) claims that the levels of culture shock one experiences, are highly dependent on the situations the individual encounters and the individual himself. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) point out that culture shock is something people endure over the duration of their cultural adaptation. It is essential for one to become proficient in adaptation skills to move beyond culture shock (ibid.).

Brislin (1981: 138) states that the constant demand of coping with differences in climate, housing, transportation, food, and social norms leads to frustration and sometimes to a sense of worthlessness. Furnham (1988) views culture shock as the inability to negotiate social situations in the host country, relating more to the migrant’s lack of social skills than to a deficiency in the migrant’s personality or cultural socialization. Gudykunst and Hammer (1988: 132) argue that intercultural adaptation is a function of the elimination of uncertainty. According to Gudykunst (1989), most often culture shock is a product of uncertainty. Culture shock can be defined as the inability of a migrant to accurately predict the beliefs and attitudes of both themselves and others (cognitive uncertainty) as well as the inability to predict behavior in a given situation (behavioral uncertainty). The reduction of uncertainty allows migrants to overcome their culture shock (ibid.).

Although negative experiences are often associated with culture shock, there are positive aspects of it too. For instance, Adler (1987: 30) defines culture shock as a “cross-cultural learning experience”. It causes migrants to gain an awareness of their own development, learning and change. These are the areas in which the positive results of culture shock can be investigated. One of the most effective strategies with which culture shock can be dealt with is the development of the communication skills of the migrant, in both their knowledge of the host country and in their empathy (Rothwell 2000).

Research indicates that culture shock progresses through three different phases: 1) fascination with the new culture; 2) hostility and frustration; and 3) acceptance and adaptation (Smalley 1963; Adler 1987; Furnham & Bochner 1982; Ting-Toomey & Chung 2005). Petkova (2007) argues that the level of culture shock experienced is directly related to the “cultural distance” between the home culture of the migrant and the host culture. Babiker et al. (1980) define “cultural distance” as a concept which explains the distress caused by migration during the acculturation process. Cultural distance has been defined by Gorgorio and Planas (2005: 65) as:

the distance between how different individuals interpret the same fact, situations, person, event or norm, resulting from living and experiencing them from the perspectives of the different cultures to which they belong.

According to Mumford & Babiker (1997), the following factors can be used to measure cultural distance: climate, dress, language, food, religion and social norms. Other researchers found that cultural distance is also linked with psychosocial adjustment (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980; Ward & Searle, 1991). Babiker et al. (1980) argued that the degree of psychological adjustment difficulties is a function of the dissimilarities between culture of origin and culture of contact. This can be interpreted to mean that migrants whose host and home countries have a larger cultural difference are more likely to experience greater life changes, more stress and complications with psychosocial adjustment during cross-cultural transition (Cigularova 2005).

Furnham and Bochner (1982, cited in Cigularova 2005) reported that international students in the United Kingdom, who came from culturally similar regions, experienced fewer social difficulties than students from culturally distant regions. The larger the gap between the host culture and the home culture of the migrants, the more difficult it is for the migrants to adapt. Individuals moving between very culturally distant places tend to experience greater challenges of adaptation. As Redmond (2000: 153) suggests that “the greater the (cultural) difference, the more one might expect problems in developing and maintaining relationships, meeting social needs, communicating effectively, and in general adapting to the culture”. Cultural distance refers in general to the level of cultural difference between two groups, which is usually evaluated by comparison of a number of factors. In the following section, cultural dimensions will be introduced as one way of comparing cultures and indicators of cultural distance.

**2.4.4 Cultural Dimensions**

Studies have shown that the degree of difference between the home culture and the host culture can greatly increase the degree of culture shock that the individual will encounter (Ward, et al. 2001). If there is a big degree of difference between the host and home culture, the individual may experience a large amount of psychological stress and a number of adaptation problems. Migrants can experience a ‘greater intensity of life changes during cross-cultural transition and, consequently, more acculturative stress’ (ibid.: 95). Hofstede (1994, 2001) presents a well-documented source of research on cultural dimensions. He carried out a survey based on different cultures of the employees of IBM in their various offices in 64 countries in 1980. Hofstede (1994, 2001) found that national cultures had similarities and differences which enabled them to be grouped into different ‘cultural dimensions’. The cultural dimensions model designed by Hofstede (1994, 2001) offers five different cultural dimensions and value perspectives between national cultures:

**Power-DistanceDimension** is related to the effects of power inequality and authority in relation to society. It exerts an influence on the hierarchy and relationships of family and organizational units.

**Individualism Dimension** focused on how a society rewards achievements and interpersonal relationships in an individual or collective manner.

**Masculinity Dimension** According to Hofstede (2001), in masculine countries, achievement and success are the primary values held by members; whereas in feminine countries, caring for other members and quality of life are more valued.

**Uncertainty Avoidance** **Dimension** is based on the tolerance a society shows for uncertainty and ambiguity. According to Hofstede (2001: 113), uncertainty avoidance refers to “the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations”.

**Long-Term Orientation** **Dimension** focuses on whether or not the society embraces devotion to traditional, forward-thinking values, and the degree to which they are embraced. Long-term orientation “stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift” (Hofstede, 2001: 359).

**2.4.5 Cultural Differences between Chinese and Irish Society**

Hofstede’s (2001) research on cultural variation offers greatly differing insights into Chinese and Irish culture. As Table 2.2 shows, Chinese and Irish cultures tend to fall at opposite ends of three of these dimensions, with particularly strong differentiation being found on the Individualism Dimensions. A low score on the Individualism scale shows that China is host to a collectivistic society. This score is in contrast with Irish scores, which reveal a strong emphasis of individualism running through Irish culture. Comparisons drawn from the Power-Distance Dimension score between China and Ireland show that Chinese society can be viewed as a hierarchical society with its culture score rating of 80 on the Power-Distance Index. Ireland is illustrated as a country with a comparatively small Power-Distance. China and Ireland’s low score in the Uncertainty Avoidance reveal an unrestricted nature of decision-making.

**Table 2.2 Index Scores for China and Ireland Based on Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions**

**(Hofstede 2001: 501, 502)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **Power-Distance****Index**  | **Uncertainty Avoidance****Index**  | **Individualism** **Index**  | **Masculinity** **Index**  | **Long-Term****Orientation Index**  |
| **China** | **80** | **30** | **20** | **66** | **118** |
| **Ireland** | **28** | **35** | **70** | **68** | **43** |

One of the key differences highlighted in the study of Chinese and Irish societal roles is the concept of the individualism dimension (Hofstede 2001). Individual goals and interests that influence social norms and encourage creative, self-reliant competitive and assertive personalities are the key characteristics of individualistic cultures. Self-promotion and self-development are emphasized and abilities are valued (Neuliep, 2003: 38). In contrast to this, collectivist societies value the goals of the group, and make these goals the primary focus of each member. The basic units of collectivist societies are groups, such as family units (Neuliep, 2003). Wilhelm (1998) notices that collectivist societies value loyalty to the group and on maintaining the dignity and integrity of the group.

Both China and Ireland achieve high scores on the masculinity index, showing strong masculine roles in comparison with feminine roles. According to Hofstede (2001), a high Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. Males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure, with female being controlled by male domination. However, Greene (1994) believes that a blurring of traditional and modern expectations and roles of women has taken place in Ireland. This indicates that Ireland has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. Females are treated equally to males in all aspects of society.

**2.4.6 Understanding Chinese Women’s Cultural Roots**

The influence of Confucian philosophies and values are evident in Chinese culture. These influences have caused value to be placed on harmony, collectivism, filial piety, and a defined hierarchical structure (Bond & Hwang, 1986). Buttaro (2010: 69) states that the Confucian hierarchy has been visible in the ruling of China over thousands of years and to this day it still dominates many aspects of the life of Chinese people. Hodge (2000: 61) states that virtues in Confucianism consist of “working hard, not spending more than necessary, being patient, and preserving”. Neuliep (2003) points out that clearly defined hierarchy and filial nationalism are also Confucian values. According to Marx (2001), Chinese people view “saving face” as maintaining the integrity of the self. “Face” concept influences communications and the constant avoidance of conflict brings a sense of harmony to the family unit.

As the harmony of society has long been valued by Chinese tradition, usually Chinese people will keep a close relationship with others, especially within the family unit (Kong, Hau, & Marsh, 2003). According to Yu (2010: 9), the traditional Confucian rituals and ancestor worship have largely been simplified in modern China as the love of and loyalty to parents. As is evident in Confucianism, material or spiritual repayment can be regarded as filial devotion to family and parents. Furthermore, in accordance with collectivism, China is regarded by Chinese people as the mother of all Chinese people. The society is viewed as a large family, with all those within treated as family members. This loyalty to the family reinforces filial nationalism which has had the effect of encouraging Chinese people to work to benefit both country and family in a diligent and hard-working manner (ibid.).

Education is given a high priority by many related values in Confucianism. Strong feelings of obligation and duty are synonymous with filial piety. Perseverance and obedience are highly valued traits of a son or a daughter and teachers are held in high esteem by society (Verma et al. 1999). Judd (1994: 2) found that the Confucian social organization laid down the place of women by creating the three obediences: women should obey their father before marriage, their husband when married and their son when widowed. This clearly defines the gender-specific role of women. Chinese industry is almost completely managed by men. Positions which require business and technical experience are usually reserved for men; public and governmental bodies are generally controlled by men (ibid.). These cultural and philosophical beliefs unavoidably influence the everyday lives of Chinese migrant women in Ireland. Buttaro (2010: 70) states “when studying Chinese women, ethnicity and cultural roots are very important in constructing who they are and how they present themselves in society”. In the process of cultural adaptation, the fewer the similarities found in two cultures, the more difficult it is for people to adapt and cope (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Chinese migrant women in Ireland must adjust in the face of cultural differences as well as the conflicting collectivistic and individualistic societies. The following section is devoted to the presentation of three theoretical approaches which explore the individual process of cross-cultural adaptation that relate to the current study: Kim’s (2001, 2005) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural adjustment and intercultural competence.

**2.5 Theories Relating to Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

Sobre-Denton & Hart (2008: 1) point out that “cross-cultural adaptation has often been used interchangeably with the term cultural shock”. Some theories link cultural shock to cross-cultural adaptation. One of the most common theories is the U-curve Model which states that migrants experience five stages of emotional adaptation in a new culture: (1) the honeymoon stage, leading to feelings of initial euphoria; (2) culture shock, resulting from feelings of disorientation; (3) hostility towards the host culture, leading to feelings of resentment; (4) initial adaptation, leading to a sense of autonomy within the host culture, and finally (5) assimilation into the host culture, leading to a sense of belonging to both the host and home culture (Adler, 1975; Furnham & Bochner, 1986, Pederson, 1995). The strength of this model is that it explains ups and downs of immersion in a country far from home. However, Hottola (2004: 450, cited in Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2008: 2) noted that the model “can not be regarded as a comprehensive explanation of intercultural adaptation”.

Gudykunst (1998) introduces the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) model which states that cross-cultural adaptation is a method of uncertainty reduction. According to Gudykunst (2005: 424), culture shock is “a product of uncertainty”; migrants must have a solid sense of self-awareness, adaptive attitudes and behavior and high tolerance for ambiguity in order to reduce uncertainty and adapt effectively. Kim’s integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation appears to be the dominant theory among the theoriesrelated to cross-cultural adaptation.Thecurrent study uses Kim’s integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation as one of the methods to examine the adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland, at both the pre-arrival and post-arrival phases. The following section is going to focus on Kim’s integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation.

**2.5.1 Kim’s Integrative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

Kim’s (2001) integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation is a broad ranging theory based on the open-system perspective. Utilizing a wide range of factors such as communication, psychological and sociological research, the aim of the theory is to enhance understanding of the processes of cross-cultural adaptation. Kim (1988) identifies five constructs which together can be viewed as the factors affecting adaptation: personal communication; host social communication; ethnic social communication; host environment; and predisposition. According to Kim (2001), the process of intercultural transformation is a process through which functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity can be attained. **Figure 2.1** is Kim’s structural model which shows factors influencing cross-cultural adaptation.

**Figure 2.1 Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Structural Model**

**(Source: Kim 2001: 87)**

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***Personal Communication Competence: Host Communication Competence***

Communication is essential for those wishing to successfully adapt to a new environment. There are three commonly referred to categories: **Cognitive, Affective** and **Operational Competence**. The **Cognitive** aspect refers to the capabilities of the individual such as the knowledge of communication system, understanding of the host culture and rules of interpersonal contact. The **Affective** category enables the individual to adapt culturally, motivating the migrant to conquer the various challenges they face living in the host country, in improving skills and involving oneself in emotional and physical aspects of the host country. **Operational Competence** relates to the remaining abilities of the migrant to communicate with host residents and to express their cognitive and affective experiences.

***Host Social Communication***

Host Communication is divided into both **Interpersonal** and **Mass Communication**. **Host Interpersonal Communication** consists of the host ties, in terms of the size, proportion and strength. **Host Mass Communication** is composed of both the quantity of host media accessed and the information targeted while using the host media.

According to Kim (2001), migrants must become involved in interpersonal and mass communication activities in the host country to successfully adapt. **Host Interpersonal Communication** enables migrants to gain both essential information regarding the host culture and understanding the mind-set and behaviour of local people, allowing them to modify their own behavior. **Host Mass Communication** relies on immersing migrants into the host culture through media such as radio, television etc and offers an important source of cultural and language information without forcing the individual to participate in the host culture.

***Ethnic Social Communication***

Ethnic Social Communication is also divided into **Interpersonal** and **Mass Communication** categories. **Ethnic Interpersonal Communication** consists of ties to the ethnic community and the size, number and strength of those ties. **Ethnic Mass Communication** is composed of both the quantity of ethnic media accessed and the information-seeking nature of this media.

Kim (2001) states that, at the initial stage of the process of integration, migrant communities offer migrants who may not necessarily be familiar with other migrants in the host country the ability to experience some of the comforts of their own culture, thus facilitating adaptation. This ethnic social communication allows migrants to maintain a relationship with their original culture even after the initial phase of integration.

***Host Environment***

Host Environmental factors consist of **Host Receptivity, Host Conformity Pressure** and **Ethnic Group Strength**. **Host Receptivity** refers to having a positive attitude towards strangers and inclusive and associative communications. **Host Conformity Pressure** is a balance of assimilative tendencies and homogenous ethnic composition. **Ethnic Group Strength** is measured by ethnic prestige, identity policies and institutional completeness.

Kim (2001) points out that not all cultures facilitate integration equally, and that there is a direct connection between the host culture’s attitude to the migrants and the ability of the individual to integrate. The openness and friendliness shown to migrants varies depending on the society. Ethnic group strength can influence the level of receptivity and conformity pressure placed on a migrant. Ethnic group strength is a measure of the ability of an ethnic group to influence the host society as a whole.

***Predisposition***

Predisposition is viewed as the mind-set of the migrant as they initially encounter the host culture, their background and the previous experiences of the migrant prior to reaching the host culture. These factors as a whole are a measure of the adaptation potential of the migrant. Predisposition consists of **Preparedness for Change, Ethnic Proximity** and **Adaptive Personality**. **Preparedness for Change** is the education and training, previous intercultural experiences and voluntary versus planned relocation. **Ethnic Proximity** is the ethnic similarity to and compatibility of a host country. **Adaptive Personality** refers to the openness, strength and positivity of a migrant.

According to Kim (2001), if migrants take action to prepare themselves in relation to entering the new environment, they will experience a positive effect on their transition. This is based on the mental, emotional and motivational ability to handle the new environment and their knowledge of the host language and culture. Maintaining an open mind eases the stress of culture shock that is usually encountered with integration into the host environment.

**2.5.2 Kim’s Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model**

A cohesive integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation has been developed by Kim (1988). The theory views cross-cultural adaptation as a process of the “stress-adaptation-growth” dynamic that gradually offers the migrants a more effective level of functional fitness and psychological health in relation to the host environment. Kim (1988: 56) details her model in the following way with Figure 2.2shown below:

**Figure 2.2 Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamics of Adaptive Transformation**

**(Kim 2001: 59)**



The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic plays out not in a smooth, arrow-like linear progression, but in a cyclic and continual “draw-back-to-leap’ way similar to the movement of a wheel. Each stressful experience is responded to with a ‘draw back’ (temporary disintegration and disengagement), which then activates adaptive energy to help strangers reorganize themselves and ‘leap forward’ (temporary integration or engagement pattern).

Kim (1988, 2001) states that three elements – “stress, adaptation, and growth”, label the psychological changes of migrants that enable them to successfully function in the host environment. Kim (2001) emphasizes that communication and establishing social networks can allow adaptation to take place and that a fluency in the host language aids cultural immersion. According to Kim (1988), a poor level of communication skills causes migrants stress, which acts as motivation to migrants to adapt, which in turn will influence migrants to experiment, again leading to stress. This cycle tends to repeat itself in a spiraling fashion and leads to the three features that Kim identifies as intercultural adaptation: functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity.

Kim (2001) points out that a simultaneous engagement in both home and host culture can cause a hybridization of identity, allowing a larger intercultural identity to develop through the process of cross-culture adaptation. Factors at both the individual level and the social level contribute to this identity transformation. Personality, motivation and educational background are individual factors; supportive environment and acceptance are social factors. Kim (2004) states that, rather than relying excessively on ethnic support structures, successful intercultural adaptation is dependent on sensitivity to cultural differences, openness, and positive attitudes. Intercultural communicative competence and the role it plays in positive intercultural interaction will be discussed in the following section.

**2.6 Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Lakey (2003) emphasizes that the ability to communicate is essential for acculturation*.* Communication is a tool that enables migrants to satisfy needs in a host culture, including both personal and social needs. Working relationships and cultural patterns must be established and adopted in the host society in order to acculturate oneself to the new culture. This cultural awareness process and the following adaptation are made possible by communication. The extent to which migrants become acculturated depends on their ability to communicate in the host culture (ibid.). Gudykunst and Kim (1984: 220) summarize the relationship between communication and acculturation as follows:

At the heart of the interactive acculturation process lies the communication process linking strangers to the host culture milieu. Acquisition of communicative competence by strangers is not only instrumental to all aspects of cultural adaptation but also indicative of the strangers’ accomplished acculturation. In other words, the degree to which strangers adapt to the host culture depends on their personal and social communication processes. At the same time, the adaptive changes that have already taken place are reflected in the strangers’ communication patterns.

According to Gudykunst and Kim (1984), the interaction of people from different cultures can be classed as intercultural. In the current study, it is the interaction between Chinese migrants and members of the Irish ‘host’ community. The characteristics of a migrant’s personality and behavior or social skills that allow adaptation to a host culture have been the focus of the current research. Taylor (1994) points out that personal development can be a result of intercultural communicative competence, through which the learner matures their levels of intercultural awareness. The indicators of effective intercultural communication and interaction have been researched for many decades. Several studies showed that factors such as empathy, respect, interest in local culture, flexibility, tolerance, technical skill, open-mindedness, sociability, positive self-image and initiative were all key to this (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Cui & Awa, 1992). Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000, 2001) have summarized the five types of intercultural effectiveness from the many intercultural personality characteristics. These include: (1) Cultural empathy: allowing the migrant to relate to members of an alternative culture in areas such as feelings, thoughts and behavior. (2) Open-mindedness: processing other cultural norms, values and groups in an open and unprejudiced manner. (3) Emotional stability: ensuring that the migrant has the ability to remain calm in stressful situations and think clearly without showing strong emotional reactions. This is related to psychological strength. (4) Social initiative: ensuring that social situations are approached in an active way and taking initiative. (5) Flexibility: adjusting the behavior of the migrant to facilitate the demands of new and foreign situations and regarding them as a challenge.

