

Abstract

This thesis explores the transferability of Western MBAs to the Chinese management education context and the associated challenges of teaching across cultures. Fundamentally, it raises the question of acceptance of the Western MBA model in the Chinese context.

The methodology included focus group discussions and questionnaire survey, both carried out with MBA candidates in two particular institutions in China. Narrative and numerical data are integrated to present the research findings.

The findings suggest that the context is the most significant factor in terms of developing the practice of MBA education in China. The programme itself is overly theoretical and without enough local practices and cases. The teacher-centred approach is still dominant in MBA teaching there with little student interaction. This is linked to students' underlying Chinese cultural values and the Confucian learning style, but also reflects the lack of practical experience of both the teacher and students. Additionally, the findings from this research also highlight Chinese MBA students' preferences for group-oriented teaching methods and raise the problematic interpretation and application of Western pedagogy and teaching methods that can arise, when transferred to the Chinese context.

This research provides a comprehensive literature review of the development of MBA education in China, and a greater understanding of the current position of MBA education there. It also provides better understanding of Chinese culture and learning style, and the impact of these on people's preferences towards teaching methods. Overall, the findings from this research have added to a growing body of literature on the impact of local culture on the delivery of Western educational programmes in non-Western countries.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Middlesex University for funding this research. Many people have helped me while carrying out this study. I wish to express my gratitude to my supervisors – Dr. Philip Frame and Dr Mary Hartog. Together, they provided me with important advice, helpful suggestions and constant encouragement throughout the course of this work. This study would not have been completed without their help and support.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Shimin Liu and Ms Luthyia Liu for providing support to carry out the research fieldwork in China. Their help and interest in my research have made the data collection process much easier and enjoyable.

I am extremely grateful to my family for their unconditional support and encouragement to pursue my interest and dreams. It was their love that helped me through all the difficulties and frustrations during the study of this research.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my fellow research students at MUBS, especially Salma, Serap, Barbara and Naaguesh for bringing fun and valuable support during this research.

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Chapter I Introduction

I.1 Introduction

MBA education in China has been experiencing a rapid growth in the past two decades as a result of rising demand for management talent, informed by theory, in the developing market-oriented economy there. However, the relevance of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context is open to question, given the fact that the current mode and content of business and management education in China to a large extent has been imported from the West, where a very different context and culture exist from those that may be found in China. In particular, questions remain as to the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices on MBA programmes as they utilize different cultural perspectives and learning styles from those that are familiar to Chinese students. This research aims to explore the transferability of Western management knowledge to the Chinese context, by investigating the current status of teaching and learning practices of MBA programmes in China.

This chapter will provide the context of this study, starting with an initial literature review of the research topic, followed by research aims and questions. The research strategy and specific methodology will then be outlined prior to discussing the primary contributions of this research. Finally, a structure of this thesis is presented with a brief summary of each chapter.

1.2 Background of the literature

Management education in China

Management education has been experiencing a rapid growth in the past decades. MBA programmes have also become the most popular post-experience management courses around the world. However, along with the rapidly changing international business environment, the content and pedagogical methods of the programme have attracted critique from both the academic and practical world: orthodox Western management theories and existing knowledge are no longer seen as universally right solutions or answers to any management problems. More specifically, the critical perspective of management education advocates the concept that management education has to be critical and context-specific (Grey and Mitev, 2004). In other words, the course content and pedagogical methods of MBA programmes need to be adapted to the local cultural and social contexts and business environment of where the courses are taking place.

As a result of its open-door policy and ongoing economic reforms, China has successfully maintained a rapid growth of its economy in the past three decades. Consequently, the current transition from a centrally-planned economy to a market-oriented economy and the country's greater integration with the global economy has caused increasing demand for well-trained managers - that is, those who are aware and operate in terms of the norms of a market-oriented economy, and who are also competent in managing independent organisations, using appropriate management knowledge and skills. (Stewart and Him, 1991; Newell, 1999; Southworth, 1999)

In response, Western style management education was imported into China in the early 1980s, and Chinese MBA education has witnessed a rapid expansion since the

early 1990s as a result of a series of policies and decisions, which have been enacted in order to develop China's domestic MBA programmes. Moreover, prospering international trade and increasing demand for management talent in newly established private enterprises, foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs) and joint ventures (JVs) have further increased the perceived value of business and management studies, both amongst potential students, and in society at large. As a result, the number of Chinese universities eligible to offer MBA programmes has increased from only 9 in 1991 to 127 in 2008, and the number of enrolments has increased dramatically from only 86 in 1991 to over 20,000 annually from 2005¹. 'MBA fever' is used as a term to describe this massive growth of MBA education in China.