The migrant’s performances in culturally diverse situations are promoted by these personality competences. They also seem to have a positive effect in functioning in culturally diverse situations. Self-efficacy is one of the most powerful psychological factors in relation to adaptation (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1994: 27, cited in Diro Daba 2007) conceptualizes a person’s self-efficacy as the “belief in his or her ability to accomplish various tasks”. Bandura (1997) states that a strong sense of self-efficacy about one’s ability and competence can help individuals with emotional adjustment. Schwazer and Scholz (2000) point out that an individual who possesses a strong self-efficacy can overcome challenging situations without being overwhelmed. Perceived self-efficacy derives from an optimistic self-belief. This positive self-belief allows an individual to complete difficult tasks of which they may have little or no experience. Perceived self-efficacy also allows an individual to set realistic, achievable goals, to persist in the face of adversity, to recover from setbacks and allows a degree of emotional flexibility (ibid.). Bandura (1995: 6, cited in Diro Daba 2007) notes:

[Those] who have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides and supports for performance. Those who doubt their efficacy visualize failure scenarios and dwell on the many things that can go wrong. It is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt.

According to Bandura (1995), self-efficacy plays a critical role as a personal resource that can protect against negative experiences and emotions, and health impairment during the stressful adaptation to a different culture. Long et al. (2009) reported that sojourners with higher levels of efficacy are more likely to consider the difficulties they come across in the process of cross-cultural adaptation as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. They redouble their efforts in the face of obstacles and soon recover their self-assurance after setbacks.

**2.7 Intercultural Adjustment**

As the increase of international migration sees more people migrating for personal, academic, or work-related reasons, many studies have focused on intercultural adjustment (Hullett & Witte, 2001; Jung, Hecht, & Chapman Wadsworth, 2007; Ying & Han, 2006). Although many multicultural societies have been created due to migration, acculturation still presents problems for migrants. Berry (1980) points out that the host culture’s behaviour, values and attitudes are often unpredictable in the eyes of the migrants. Koltko-Rivera (2004) also mentions that the potential inability to anticipate the worldview and ways of being of their hosts causes stress and anxiety for migrants. Unease, worry and potential threats are the origin of this anxiety. Accurately gaining an understanding of the host society’s behaviours and attitudes can allow migrants to manage their anxiety, thus relieving stress during the acculturation process. The anxiety/uncertainty theory (AUM) developed by Gudykunst (1998) focuses on enabling migrants to communicate easily and effectively in a new culture and it also enables migrants to adjust to living abroad in countries with different customs.

Intercultural adjustment is seen as one of the most important processes and consequences of intercultural communication. Matsumoto at el. (2001) define intercultural adjustment as the unique experiences of migrants that are formed from attempted adaptation that also inspire further adaptation. Three factors of adjustment identified by Brislin (1993) include: (1) maintaining prosperous relationships with individuals from the other culture; (2) feeling that contact with this culture is warm, cordial, respectful, and cooperative; and (3) completing tasks in a timely and effective manner.

According to Matsumoto et al. (2001), there are both positive and negative outcomes in adapting to a new culture. Positive outcomes including enhanced language competence; self-esteem; self-confidence; positive mood; interpersonal relationships and stress reduction (Kamal and Maruyama, 1990; Matsumoto et al. 2001). Negative outcomes include psychological problems (Shin and Abell, 1999); early return to the home country of the migrant (Montagliani and Giacalone, 1998); dysfunctional communication (Gao and Gudykunst, 1991); culture shock (Pederson, 1995); depression; anxiety; poor educational and work performance; and struggling interpersonal relationships (Matsumoto et al. 2001).

Tseng (2002, cited in Cigularova, 2010: 3) states that sojourners face four major categories of adjustment problems: general living, academic, socio-cultural and personal psychological adjustment. General living adjustment includes adaptation to host cuisine, living environment, transportation, climate and financial and health care systems. Low proficiency in the host language is an example of academic adjustment issues. The third category of adjustment problems is socio-cultural adjustment including culture shock and discrimination. The fourth category is personal psychological adjustment (e.g., homesickness, loneliness, depression, and loss of identity or status) (ibid.).

Matsumoto et al. (2001) identified knowledge, language ability, attitudes, past experience, social support, cultural similarities and self-image as some of the factors that are influential in intercultural adjustment. Knowledge of both host and home culture and language ability are the two factors that appear to continually rate as leading contributors. This leads to the assumption that if a migrant can speak the language of the host country fluently and learn some general information about the country they can adjust to life in the host country more successfully (ibid.). According to previous research by Pak, Dion and Dion (1985), improved fluency in the host language can be connected with enhanced interpersonal interactions and minimal communication difficulties. Schuck (1998) identified age as an important factor, as the challenge of adapting to a new culture was more suitable for younger migrants.

Researchers have paid attention to the role gender plays in adjustment and acculturation. Tang and Dion (1999) investigated traditionalism and the relationship between gender and acculturation among 106 Chinese University students, finding that males were significantly more traditional and usually experience higher levels of difficulty in integration. Women migrants are more flexible than men and multi-task better. Tang and Dion (1999) maintained that there is a great contrast between the traditional gender roles assigned to women and their cultural values.

Having discussed the studies related to intercultural adjustment of migrants, the following section is going to focus on the recent studies of Chinese cross-cultural adaptation.

**2.8 Recent Studies of Chinese Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

There are various studies on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrants in many countries including Australia, America, Britain, the Netherland and Ireland.

Liu and Louw (2007) investigated the relationships among print media exposure, ethnic identification, intergroup contact and acculturation orientations of Chinese migrants in Australia. They found that exposure to ethnic newspapers was negatively related to integration but positively relate to separation.

A number of researchers have explored the effects on ethnic identity of generational status among migrant groups. Lower levels of ethnic identity were found to be present among migrants who had immigrated at a younger age and had therefore spent more time in the host country (Garcia & Lega, 1979; Rogler et al., 1980). Following research on Chinese-Americans, Ting-Toomey (1981) found that these migrants had kept a commitment to their culture although they had adapted some cognitive and behavioral elements in terms of ethnic identity. Tsai, Ying and Lee (2001) found that Chinese who migrated to the US before the age of twelve identified more strongly with American ways of life than those who migrated after the age of twelve. Guan and Dodder (2001) found that Chinese students with cross-cultural contact in America tended to hold on to original values so as to maintain cultural identity and psychological stability.

The role of gender in the process of cross-cultural adaptation has received attention by scholars. Chia, Moore, Lam, Chuang, & Cheng (1994) conducted research exploring cultural differences between Chinese and American students in relation to gender role attitudes, finding that Asian women tend to have more open attitudes than Asian men. Long, Yan, Yang & van Oudenhoven (2009) discovered that Chinese migrant women in the Netherlands performed better, received more social support and were more satisfied with their lives than their male counterparts. Lee, Chan, Bradby and Green (2002) examined the mode of understanding and experiences of family relationships of Chinese migrant women in Britain. The life stories of 41 Chinese women reveal Chinese women’s diverse expectations and experiences of migrant family relationships and their different strategies to achieve self-fulfillment both within and outside the confines of the migrant family.

Although Chinese migrants are one of the largest minority ethnic groups in Ireland, they are almost “invisible” in other ways (Yau, 2007). Very few studies have focused on this community, and little is known about Chinese migrant women. There are a few studies on Chinese students (Wang, 2006, 2008; King-O’Riain, 2008; O’Leary and Li, 2008) and on exploring the sense of identity among second generation Chinese (Yau, 2007).

Wang (2006) undertook a qualitative research exclusively focused on the Chinese student community studying in Ireland. Research consisted of 22 semi-structured interviews in Mandarin Chinese conducted by a co-ethnic researcher. According to Wang (2006), two groups of Chinese people existed in Ireland according to their visa status. The “settled” group consisted of those with long term residency permits in Ireland or those with Irish citizenship. Those with student visas or work permits comprised the second group. This second group was the larger of the two groups of the Chinese community in Ireland. Wang (2006) found that difficulties relating to the English language formed the largest and most basic barrier. Many students spoke of experiences where their language limitations caused them to feel marginalized. Secondly, their immigration status limited their freedom. Due to the work permit system they were unable to freely apply for jobs. Finally, cultural differences were a difficult challenge to overcome. Even for those proficient in English, cultural differences prevented their integration into Irish society. Wang (2006) indicated that Chinese immigrants in Ireland experienced some social isolation both because of a cohort effect (having arrived at the same time and living together) and due to language difficulties. Wang (2006) suggested changing visa regulations, tackling racial discrimination, enabling intercultural dialogue, providing free English classes, and offering support for Chinese students as ways to minimize these problems.

Based on Wang’s (2006) study, King-O’Riain (2008) also wrote a report based on Chinese immigrants, in which she categorized Chinese immigrants as “target learners” (investing in human capital skills of speaking English to transfer them back to China or other English-speaking locations), in comparison with Polish immigrants who are classified as “target earners” (rationally working largely in isolation from the mainstream Irish community to send money to Poland) (ibid.: 215). She found that Chinese immigrants mainly consisted of students rather than laborers. Many Chinese migrants came to Ireland to study English at universities or private language centers. The friendliness of Irish people impressed most interviewees over the duration of their stay in Ireland, although negative cultural and racial experiences which affected their ability to integrate and settle in Ireland were noted (ibid.).

Li’s (1997: 21, cited in Wang, 2009: 7) study of Chinese voluntary associations in Europe discovers that “there are vast but loose-knit webs of Chinese voluntary associations across the world, providing numerous possibilities for communication, mutual help and organized activity among Chinese migrants”. However, Wang (2009: 12) reported that Chinese-led organizations as networks in Ireland focused more on increasing the profile of their own organization “rather than on practical issues such as working conditions, accommodation and rights for Chinese migrants”.

Yau (2007) explored identity among the second generation Chinese in ‘Celtic Tiger’ Ireland through qualitative interviews, participant observation and group discussion on an internet forum. Yau (2007) used the theory of double consciousness and examined how the second generations self-identify. The migrants’ sense of identity was also researched through a ‘homing desire’ in terms of links to China and Hong Kong. Yau (2007) showed in her findings how the second generation Chinese immigrants in Ireland experienced a greater cultural identity as they were a minority ethnic group which received racialization from the general public and how this affected their cultural identity.

O’Leary and Li (2008) conducted a large scale study of mainland Chinese students in Ireland. The study was commissioned jointly by the Church of Ireland’s Dublin University Far Eastern Mission (DUFEM) and the China Educational and Cultural Liaison Committee, a Catholic organization. Mainland Chinese students were the primary target group, particularly the large number of Chinese students studying at private language schools. The research consisted of a survey, visits to places of worship and in-depth interviews. The survey included questions about both the religious domain and about the experiences of living in Ireland in general. 42 semi-structured interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese which were transcribed and translated into English. O’Leary and Li’s (2008) study displayed a despairing image of the life of Chinese students’ in Ireland, with financial pressure, poor English, a lack of knowledge of public bodies and feelings of social isolation and loneliness. According to O’Leary and Li’s (2008) report, four in every five Chinese students in Ireland have been subjected to a form of racist abuse while living here. O’Leary and Li (2008) found that the knowledge displayed by respondents about Irish legal, medical and policing systems was very low and almost all Chinese students were working in addition to studying. While most worked alongside Irish and foreign colleagues, four-fifths (84 percent) lived exclusively with Chinese housemates and 83 percent reported that all their friends were Chinese. Although nearly half of them were studying English, the “language barrier” was listed as the main concern. Adapting to Irish culture was found to be a major stressor, because of the difficulties in establishing close relationships with Irish people and feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Overall, the above studies related mostly to Chinese students both male and females in Ireland. In contrast, research specific on the Chinese female migrants in Ireland is very limited. Attempting to address the relative lack of research on Chinese migrant women, the present investigation focuses on exploring their cross-cultural experiences and identifying facilitators of and barriers to their cross-cultural adaptation.

**2.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter first explored the push and pull factors that influenced Chinese migration to Ireland. Then it introduced theoretical approaches to migration within the field of social sciences, namely social networks, institutional completeness and ethnic identity. The relationship between institutional completeness and ethnic identity, and the effects they have on acculturation, were explored. The causes of acculturative stress were discussed, along with how this hinders cross-cultural adaptation. Following the definition of culture, the link between cultural distance and culture shock was presented. Hofstede’s ‘Cultural Dimensions Model’ was used to calculate the level of national cultural difference between China and Ireland. These cultural differences have implications for communications between the Chinese migrant women and their Irish hosts, and for Chinese migrant women’s cross-cultural adaptation process. A study of Kim’s theories of cross-cultural adaptation offered a method to examine the adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland, at both the pre-arrival and post-arrival phases. It was shown that adaptation is facilitated by intercultural communication competence, thereby allowing a greater self-efficacy.

Existing knowledge of the factors relating to intercultural adjustment allowed me to analyze current research on Chinese migrants in Ireland, and also enabled me to identify some shortcomings in previous research. It was stated that the lack of empirical research on Chinese women in Ireland represented the rationale for my study. I found that a blind-spot existed focusing on Chinese migrant women in Ireland and their cross-cultural experiences. It is the intention of the current research to explore the factors facilitating and hindering the processes of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland, and this leads me to formulate research questions which guide the current study. It will then be necessary to implement the appropriate methodological approach for this study. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on discussing the research methodology applied by the current research.

 **CHAPTER THREE**

 **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains the overall methodological approach of this study. It includes ten sections, each focusing on a distinct methodological concern. Section 3.2 presents the current researcher’s personal link to the research topic. Section 3.3 presents the aims of this study and research questions. Section 3.4 explains the reasons for choosing a qualitative research framework for this study. Section 3.5 focuses on the specific strategies of inquiry employed, “Thematic Analysis” and explains how to apply this methodology in the current study. Section 3.6 provides an account of the research procedure in terms of the participant recruitment, ethical considerations and the choices of interview venue. Section 3.7 details the data collection process. Section 3.8 reviews the process of data analysis. This facilitates the understanding of the subsequent chapters of research findings. At the end of this chapter, some issues relating to the methodological approach are discussed, including the need for researcher reflexivity (Section 3.9) and the limitations of the study (Section 3.10).

**3.2 Research Context - Personal Link to Research Topic**

The origin of this research comes from my personal experience of intercultural adaptation. I came to Ireland in 2002 to pursue a graduate degree after I had been teaching English and Japanese as foreign languages for twelve years in China, where I was born, raised and educated. Ireland was the first country outside of my homeland, in which I stayed. I had no previous intercultural experience of staying in foreign countries before I came to Ireland. I was a complete stranger in a new country. I can still vividly recall the shock and frustration I experienced when I first arrived in this country. However, I thoroughly enjoyed my eight years living and teaching here. I wrote a story about my own cross-cultural experience in Ireland. My supervisors read my story and told me that they found it interesting. They advised me to do research about Chinese migrant women. I decided to take their advice and follow their guidance to focus my research on the cross-cultural adaptation and intercultural identity experiences of Chinese migrant women, so as to gain a better understanding of how they cope with the cultural differences. I felt then that my knowledge of the Chinese community in Ireland would be a help in carrying out the research. During my eight years of living in Ireland, I have worked extensively as a translator and interpreter for many governmental and private sector institutions including Citizen Information Centres, the Court Services, An Garda Síochana, hospitals and international organizations for migrants. I have met a lot of Chinese migrant women through my social and professional contacts. Being a migrant woman myself, I was attracted to the exploration of other Chinese migrant women’s stories and experiences in Ireland to see whether they shared the same kind of journey as me. I became interested in gathering individual stories for my research project. I was enthused to discover the concerns of Chinese migrant women, analyzing their intercultural experiences and cultural identity because they give a different perspective on lives of Asian women living and working in the West. How do Chinese migrant women adapt themselves to a new social and cultural environment in Ireland? Do they feel a sense of belonging in Ireland? Do they have any intention of integrating into Irish society? I want to explore and find answers to these questions.

**3.3 Aim of the Research and Research Questions**

The importance of selecting a suitable research topic has been highlighted by many researchers in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Glesne, 1999). It is essential to identify “which issues, uncertainties, dilemmas, or paradoxes” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992: 14) are most valuable. The researcher should choose a topic on the basis of what the researcher feels is most worthwhile. “Good research questions spring from [a researcher’s]...values, passions, and preoccupations” (Russell & Kelly, 2002: 5, cited in Watt, 2007: 84). This, I felt, fitted my personal research concerns. Based on the current researcher’s own experiences of Chinese migrant women living in Ireland, the aim of this research is to explore, in more detail, the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese women migrants living in Ireland. In order to fulfill this aim, the following research questions were developed:

* What are the factors that facilitate the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland?
* What are the factors that hinder the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland?
* What are the factors that can be both facilitators of and barriers to cross-cultural adaptation?

I felt it would be useful to employ a qualitative research framework for this research to find the answers to the questions of my study and set out to look closely at definitions of such an approach to determine whether it was the most appropriate.

**3.4 Qualitative Approach**

Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005: 3) definition of qualitative research has a strong orientation toward the impact of qualitative research in transforming the world, as shown below:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self.

Creswell (1998: 15) sees qualitative research as:

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Creswell (2007) gives three reasons for conducting qualitative research. The first reason is to investigate a problem or issue. This investigation is necessary to study groups or a population, identify measurable variables, or to give a voice to those who are silenced. The second reason is to gain an essential detailed understanding of these issues. This level of detail can only be achieved by direct contact with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell their personal experiences without the influence of researchers’ expectations. The third reason is to offer individuals the opportunity to tell their personal experiences and to minimize the power relationships that are often present between a researcher and the participants in a study (ibid.: 39).

Creswell (2007) details the challenging process involved in designing qualitative research: issues in qualitative research are related to the social and human sciences, and concerns relating to gender, culture, and marginalized groups are evident in modern qualitative research. The topics which are researched are often emotionally charged, close to people, and practical. In the process of studying these topics, open-ended research questions are used, allowing the researcher to listen to the participants who are facilitating the study (ibid.: 42).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) claim that qualitative research uses both an interpretive andnaturalistic approach:

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

As this definition reveals, the term qualitative study is used to describe approaches to investigate human experiences, perceptions, motivations and behaviors. It is associated with the harvesting and analysis of words, usually speech or writing. Ritchie et al. (2003: 82) state that in using qualitative research, researchers hope to garner an understanding of the nature and form of phenomena, to highlight meanings, develop explanations or to plant ideas, concepts and theories. Philips Morrow et al. (2000: 590, cited in Dunne 2008: 58) argue that qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring phenomena about which relatively little is known:

Qualitative research has begun to gain the reputation of being an excellent method for examining phenomena about which little is known, especially when the research focus is on cultural and ethnic minority issues.

Chinese women immigrants in Ireland form an ethnic minority group about which very little is known. This prompted me to look closer at this group and I decided to undertake an initial, exploratory study. The aim was to gain a deep understanding of the process of cross-cultural adaptation of these women. A qualitative approach could provide a richer understanding of women's adaptation and give insight into previously unexplored areas. The next level of analysis, within the qualitative approach, is a Thematic Analysis. The reasons for employing this methodology are outlined in the following section.

**3.5 Thematic Analysis as a Main Methodology for this Study**

Thematic Analysis is commonly used in qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Generally speaking, Thematic Analysis is a tool used to identify, analyze and report thematic patterns within collected data. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006: 79), “there is no clear agreement about what Thematic Analysis is and how you go about doing it”. In fact, a plethora of methodologies may be deemed as Thematic Analysesand may be aligned with a range of theoretical frameworks. Braun and Clarke (2006: 81) state:

Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is important to find a theme in collected data with regards to the research question, and highlight some degree of patterned response or meaning within the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) point out the main advantages of Thematic Analysis as follows: flexibility, and the accessibility to research. It is easy to employ with little experience of qualitative research. The features of a data set can usefully be summarized and described.

Thematic analysis has been a natural and frequently used methodology for organizing raw data from interview contexts in a variety of disciplines (Rawal, 2006). In the current research, data was analyzed using Thematic Analysis, because Thematic Analysis was found to offer a solid framework which could facilitate the answering of the research questions. It allows a full exploration of the data without the restraints of methods such as interpretative phenomenological analysis or grounded theory analysis which are more theoretically bounded (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic Analysis is the most suitable method for the data analysis in the current research because this methodology allows a greater depth of analysis. With the collected data, Thematic Analysis enabled the identification and description of hindrances of and facilitators to the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland. Details of the application of this methodology in the current study are provided in Section 3.8.

**3.6 Research Procedure**

This section outlines the procedure for conducting the research, including the process of selecting participants, ethical considerations and the selection of interview venues.

**3.6.1 Selection of Interviewees**

Holstein & Gubrium (1995:19) state that:

Selecting people, as opposed to representatives of populations, suggest that individuals, in principle, are equally worthy despite individual differences and therefore have worthwhile stories to tell. Although this may complicate the description of culture and experience writ large, it enables and encourages representations of diverse and complex experience.

A total of twelve Chinese migrant women participated in my interviews. I knew these participants through my social and professional contacts and I had easy access to them. All of the twelve participants have lived in Ireland for more than two years, which I considered an essential criterion for any significant examination of cross-cultural adaptation. In other aspects I sought variation within the sample to represent different experiences. For example, their ages range from twenty to mid-fifties, as age has been shown to be an important factor in cross-cultural adaptation (Schuck, 1998).

Participants were recruited from a variety of different visa statuses in order to increase variation within the sample. Six women hold a student visa; Four women migrated to Ireland under the family re-unification visa programme and hold Stamp 3 (dependent Visas); one interviewee came to Ireland with a student visa but has obtained Stamp 4 (long-term residency) as she gave birth to an Irish-born child; One interviewee came to visit her sister, overstayed in Ireland and became an undocumented immigrant. Table 3.1 provides fuller details of the interviewees’ profiles.

**3.6.2 Ethical Considerations**

This research adheres to the DCU ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. The ethics form was sent to the DCU Research Ethics Committee and was approved on 5th of June, 2008. In accordance with the stipulations of the University Ethics Committee, a ‘Plain Language Statement’ and an ‘Informed Consent Form’ were given to participants. Copies of both forms (an English version and a Chinese version) are included in Appendix D and E respectively.

The main ethical issues considered for this study were informed consent and confidentially. Firstly, informed consent: all participants were informed of the overall purpose of the research project and the main features of the design before any data was collected. A ‘Plain Language Statement’ (both an English version and a Chinese version) was given to the participants. I made sure that they understood that all information obtained was confidential. Consent forms regarding the interview and purpose of the study were given to the participants in advance (two or three days). These consent forms were translated into Chinese (see Appendix E) and distributed to participants in order to be read and signed. Participants were also informed of their rights to withdraw participation or data at any time. Once I was certain that all information was understood, written consent was obtained to record the interviews. Secondly, to ensure anonymity and confidentially, the names of participants were changed (see Table 3.1. Profiles of Research Participants). Thirdly, the recordings were kept for the purpose of research and will be destroyed in 2 years’ time after completing the research.

**Table 3.1 Profiles of Research Participants**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Age, marital status** **and children** | **Reasons** **for coming to****Ireland** | **Prior cross-cultural experience** |  **Length of**  **stay**  **in Ireland** | **Level of English**  |
| 1. Ling | 29, single, no children. | Study | None |  2 years |  Basic |
| 2. Hong | 41, married with one child. | Study  | Traveled to Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia for short period |  5 years |  Inter-mediate |
| 3. Ming | 27, single, no children. | Study | Studied in Finland for one year |  2 years | Advanced |
| 4. Jin | 20, single, no children. | Family reunification | None |  2 years  | Basic |
| 5.Cai  | 39, married with one Irish-born child | Family reunification | None |  4 years | No English  |
| 6. Hua | 55, married with one child. | Family reunification | None |  2 years | No English |
| 7. Elli | 30, married with two Irish-born children. | Study  | None |  10 years  | Inter-mediate |
| 8. Wei | 26, married, no children. | Study  | None |  4 years | Inter-mediate |
| 9. Sunny | 42, married with one Irish-born child. | Visit her sister | Traveled to Singapore Malaysia, Hong Kong and Macau for short periods. Studied in Moscow for one year |  3 years | Inter-mediate |
| 10. Ying | 27, married, no children. | Study  | None |  9 years | Advanced |
| 11.Amy | 35, single, no children. | Study | None |  7 years | Inter-mediate |
| 12. Xia | 47, married with two children. | Family reunification | None |  2 years | No English |

**3.6.3 Interview Venues and Duration**

I collected the data in Dublin, the capital city of Ireland. The first interview took place in a classroom in a university where the interviewee was working as a part-time lecturer. However, students interrupted the interview and I had to interview her a second time. I preferred a quiet location free from distraction so I decided to conduct the interview at the interviewee’s home**.** The data was therefore collected in her apartment where the woman was more relaxed and better able to freely share her personal experiences with me. This incident highlights the difficulty of deciding where the interviews should be conducted. Nine interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ home but two interviewees insisted on going to a café bar to have their interviews done. The noise levels in these café bars were quite high. This also affected the recording. The interviews were completed within two months, from December 2009 to January 2010. Each interview took between 35 and 50 minutes.

**3.7 Data Collection**

Silverman (2000: 19) points out that we exist in an ‘interview society’ in which interviewing:

…pervades and produces our contemporary cultural experiences and knowledge of authentic personal, private selves…interviewing is the central resource through which contemporary social science engages with issues that concern it.

According to Darlington and Scott (2002), conducting interviews offers the data collection process a degree of flexibility, aids the researcher in the task of understanding the participants. Semi-structured interviewing is the most frequently used method of data collection in qualitative research (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Seidman, 1998). For the current research, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the intention of obtaining narratives of Chinese women’s cross-cultural experiences in Ireland. I decided interviews would be informal and conversational; exploratory, flexible. This is partly because data obtained in an interview can be analyzed in multiple ways, which means that the method of semi-structured interviewing is compatible with many forms of data analysis (e.g., discourse analysis, grounded theory, and interpretative phenomenology). The ease with which data collected from semi-structured interviews can be arranged in comparison with other forms of qualitative data collection is another reason for their popularity. The semi-structured interviews allowed the Chinese women to tell their experience of living in Ireland openly and could provide the researcher with a good opportunity to find answers to the research questions of the current study.

Open-ended questions were used to obtain personal narratives of migration from each participant and to bring in rich and contextualized information. Use of open-ended questions gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses. The unstructured format allowed for a depth of exchange and a truthfulness that enabled the women to talk freely about their lives and the challenge of living and working as immigrant women in Ireland. The interview questions were designed in English, and then translated into Chinese. The interview themes were developed as follows: pre-arrival adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment and personal psychological adjustment (See Appendix A for details).

Wang (2006) undertook a qualitative research exclusively focused on the Chinese student community studying in Ireland. Research consisted of twenty-two semi-structured interviews in Mandarin Chinese. During the transcription process, the interviews were translated into English. Wang (2006) was of the opinion that by using interviews conducted in the native language of the interviewees (the language they said they felt most comfortable in) the participants would feel more relaxed and that this would significantly increase the validity of the research. Wang (2006) argues that if she had wished to conduct the interviews exclusively in English, younger and more educated people would have been selected for the research because of their higher proficiency in English; however she wanted to include older, less educated people who were less confident and less proficient in speaking English, so she chose to conduct the interviews in Mandarin Chinese. I strongly agree with her. For the current research, the participants were interviewed in Mandarin Chinese. One of the participants’ first languages was Cantonese so her husband was present as an interpreter at the interview. According to King-O’Riain (2008), interviewees often present themselves in a more open and honest manner when being interviewed by someone who shares a similar background and cultural framework to themselves. I also believe that relying on a co-ethnic researcher will be a facilitating factor because this clearly provides an empathy with interviewees, and puts them at ease which clearly will be helpful during the interview process.

Fontana and Frey (2000: 646) state that “increasingly qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two or more people leading to negotiated, contextually based results”. Charmaz (2006) also points out various challenges for the interviewers that arise through interviewing; one of the challenges is that a feeling of trust and rapport must be created to facilitate self-disclosure. To do this, McCracken (1988: 38, cited in Dunne 2008: 84) recommends the interviewer offer herself or himself as “a benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest”. Accordingly, during the interviews, I made a conscious effort to make the interviewees feel comfortable so they could talk freely. I listened carefully to what participants said, engaged with them according to their individual personalities and styles. I started the interview with general questions. I avoided making comments which I felt could be perceived as judgmental. My identity as a Chinese person, a woman, and a migrant was central to the relational dynamics of the interviews. For the reasons of our sameness, participants can talk to me freely. There was rapport and a connection that characterized our engagement because some of the issues participants raised about perceived discrimination and culture identity were also significant in my life. I believe that the fact that the interviewer was a woman and a migrant herself put the interviewees at ease. Because of the Chinese cultural value of “saving face”, Chinese women tend not to show their true feelings to strangers. In the current study, the fact that the researcher already knew the interviewees personally proved to be an advantage as there was trust between both parties. Therefore, there was less of a barrier, which could have constrained the answers to the questionnaires.

**3.8 Data Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a helpful outline of the phases of Thematic Analysis. According to them, there are similarities in the phases of thematic analysis and those of other qualitative research methods, meaning that these stages are not necessarily unique to thematic analysis. The process begins as the researcher searches for and notes patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data highlighted during data collection. Braun and Clarke (2006) specified the main phases of thematic analysis as follows (as shown in Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Main Phases of Thematic Analysis**

**(Source: Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87)**

|  |
| --- |
| 1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. |
| 2. Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collation of data relevant to each code. |
| 3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| 4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Phase 1) and the entire data set (Phase 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis. |
| 5. Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme. |

**3.8.1Transcription of Verbal Data**

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that it is essential for verbal data such as interviews to be transcribed to written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis. Riessman (1993) argues that the process of transcription can be an excellent way to familiarize the researcher with the data although it may seem time-consuming, frustrating, and tedious. Bird (2005: 227) suggests that transcription of verbal data should be viewed as “a key phase of data analysis within interpretive qualitative methodology”. The interview data of the current research was transcribed to Chinese and then translated into English. The transcripts were read and studied several times to identify themes.

**3.8.2 Searching for Themes**

Analysis begins with the identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as ‘open coding’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Rawal (2006: 57) states that during open coding, the researcher must identify and tentatively name the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed would be grouped. These categories, created when a researcher groups or clusters the data, become the basis for the organization and conceptualization of the data.

The conceptual categories I was looking for in this research related to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese women immigrants. I studied and restudied the raw data to develop detailed cross-cultural accounts of Chinese migrant women. Analysis in this study focused on what the participants expressed about their cross-cultural experiences, and was extended into a close reading to extract themes identified as facilitators of and hindrances to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women. I read through the text to be analyzed, and underline potential answers to the research question. I identify major themes by their frequency and by the degree to which they are closely associated in meaning and in discourse with other themes. The identification of recurring themes and ideas played an important role in the process. For example, when interviewees were discussing their life and experiences as migrants, the word “challenge” was repeatedly used when they talked about facing difficulties in their adaptation process. Based on this, I generated a new theme: self-efficacy became a factor facilitating their adaptation process.

**3.8.3 Presenting Data**

I present data from three sections, derived from the interviews, identified as facilitators of or hindrances to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women. These sections are as follows:

* Factors that facilitate the cross-cultural adaptation
* Factors that hinder the cross-cultural adaptation
* Factors that can be both facilitators of and barriers to cross-cultural adaptation

In presenting these sections, I have provided detailed descriptions of their narratives to give voices to the Chinese women immigrants. Denzin (1989: 83) states that:

Thick descriptions discover the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard.

I believe that the use of thick descriptions can be more trustworthy and credible than statistics because thick description facilitates a deeper understanding of the significance of Chinese women immigrants’ cross-cultural experiences.

**3.9 Reflections upon this Research**

Having outlined my research methods and process, and my own personal connection to the topic and interviewees, I consider it is essential now to reflect on my role as a researcher in this process.

Denscombe (2007) refers to reflexivity as the sense researchers make of the social world, the meaning they give to events and situations that are shaped by their experience as social beings. Bryman (2001: 471) talks about the importance of reflexivity and suggests that:

Researchers should be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate.

Therefore, researchers need to be reflexive about how their personal experiences, beliefs and values may have shaped their interpretation of the interviews. Being a researcher, I tried to relate reflexivity to my research in the following ways outlined below.

Reinharz and Chase (2002: 233, cited in Seale et al. 2004: 19) point out that “it is crucial that the researcher takes account of his or her own and the interviewee’s social locations and how they might affect the research relationship”. Bearing this in mind, I approached the research from a specific position, which ‘involves reflection on the impact of the researcher on the interaction with the interviewee’ (Byrne 2004: 184). During my interviews, I presented myself as a friend of the interviewees and listened to their stories. I believe that it would therefore be easier to build rapport with interviewees and that they would be more open and give honest information to help me in gaining a deep understanding of their migration experiences. Nevertheless, throughout the research process, I was acutely aware of the potential for personal bias, given my familiarity with the participants, and my personal experience of cross-cultural adaptation in Ireland.

Bochner (1994: 33) states that “if we are part of our data, then we cannot ignore and should not hide the ways in which we proceed from our own experiences, our own feelings and values, and our own stories”. Riessman (1993) also suggests that the construction of any research work is always influenced by the person who has created it. Having been a Chinese migrant woman myself in Ireland for eight years, I reflected on my own experiences of cross-cultural adaptation, which helped me create and build up original research questions. As a researcher from the same cultural background, my intimate cultural knowledge and personal acculturative experiences have inevitably shaped data interpretation. For example, I have a Chinese name and also have an English name. My English name was given by my English teacher when I was studying in university in China. I used this English name when I first came to Ireland because I was worried that Irish people would not be able to remember my Chinese name. Later, I realized that my Chinese name was part of my cultural identity so I decided to tell Irish people my real name and I found that they accepted it. During my interviews, I asked participants to tell me stories about their names. The theme “cultural identity” was derived from these interviews to explore Chinese women migrants’ cultural identity.

**3.10 Limitations of the Research**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese women migrants living in Ireland. The same as with other qualitative research, there are questions of information bias, reliability of results and validity of explanations.

One of the weaknesses of the present study concerns the use of interviews. Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 19) comment that interviews “do not give us access to how people actually perform a wide variety of daily activities”. Darlington and Scott (2002) also point out that interviews inform us of what people say they do, without truly revealing what they actually do. Interviews rely on the self-reported, rather than observed, behaviours of participants, and therefore are based on the idea that participants are truthful when reporting their thoughts, experiences and behaviours. Although I do not think that interviewees deliberately provided false information, I cannot guarantee that their actual behaviours mirror their self-reported ones. In addition, in the case of one of the interviewees, her husband was present during the interview, which might have influenced her reporting. Furthermore, the process of this research is subjective and interpretive. Another researcher could possibly conduct a different analysis and draw different conclusions with the same data. For example, a different researcher could assign a different meaning to a given piece of text, which could in turn lead to differences in how categories develop.

Another limitation is the data collection process. The data was only collected at one point in time because of limited time available to the researcher. Clearly, the theoretical and research questions could be more accurately answered through a time-series study of the same interviewees over an extended period of time. Information that is collected longitudinally will enable researchers to gain a much greater insight into the changes in the same interviewee. Another limitation of this study is the size of the sampling. The current researcher conducted in-depth interviews with twelve Chinese women living in Ireland. The size is small and not generalizable. It does not address the social context; it is one small snapshot in time. Although the generalisability of findings is not possible, using Thematic Analysis ensures that the results have a strong degree of validity in relation to the raw data, given the transparency and rigour of this approach.

A further limitation of this research is in its study of the process of cross-cultural adaptation from an “ethnic community” point of view; the research focus has been only on Chinese migrant women. Dunne (2008) points out that the host society is also essential to successful adaptation. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to the host society in this research.However, given the fact that so little research has been conducted in relation to Chinese women in Ireland, it was felt that the decision to focus specifically on this group was warranted in this case. Nonetheless, it is desirable that subsequent research include additional perspectives, such as that of the host society.

**3.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has focused on the methodological approach employed to answer the research questions driving this study. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the development of my own interest combined with my personal experience of being a Chinese migrant woman. Having this experience had a positive influence on the research as it clearly provided empathy with interviewees and helped during the interview process. This was followed by discussing the distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research. It then presented the reason for choosing Thematic Analysis as a main methodology to this study. The next section provided an account of the research process from the data collection to the data representation. At the end of this chapter, some issues relating to the methodological approach were discussed, including reflections upon the research and its limitations. Thematic analysis was chosen to present the research findings in the current research because it was felt it would produce insightful and helpful findings. These will be presented in the following chapter.

 **CHAPTER FOUR**

 **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

**4.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the research findings. It concentrates on answering the following research questions:

* What are the factors that facilitate the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland?
* What are the factors that hinder the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland?
* What are the factors that can be both facilitators of and barriers to cross-cultural adaptation?

These research findings are based on rich data which has been collected through twelve face-to-face interviews. These interviews were conducted in Chinese and then translated into English (as discussed in Chapter 3, Methodology). In presenting the research findings, I have provided detailed descriptions of their narratives to give voices to these Chinese migrant women. I believe that it is the best way to discover the significance of Chinese migrant women’s cross-cultural experiences.

Based on an analysis of Chinese women’s cross-cultural adaptation experience in Ireland, this study aimed to identify facilitators of and hindrances to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women. First, seven facilitators were identified through a thematic analysis of the data: motivation; prior cross-cultural experiences; preparation; perceived social support; integrative attitude; gender and intercultural personality characteristics. Through exploring the concept of acculturative stress of Chinese women immigrants in Ireland, this study identified two factorsthat hinder the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women: restrictions associated with visa status and perceived discrimination. This study also suggests that cultural distance, host language (English) proficiency; institutional completeness; age factor; length of stay in the host country; and using modern technology can be both facilitators of and hindrances to cross-cultural adaptation. These facilitating and hindering factors were deemed significant based on the frequency of reference to them and on the importance which the women attributed to them during the interviews. Table 4.1 lists the emergent themes from the data analysis, grouped according to facilitators of and hindrances to cross-cultural adaptation.cr-cultural adaptation identified in the current study

|  |
| --- |
| Table 4.1 Facilitators of and Hindrances to Cross-Cultural Adaptation Identified in the Current Study |
| **Facilitators** | **Hindrances** |
| * **Motivation**
* **Prior cross-cultural experience**
* **Preparation**
* **Perceived social support from two sources: co-ethnic networks and the host society**
* **Integrative attitude**
* **Gender**
* **Intercultural personality characteristics: openness; self-esteem and self-efficacy**
 | * **Restrictions associated with visa status**
* **Perceived discrimination**
 |
| **Facilitators / Hindrances****Cultural distance, host language proficiency, institutional completeness, age factor, length of stay in the host country and use of modern technology can be both facilitators of and hindrances to cross-cultural adaptation** |

In the following sections these facilitators and hindrances will be discussed in further detail.

**4.2 Factors that Facilitate Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

**4.2.1 Motivation**

Kim (2001) has identified motivation as an important factor that facilitates cross-cultural adaptation. Generally speaking, the Chinese migrant women in the current study are highly motivated to come to Ireland for a better life, such as for family reunification or further education. In this study, one third of the Chinese women came to Ireland with their children to join their spouses who already had work permits. As the quotations below show, an important personal reason affecting these Chinese migrant women’s decision to locate to Ireland is family reunification:

Cai: *I came to Ireland on 10th of June 2005. I came to Ireland with my son to join my husband. My husband had a work permit.*

Xia: *I came here to join my husband. I came with a family reunification visa. My husband came to Ireland with a work permit in 2001. He is a construction worker.*

For the Chinese migrant women in this study, another reason influencing their decision to migrate to Ireland was the prospect of further educational opportunities, which seemed more advantageous in comparison with the opportunities they were presented with in China, as shown in these quotations:

Ling: *I had an opportunity to study in Ireland. I knew a teacher who happened to be teaching Chinese in a university in Ireland. He advised me to study in that university so I applied for the postgraduate research and I got the offer.*

Ying: *I wanted to study hotel management in Shannon so I chose to come to Ireland.*

Amanda: *My dream was to study in Ireland and improve myself so I could go back to China to find a better job.*

In order to meet the needs of the country’s growing economy, there has been a marked increase in the number of students entering Chinese universities, and a simultaneous increase of higher education provision (Davey et al. 2007). From 1985 to 2003, the number of universities increased by 536, and the number of new students enrolled in them rose from 61.9 to 382.2 per 10,000 people (China Statistical Yearbook, 2004). There were seven million candidates in the university entrance examination in 2005, but the number of university places for students is limited. That is why Chinese women perceive that educational opportunities exist in Ireland.