This degree is widely considered as the most recognised and prestigious management degree in China, and MBA programmes have been developed in selected universities through cooperating with business schools from Western countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries from Europe (Zhou, 2003; Goodall et al, 2004). Inevitably, MBA education in China is heavily influenced by the Western model, especially in terms of curriculum design, teaching content and material (Berrell et al, 2001; Chow, 1995; Newell, 1999).

Concerns over transferability of Western management knowledge via MBA programmes in China

While western management knowledge is transferred from the West to China as the 'best practice', the Western model for inculcating this knowledge, the MBA, has heavily influenced Chinese MBA programmes, not least because of the direct import of both

¹ Figures sourced from www.mba.org.cn

the curriculum and teaching materials, as well as Western teaching methods (Chow, 1995; Newell, 1999). In recent years, doubts have been raised as to the transferability of Western management knowhow to China, which is in line with critical perspective of management education (Grey and Mitev, 1995; Grey et al. 1996; Grey and French, 1996; Reynolds, 1997, 1998). A fundamental problem in transferring business and management knowledge from the West to China lies in the cultural and contextual differences between these two counterparts. Moreover, employers' increasingly negative attitude towards the benefit of MBA graduates in recent years has also raised concerns from academics and practitioners alike, with respect to the quality of MBA education in China (for example, Berrell et al, 2001; Chen 2005; Chow, 1995; Howe and Martin, 1998; Li, 1999; Newell, 1999; Southworth, 1999, Vinten, 2000).

On the one hand, the relevance of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context is open to question, given the fact that such context-specific tacit knowledge was developed for the Western context and culture, which are very different from those of China. As a result of focusing on the impact of cultural issues on the process of transferring Western management knowledge to developing countries, Jaeger (1990) states that the uncritical use of western management theories and techniques in these countries could well contribute not only to organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness there, but also to the growth of resentment and other negative feelings in those required to adopt 'foreign ways'.

Howe and Martin (1998), in their study of the internationalization of management education, identify the problem of cultural barriers which can inhibit the transfer of management ideas and practices across borders. They point out that the universalism of

“best management practice” is being increasingly questioned, because some of these practices may not have a universal application. Indeed, the more they are culturally specific, the less likely they are to be capable of direct or even modified transfer.

On the other hand, concerns as to transferability also focus on the effectiveness of MBA programmes’ teaching and learning practices in the light of differing contexts between the West and China together with the cultural characteristics of Chinese learners. There is now a question as to whether this direct transfer of Western management knowledge to China is appropriate and to what extent Chinese managers can accept and apply this knowhow. There have been concerns expressed over the potential problems of adopting and utilising Western management education pedagogy in the Chinese context (Chan, 1999; Goodall et al, 2004; Lau and Roffey, 2002; Newell, 1999; Shi, 2000). For instance, Fan (1998) reports Chinese students as showing little enthusiasm for discussions; Wang et al (2005) noted that Chinese students felt confused when they were left to judge a case study by themselves, without a ‘right’ and clear-cut answer; Lau and Roffey (2002) also noticed a lack of student participation in class activities such as case studies deliberation, role-play exercises, group discussion and providing feedback in lectures.

So why do these interactive methods, which are often regarded as the essential components of Western Management Education present such difficulties to Chinese MBA students and their tutors? It is a well-documented reality that there are differences in teaching and learning approaches between Chinese and Western pedagogical practices. Such culturally embedded pedagogical preferences are based on people’s different beliefs and values, on their learning goals, on the lecturer-student

relationship and on the means whereby we obtain knowledge. Because Western management pedagogy clashes with Chinese cultural values, it is difficult for teachers and students alike to implement more autonomous, interactive and experiential approaches to management learning (Currie, 2007).

Goodall et al (2004) and Southworth, (1999) identified three recurring problems in respect of the transferability of Western management knowledge to China:

- the difficulties of adapting Western management knowhow and practices to the distinct social, economic and cultural context of China;
- the barrier of language in terms of textbook translations and of using English as the teaching language;
- the need for a more interactive teaching approach in the light of the cultural perspectives and learning styles of Chinese students.

In this regard, Chinese culture becomes an important factor in transferring Western management knowledge to China, with regard to both the course content and pedagogical methods, as it plays a crucial role in defining particular management style and the general acceptance of new ideas and knowledge. Furthermore, cultural differences between Western and Chinese learning style is also problematic in the transfer of Western MBA (including content and teaching methods) to the Chinese context.