Ireland is very popular for English language learning among Chinese students who come to study and work for a limited amount of time. With the growth and emergence of China as a major world player, English has become important. As an international language, English is the language of business, technology, sport, and aviation in China. Chinese migrants believe that they can find a better job in China with better English language skills. The quotations below show that two Chinese women chose to come to Ireland specifically to improve their English language skills, either through English language school courses or through communication with native speakers in an English-speaking environment.

Elli: *My motivation for coming to Ireland was to study English abroad.*

Amy: *I wanted to improve myself and learn English so I chose to come to Ireland.*

Education is valued and prioritized in Confucian beliefs (Verma et al. 1999). In general, Chinese parents highly value education and want to give their children the best they can for their education. For example, one of the important reasons for Hua’s immigration to Ireland is for her daughter’s education:

Hua: *I came to Ireland with a family reunion visa. My husband came to Ireland eight years ago with a working permit. I came to Ireland with my daughter two years ago. The main purpose for coming here was for my daughter to study at the university in Ireland. Studying abroad is good for my child’s future development.*

Four Chinese migrant women in this study mentioned that they were the only child in the family. The ‘One child policy’ (Zhang 2007) in China, where families are allowed only one child, resulted in parents devoting themselves to their only child, with little regard to cost or effort. Their parents decided to send them abroad to study and paid their tuition fees because they believed that studying abroad offered better opportunities to their children.

Wei: *I am the only child in my family, I was born in 1983. The one-child policy was promoted in China from 1980. My mother decided to send me to study in Ireland because she was thinking of her child’s future. My tuition fee was very expensive - eight thousand Euros for one year. My mother paid the fee for me. She posted the fee to my College.*

The following extracts demonstrate that two Chinese migrant women expect to gain work experience after completing their studies in Ireland, offering them enhanced employment prospects on their return to China. They hoped to find an ideal job to fulfill their parents’ expectation:

Wei: *I planned to study Accounting in Ireland and go back to China to find a nice job after I gain some work experiences here.*

Ying: *My dream was to complete my study within 4 years’ time and work for two years to gain some experiences. Then I planned to go back to China.*

It is common in Chinese culture for adults to live with their parents prior to marriage. In this study, migration provides Chinese women with the opportunity to seek independence from their parents or spouses, offering both financial independence and emotional freedom:

Elli: *I was studying and working when I first came to Ireland. I felt relieved because I left my mother in the end. She was very strict with me.*

As the extract below suggests, Hong decided to come to Ireland to pursue a new life of adventure despite her steady and comfortable life in China:

Hong: *I was 37 when I came to Ireland. I was not young at that time so it was a challenge for me. My life in China was very comfortable. I had a steady job in a hospital, a happy family with my husband and my son, and many friends in China. I also took a part-time course to study. But I felt that my life was boring. My husband found that I lost interest for life so he encouraged me to get out and see the world. I made an impulse decision to go to study abroad… I depended on my husband a lot when I was in China. I enhanced my life ability through social practice after I came to Ireland.*

Although dependent on personal circumstances, the majority of Chinese migrant women in this study saw coming to Ireland as an opportunity to escape family control and enjoy independence, adventure and self-fulfillment. These women’s motivations are largely “pull” factors rather than “push” factors (which will be discussed in section 5.2.1). As a result, they had a more open and positive attitude towards Irish culture on arrival, which in turn facilitated their cross-cultural adaptation. For example, through family reunification procedures, those with work permits can bring family members to Ireland on a family reunification visa and can benefit from social welfare (Citizens Information, 2010). As a result, this offered positive perceptions of Ireland, as Xia comments:

Xia: *I think Ireland treats women well. This is my own personal feeling. I came to Ireland to join my husband. I didn’t contribute to Ireland because I never worked here. But I am getting social welfare. If I were in China, I would never be able to get social welfare. The policy in China is different. I had a job in China but I have to wait until I am retired to claim social welfare.*

**4.2.2 Prior Cross-Cultural Experiences**

Various studies have identified prior cross-cultural experiences as a key factor in the process of cross-cultural adaptation (Berry et al. 1987; Kim, 2001; Matsumoto et al. 2001). Most Chinese women in this study had no prior cross-cultural experience; however, three of them who had prior cross-cultural experience highlighted that their prior cross-cultural experience assisted them in managing their life in Ireland, particularly in the early stages of migration. For example, Hong had travelled to Thailand and other countries for a short period and these experiences opened her eyes.

Hong: *Before I came to Ireland, my husband and I had travelled to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. So I gained experiences of staying in foreign countries. My husband also had business partners in many countries in the world. So he encouraged me to study abroad to see the world.*

Ming had studied for one year in a European country, Finland, before she came to Ireland. This one-year study experience in Finland changed Ming’s view of life and her values because she thought the lifestyle in European countries was relaxed in contrast to China which she considered a highly-competitive society. The similarity of European cultures appealed to Ming. As a result, she made the decision to come to study in Ireland:

Ming: *There was an exchange program in my college to get a bachelor’s degree in Finland. I took the opportunity and went to Finland to study for one year. I felt that I was very lucky because I had the opportunity to live in Europe for one year. I went back to Shanghai after my graduation. This experience changed my view of life and my values. I kept thinking about studying abroad during my two years’ work in Shanghai. I came to Europe again two years ago. I chose Ireland because Ireland is an English-speaking country. People speak Finnish and Swedish in Finland. They don’t speak English. I liked Finland very much and I had the opportunity to stay there. But I chose to come to Ireland instead of Finland because of the language barrier there. I also like Ireland very much. I like the culture here because generally European cultures share the same ideas.* *Finland is one of the Schengen countries. I had opportunities to travel to many countries, such as Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland[[1]](#footnote-1)* *My impression of European countries is that the lifestyle there is relaxed; it is not like China, which has strong competition and a crowded environment. I enjoyed and looked forward to living in a country with that kind of atmosphere.*

Sunny is 41 years old. She was 30 when she was studying in Moscow. The passage below indicates that Sunny enhanced her ability to adapt to life in Ireland because her previous experience studying in Moscow benefited her cross-cultural adaptation. She has learned how to overcome her homesickness:

Sunny: *I had been to some places before I came to Ireland. I went to Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Macau for travelling. I also studied Russian in Moscow for one year…I think this previous study experience enhanced my ability to adapt to Ireland. I was homesick when I was in Moscow. But I am much better in Ireland now.*

**4.2.3 Preparation**

Kim (2001) points out that the process of cross-cultural adaptation depends significantly on preparation and careful planning for a life in destination countries. Chinese women in the current study prepared themselves well before migrating to Ireland. They collected a basic knowledge of the host society from friends or agents before they came to Ireland. Most of the Chinese women migrants’ pre-knowledge about Ireland focuses on the country’s natural environment, as the following extracts show:

Hong: *What I knew about Ireland was that Ireland had been a British colony. It became independent later. I also knew that it was a beautiful and green Ireland. It was called the jade island.*

Cai: *My husband told me that the weather in Ireland was pleasant and Irish people were very nice; life in Ireland was good.*

Elle: *I heard that there is no heavy industry in Ireland. I didn't know other things about Ireland except that there is a lot of green land and the air is fresh.*

Personal networks such as friends and relatives who have immigrated to Ireland are useful providers of information regarding standards of living and employment for people who are still in their countries of origin. From the women’s perspective, the information turned out to be mostly accurate, regardless of whether it was positive or negative, as the following example shows:

Jin: *I didn’t know much about Ireland before I came here. I only saw some foreign movies. I was not clear about my father’s life in Ireland. However my father found a Chinese student from Shanghai who studied in Ireland and asked her to tell me about her life in Ireland. She said life in foreign countries was extremely hard but not bad. I was half-believing and half-doubting. After I came here, I found the life in Ireland was quite boring exactly as my friend described.*

The existing personal networks of Chinese migrants offered assistance in getting information for finding jobs and accommodation to prepare them to adjust to an unfamiliar environment in the host country. For example, Wei tried to gather information about life in Ireland from friends who had already immigrated to Ireland:

Wei: *My high school classmate was studying Finance and Accounting in Ireland. She gave me some information about Ireland so I knew that it often rains in Ireland and Irish people are friendly; I also knew that I could have a part-time job to support my living expenses. She also suggested that I could share accommodation with her after I arrived in Ireland.*

Many Irish universities and language schools work with education agents in China. Hong came to Ireland as a student and got the help of an agency which proved to be an important source of information for her, although sometimes the information the agent provided did not reflect the reality:

Hong: *I heard that there was an agent in my hometown who was specialized in getting people to study in Ireland. I made an application there and got my visa. The agent described Ireland as “heaven for workers”. We were told that we could work in hospitals after 6 to 12 months’- training. They didn’t mention any language requirement. My English was not good at that time so I had a lot of difficulties after I came to Ireland.*

As described by Amy, the agents usually organize a host-family for each student. Two Chinese migrant women are grateful to these agents because they built a bridge between Ireland and China even though the information received did not always match the subsequent life experiences of some of the women:

Amy: The *agents gave me some information about Ireland. They provided me with a list of all the necessities we need in Ireland. They also introduced me to a host family which cost me 600 Euros a month including accommodation and food.*

Hong: *I am grateful to that agent because it built a bridge between Ireland and China. Although I found the information the agent provided was different from the reality after I arrived in Ireland. However, I came to Ireland through them and started a new life.*

Ming tried to improve her English language skills before she came to Ireland in order to be able to survive in the new country:

Ming: *Before I came to Ireland, I was confident to find work because my Major was nursing so it should be easy for me to find work in Europe. I focused on improving my English. I took part in many English training courses. I also made friends with the people who wanted to study or work abroad so we could exchange ideas. I prepared to experience hardship when I studied abroad.*

As the above quotations show, Chinese women in this study put a lot of effort into preparing themselves before they started their journey of migration to Ireland so they could adjust to an unfamiliar environment in the host country. The preparation includes gathering information about life in Ireland from friends or family members in Ireland and from the education agents in China; improving English language skills in order to be able to survive in the new country. Pre-arrival information gathering facilitates an individual’s adaptation to the host culture on arrival because it creates reasonable expectations for the individual and helps reduce uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005) which in turn facilitate adaptation.

**4.2.4** **Perceived Social Support**

Some studies have suggested that getting support is crucial in surviving the early stage of the journey of cross-cultural adaptation (Bochner, 1982). The Chinese migrant women interviewed in this study received social support from two sources: existing Chinese networks both in China and Ireland, and host-culture networks.

**4.2.4.1 Social Support from Existing Chinese Networks**

Chinese women in this study enjoy a level of support from their existing networks back home in China and in Ireland. Firstly, support from family is important to the migrants. The family-oriented culture of China is a key reason that some women are reliant on their family for support. For example, Elle rang her father back home in China for advice:

Elle: *At the beginning, I did not even know how to cut oranges and I was laughed at by other people. That’s because I did nothing when I was at home in China. I had to ring my father to ask him what medicine I should take when I got a cold. Now I have learned to look after myself.*

Support provided by interpersonal relationships has been shown to play a highly significant role in determining a person’s adaptation and sense of well-being (Furham, 2005). Chinese women in the current study reported that they received support from their Chinese friends and family members living in Ireland and also back home in China. They perceived such support as vital in the host country. For example, friends helped the Chinese women settle down in the new country following their arrival in Ireland; find accommodation and work; and provided help when they had language difficulties, as the following excerpts show:

Wei: *I knew nothing when I first came to Ireland. For example, I didn’t know how to open a bank account and I had to ask my classmates to help me.*

Elle: *My friends helped me find a part-time job.*

Sunny: *I got help from my friends. They have been here for many years. They helped me find accommodation and work.*

Xia: *I got help from my friends who can speak good English. Some of them are university students. They translated letters for me.*

Due to the nature of migration, which involves change and loss, one third of the women in the current study reported experiencing loneliness. They feel that they need “heart-to-heart” relationships (intimate interactions) for full trust and openness in discussing personal matters, not just superficial friends. Two participants stated:

Ling: *I don’t have heart-to-heart relationships with people in Ireland. Some people already had friends or relatives before they came here. I had to build a network myself after I came here. It was difficult for me.*

Hua: *I found that life was really difficult after I came here. …However, I am not used to life in Ireland. I feel depressed. I found it was difficult to adjust to living in Ireland. I have some friends here but I still feel lonely because I don’t have many “heart-to-heart” relationships in Ireland.*

The quotations that are shown above indicate that women migrants and host nationals do not have a large amount of intimate interactions or heart-to-heart relationships. The majority of these women’s friends are also immigrants of the same nationality. However, some women did have social interactions with host nationals and set up their new social networks in Ireland. Thus they gained support from within the host community as it is shown in the next segment.

**4.2.4.2 Social Support from the Host Society**

Chinese women in this study indicated that they received support from newly-established networks with host-society members in Ireland. For example, Cai mentioned that she received some assistance from her landlord:

Cai: *My landlord was very nice. She came as soon as I needed her. She was nice to my children as well. She also helped my husband to apply for the renewal of his work permit. I didn’t know where to pay my electricity bills and she showed me the way.*

Half of the women in the current study stated that they made friends with Irish people such as their neighbors, landlords and workmates. They set up their new social networks in Ireland and gained support from within the host community.

Elle: *I have one Irish friend. One of my friends is married to an Irish man. Her mother- in-law is Irish and she helped me look after my second baby. She is very nice. I went to visit her every Christmas.*

Wei: *I have some Irish friends. I made friends with my neighbors. They explained to me patiently whenever I asked them questions. I was living in Dublin 4 at the time, the people there are very nice and warm-hearted.*

Ying: *I have some Irish friends. They are my workmates. In Ireland, friendship is built on the basis of going out for fun and a drink. I don’t like going to pubs but I think it is good that we can help each other at work.*

Overcoming the language barrier is crucial to creating these social networks as Hua indicated:

Hua: *I don’t have Irish friends myself because of the language barrier. However there is an Irishman who was the manager in my husband’s factory, he helped my family a lot. He came to our flat to teach my daughter English when we first arrived here. My husband and daughter went to visit him in a hospital after he had an operation recently. I think he is a very nice person. He never drinks or smokes. My daughter told me that once he was a lecturer in a university and he was a football player. I think he is very educated. He is a friend of my family. He is very kind. He helped us move house because he has a car.*

Two of the women in this study illustrated the importance of a high-level of English, which allowed them to deepen their friendship with Irish people. For example, Ming stated that she asked her colleagues for help when she had difficulties at work and she had a close Irish friend with whom she could discuss private and personal problems, and from whom she could request advice:

Ming: *I consult my boss and colleagues when I have difficulty at work. I ask my friends for advice if I have personal problems…* *One of my colleagues is my good friend and she is in her 40s. She gives me some advice about finding a boyfriend. She told me that I should keep my eyes open to find a husband who really loves me. She advised me not to care too much about my boyfriend’s education background and job.*

Family members of people with work permits or long-term residency are able to receive social welfare in Ireland (Citizens Information, 2010). Chinese migrant women in this study found that the social welfare system in Ireland is more generous than in China. The quotation below indicates that Hua is embarrassed at being seen collecting social welfare because Chinese people view “saving face” as maintaining the integrity of the self (Marx, 2001, as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4.6).

Hua: *I don’t feel confident living here because this is not my own country. I have stamp 3 so I am not entitled to work here. I have to do some casual work because my life here is difficult. I was advised to claim social welfare but I feel ashamed at doing so.*

Chinese women in this research also reported that they seldom avail of the services of local ethnic Chinese community networks in Ireland despite the fact that there is no language barrier. Again, the reason is possibly because of the Chinese culture of “saving face”.

Hong: *I know that there are some Chinese organizations in Ireland, but I seldom contact them. I think that I should solve my problems myself. I don’t want to leave my problems to other people. I try to solve problems myself. This is a challenge for me.*

Sunny: *I didn’t get support from the Chinese community. I heard that there was a Chinese information centre but I didn’t contact them.*

Chinese women in this study acknowledge that they have received practical support from Irish society. For example, some governmental or non-governmental organizations, such as Citizens Information Centres, the Migrant Rights Centre and the Crosscare provide help for Chinese migrants including free consultations and Chinese interpreting services. Four women in the current research indicated their use of these services in Ireland:

Cai: *I looked for help at Migrant Rights Centre in Ireland whenever I encountered problems in my life. Once my son’s child benefit payment was stopped and I went there for help. They provide free Chinese interpreting services.*

Hua: *I got help from Irish organizations. At the beginning, I got help from Migrant Rights Centre in Ireland. A Chinese interpreter, Li, helped my husband to apply for Stamp* 4[[2]](#footnote-2). *Then I got help from Crosscare. The people who were working there were very nice. They helped me a lot the last two years. They did things efficiently and they wrote letters for me.*

These women find it is easier to avail of state-funded support systems possibly because they provide free interpreting services and they think the service is part of the whole package offered by the host country, i.e. child benefit, unemployment benefit. Getting support is crucial in surviving the early stage of the journey of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2001), and the women interviewed in this study indicated that social support facilitates their cross-cultural adaptation.

**4.2.5 Integrative Attitude**

Berry (2005) suggests that immigrants tend to use multiple acculturation strategies when they encounter the host society. Four acculturation strategies are noted from the attitudes immigrants hold towards cultural maintenance and encounters with the host culture. As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.3), Berry (2005) identifies these four different strategies of acculturation: marginalization, separation, assimilation and integration. Chinese women in this study showed no sign of marginalization. In accordance with their acculturation strategies, Chinese women in this study can be split into three groups: separationists, assimilationists and integrationists.

Assimilation is the strategy of adopting the customs and culture of the host society, while replacing one’s values (Berry, 2005). Elle can be classed as an assimilationist because she has accepted and adopted Irish culture and rejects Chinese culture:

Elle: *I was born in China, but I became mature in Ireland. I came to Ireland when I was twenty-one years old and I have been living here for ten years. I accepted Irish culture and I like everything about Ireland.* *In contrast, I could not accept ideas in China when I went back to China for holidays. Education in China is different from here. In China, children study hard and they feel tired. It is relaxed to study in Ireland…. I have adapted to Irish life. I like Irish music and watching English movies. I don’t like Chinese music any more.*

Most Chinese women in the current study have two names: a Chinese name and an English name. They use their English names in Ireland because they try to fit in Irish society and it is easier for Irish people to pronounce and remember their English names:

Elle: *My Chinese name is not easy for Irish people to pronounce. It is easy for Irish people to remember English names and this made my work and daily life more convenient. I like my English name. When I first arrived in Ireland, I was working in a coffee shop and the coffee tastes nice. So I decided to use that coffee’s name as my English name.*

Wei: *I told Irish people my English name because it’s difficult for Irish people to pronounce my Chinese name and to remember Chinese names but it’s easy for them to remember an English name. However, I use my Chinese name when I associate with Chinese people because they are used to Chinese names.*

Sunny: *I used my Chinese name when I first came to Ireland. Later I chose an English name for myself because it is easy to pronounce. There is a lot of rain in Ireland so I want to bring sunshine here so we can be happy!*

Separation is the strategy employed by migrants who are intent on maintaining their original culture and thus avoid interaction with the host culture (Berry, 2005). Ling separates herself from Irish culture because she is busy with work or studies, which prevents her from becoming familiar with true Irish culture.

Ling: *To be honest, I haven’t adapted to the life style here. It’s not easy for me to get along well with people with a different culture. My major is Chinese and I am teaching Chinese language and culture in a university. I identify myself strongly with Chinese culture. I am busy studying and working, I had no opportunity to get to know the so-called real Irish culture.*

Another four women in this study separate themselves from the Irish society mainly because of the language barrier, associating exclusively with compatriots, as Xia states:

Xia: *I don’t have Irish friends. All of my friends are Chinese. I can’t communicate with Irish people because of the language barrier. I don’t understand them at all…* *I don’t speak English at all. I speak Chinese all the time. I talk to my husband and my friends in Chinese. We live with Chinese housemates.*

Integration is characterized by the maintenance of an ethnic cultural heritage coupled with a desire for regular interaction with the larger social network (Berry 2008). Half of the women in the current study find it important to integrate into Irish life and do so by involving Irish people in their existing personal networks. For example, Sunny often went shopping in Chinese supermarkets, while she also went shopping in Irish shops. She attempted to mix with members of the host culture:

Sunny: *I often go shopping at Chinese supermarkets but sometimes I go shopping to Tesco and Lidl so I can chat with Irish people.*

Hong regards Chinese culture as tea culture but she goes beyond her own cultural values to drink in pubs because she wants to follow the norms/customs of the host culture so she can get involved in Irish life:

Hong: *I go out with my colleagues to parties or pubs. Irish people like pubs. Chinese culture is tea culture. We like drinking tea and they like drinking alcohol. I can’t drink much but I try to follow the trend. I don’t want to get drunk. However, this is the way to get to know them, to be close to them.*

Hong is also motivated to make some aspects of her speech more similar to the Irish way of speaking in order to gain approval. She attempts to close the distance from the sociolinguistic practices of the host culture. The following extract gives us a clear example:

Hong: *My colleagues tell me that I am becoming more and more Irish. I am getting Irish habits and an Irish accent.*

Two women in the current study stated that they toured Ireland’s attractions and landscape. They travelled the country with the intention of exploring Irish culture. The enjoyment they have experienced in Ireland while exploring the country may be helpful in facilitating their process of cross-cultural adaptation.

Hong: *I like Ireland very much. I have been to many places in Ireland. Dingle, Cork, Galway….. I like travelling and seeing things.*

Another way to understand the host culture is to learn the language of that culture. Although English is statistically the primary language of communication in Ireland, Irish/Gaeilge is a part of Irish national culture and identity. Ming feels that the Irish language can be a method of communication and integration, so she is attempting to learn this language:

Ming: *I am learning Irish in my spare time. It is difficult to learn but I found it is interesting.*

Chinese women in the current study also try to bring their own culture to the attention of Irish people and feel proud of playing the role of an intercultural ambassador, as Hong indicates:

Hong: *I shared the Chinese culture with my Irish friends. I showed Chinese knots and ornaments of the Chinese zodiac to my friends. I also explained the meaning of the Chinese zodiac to my friends and they were amazed.* …*I like eating Chinese food and cooking Chinese food. All my friends and my neighbors like eating the food I cook. I brought the food I cooked to my work place and my colleagues like eating my food very much. I introduce Chinese food to them and recommend Chinese supermarkets to them so they can buy Chinese food. They got recipes from me and learned to cook Chinese food. I am very happy that I can have a big influence on them.*

Half of the women in this research want to maintain their Chinese cultural identity and heritage, but at the same time they are committed to developing relationships with Irish mainstream society. They generally tend to make friends with people from other ethnic groups and live with them. For example, Hong believes that it would be better if different ethnic groups mixed together:

Hong: *I don't want to live with people who have the same culture as me. I want to contact different cultures because I am in Ireland. I would like to contact and get to know different people in Ireland. I am sharing a house with people from different countries: French, Korean, Italian and Irish. I think it is better to live with people from different cultural backgrounds so I can share their culture.*

**4.2.6 Gender**

Chinese migrant women in the current study reported that they enjoyed their life in Ireland. They believed that they received more social support than male migrants and they were more satisfied with their lives in Ireland.

Hong and Sunny believe it is easier for women to adapt to life in Ireland mainly because of women’s special personalities, such as toughness, patience and tolerance:

Hong: *Generally speaking, women have more delicate feelings than men. Women are more liberal-minded than men. In my opinion, it is easier for Chinese women to adapt to life in foreign countries than Chinese men.*

Sunny: *Women are more tolerant and willing to do some small jobs. It is not easy for men to adjust. Women usually work in the service industry, for example restaurant and housecleaning, so it’s easier for them to find jobs. Women are very tough. Patience and tolerance make it easier for women to adjust to life here.*

Wei thinks that women normally have better language skills than men and this is one of the advantages they have in the course of adapting to a different culture:

Wei: *I think it is easier for Chinese women to adapt to life in Ireland than for Chinese men. First, women are good at languages. Ireland is an English-speaking country. It is easier to adjust and find work here for women with good English.*

Two women in this study indicate that they enjoy a relatively equal status to men in Ireland and feel that women are respected in the host country.

Ming: *I think it is easier for Chinese women to adapt to life in Ireland than for Chinese men. Because Irish people respect women and they are willing to take care and protect and help women. Being an Asian woman, I got a lot of help from my friends when I first arrived here.*

Wei: *The other reason is that Ireland is a country which respects women’s rights and women have high social status here. I have never heard about Chinese women being beaten up but I have heard about Chinese men being beaten by some Irish kids. I think Chinese men experience more discrimination. Women’s situation is better than men’s.*

Women in the current study believe that women enjoy high social status because Ireland is a country which respects women’s rights:

Amy: *It is easier for women to adjust. I think it is because Ireland is a country which respects women’s rights.*

Hong: *I think that Chinese women are more independent because of the policy of the two countries. The Irish government support women and children. They can claim social welfare and they are provided with a lot of opportunities to develop themselves. We do not have such benefits in China.*

Ying: *In Ireland, legislation and law of protecting women is better, especially about holiday pay and maternity leave. In China, women may lose their job after maternity leave but that does not happen in Ireland.*

The above quotations not only support Green’s (1994) argument about the blurring of the traditional and modern role of women in Ireland, but also contradict Hofstede’s (1994) scores on the “Masculine” dimension which ranks China and Ireland very closely. However, it is important to point out that Hofstede’s data was collected over 30 years ago and Irish society has undergone significant changes in gender roles over that period of time.

**4.2.7 Intercultural** **Personality Characteristics**

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.6), intercultural personality characteristics such as empathy and open-mindedness were the keys to successful intercultural communication and interaction (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Cui & Awa, 1992). Kim (2001) describes the adaptive personality as: openness; strength; positivity. The adaptive personality immensely aids the process of cross-cultural adaptation for migrants. Chinese women in the current study agreed that having an open personality made it easier to adjust to life in Ireland thereby demonstrating that out-going women will seek out relationships and social support groups which will aid in adaptation:

Ying: *I think personality is important. If you want to be happy, you have to go out and make more friends and be more open.*

On the contrary, Jin’s experiences indicate that she had difficulties in adjusting to life in Ireland because she does not have an outgoing personality; in addition, there is a language barrier:

Jin: *I find it is difficult to adjust to life in Ireland because my English is not good. The second reason is that my personality is not very open so I feel that there are misunderstandings between me and my classmates.*

Bandura (1997) states that self-efficacy is a concept that concerns an individual's belief in his or her ability to accomplish a task. Studies show that one’s own beliefs of efficacy function as an important determinant of motivation, affect, thought and action (Bandura, 1992). Data suggest that women in the current study have high levels of efficacy. For example, Hong regards immigrating to Ireland as a challenge for her. She had to pay expensive education fees but she set this as another challenge. She decided to earn and save this much money for herself, rather than relying on her family:

Hong: *I was 37 when I came to Ireland. I was not very young at that time, so it was a challenge for me…* *I plan to take an MA course in Finance after I pass my English test. Non-EU fees are very expensive and I need to pay about 18,000 Euros a year or 12,000 Euros a year for a part-time course. That's a lot of money plus I have to pay living expenses. It is another challenge for me. I need to save hard. Although my family will support me, I want to pay my fees myself.*

Both Ming and Ying are the only child in their family and were spoilt by their parents in China. Living in Ireland on their own, they have had to learn to look after themselves. Ming and Ying viewed this as both a challenge and a worthwhile experience:

Ming: *I live the life I chose because I made a choice about my lifestyle. I miss the food my father cooked for me in China. I didn't need to do anything at home because I was the only child in the family - pampered by my parents. I have to look after myself and do everything myself in Ireland. So I miss my home. However, I am over 20 years of age and I should learn to become independent. This is a challenge for me.*

Ying: *I came to Ireland after I finished my high school in China. I have learnt to communicate with other people and solve the problems in my life. More or less, I have grown up.*

The Chinese migrant women in the current study indicate that they have to work harder just to get to the same place as other migrants with structural advantages such as EU citizenship. The mentality they possess indicates that they feel that they must work harder than their competitors, but this serves to motivate them to succeed:

Ming: *Surely I am in competition with other migrant women. My attitude towards competition is positive. Competition leads to winning. Women from other European Union countries have an advantage over Chinese women because they don’t need to apply for work permits. I think it depends on an individual's mentality and effort. Irish society gives everybody equal opportunity. Whether you are a man or a woman, you can be successful if you can take hardship and are determined to make your way up. It is possible however that - women get more attention and care than men.*

The following quotation shows Hong made friends from different cultural backgrounds and got inspiration from Irish people with disabilities whom she met at work:

Hong: *I have Chinese friends, Irish friends and Italian friends. My Italian friend is a teacher in a kindergarten. She likes China and went to China travelling with me last summer. I also made friends through my work. Some of them are disabled people. I admire them. I was touched by their strong will when I was looking after them. They set good examples for me and I was inspired to become stronger.*

As the analysis above shows, Chinese women with a high level of self-efficacy adapted to life in Ireland better and were more satisfied with life because they tended to regard setbacks encountered during the process of adaptation as challenges rather than difficulties.

Most Chinese women in the current study also express pride in Chinese culture, which appears to give them greater confidence. For example, Ming and Jin derive pride from their cultural background:

Ming: *I am very proud of (being a Chinese) because China has a long traditional culture. I possess Chinese traditions and I have been learning English and integrating to the Western life so I combine two elements myself.*

Jin: *I think Chinese culture is erudite and I feel it is good to be Chinese because we have our moral standards and principles.*

Another reason why most Chinese women in this study feel proud of being Chinese is because China has developed fast and the economy in China is very successful. The reputation and importance of China in the West has been growing steadily as well. The women refer to the increased status of China on the international scene and derive pride from it:

Wei: *I am very proud of being Chinese because China is becoming stronger. One of my Chinese friends has an Irish boyfriend. His mother looked down upon my friend because she thought Chinese people were very poor. Some short-sighted Irish didn’t know that China has developed fast over the last few years. I am proud that China is becoming one of the strongest countries in the world. Now more and more Irish people go to China for travelling and they get to know China better than before.*

Two Chinese women in this research perceived strong links between a national language and cultural identity. Keeping one’s mother tongue is described by Elle as one of most important elements in Chinese identity:

Elle: *I inherited Chinese traditional virtues: kindness and bravery. I also speak Chinese. Speaking Chinese is most important to Chinese identity.*

Hong speaks English with an Irish accent but she still identifies herself strongly as Chinese:

Hong: *My colleagues tell me that I am becoming more and more Irish. I am getting Irish habits and an Irish accent. But I feel that I am still Chinese.*

Two Chinese women in this research thought that their Chinese name is part of the cultural identity which was given by their parents and they kept their Chinese names in their later stage of immigration. This instilled a sense of pride in the migrants, feeling proud of their culture and their ancestry:

Ming: *I have an English name. I used my English name when I first came to Ireland until I met a friend in Ireland. He told me that my Chinese name is pleasant to the ears and he asked me why I gave it up. He advised me to keep my own cultural identity. His words woke me up. My name was given to me by my parents and I should respect my parents. Actually my Chinese name is easy to remember. Then I started using my Chinese name. Now my colleagues still call my English name because they are used to it. But the friends I met later all call me by my Chinese name.*

Jin: *An* *English name is more easily accepted by Irish people because my English name is easier for my classmates to pronounce. I guess that my classmates discussed my Chinese name behind my back because they couldn’t understand what it meant. I found my English name in my dictionary. I feel that my English name does not belong to me. Sometimes I don’t even know it is me when other people call my English name. So I think it is better to tell other people my Chinese name. At least it is my real name.*

As analysis above shows, self-esteem helped Chinese migrant women feel accepted by the people in the host society; thus they could easily adapt to life in Ireland.

**4.3 Factors that Hinder Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

Through reviewing the concept of acculturative stress of Chinese women immigrants in Ireland, this study identified two factorswhich hinder the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women –restrictions associated with visa status and perceived discrimination.

**4.3.1 Restrictions Associated with Visa Status**

Chinese immigrants require a work permit to legally take up employment in Ireland. All women in this study referred to varying levels of restriction accessing the Irish labour market due to their respective visa status, which in turn impacts upon their cross-cultural adaptation. As explained in Section 3.6, in accordance with official immigration status, the women in this research represented different visa status.

Four Chinese women migrated to Ireland to join their family, and as the dependents of migrants who hold work permits or long-term residency, have Stamp 3 visas. According to Irish law, immigrants with Stamp 3 (dependents of work permit holders or long-term residency) can only work if they apply for their own work permit, a process which presents financial and operational challenges (Ruhs, 2009).As Hua states below, such difficulties sometimes lead interviewees with Stamp 3 to seek employment in casual work rather than apply for an official work permit. The majority of women work in the unskilled sector, for example: Chinese restaurants, pubs or cleaning companies.

Hua: *I have Stamp 3 so I am not entitled to work in Ireland. I do some casual work because it is too expensive to live here … I am working in a Chinese restaurant as a cleaner.*

Elle: *I am working in a Chinese restaurant as a waitress. Most of my colleagues are from Fujian province in China, Hong Kong and Malaysia. We get along very well.*

One of the women in this study, Sunny, is an undocumented immigrant and mentions how she is working illegally in casual employment:

Sunny: *I had a job doing office cleaning.*

Such illegal employment, sought out because of either visa restrictions or the lack of a visa, increases the likelihood of being exploited by employers (Migrant Right Center Ireland, 2011).

A further six women in this study hold a student visa. Full-time students in a recognized course are allowed to work for up to 20 hours per week during term time and full-time during holiday periods (Immigrant Council Ireland, 2003: 82). However, they still have to apply for work permits or working visas to work full-time (Ruhs, 2005). Issues relating to work permits and working visas pose particular and complex problems. Chinese women in this study felt structurally discriminated against within the migration system in Ireland because they do not have the same freedom to apply for jobs as members from other European Union countries (King-O’Riain, 2008). All the women in the current study on student visas stated that they have a part-time job to pay for their living expenses or their tuition fees. Importantly, Chinese women’s adaptation was hindered because they have less opportunity to enter the labour market to achieve their personal goals and objectives, as Wei indicates:

Wei: *I studied Finance and Accounting during my first year in Ireland. I heard that one of my friends passed the ACCA exams and had three years’ experience working in a company in Ireland. She was fired recently because she was Chinese and she couldn’t get a work permit. I feel frustrated and think that there will be no future of going to university here. I planned to go back to China to find a nice job after finishing my accounting study, alternatively to stay here if I can find a well-paid job. However I felt that there would be no future for studying accounting after I heard my friend’s story. So I changed my mind and began to practice hairdressing.*

Gaining foreign working experience is a dream for most Chinese migrant women who came to Ireland to study. However, this dream is not easy to fulfill due to the work visa restrictions facing non-EU workers, as Ying states:

Ying: *My dream was to complete my study within 4 years’ time then work for two years and gain some experiences. Then I planned to go back to China. My dream didn’t come true after ten years’ study in Ireland. I spent two years to improve my English and I spend 8 years to finish my undergraduate study and Master degree. But I can’t find work now. It is difficult to find work because we are non-EU citizens. I need to apply for a work permit to get a full-time job.*

Mirroring the findings of King-O’Riain (2008), the women in this study also feel they are losing out in competition with other migrants because they are structurally disadvantaged. This in turn hinders their adaptation to the host culture, as they struggle to access the opportunities which are available to the migrants from other EU countries who are not bound by similar visa restrictions. The fact that the power to effect change in their area resides at government level means that individual migrants have very limited ability to address this issue.

Finally, one of the women in the study, Elle, already quoted above, presents an interesting case. She arrived in Ireland on a student visa, then overstayed her visa and became an undocumented migrant for two years. Following this, she gave birth to a child in Ireland in 2004, which secured her long-term residency status and entitlement to social welfare. Throughout her time in Ireland she has worked in casual employment in a Chinese restaurant, moving from legal, to illegal, and back to legal status once again. In her case, she explained that, with long-term residency she can work part-time while still claiming social welfare. This means that life is now much easier than if she were undocumented or on a more restricted visa, and stated that she could not survive and manage as well were she a single parent in China.

Elle: *I can’t survive if I were in China because I have no job and I have to raise two children. Luckily Ireland provides good social welfare for women, children and elderly people. It’s difficult to find work now. At the moment I have a part-time job and am getting social welfare. I have enough time to look after my children.*

**4.3.2 Perceived Discrimination**

Many studies have found that perceived discrimination negatively predicts psychological well-being (Neto, 2002; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind & Perhoniemi, 2006). According to previous research by King-O’Riain (2008), Chinese migrants tended to report more experiences of racism both in work and on the street than Polish immigrants as non-white, non-Catholic, non-EU immigrants. Indeed, Chinese women in the current study reported that they have experienced some forms of racism in Ireland: some of them experienced racial harassment and abuse from youths and teenagers on the streets; some of them experienced discrimination at school or in the work place. The negative feelings that Chinese migrant women associate with these events affect their individual cross-cultural adaptation as these negative experiences cause feelings of rejection and prevent them from participating in the host culture.

**4.3.2.1 Harassment on the Streets**

Chinese women in this study reported that they experienced racial harassment and abuse from youths and teenagers on the streets:

Cai: *Generally speaking, adults are very friendly; kids are very naughty. A kid hit me with a stick on the street when I was pregnant. Some men are not nice. I was sitting at O’Connell Street to hold an advertisement board for a Chinese restaurant. A man abused me. I thought that he was drunk but actually he was not.*

This perception of discrimination actually hindered Chinese women’s adaptation because it caused them to develop negative attitudes towards Irish culture which in turn stunted their adaptation because it reduced the amount of contact which they were able to have with the host community and culture, as Wei states:

Wei: *I am living in Dublin 8 where poor people live. Some Irish kids abused me on the street. I suppose that their parents taught them this. So I decided not to talk to Irish people there any more…*  *I was living in Dublin 4. The people there were very nice and warm-hearted. Now I am living in Dublin 8. I don’t talk to the people because they even abused me. There was a heavy snow two days ago and the kids threw snowballs at me. I was angry but I could do nothing about it. Even the police could not do anything about this.*

**4.3.2.2 Perceived Discrimination at Work**

Chinese women in this study stated that they felt discriminated against in the work place. Some of them reported that they had less opportunity of promotion than EU staff; some of them were paid less and had to work longer, more unsociable hours. As well as this, it was felt that their career paths were being impeded by prejudiced management who favored staff from within the European Union.

Sunny: *I did cleaning jobs with my colleagues. I did a good job but my supervisor said it was bad. I was furious. Our manager checked my work and made fair comments. However I lost that job later. I think there are discriminations in my work place.*

Ying: *When I was at work, I can only work 20 hours because I have a student visa and managers are prejudiced against non-EU staff. EU or Irish staff had more opportunity for promotion.*

Amy: *I have experienced discrimination at work. I was working at a deli before and our manager treated Chinese staff and East European staff differently. For the same work, the manager arranged one Chinese staff to work alone but two East European staff work together. It’s unfair because one Chinese worker had to do two jobs but only got paid one salary.*

The women in this study believe it is difficult to compete with Eastern European women in the job market because Chinese immigrants need to apply for work permits or work visas if they want to have a full-time job. They spoke openly about how women from other European Union countries have an advantage over Chinese women and they felt that they do not have the same freedom to apply for jobs as members from other European Union countries:

Hong: *I never experienced discrimination at my workplace but there is discrimination in European law. I came here with a student visa. I have to apply for a work permit if I want to have a full-time job. But it is very difficult to get a work permit. I have to accept the reality although my colleagues all think it is unfair.*

Sunny: *It is difficult to compete with Eastern European women. It is difficult for Chinese women to get jobs no matter how hard we work. Eastern European women always get well-paid jobs even with poor English. This is my own personal experience.*

Ying: *Eastern European migrant women don’t need work permits. Chinese women need a visa and immigration law is very strict.*

Amy: *Eastern European women have an advantage in finding work. It is difficult for Chinese people to find work.*

**4.3.2.3 Perceived Discrimination by Chinese Students**

Two women in this study believe that they have experienced discrimination when they were studying in language schools or secondary schools.