Chinese cultural values and Chinese learning style

Chinese culture is different in many ways from Western culture, especially the Anglo-Saxon variety prevalent in the US and the UK, where Western MBA education originated. Cultural dimension models are normally used in measuring particular cultural values and differences between cultures, as summarised by Morden (1999), there are mainly three clusters of such models: single-dimension models, multiple-dimension models and historical-social models.

When measured by a single-dimension culture model, Chinese culture is normally categorized as high-context, indicating that communication is deemed to be a multi-dimensional process involving much more than written words, which are viewed as much more important to rely on in low-context Western cultures.

Based on some commonly used multiple-dimension models (Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, Schwartz's seven cultural dimensions and GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions), in general, Chinese culture is found high in power distance and hierarchy; in other words, Chinese people are more likely to accept centralized power and individuals rely heavily on superiors for structure and direction. Chinese people also tend to be strong in uncertainty avoidance and less comfortable with changes than do Westerners. In Chinese society, due to its masculinity cultural dimension, men and women are expected to carry different social responsibilities, and, as a whole, Chinese culture differentiates itself from Western culture as collectivist rather than individualist.

Furthermore, historical-social cultural measurements always see Confucianism as the core value of Chinese culture, in that it forms the foundation of Chinese cultural

tradition and still provides the basis for the guidelines and norms of people's behaviour and beliefs, inherited historically and socially. Confucian principles emphasise social harmony, hierarchy and proper relationships between people, which have shaped Chinese people's relationship-oriented sensibility. Values and beliefs of Confucianism also underpin business and management norms and practices in China, and learning styles of Chinese people.

According to Shade (1989), a distinctive learning style will emerge amongst people who share a common historical and geographical setting or culture. In accordance with the values of Chinese culture, the teacher is respected by the students because he/she is considered to be the sole provider of knowledge; students would regard it as disrespectful to ask questions or to disturb the teacher in class, especially with questions that challenge or contradict their teacher's viewpoint (Liu and Littlewood, 1997). Because of their strong tendency to avoid uncertainty, as Chow (1995) states, Chinese students prefer regular, sequential assignments on structured problems rather than more ambiguous case studies with no standard right or wrong answers.

Moreover, in line with the collectivism of Chinese culture, the Confucian values of modesty and social harmony also influence Chinese students, resulting in avoidance of speaking up in a large class and thus expressing their true opinions, which might otherwise embarrass or offend others. Chinese students are also said to be more group-oriented and with more inclination to work in a small group than to work independently (Biggs, 1994; Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996). Finally, the masculinity dimension of Chinese culture implies that students normally get rewards for excellent academic performance rather than any other social adaptation of the process, which is

also a reflection of the emphasis on effortful learning in Confucian cultures.

1.3 Aims and objectives

As summarised in the above initial literature review, there is a lack of existing literature concerning the transferability of Western management knowledge in China's management education in terms of the content, process, context, and cultural issues on the whole. Therefore, one of the aims of this research is to undertake a comprehensive review of literature in terms of

- Western MBA education;
- MBA education in China;
- Chinese culture; and
- Transferability of Western MBA in China.

Furthermore, this research also aims to explore the current position and problems of MBA programmes in China. Overall, the objectives of this research are:

- to explore to what extent Chinese MBA course curricula embrace both Western “best practice” and China's own cultural and business context;
- to examine the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods on MBA programmes in China, and their compatibility to Chinese learning styles; and
- to investigate the applicability of western management knowhow in practice to management work in China.

More specifically, in order to address these objectives, this research will

- explore Chinese MBA students' perceptions of the usefulness of Western-based management knowledge versus Chinese local practices;
- examine Chinese students' perceptions of the current pedagogy they are required to engage with and to what extent those pedagogical methods challenges or supports their underlying cultural perspectives and learning styles;
- examine how Chinese students perceive Western management teaching methods and to what extent Western pedagogy has been modified to cater for Chinese students' learning preference, and
- investigate Chinese students' perceptions on to what extent Western management knowhow can be applied in practice in the Chinese context and how difficult it would be in doing so.

Overall, it is anticipated that this research will provide a more in-depth understanding of the current position of MBA education in China, and contribute to the growing body of literature on cultural impacts in delivering Western-constructed educational programmes in different cultural contexts. Moreover, the research findings are also expected to contribute to the development of more effective MBA teaching and learning practices in the Chinese context.