Jin: *There was an Irish teacher who taught history in my high school who always discriminated against Chinese students. He was very nice to Irish students and that’s understandable. He was also very nice to Black students but he treated Chinese students as if he did not see us.*

Ying: *Occasionally I have experienced discrimination. When I was studying at language schools, teachers preferred talking to EU students and they gave the cold shoulder to non-EU students.*

Students coming to Ireland had limited support in dealing with immigration and other services, although they have paid big tuition fees. Experiences of renewing student visas in immigration offices were unpleasant and often created stress and anxiety, thus making their process of adaptation more difficult.

Jin: *Every time when I need to get a visa, I would prefer to be American or another nationality rather than Chinese. I would not have all these troubles and waste my time to wait in the immigration office for nothing.*

Wei: *I had to queue in front of immigration office to renew my visa at 4 a.m. so I could get a ticket at 9 a.m. Then I had to wait another four or five hours before my number was called. If I went there late then I couldn’t get a ticket and I have to go there again the next day. This is the discrimination I have experienced.*

The negative feelings that Chinese migrant women associate with these events affect their individual cross-cultural adaptation as these negative experiences cause feelings of rejection which, in turn, prevent them from participating in the host culture:

Hua: *I want to travel to other European countries but it is too difficult to get a visa. So I decide not to go. My daughter had to go to the embassy many times to prepare the documents for her visa application. I think the visa policy is too strict.*

Wei: *There is a shadow in my mind because I have experienced discrimination here. It is very difficult to get a visa. One of my Chinese friend planned t otravel to France for a skiing holiday and her visa application was refused. I never traveled to other European countries because there was too much hassle to apply for a visa. People from Malaysia, Japan and South Korea don’t need a visa to go to European countries for travelling. China is not a poor country but Chinese people are looked down upon by other nationals. The social status of Chinese people should be enhanced.*

**4.4 Factors that can be both Facilitators of and Hindrances to Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

While the previous sections have discussed factors which have been identified as explicit facilitators or hindrances, the findings also indicated that certain factors may constitute either a facilitator or a hindrance. For example, the findings of the current study suggest that cultural distance, host language proficiency, institutional completeness, age factors, length of stay in the host country, and use of modern technology can be both facilitators of and hindrances to cross-cultural adaptation. In the following sections these factors will be discussed in further detail.

**4.4.1 Cultural Distance**

Various studies have identified cultural distance as a key barrier in the process of cross-cultural adaptation (Brislin, 1981; Furnham, 1988; Adler, 1987; Mumford & Babiker, 1997). However, the findings of this study suggest the effects of cultural distance can be more nuanced. While the Chinese migrants certainly noted large cultural differences between their home and the host culture, on certain occasions these differences were very favourable to them and therefore facilitated their adaptation.

Petkova’s (2007) stage-model relating to cross-cultural adaptation is one which is useful to use in analyzing the role of cultural distance in migrants’ cross-cultural adaptation. She found that the experience of culture shock and adaptation matures through three phases. It is interesting to note that, in this study, the Chinese migrant women also went through these three phrases:in the first phase, women in this research notice differences in visible, cultural artefacts; while in the second phase, they notice more value-based differences. During the third phase, some Chinese women migrants have gained an understanding of the social norms, attitudes and behaviours in the host country. They have developed an intercultural identity which integrates aspects of both Chinese and Irish culture. The part that cultural distance plays in the process of Chinese women’s cross-cultural adaptation is going to be explained below according to these three phases.

**Initial Phase** – **General Impression of Ireland and Initial Adjustment**

In the first phase, women in this research notice differences in visible, cultural artefacts. Their general impression of Ireland is of ‘*a quiet place with many old buildings*’ (Xia) whereas China is described as having ‘*crowds*' (Xia) and '*high buildings’* (Sunny). These buildings in Ireland were considered small and dated, and contributed to feelings of boredom in comparison with China. Narrow, quiet streets differed from the fun, bustling streets of China.

Ming: *It was very crowded and noisy in Shanghai. I am living in Ireland and the place is very quiet.*

Jin: *I found life in Ireland was quite boring after I came here.* *There was no fun. I could take some classes to learn something at the weekend when I was in China. But I can’t find any classes to attend at the weekend in Ireland. When I was wandering the streets, I found that all the shops here were almost the same.*

Sunny: *There are high buildings in China everywhere. Ireland is like a little people's country: houses are small; streets are narrow and there are not many people on the streets.*

Xia: *There is no fun at all in Ireland: everywhere you look there are old buildings. There are many high buildings in China but there are a lot of two-storey houses in Ireland. It is different from China: In China, streets are crowded with people and bustling with activities.*

Wei observed the differences of dress between home and host culture:

Wei: *Chinese culture is traditional and Irish culture is open. For example, Chinese people wear conservative clothes and some Irish girls often wear clothes that expose their bodies.*

Jin praises the Irish landscape and the natural environment:

Jin: *I like fresh air and the environment in Ireland.*

Many women in this study mention that they are fond of the weather in Ireland because the weather in China is extremely hot in summer and cold in winter, in comparison with the mild climate of Ireland:

Sunny: *I like the Irish weather- not too cold, not too hot. My hometown in China is extremely cold in winter and extremely hot in summer. There is almost no difference between winter and summer in Ireland. I like this kind of maritime weather.*

Amy: *Ireland is different from China. It has an exotic atmosphere. I like the weather here. Not too cold, not too hot.*

Most Chinese migrant women in the current study enjoyed living in Ireland; they found that the quality of life in Ireland was better than in China. Ming compared her life in Ireland positively in comparison with Shanghai, in areas of day-to-day living such as food, clothing, accommodation and transportation. Favorable comparisons were drawn with China in terms of the environment and climate as well:

Ming: *I am going to discuss daily necessities: food, clothing, accommodation and transportation. Clothing: price is almost the same as in Shanghai with more fashion so I bought a lot of my clothes here. Food: not as many varieties as in China. But it is convenient to go shopping at a Chinese supermarket. I like western food as well. I just need to cook for myself. Accommodation: it is better in Ireland because it is too crowded and noisy in Shanghai. The place where I live in Ireland is very quiet. I take a walk along a river and enjoy the view. I feel very relaxed. Transportation: Many people complain that the bus service is not on time; Luas is not as good as subways in China. I find it is convenient to cycle everyday. There are also many taxis in Dublin. In general, the quality of life in Ireland is better than in Shanghai so I am satisfied with everything. I enjoy life in Ireland. I even like Irish weather. It is dark and wet in winter here and my friends often complain about it. But I think it is not as cold as in Shanghai. There were showers when I came back home from work but they stopped when I needed to go outside. I am satisfied with everything in Ireland.*

However, two Chinese migrant women in this study complain about the cost of living and the transport system in Ireland:

Sunny: *My biggest headache is looking for accommodation. It is not easy to find a suitable flat with a reasonable price. I think rent is too expensive here.* … *Bus services are never on time. Sometimes I had to wait for one hour in the cold. I was very worried because I was late for work and I had to apologize to my boss.*

Hua: *I have to do some casual work such as cleaning jobs because it is very expensive to live in Ireland. The rent is too expensive.*

**Second Phase - Perceived Similarities and Differences between Home and Host Culture**

In the second phase, women in this research notice more value-based differences between their home culture and the host culture. Two women in this study drew comparisons between Chinese and Irish drinking cultures. For example, they complained about extensive alcohol drinking in Irish culture. This perception caused them to develop negative attitudes towards Irish culture which in turn stunted their adaptation.

Amy: *I like Ireland except that I can’t understand why some Irish people stay in the pub all day long. Why do they drink everyday? This is quite different from Chinese culture and values.*

Hong: *Irish people like going to pubs. Chinese drinking culture is tea culture. Chinese people like drinking tea; while Irish people like drinking alcohol.*

Women in this study who have Irish-born children praise the education environment in Ireland. Comparing the two systems, they prefer Irish education which is focused on creativity, whereas the Chinese education system, which is traditional, focuses on the regurgitating of information for third-level entrance examinations as Elle indicated:

Elle: *The education environment in Ireland is very good. On the one hand, parents set good example for their children by working hard; on the other hand, children are educated through good TV programs. For example: my children watch cartoons to learn the Chinese and French languages on BBC. They also watch brain-storm programs and art programs. For example, one program asked children to imagine the changing shapes of a hanger and to draw creative pictures. Education in Ireland is very creative; whereas the goal of Chinese education is to sit entrance examinations. Students in China have to memorize without comprehending. I think education in Ireland is better than in China. I have a library card for my children in a shopping centre. We can use the library for free. My children can borrow books and use the internet for free.*

Although Elle is very positive about the education system in Ireland, another two women have some negative opinions about Irish education because the evaluation system in Irish schools challenges their inherited belief that good grades rely on studying hard, as opposed to the freedom allowed to Irish students:

Cai: *There are big differences between Chinese culture and Western culture. The most obvious difference is education. Chinese education follows Chinese traditional culture. For example, students in China must study hard and finish their homework; while Irish students are quite free.*

Ling is a part-time lecturer in a university in Ireland and she highlighted the perceived immaturity of Irish students, equating them to Chinese middle school students:

Ling: *The university students in Ireland lack discipline. They are childish and they don't know what they want in their life. They are immature in both study and life. My impression of them is that they are like middle school students.*

Ling found that communication in her work place in Ireland was different from China. In China, lecturers usually shared problems and experiences related to teaching. In contrast, such communication was found to be absent in her university in Ireland. Ling also felt that the teaching environment was not well-organized in Ireland. Because of the high level of cultural distance, she does not have a sense of belonging to Ireland:

Ling: *In China, young teachers learned from the teachers who have more teaching experience. I often discussed problems with my colleagues and shared my teaching experiences with them when I was teaching in China. However, everybody does his/her own work in Ireland. I didn't have exchanges with my colleagues in Ireland. I don't know the exact reason. I guess one reason is because I am not a native speaker and also because my colleagues in Ireland seldom communicate with each other… The teaching environment was quite different from my expectation. I thought that the teaching environment would be well-organized but I didn't find it so in the university in Ireland…* *I don’t have a feeling of belonging to Ireland. I plan to go back to China.*

Although cultural distance exists, when making comparisons between Chinese culture and Irish culture, Ming states that some parts of Irish history are similar to Chinese history and this made her cross-cultural adaptation easier:

Ming: *I think* *Irish culture is similar to Chinese* *culture. First, both nations have their traditional cultures; second, both nations were in deep distress. There were famines in both Irish and Chinese history. There were many big families with 7 or 8 children in Ireland and China in the 1950s. Now both Ireland and China have become rich and there are smaller families with one or two children in China and Ireland. Both countries keep traditional values but are influenced by advanced ideology at the same time. So I think they are quite similar.*

Elle states that both countries think highly of festivals, although people enjoy different ways of celebrating them:

Elle: *Both China and Ireland think highly of festivals. In China there is the Chinese Spring festival and in Ireland there is Christmas. There is a lot of freedom in Ireland while there are many restraints in China.*

Chinese migrant women in this study enjoy the multicultural environment in Ireland. They live with people from different countries and share their cultures, which might not be as easily experienced in China:

Hong: *I don't want to live with Chinese people. Many Chinese people share accommodation to save money but I would like to get to know different people in Ireland. I am sharing a house with people from different countries: France, Korea, Italy and Ireland. I live with people from different cultural backgrounds so I can share their cultures.*

In the current study, Chinese women's general impression is that Irish people are friendly, polite and courteous. Their perception is that there is little social hierarchy in Ireland in comparison with China, and a greater level of politeness to strangers:

Jin: *I think Irish people are very polite. For example: I noticed that people always hold the door for other people coming behind or open the door for other people even if they are a bit far away from the door. They don't know each other but they are so courteous. In China, people won't do that.*

Sunny: *Most Irish people are nice. They are very polite and greet me every time they meet me. I was cleaning an office and there was a man who looked like a big boss sitting there. He always thanks me for keeping his office clean. I was touched by his words because that’s my job.*

Hong indicates that she is very happy working with Irish colleagues where there is no prejudice in the work place:

Hong: *I am working as a care assistant in a nursing home which is a charitable organization. We look after disabled people. I like my work place. There is no prejudice there. Everybody is equal. Sometimes we are quite busy but I am very happy. My colleagues are so nice and friendly.*

Most Chinese students stayed with a host family for one month when they first came to Ireland. Chinese migrant women in this study reported that they enjoyed the social nature of Irish people while they were staying with host families although they were not used to Irish food and encountered language barriers:

Amy: *I lived with a host family for one month when I first arrived in Ireland. I was not very happy at that time because I was not used to Irish food. …I got along very well with my host family. I think Irish people are affable and genial. But I found it was very difficult to communicate with them because my English was poor.*

The women in this study have a clear appraisal of ‘Irish mentality’, which is perceived as being open and welcoming, similar to the mentality of Chinese people. They feel it is easier to adjust to the new culture because they think the mentality of the Irish is similar to the Chinese one.

Ming: *Irish people are optimistic, cheerful and warm-hearted. This is reflected in their pub culture. They are also honest and sincere. Their personalities are similar to Chinese people who are hard-working, friendly and warm-hearted.*

From the perspective of the Chinese women, attitudes towards study and work are different for Chinese people and Irish people. The women in this study believed that Irish people tended to procrastinate with work and study, whereas Chinese people generally strove to complete work and viewed work in a more serious manner:

Jin: *Chinese people don't want to leave today's work until tomorrow and want to solve the problem as soon as possible. Irish people’s attitudes towards work are different.*

Ying: *Both Ireland and China have long histories. But Ireland is situated in the west of the world so Irish people are more open. Chinese people are deeply influenced by traditional education so we do things seriously. Chinese people are serious about work and study; while Irish people are careless about work and study.*

Chinese women in the current study find that lifestyles in Ireland are quite relaxed. There is little pressure placed on individuals in Ireland. Irish people are found to lack the strong competitiveness that Chinese colleagues normally have:

Amy: *Irish people are amiable and nice. There is no discrimination.* *I feel relaxed here (in Ireland) and there is no pressure here. There are a lot of pressures in China. My colleagues in China were attempting to squeeze each other out.*

This easier life in Ireland is related to the apparent laid-back attitude to life in Ireland, as seen, for example, in the lack of competition amongst colleagues in the workplace. The relaxed attitude of the Irish people spans both their public and private lives, as opposed to the competitive attitudes of Chinese. ‘Irish laziness’ is one of their perceptions.

Ming: *I think Irish people are not working hard because the economy was good especially during the Celtic Tiger period. Young people are very lazy, especially Irish men I know. They don’t strive to make progress and they don’t want to do housework either. They want to have fun everyday. It is a pity. I hope that the Irish will learn from the Chinese to work hard to create a better life. Now it’s recession time. I hope that Irish people will reflect upon their past and change their attitude.*

Jin: *Irish people are very friendly and easy to get along with. But they are lazy. They prefer to stay at home instead of working or studying.*

People have different religions in China and Ireland. The following extract shows Hong’s religion is Buddhism and she does not want to be converted into Catholicism which is the main religion in Ireland:

Hong: *Although I am a Buddhist,* *I have visited a Catholic Church in Ireland twice. Buddhism is the main religion in China. It is impossible to convert me to Christian or Catholic. I think Buddhism is the root of China. We cannot lose it.*

Hong is curious about other religions, but religion is such a strong part of her world view and a strong link to her culture that, naturally, she is not keen to give it up. As such, the host community might view her as adopting a separation strategy. However, her approach can be seen as a bridge between integration and cultural separation: “integrationist” in the sense that she recognizes other religions and has engaged with them at some level, yet “separationist” in the sense that she opts to maintain her religion, which is a minority religion in the host society.

**Third Phase** – **Development of Intercultural Identity**

In the third phase, Chinese women in this study have gained an understanding of the social norms, attitudes and behaviours in the host country, which in turn reduces the perceived cultural distance between their home culture and the host culture. Empathy and evaluation of the host culture are the signs that this phase has been reached (Petkova, 2007), as Jin indicated:

Jin: *Communication styles among people in Ireland are almost the same as in China. But the difference is that Irish people look at things from a different angle without burden and they would not put too much pressure on other people. …People in Ireland are very open. Whatever I told them, they would say: never mind. They would give me more space to adjust and they see things in different ways.*

In the current study, the Chinese migrant women’s experience suggests that migration creates a space for personal maturity, which leads to development of a larger intercultural identity, in addition to the material benefits gained from migrating to Ireland. Successful adaptation results in an intercultural identity (Kim, 2001). Hong openly appreciates both her own home culture and the new host culture. An intercultural identity was developed, integrating aspects of both Chinese and Irish culture:

Hong: *I like reading the book - Buddhism “Xinyu”. It is about the enlightenment of life and guidance of people’s behaviour. I like Buddhism. I like Chinese traditional culture. For example, I practice Chinese calligraphy in my spare time. I decorated my room in a Chinese style such as Chinese knots and Chinese paper-cutting. My friends were fascinated when they came to visit me. I like Chinese classical poems. I participated in a Chinese poem competition on the internet. I also like reading English novels and English magazines, for example: National Geography. I often listen to BBC news, especially reports about China and financial news. I would like to know Western culture and then introduce Chinese culture to the West so I can contribute to Western culture.*

Ming: *I feel that I am becoming international. I benefit from my traditional Chinese culture so I hope that I can keep it. Meanwhile, I have absorbed western culture and I will keep learning it.* *I feel that I have enhanced my abilities in Ireland. First, my English has improved. Second, I learned to think independently and make decisions on my own. I was childish and impulsive when I was in China but now I handle matters with discretion. I was pampered and indulged since childhood but now I do things conscientiously and reliably. I also made more money than in China. I have ample clothing and food. Everything is good.*

As the above examples indicate, despite the cultural distance between the home and host culture, some of the women in this study have successfully developed what could described as an intercultural identity, integrating aspects of both Chinese and Irish culture. Indeed, the findings have provided evidence that cultural distance is not an a priori negative factor, but can in fact facilitate adaptation when the host culture provides opportunities for the migrant not available at home.

**4.4.2 Host Language Proficiency**

Good Englishskills can facilitate communication with the host nationals and use of mass host media; a poor level of English is perceived as a barrier for the women in this study to integrate into the host society. The dominant use of Chinese language by the women in the study hinders their development of English language proficiency, as using their native language slows the improvement of their English language skills and obstructs the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Four women in the current study reported that they live solely with other Chinese housemates and naturally speak their mother tongue at home as Xia states:

Xia: *I don’t speak English. I speak Chinese all the time. I talk to my husband and my friends in Chinese. We live with Chinese housemates.*

Some Chinese women do not speak English at work because they work with Chinese colleagues, which further reduce the opportunity of developing their English language skills:

Hua: *I am working in a Chinese restaurant. My workmates are mainly from Hong Kong and Malaysia.* *I don’t need to speak English at work.*

There are numerous dialects in China. Mandarin is the official language. Elle is from mainland China but she understands Cantonese, thus it makes her communication with colleagues from Hong Kong and Malaysia easier:

Elle: *Most of my colleagues are from Fujian, Hong Kong and Malaysia and I get along very well with them. I can communicate with them because I understand Cantonese.*

Hua experienced difficulty when she worked with migrants from other Asian countries because she could not understand the dialect her workmates spoke, and because of the perceived prejudice against mainland China displayed by those from Hong Kong and Malaysia:

Hua: *I don’t need to speak English at work. But I cannot understand Cantonese either. People from Hong Kong and Malaysia look down upon people from mainland China because they think we are poor. Actually we are not poor. We came to Ireland for the same reason as them: to see the outside world. My motherland is different now. Irish people are nice to Chinese people but people from Hong Kong and Malaysia look down upon us. It is so annoying.*

In the current research, the women’s cross-cultural difficulties mainly stem from their low level of English language proficiency, and among a number of them there is a clear recognition of this. Particularly following their arrival, Chinese women migrants encountered difficulties in day-to-day living when faced with a new language in which they had a poor level of fluency, as shown in these examples:

Ling: *I didn’t adapt to life here straight away. The main problem is the language barrier. Because my major was Chinese in the university and I didn’t have the right environment to speak English when I was in China. I didn’t use English in my work for a few years so I found it was very hard at the beginning.*

Hong: *I even didn’t know how to ask the way when I got lost. I was living with a host family when I first came to Ireland. So they wrote a note for me: I want to go to (someplace), please tell me how to get there. I brought this note with me whenever I went out. Another difficult thing is shopping. I didn’t know where to buy the goods I needed and I had to find the shops myself.*

Such difficulties with the English language can be a serious obstacle for the women in this study to find employment because in some specific areas, excellent English language skills may be required. For instance, Hong experienced language barriers to working as a registered nurse. This greatly increased the pressure she felt following her arrival. Outside the work context, poor English skills represent a language barrier to socializing with members of the host society. As illustrated in the following two examples, Chinese migrant women in this study are hindered from adaptating fully to the new life in Ireland because poor language skills caused difficulties while communicating with host people:

Jin: *I cannot communicate well with Irish people because of the language barrier thus this prevented me from expressing myself.*

Hua: *All my friends are Chinese. I can’t communicate with Irish people because of a language barrier. I can’t understand them at all.*

As the above extracts reveal, these women socialized entirely with Chinese friends and remained distanced from the host culture due to their poor level of English language skills. Therefore, interaction with members of the host society was hindered and the process of cross-cultural adaptation was impeded. Socialization is in turn linked with friendship development. Cai reported that it was difficult to build close friendship with host nationals with poor levels of English:

Cai: *I cannot communicate with Irish people because of the language barriers. I can only greet them by saying hello to them and I can’t build deep friendships with them.*

Xia reported that poor English also caused problems in finding accommodation:

Xia: *It was hard to find work and accommodation. I can’t communicate with Irish people. It is difficult to find accommodation because landlords all speak English and I can’t speak English.*

Chinese women may harbor feelings of frustration due to their lack of English and inability to understand Irish people. They can feel exhausted when confronted with an unfamiliar English-speaking environment. These English language difficulties can lead to separation (Berry 2005), as migrants may intentionally avoid contact with members of the host society due to a fear of making mistakes.

Elle: *I could not communicate with Irish people because of the language barrier. I was trying to avoid speaking to Irish people because I was worried that they would laugh at me because of my poor English.*

Some Chinese migrant women communicate only with other Chinese people, as they either cannot speak English or are more comfortable using their mother tongue. As a result, they withdraw into the Chinese community and socialize only within the Chinese closed society. On the other hand, English language skills can also be a factor which facilitates Chinese women’s cross-cultural adaptation because the more fluent migrant women are in the host language, the greater the participation in interpersonal communication with members of the host society (Kim 2001). Two Chinese migrant women reported that they gradually adjusted to the host language and communicated in English relatively well over time in the host country. This enabled increased involvement in the host society and increased self-confidence:

Sunny: *The most important thing for Chinese women to integrate in Ireland is to overcome language barriers. I tried to learn English as much as possible in my daily life so I can communicate with other people. I have an Irish friend. I couldn’t chat with her one year ago because she couldn’t understand me. Now I surprised her because my pronunciation is much better. She thought I had learned English in a language school.*

The more fluent Chinese women are in the host language, the greater the usage of host mass media such as magazines and radio news (Kim, 2001). This allows them to enjoy culturally rich activities, such as reading host language books or watching host language films:

Ming: *I often read Chinese news and listen to Chinese music on the internet. I also listen to English broadcasts.*

Hong: *I like watching movies. In my spare time, I often go to cinema to watch movies with my friends.*

Chinese women in this study reported that they benefit from their good English language skills when they communicate with members of the host society as Ming indicated:

Ming: *Luckily I passed the English test and I got 7.5 point for my ELTS test in my second year studying in Ireland. Hopefully I can register as a nurse in Ireland next year. The school where I am studying also offered me an opportunity to teach there. I feel that life suddenly opened a door for me because I have more chances to meet more Irish people and contact the host society. I have a feeling that Ireland is my home now.*

The above examples show that language becomes a major barrier in the interaction of Chinese women with members of the host society because a lack of English skills leads to communication difficulties; whereas good language skills allow greater access to the host culture and facilitate Chinese women’s individual process of cross-cultural adaptation.

**4.4.3 Institutional Completeness**

Breton (1964) introduced the concept of institutional completeness to explore how immigrants integrated within host societies (as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.2.3). Institutional completeness offers a way to make a transition from the migrant women’s own culture into the new culture; high levels of institutional completeness hinder communication with the host society. The level of institutional completeness to which the Chinese community in Ireland has access is explained from three perspectives: socializing; food and Chinese language services.

**4.4.3.1 Socializing Exclusively within Existing Chinese Networks**

Due to the vast cultural differences and language barriers faced by many Chinese migrant women they have a tendency to live with and exclusively socialize with co-ethnics, as Wei indicated:

Wei: *I have been living with Chinese people all the time to save money because we have to pay non-EU fees and it is four times more expensive than EU fees.*

The process of cross-cultural adaptation can be significantly hindered when Chinese migrant women have no opportunity or little incentive to communicate with members of the host society. This is often blamed on poor English language skills, the developments of which are slow due to a lack of engagement in the host community, which also hinders participation in events in the host society. For example, Chinese migrant women’s colleagues tend to mainly be migrants from the home country so it is difficult for them to gain access to members of the host culture. For these women, integration is not an issue because they can function successfully without interacting with the host culture. They can live, work and survive in a totally Mandarin-speaking world. It works for them in the short term, but it is debatable that it would work in their favour in the long term. Keeping to themselves allows them to maintain their own culture, but it is a definite hindrance to their integration.

**4.4.3.2 Chinese Food**

The availability of Chinese products has risen with the increased numbers of Chinese migrants in Ireland. There are several Chinese shops and supermarkets in Dublin and across Ireland, providing access to Chinese food. This relates to a high level of institutional completeness for Chinese women in Ireland, as they have access to many home culture supplies in the host country.

Hua: *I feel that the lifestyle in Ireland is almost the same as in China. Now there are many Chinese supermarkets in Dublin and we can buy Chinese food and cook at home.*

The ability to avail of Chinese food and groceries is particularly important to some Chinese migrant women as they tend to dislike local Irish food, as Wei indicated:

Wei: *I am not used to the Irish food. Irish people like eating potatoes while Chinese people prefer eating rice. I often buy food in the Chinese supermarket. I don’t like eating potatoes and fast-food.*

The above quotation indicates that cross-cultural adaptation is aided by the availability of Chinese supplies in the host country, as feelings of missing home culture items are minimized, especially when the migrant dislikes the host country food. Two women in this study have adapted to their new lifestyle and begun to enjoy trying Irish food as well as Chinese food:

Ming: *There are not so many varieties of food in Ireland. But it is convenient to go shopping at Chinese supermarkets. I buy Chinese food and cook for myself. I like western food as well.*

Sunny: *I like Irish food. I think sandwiches, chips and cheese are nutritious foods. They are good for my health. But I miss Chinese food, I often eat sandwiches together with Chinese rice porridge.*

It is important for migrants to explore the host culture cuisine and not exclusively rely on their own cultural cuisine abroad, as experiencing a culture’s food can help bridge the gap between home and host cultures, food being such a key cultural artifact. Indeed, as Pearson-Evans (2000) argued, the ability to share in a culture’s food can be linked directly to one’s level of cross-cultural adaptation and facilitate integration into the host culture. These two women are happy to mix the two food cultures; thereby showing they are willing to explore fundamental elements of the host culture.

**4.4.3.3 Chinese Interpreting Services**

The level of institutional completeness in the Chinese community in Ireland is further enhanced by the opportunity to access a variety of services in Ireland. Many hospitals in Ireland provide free Chinese interpreting services to help Chinese patients; some governmental or non-governmental organizations, such as Citizens Information Centres, the Migrant Rights Centre and the Crosscare also provide information, advice and help for migrants through interpreting services. Half of the women in the current study indicated their use of these services in Ireland because of the availability of free Chinese interpreting services:

Cai: *I gave birth to my son in a hospital in Dublin. I had no English so the hospital provided free interpreting services.*

Elle: *I consulted organizations in Ireland such as the Crosscare and Citizens Information Centre when I had difficulties in my life. They helped me with writing letters and making phone calls. Their services are very good. My friends spent money to consult a solicitor but I think it’s better to get free information and help from these organizations. I find it’s convenient to live in Dublin.*

Sunny: *Sometimes I go to some organizations which provide free interpreting services for help.*

High levels of institutional completeness allow the women to avail of services from host culture institutions. This is welcomed by the women in this study because it makes their life easier in the host country and helps them to adapt to a new life in Ireland, for example, the interpreting services provided in hospitals. However, this kind of interpreting service may have a negative side-effect as migrants are not encouraged to learn English. Migrants feel comfortable using their mother tongue all the time and this slows the improvement of their English language skills and obstructs the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

In brief, institutional completeness offers a way of making a transition from the Chinese migrant women’s own culture into the new culture. In contrast, high levels of institutional completeness may hinder communication with the host society by reducing the perceived need to actively engage with the host community (as explained in Chapter 2, section 2.2.3.). This latter scenario is certainly the case for some of the women in the current study.

**4.4.4 Age Factor**

Schuck (1998) identified age as one of the important factors which adversely affect adaptation outcomes, as the challenge of adapting to a new culture was more suitable for younger migrants. Sodowsky and Lai’s (1997) study discovered that the younger the migrant and the longer duration of time in the host country, the higher the acculturation and the lower levels of stress.

In the current study, women who migrated to Ireland at a young age found it was easier to adapt to the host society. For example, Elle found that it was easy for her to adapt to the new culture when she migrated to Ireland at a young age and she became “Irish” after ten years living in Ireland:

Elle: *I was born in China, but I became mature in Ireland. I came to Ireland when I was twenty-one years old and I have been living here for ten years. I accept Irish culture and I like everything in Ireland.*

On the contrary, an older woman in this study, Cai, reported that it was difficult for her to start learning a foreign language at her age.

Cai: *I can’t speak English. I am not young. I am 38 and I find it is difficult to learn languages at my age.*

Hua stated that her older age (53 years old) affected her ability to adapt to the new culture because she found it difficult to find work and set up a new social network in Ireland because of the language barrier. The following extract shows how the interaction between age, social networks and language competence negatively effects her cross-cultural adaptation:

Hua: *I found that it was difficult to find work at my age. When I first arrived here, I often went to the Ilac Shopping Centre to look for work. The economy was not so bad at that time. I found a cleaning job to work in a bank in Dublin 4. Irish people were friendly but there were strong competition between Chinese people. I think I am a good worker but I lost my cleaning job because my English was poor… At my age, it is difficult to get used to the life in a foreign country. One reason is that I find it is difficult to learn English at my age. The other reason is that all my social networks are in China.*

In summary, women in this study who migrated to Ireland at a young age found it was easier to adapt to the host society; while women who migrated at an older age, and who did not speak English well, reported that they found it difficult to adjust to the life in the host country mainly because of the language barrier.

**4.4.5 Length of Stay in the Host Country**

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2), the length of stay in the host country is an important factor in the process of cultural adjustment for migrants, with a decrease in the level of discomfort as they familiarize themselves with the new culture (Adler, 1975; Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998). Previous research (Gil & Vega, 1996; Zheng & Berry, 1991) noted that migrants experience different levels of stress at different times of residence in the society of settlement. According to Cox (1987), the period of arrival is a critical phase in which migrants experience physical, social and cultural changes or losses. Uncertainty is at its highest level at the initial stage and reduces gradually with time.

In this study, women reported that they were facing a variety of difficulties when they initially immigrated to Ireland. For example, finding accommodation proves to be a challenging task in an unfamiliar environment where differences in the expectations and processes of obtaining accommodation exist. Hua and Sunny both report that these difficulties caused stress and anxiety and this impacted on their cross-cultural experiences.

Hua: *Our living standard was not low when we were in China because we own a three-bedroom apartment. However, we have to rent an apartment in Ireland and my husband's salary is not high. We don't want to share one apartment with other Chinese people so we have to pay expensive rent. We keep looking for an apartment with cheap rent. We have moved six times in the last two years; while in China we only moved once within twenty years after I got married.*

Sunny: *My biggest headache is looking for accommodation. It is not easy to find a suitable flat with a reasonable price. I think rent is too expensive here. I normally surf on the internet to find accommodation.*

Women in this study reported that the setbacks they came across in the period of arrival include a language barrier and lack of information and social networks:

Wei: *I knew nothing when I first came to Ireland. For example, I didn’t know how to open a bank account and I had to ask my classmates to help me.*

Hua: *I found that life was really difficult after I came here. There was a language barrier. I had been living in China for more than fifty years. My friends, relatives and networks are all in China. When I first came in Ireland, we knew nobody here. It was difficult for us to find a school for my daughter. We did not know how to apply for a senior middle school for my daughter.*

The women in this study are adrift between two different worlds and cultures. Because they come into Irish culture with different behavioural modes and values, they found themselves separated from the host culture. Furthermore, separated from their own culture, Chinese migrant women are faced with a high degree of uncertainty and many aspects of life are unfamiliar to them. This uncertainty is probably at its highest level at the initial stage, especially the first year and reduces gradually with time. In the quotation below, this uncertainty relates directly to language competence, and reduces over time as Hong improved her host language skills.

Hong: *I couldn’t understand what Irish people said during my first year staying in Ireland. I started to learn English at zero level. I have been attending English classes, listening to English broadcasts and reading English newspapers. My English improved a lot. I am satisfied with myself because I feel that I am making progress.*

Women in this study reported that a poor level of English language can be a serious obstacle in the process of adaptation especially at the initial stage of migration (as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.4.1). Amy reported that she gradually overcame the language barrier after a period of stay in Ireland and this enabled increased involvement in the host society and increased self-confidence:

Amy: *When I first arrived in Ireland, I didn’t understand English because I studied Japanese as a foreign language when I was in China. I couldn’t communicate with other people. Now my English is getting better and I can do things myself without getting help from my friends.*

**4.4.6 Use of Modern Technology**

Use of modern technology can be helpful to diminish homesickness; but it has the potential to keep migrants away from people of the host culture. Two different Chinese newspapers (“Ireland Chinese News” and “Sun Emerald”) are on offer in Ireland at present and they provide information on life in Ireland in addition to current affairs in China. The newspapers are generally used by women in this study as information sources, including searching for accommodation, jobs or cultural events:

Jin: *I found my job in a Chinese newspaper. Some students were busy working and had no time to go to school. However, they need attendance for renewing their visa so I went to English classes in language schools for them. This was one of my part-time jobs and it was helpful for my English. I thought it was a good idea. I put an advertisement in a Chinese newspaper to say that I can teach children painting and I got some students.*

Sunny: *I often read Chinese newspapers so I can get some information. For example, I went to the National Concert Hall to watch a show this Chinese Spring Festival. I knew about this through reading a Chinese newspaper.*

In addition to using Chinese community newspapers, two of the women indicated that they browse Chinese news on the internet because the news on the internet is more up to date.

Hong: *It’s convenient to use the internet. I often read Chinese news and listen to Chinese music on the internet.*

Jin: *I read Chinese websites on the internet and watch some Chinese TV programs.*

Being far away from home, many women in this study reported that they became homesick. They missed their families, friends and their familiar lifestyle in China. They stated that the lack of entertainment caused boredom and loneliness.

Jin: *I miss the crowded streets, crowds, houses and lifestyle in China. I went to China to visit my family and friends during my holidays. I felt much more secure when I was in China. I feel lonely in Ireland.*

Ying: *I miss China very much. I miss Chinese food. There is much more entertainment in China than in Ireland. Life is colorful in China but it is boring in Ireland. Ireland has an alcohol culture.*

However, the women in this study have found creative ways of overcoming separation by using modern technology: surfing the internet and making phone calls to China. Many women mentioned that they chatted with friends in China on the internet or on the phone to reduce their homesickness:

Wei: *Being Chinese, of course I miss China. I go back to China every year. Thanks to Vodafone’s cheap calls, I ring my mother everyday. It’s really convenient so I can get information about my family.*

Amy: *I often chat with my friends in China on the internet.*

Although using modern technology can help the migrants overcome the homesickness at the beginning stage of migration, it has the potential to confine them within the Chinese networks and keep them away from the host society, in particular if, as some of them do, they become obsessed with chatting to friends in China on the internet or on the phone. These modern means of communication thus become a barrier to the process of cross-cultural adaptation:

Wei: *My lifestyle in Ireland is the same as in China. I went to school in the morning and went home in the afternoon. I surf on internet to get some information about my study. I also chat with my friends in China. I do not go to night clubs or drink at pubs. I keep my own lifestyle which is not influenced by a Western lifestyle. I go to bed early and get up early. I have to keep good attendance for renewing my visa.*

From this quotation, it is quite clear that although it can be helpful to diminish homesickness, the use of technology, because it is solitary, may keep migrants away from contacting people from the host culture. In this sense, the accessibility of the women’s home culture, through the means of technology, can be seen as a ‘virtual’ form of institutional completeness, which, as highlighted in section 2.2.3, can reduce an individual’s incentive or need to interact with the host community.

**4.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has reflected on the research findings with reference to the original questions guiding the research. Based on the analysis of Chinese women’s cross-cultural adaptation experience in Ireland, this study identified facilitators of and barriers to the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrant women. First, seven facilitators were selected: motivation; prior cross-cultural experiences; preparations; perceived social support; integrative attitude; gender and psychological factors. Two hindrances were also identified: visa status; and perceived discrimination. The data analysis also suggests that cultural distance; host language proficiency; institutional completeness; age factor; length of stay in the host country and use of modern technology can be both facilitators of and barriers to cross-cultural adaptation.

The research findings have been presented through an analysis of the rich data which emerged from these Chinese women’s stories. These findings have highlighted the complex nature of twelve Chinese women migrants’ cross-cultural adaptation. In order to provide specific theoretical explanations for Chinese women migrants’ comments, reported behaviors and experiences, there is a need to discuss a number of theoretical concepts relevant to the findings. This following chapter will provide such a discussion, linking the findings to relevant theories, and will propose strategies for migrants and give suggestions to policy-makers. It then will introduce the contribution of this study to existing knowledge and identify the possible topics for further research.

 **CHAPTER FIVE**

 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

**5.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the research findings have been presented. These findings are grounded in empirical data, namely the voices of the twelve Chinese women interviewed about their cross-cultural adaptation experiences. The findings suggest that from the perspective of Chinese women migrants, cross-cultural adaptation is a multifaceted process affected by complex, interconnected factors. With this in mind, the current chapter reviews the study, analyzes and discusses the findings of the research with reference to relevant theoretical concepts and the research questions. It first identifies theories which are particularly relevant to the research findings outlined in Chapter 4 and shows how they are related. This is followed by proposing strategies for migrants and giving suggestions to policy-makers. It then introduces the contribution of this study to existing knowledge and identifies the possible topics for further research. At the end of this chapter, conclusions from the research are drawn.

**5.2 Discussion of Research Findings with Reference to Existing Theories**

In terms of the specific research findings, the study has identified important factors which impact upon migrants’ cross-cultural adaptation. Among these, it has identified two hindrances. Coupled with these hindrances, a number of key factors that appear to facilitate Chinese migrant women’s cross-cultural adaptation have been identified and summarized in section 4.2. Furthermore, based on the women’s experiences, the study identified important factors that can be both facilitators of and hindrances to cross-cultural adaptation.

According to Dunne (2008), it is essential that researchers are aware of and draw upon existing theoretical concepts; as such the engagement can enrich the validity of the research, helping to explain the findings and promote them to a more theoretical level. The theoretical concepts identified as most relevant to the current research findings are taken from diverse fields, including migration, acculturation and cross-cultural adaptation. They are:

* Push/Pull factors (Kofman 1999; Kofman et al. 2000)
* Social Network Theory (Massey et al. 1993; Castles and Miller 2003)
* Institutional Completeness (Breton 1964)
* Culture Shock and Cultural Distance (Oberg 1958; Babiker et al. 1980; Mumford & Babiker 1997; Gudykunst 1998; Hofstede 1994, 2001)
* Integrative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation (Kim 1995, 2005)
* Ethnic Identity Theory (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Phinney 1992; 2001)

In the following sections, the relevant theoretical concepts are presented and discussed in relation to the research findings.