1.4 Methodology strategy

In this research, a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative techniques has been adopted to improve the quality of the data and to enrich the findings. As to the specific

methods, questionnaire survey and focus group discussions have been organized into two phases to collect both numerical and narrative data.

A non-probability sampling procedure: focused or purposeful sampling strategy has been adopted in the research, the rationale for choosing such a sampling strategy is to explore the current status of the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context, with attention paid to the MBA programmes in particular. Samples carrying prevalent characteristics and deemed typical have been selected to obtain quantitative data via questionnaire survey and qualitative data via focus group discussions.

This research benefits from my personal experience of having lived, studied and worked in the UK, which provides a valuable understanding of Western culture and management styles. Also, being Chinese has given me more confidence and greater ease in managing the field work since there is no language barrier and no obstacles in understanding of my own culture. This has provided me with a better view when considering the cultural and contextual factors in transferring management knowledge from the West to China. Furthermore, owing to my cultural and educational background, the samples are selected based on my judgment about the population of interest, which provides meaningful insights of MBA education in China.

1.5 Structure of this dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of eight chapters. The next four chapters (Chapter 2, 3, 4 and 5) provide a literature review of the research topic. Then Chapter 6 outlines the

strategy and methodology of data collection employed in this research, followed with research findings in Chapter 7. Finally, a conclusion comes in Chapter 8. Details of each chapter are as below:

Chapter 2 provides an introduction of the development and current trends of Western management education in general and MBA education in particular. More specifically, the prototype Harvard model MBA is discussed along with the rising critiques on this typical Western model from the critical management perspective. Further, Western MBA pedagogy is explored by looking at some specific teaching methods, such as case study, and the broad concept of andragogy, which is the term for adult teaching and learning.

Chapter 3 provides a review of the development of MBA education in China in the past 30 years. Western MBA education was imported into China to meet the high demand for well-trained managers caused by the rapid economic development of the country. Nevertheless, management education in China is heavily influenced by Western approaches, and current major concerns focus on the appropriateness and applicability of transferring this context-specific knowledge from the West to China, which in turn highlights the importance of cultural influences in this process of transfer.

Chapter 4 explores Chinese culture by measuring it within three different types of classifications of culture: single-dimension model --- Hall's high-low context; multiple dimension models --- Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, Schwartz's seven cultural dimensions and GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions; and historical-social model --- Confucianism.

Chapter 5 discusses the potential problems of transferring Western management knowledge via MBA education in the Chinese context, by exploring the different cultural values and, more importantly, the resulting different management perspectives and learning styles that exist in the West and in China. The Confucian-Socratic model is also used in investigating Chinese learning style.

Chapter 6 draws the methodology strategy for this research. The rationale of adopting the triangulation approach is explained with detailed outline of the choosing and implementing of the questionnaire survey and focus group discussion as the main data collection methods. Sampling procedure is demonstrated followed by the validity and credibility of the research design. The research fieldwork and data analysis methods are also discussed at the end.

Chapter 7 presents the analysis of the fieldwork and research findings. A summary of the sample background is provided first. Quantitative and qualitative data are integrated where appropriate under the same themes. Data analysis is structured under five major sections: an overview of students' general impression of their MBA programme, an evaluation of course content and teaching material, a consideration of Western theory vs. Chinese practice, teaching language and methods, and the applicability of the MBA course in practical work.

Chapter 8 brings the preceding chapters of this thesis together, and concludes with the findings from literature review, research fieldwork and data analysis. The principal contribution of this research to existing academic knowledge is discussed, along with some suggestions, based on the findings of this research, for improving the current circumstances of management education practices in China. Limitations of this research

are also discussed, and finally further research directions are suggested at the end.

1.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has provided an initial literature review of this research by exploring the broad context of MBA education and its current situation in China, and the potential problems of transferring Western management knowledge via such programmes in the Chinese context. Research aims and questions are defined with a brief outline of the research methodology. The structure of this thesis is also illustrated at the end with detailed description of each chapter. The next chapter will start the literature review with Western MBA education.

Chapter 2 Western MBA Education

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to review the development of Western management education, in particular current developments and trends in MBA education. Management education has been experiencing a rapid growth in the past decades: it is one of the most popular subjects in universities worldwide and MBA programmes have become one of the most popular post-experience management courses around the world. However, the traditional content and teaching methods of management education have been challenged and influenced by more practice-oriented approaches of teaching and learning. Meanwhile, from the critical perspective of management education, traditional managerial approaches have also been questioned for their failure to consider differences between specific social, political and moral contexts and business environments. In this respect, business schools are seeking approaches that can achieve a better balance between theory and practice, and provide more practical solutions to real life problems.