**5.2.1 Push/Pull Factors**

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.1), researchers divide factors causing migrations into two groups of factors: push and pull factors (Kofman, 1999; Borjas 2001; Castles and Miller 2003). According to Kofman et al. (2000), women migrate for a diversity of motivations, including better economic opportunities, to achieve a greater degree of independence, to escape patriarchal oppression, or women’s increasing participation in higher education. This study reveals that ‘pull’ factors are the main factors which affect Chinese migrant women’s journey of migration to Ireland. Although dependent on personal circumstances, the majority of the women in this study saw coming to Ireland as an opportunity to enjoy independence, adventure and self-fulfillment. On the whole, Chinese migrant women in the current study are highly motivated to come to Ireland for a better life, such as for family reunification or further education. These women’s motivations are largely ‘pull’ factors rather than ‘push’ factors. As a result, they tended to have an open and positive attitude towards Irish culture on arrival, which in turn facilitated their cross-cultural adaptation.

**5.2.2 Social Network Theory**

As explored in Chapter 2, getting support is crucial in surviving the early stage of the journey of cross-cultural adaptation because such support provides migrants with practical help. Pearson-Evans (2000) discovered that Irish students who studied in Japan received great support from their existing networks in their original country. Similarly, Chinese women in the current study enjoyed a level of support from their existing ethnic networks both in China and Ireland. Support from family is also important to Chinese migrants. The family-oriented culture of China (Hofstede, 2001) seems to be a key reason that some Chinese women are reliant on their parents and family members in China for advice and support. They seek psychological support and encouragement from their families through modern technology. For example, they may call their families on mobile phones or chatting on internet.

Interestingly, Chinese women in this research reported that they seldom avail of the services of Chinese-led organizations because such Chinese-led organizations as networks in Ireland did not provide practical support for Chinese migrants. In contrary, women in this study indicated that they received support from the host society. They have opportunities to access a variety of services in Ireland. For example, some governmental or non-governmental organizations, such as the Citizens Information Centres, the Migrant Rights Centre and Crosscare, provide free interpreting services to Chinese migrants.

In general, Chinese women in this study indicated that they received social support from both co-ethnic networks and host networks. The findings show that all sorts of social support can benefit cross-cultural adaptation.

**5.2.3 Institutional Completeness**

As explored in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.2), migrants can “soften their landing” in the host country by using existing social networks and organizations (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Overall, a high level of institutional completeness provides the women in this study with opportunities to avail of services from host culture institutions or from co-ethnic networks in Ireland. However, the level of integration into the host society can also be hindered by a high level of institutional completeness. Nesdale and Todd (2000) discovered that immigrants may be discouraged from participating in the host society due to a high level of institutional completeness. According to a previous study by Storch (2008), the dangers of high levels of institutional completeness are exemplified by Polish migrant women who only socialize with other Polish migrants. Similarly, the dangers of high levels of institutional completeness are highlighted by the Chinese women in this study who only mix with their compatriots. On the one hand, institutional completeness offers a way for the women in this study to make a transition from their home culture into the new culture. On the other hand, high levels of institutional completeness hinder communication with the host society. Becoming surrounded by the intense offerings of the home culture, migrants can become closed into a familiar world, refusing to adapt to the host culture (Breton, 1964).

Several examples of this have been presented in Chapter 4. Chinese women in this research who have a tendency to socialize entirely with their compatriots highlight the problems associated with this high level of institutional completeness. These women have little opportunity to communicate with people from the host culture or to participate in life in the host society because they live, work and socialize only with their compatriots. Importantly, the enhancement of English language skills – which has been shown to be a key factor influencing adaptation – is also obstructed by this lack of engagement in the host society, which can lead to further isolation.

According to previous research by Pearson-Evans (2000), food played a key role in the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Irish students studying in Japan. Cervellon and Dube (2005) conducted a study and found that acculturation amongst Chinese migrants in Canada was hindered due to a dislike of certain foods. In the current study, cross-cultural adaptation is aided by the availability of Chinese supplies in the host country, as feelings of missing home culture items are minimized. The ability to avail of Chinese food and groceries is particularly important to some of the women in this study as they tend to dislike local Irish food. Chinese migrant women benefit from this high level of institutional completeness in view of the fact that it helps their adjustment in the early stages of the process of cross-cultural adaptation and offers a method to make a transition from their home culture into the host culture.

**5.2.4 Culture Shock and Cultural Distance**

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.4.3), culture shock can affect migrants in cross-cultural situations. Migrants frequently encounter problems in adjusting to their new social environment. These problems can form dreadful barriers to their cross-cultural adaptation. Gudykunst (1998) develops the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory which focuses on enabling migrants to communicate efficiently in a new culture and it also enables migrants to adjust to living abroad in countries with different customs.

As already mentioned in Chapter 4 (section 4.4.1), Petkova (2007) has proposed a three-stage-model of cross-cultural adaptation which is highly relevant to understanding the adaptation of the twelve Chinese women’s experiences in this study. Petkova (2007) conducted research with face-to-face interviews involving twenty-three people from seventeen different countries, discussing how they encountered foreign culture, and the experiences and difficulties they faced. Through analyzing the data she collected, she found that the perception of culture shock encountered matures through three phases: during the initial phase, migrants usually observe and analyze the physical environment and surroundings of the host country, such as houses, shops, geographical distances, race, ethnicity, physical traits of people and the languages spoken by people from the host society. Migrants usually do not become aware of culture shock at this time. During the second phase, migrants take note of the values, way of life and culture associated with the host country. Comparisons are drawn between the attitudes, customs and traditions of the host country with those of their home country. During the third phase, migrants fully recognize that they have experienced culture shock. Usually they have gained an understanding of the social norms, attitudes and behaviors in the host country. Empathy and evaluation of the host culture are the signs that this phase has been reached (Petkova, 2007: 19). It is interesting to note that, in this study, the Chinese migrant women’s experience of culture shock and adaptation mirrored the three stages proposed by Petkova (2007).

Already introduced in Chapter 2, Babiker et al. (1980) define “cultural distance” as a concept which explains the distress caused by migration during the acculturation process. According to Mumford & Babiker (1997), the following factors can be used to measure cultural distance: climate, dress, language, food, religion and social norms. However, the factors used to define cultural distance are open for debate, and may vary from these. The women in this study do, nonetheless, mention certain components of cultural distance such as weather, food, dress and religion.

As explained in Chapter 2, in the process of cultural adaptation, the fewer the similarities found in two cultures, the more difficult it is for people to adapt and cope (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Irish culture is very different from Chinese culture on many dimensions, language being the most prominent. Throughout the data, English language acquisition is seen as one of the biggest challenges that Chinese women migrants encounter.

**5.2.5 Kim’s Integrative Theory of Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

Kim’s integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation is regarded as the dominant theory among the theoriesrelated to cross-cultural adaptation.Thecurrent study uses Kim’s integrative theory of cross-cultural adaptation as one of the main methods to examine the adaptation of Chinese migrant women in Ireland, at both the pre-arrival and post-arrival phases.

According to Kim (2001), the pre-arrival phase tends to influence the migrant’s predisposition and determine the future experiences of the migrant. Although most Chinese migrant women in this study had no prior cross-cultural experience, three of them who had prior intercultural experiences highlighted that such experiences enhanced their ability to adapt to life in Ireland. Prior cross-cultural experience prepared them for homesickness and assisted them in managing their life in Ireland, which consequently facilitated their cross-cultural adaptation particularly in the early stages of migration.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.5.1), the process of cross-cultural adaptation depends significantly on preparation and careful planning for a life in destination countries (Kim, 2001). According to Kim (2001), if migrants take action to prepare themselves in relation to entering the new environment, they will experience a positive effect on their transition. Chinese migrant women in the current study put a lot of effort into preparing themselves before they started their journey of migration to Ireland so they could adjust to an unfamiliar environment in the host country. Their preparation included gathering information about life in Ireland from friends or family members in Ireland and from agents in China and improving their English language skills in order to be able to survive in the new country. The data analysis indicates that pre-arrival information-gathering facilitates an individual’s adaptation to the host culture on arrival because it creates reasonable expectations for the individual which can help reduce uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005) and consequently facilitates adaptation.

As explored in Chapter 2, host language proficiency is generally identified as one of the most significant skills required to develop communicative competence in a foreign culture (Kim, 1988). As a result, it has been included as a key variable in many studies of cross-cultural adjustment (Pak, Dion and Dion, 1985; Kim, 2001). In thecurrent study, it was shown that host language proficiency can be an aid of or a barrier to the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese women when interacting with members of the host society. A poor level of English was perceived as a barrier for Chinese women to function in the host society. According to an ESRI report (2010), migrants from non-English-speaking countries face a higher risk of unemployment, and report greater difficulties in accessing employment. Non-Irish nationals suffer a disadvantage compared to Irish nationals in the labour market, with lack of language skills contributing to the disadvantage. Similarly, difficulties with the English language are perceived as a serious obstacle to find employment for the women in this study because in specific areas excellent English language skills may be required.

Kim (2001) points out that the more fluent a migrant is in the host language, the greater the participation in interpersonal communication with members of the host society, and the more fluent a migrant is in the host language, the greater the usage of host mass media. Correspondingly, Chinese women reported that improved Englishskills can facilitate their communication with the host nationals and their use of mass media.

**5.2.6 Ethnic Identity Theory**

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.4), ethnic identity represents a component of self-concept that is derived from an individual’s knowledge of his or her membership in a social group or groups. The individual draws certain value and emotional significance from this membership (Phinney, 2001). In the current study, Chinese women realized that the names given by their parents were part of their cultural identity, therefore keeping their Chinese name was deemed very important. This instilled a sense of pride in the migrants, feeling proud of their culture and their ancestry.

Language represents a central aspect of identity and culture (Chow, 2001). Chinese migrant women in this research perceive strong links between a national language and cultural identity. Keeping one’s mother tongue is described as one of the most important markers of Chinese identity by these women.

The importance of social identity was first emphasized by Lewin (1948), who asserted that individuals need a firm sense of group identification in order to maintain a sense of well-being. According to social identity theory, simply being a member of a group provides individuals with a sense of belonging that contributes to a positive self-concept. Verkuyten (2003: 268) argues that “a sense of group belonging is implicated in the psychological well-being of ethnic group members. Ethnic identification may play an important role in the self-concept because people attribute value to their ethnic group and derive self-esteem from their sense of belonging”. According to previous research of Tsai, Ying and Lee (2001), pride was found to be the main influence on self-esteem in Chinese culture for Chinese American women. Similarly, Chinese women in this study report that they take pride in their home culture and values, which result in higher levels of self-esteem for them. In the current study,the women are proud of being Chinese because China has developed fast and the economy in China is booming. It is also to be noted that the reputation and importance of China in the West have been growing steadily thus giving Chinese people, including the women in this study, further reasons to be proud of their country. Chinese women who felt the Irish have positive perceptions about their country of origin feel accepted by the host society. This made Chinese migrant women’s process of cross-cultural adaptation easier.

**5.3 Strategies for Migrants and Suggestions for Policy-Makers**

Based on the in-depth analysis of Chinese women migrants’ cross-cultural adaptation process, the following strategies can be proposed to improve the cross-cultural adaptation of newly-arrived migrants.

1. At the stage of pre-migration, the potential immigrants should try to obtain as much information as possible about their chosen country. The women in this study who had done this advanced preparation reported an easier adaptation experience in the initial phase.
2. An organization could be set up by Chinese women migrants already living in Ireland to assist potential immigrants in their preparations before they travel to Ireland and provide information such as living arrangements in Ireland, financial requirements, immigration requirements, job prospects and educational opportunities. Upon arrival, the individual migrant could then be assisted by the organization in order to facilitate integration into their new country and culture. Since culture is so important, it is vital to assist the individual in understanding the new culture as much as possible especially since Western cultures and ideals can be very different from those of Asian countries. A solid study of the new culture can be the basis for successful integration.
3. From policy-makers’ perspective, as well immigrants learning about their host culture, it is equally important for the host culture to be educated in the cultures of the minorities that are living in their country. There are examples of existing cross-cultural training programmes in Irish hospitals designed to assist doctors and nurses understand the culture of their patients better (DCU Language Services, 2004 and 2005). Such training programmes could be extended to other areas of life in Irish society in an attempt to reduce the probability of discrimination.
4. Chinese immigrants are advised to attempt to actively immerse themselves in the life of Ireland. Those of the women in the current study, who tended to stick together with their own people and indicated a strong preference for making friends from the same country, were less successful in adapting to Irish culture. This attempt to shelter themselves from the new culture and to ascertain what is familiar to them was ultimately detrimental to their successful cross-cultural adaptation. In contrast, those women in the study who interacted more with Irish people received more support and integrated better into society. Accordingly, immigrants are advised to try to make friends and develop relationships with members of the host culture to help facilitate their adaptation.
5. Another very important strategy for Chinese Women who immigrate to Ireland is to try to reach a good level of fluency in English prior to arrival. As shown in this study, a good grasp of English goes a considerable way towards facilitating cultural integration. At a policy level, the Irish Government and organizations should not only provide free interpreting services but should also provide free English language courses for immigrants. However, in the current economic climate, few governments provide such training, which is often left to volunteers.

**5.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

This study aims to make a worthwhile contribution to previous research on the cross-cultural adaptation of female migrants, in particular Chinese women in Ireland. Firstly, there were no prior studies of the experiences of Chinese female immigrants in an Irish host society. This research is an attempt to fill this gap. As Irish culture and society are becoming increasingly diverse, it is legitimate and useful for this study to analyze one element of Irish diversity, Chinese female immigrants, as one component of contemporary Ireland. Secondly, the individual experiences and perceptions of Chinese migrant women needed to be explored, as they are constantly changing along with Irish society and research is rapidly rendered obsolete. Qualitative inquiry facilitated this research and produced rich and original data. Thirdly, the research has identified several key factors which facilitate Chinese migrant women’s cross-cultural adaptation, and also some factors which hinder their cross-cultural adaptation. It is felt that this body of knowledge is a useful addition to research on women’s migration. Finally, the areas identified could direct future studies in the field of intercultural studies.

**5.5 Recommendations for Further Research**

Given the large number of Chinese migrants living in Ireland, and the increasing benefits of trade with China, there is a great opportunity for further exploratory research on cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese migrants. Using a qualitative research framework, this study has reported on the Chinese women migrants’ self-reported opinions and perspectives, which may not be entirely reflective of the experiences of other migrant groups. Therefore, research into the perspectives and experience of members of other migrant groups could be undertaken and compared with the findings of this study. In addition, given that the host community invariably influences the process of cross-cultural adaptation, research could be conducted on their attitudes towards, or experiences of, Chinese immigrants in Ireland. The findings of such research could be compared to the findings of the current study, and would offer a unique insight into the cross-cultural relationships of Chinese migrants with the host community in an Irish societal context. Future studies would necessitate further investigations of similar topics with larger and more random samples including Chinese male migrants and undocumented migrants in order to explore a broader range of knowledge and attitudes towards migration. The current study shows that the relevance of technology in cross-cultural adaptation is becoming increasingly important and therefore would constitute an interesting topic for future study. In particular, it would be useful to explore to what extent technology can represent a means to achieve ‘virtual’ institutional completeness for migrants and the impact this may have on their interaction with the host community and their adaptation.

**5.6 Conclusion**

This research presents an original qualitative study on the cross-cultural adaptation process of Chinese migrant women in Ireland. The goal of this research was to investigate the factors facilitating and hindering the process of cross-cultural adaptation of these women. Through the use of a qualitative research framework, this study identified the facilitators and hindrances to cross-cultural adaptation of the Chinese migrant women. Relevant to this is the aim of highlighting the strategies which allow for a more beneficial relationship between the host society and migrants.

Chinese women in the current study were highly motivated to come to Ireland for a better life, such as for family reunification or personal development such as further education. Drawn towards Ireland, the Chinese women tend to arrive in the country with varying levels of pre-experience and pre-knowledge of life in their new culture. Irish culture was seen to be very different from Chinese culture, the differences relate to language, weather, food and values. This presented great challenges for Chinese migrant women who live in Ireland. They experienced great difficulties adapting due to culture shock. The women in this study agreed that social support facilitated their cross-cultural adaptation. This support came from their existing ethnic networks both in China and in Ireland. They also set up their new social networks in Ireland and gained support from within the host community. The women in this study acknowledged that they received practical support from Irish society such as access to a variety of services and social welfare.

Most women in the current study indicate that they enjoy a relatively equal status to men in Ireland which reflects the changing role of gender in Irish society. This not only supports Green’s (1994) argument about the blurring of the traditional and modern roles of women in Ireland, but, as pointed out in Chapter 4, also somewhat contradicts Hofstede’s (1991) scores on the ‘masculinity’ dimension which ranks China and Ireland very closely. This positive experience of greater gender equality in Irish society in comparison to their home culture helps facilitate their adaptation.

The findings of this study show how the process of cross-cultural adaptation tends to be an uncertain and difficult journey, demanding determination and resilience. The adaptive personality immensely aids the process of cross-cultural adaptation for migrants (Kim, 2001). Women in this study agree that having an ‘open’ personality made it easier to adjust to life in Ireland. They also indicated that self-efficacy is the most powerful factor in relation to their adaptation because even though there are some obstacles in a host country, they can handle these hectic situations and experience fewer difficulties, thus, smoothing their progress towards cross-cultural adaptation. The women in this study take pride in their Chinese culture and values. Pride in Chinese culture results in higher levels of self-esteem.It was also found that the women who adopted an integrated strategy (Berry 2005) developed an intercultural identity (Kim 2001). They want to maintain their Chinese cultural identity and heritage, but at the same time they are committed to developing relationships with Irish mainstream society.

Host language proficiency can be both an aid and a barrier to the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese women when interacting with members of the host society.Language becomes a major barrier in the interaction of Chinese migrant women with members of the host society because a lack of English skills leads to communication difficulties; whereas good language skills allow greater access to the host culture and facilitate Chinese women’s individual process of cross-cultural adaptation.

A high level of institutional completeness provides the women in this study with opportunities to avail of services from host culture institutions or from co-ethnic social networks in Ireland. This is welcomed by the women in this study because the existence of Chinese supermarkets, Chinese food, Chinese newspapers, Chinese interpreting services and Chinese cultural events can maintain familiar home culture socialization patterns for Chinese women. Feelings of homesickness can be soothed by familiarity in the early stages of migration as Chinese women experienced varying levels of culture shock when they confronted completely new surroundings in Ireland. However, as already mentioned, the level of integration into the host society can be hindered by the high level of institutional completeness (Breton 1964, Storch 2008).

The research findings emphasized the difficult nature of cross-cultural adaptation. Chinese migrant women come to Ireland with deeply engrained traditions, such as a strong work ethic and desire for education. These Chinese women’s experiences tell us that no matter how prepared or motivated they are, there are setbacks, such as difficulties in obtaining work permits, language barriers and perceived discrimination which hinder their cross-cultural adaptation. Although many of the women in the study acknowledge the benefit of trying to integrate into the host society – and some do indicate that they have successfully done so – several of them indicate that the above-mentioned barriers hinder this process and therefore complicate their sense of belonging in Irish society. However, all the women in this study are positive about their experiences of living in Ireland. They believe these experiences broadened their mind and they became more independent and mature.

Chen (2000) argues that studies of ethnicity help the host society to better understand the situations and feelings of ethnic minorities, and encourage respect and learning about cultures different from the mainstream. Irish society is becoming increasingly diverse and this presents challenges to both the host society and migrants. The current research provides an example of migrants’ cross-cultural adaptation which should help the host society to understand the situations and feelings of the Chinese ethnic minority. Finally, the current study enhances the understanding of the complex process of cross-cultural adaptation and the host society will benefit from an increased knowledge of an ethnic minority which, in turn, will help the migrants to adapt to and integrate into the host society.

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1. The Schengen Visa has made traveling between its 25 European member countries much easier and less bureaucratic. The visa holder can travel to any (or all) member countries using one single visa, thus avoiding the hassle and expense of obtaining individual visas for each country. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Stamp 4 provides immigrants in Ireland with long-term residency [↑](#footnote-ref-2)