This chapter will begin with a brief review of the development of Western management education in general and MBA education in particular followed by the trend of internationalisation of management education. Then the development of MBA curriculum will be investigated, followed by further discussion of critiques of MBA education from both academics and practitioners. Next, more details about MBA pedagogy are discussed with a brief overview of andragogy, which not only reflects some of the characteristics of MBA education but also provides some useful insights

into implementing relevant teaching and learning methods. It's also worth noting that, since this research is focused on MBA education, therefore it refers to this specific area in general when management education is discussed.

2.2 Development of MBA education

Business and management education has been through a rapid expansion in the past decades. This boom has resulted in a dramatic increase of HE provision in the subject of business and management in many countries. In the West, where business and management theories and knowledge originated, education in this special arena has become one of the largest components of HE provision (Macfarlane and Ottewill, 2001). Besides a considerable rise in business and management undergraduates, the number of graduates in MBA (Master of Business Administration) programmes has increased greatly as well. As Cameron (2005) states, some 500 European business schools produce more than 20,000 MBA graduates a year, while there are more than 80,000 MBA graduates in the US each year.

Since its inception in the US around a century ago, the MBA degree has become a widely accepted management qualification, and now the world's most popular post-experience management course, which aims to produce more academically qualified managers in organizations (Cameron, 2005). With this in mind, it is useful to first review the historical development of management education in general and MBA courses in particular.

Early days of MBA education and its development in the US

Although this rapid expansion of business and management education seems a relatively contemporary phenomenon, it can be traced back to the late 19th century, when the first business schools were established in the US. It is stated that early management education emerged as a military course at West Point and then as a personnel development scheme within the construction of the Pennsylvania railroad in the middle of 19th century (Porter and McKibbin, 1988). Soon after these first appearances of management education, the first business school was established in Wharton in 1881 in response to industrialization and increasing demand for competent business managers; and in the next half-century, some other highly reputed business schools were established, such as Harvard and Stanford (Robinson, 1995).

As Porter and McKibbin (1988) state, along with the development of business and management education in the US, there were two influential reports, i.e. Carnegie Report and Ford Report, which were commissioned by the US government in the 1950s and urged the need to make changes in the business education curriculum and set different standards for business education on different levels, e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate, MBA. As a result, the recommendations of these two reports were implemented and standards for MBA courses were established by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

Development of MBA education in the rest of the world

Along with rapid economic development and the consequently high demand for trained managers, management education was also introduced and experienced a wide spread in other countries around the world, mainly in those developed European countries,

albeit in later years. For instance, in the UK, the London Business School and the Manchester Business School were established as a result of the Robbins Report in the 1960s, which stated a need for a bigger provision of management education (Daniel, 1999). Furthermore, from the 1980s, the MBA provision in the UK was expanded rapidly since it was reported that there was a lack of qualified managers with sufficient knowledge and skills for the UK's economic development (Constable and McCormick, 1987; Handy et al, 1988). Consequently, the number of MBA graduates has increased dramatically in the past few decades.

Beside the US and the UK (the two major providers of management education), other European countries, such as France, Italy, Sweden and Germany, have also experienced development of business and management education, although to different extents in terms of time frame and scope due to varied social and economic conditions (see Engwall and Zamagni, 1998). For the rest of the world, MBA education and business schools have also been a part of the educational development of many countries, including countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa (Ramos, 2004). However, influenced by the US model of MBA education, many MBA programmes around the world, especially in developing countries, have started by cooperating with a reputed business school from a developed country, such as the US or the UK, and often the programmes are based to largely on these well-established western models of curriculum design, course content, textbooks, teaching materials and pedagogy.

Management education, management development and management learning

At this point, it is also useful to note both the differences and the trend to overlap between management education, management development and management learning.

Management education is largely provided by university business and management schools, which is usually regarded as a subset of HE, and it tends to be more theoretical, emphasising a body of knowledge and know-how, aiming at developing analytical and critical skills in the academic disciplines relevant to management. On the other hand, management development, a relatively contrasting approach to management education which emerged in the 1960s, is largely provided by organisations in the private sector in the form of in-house management training and development, and is seen as a subset of human resource development (HRD), emphasising the development of personal knowledge and management skills. (Fox, 1997; Huczynski, 1983; Kellie, 2004)

Although they are different from each other, as Fox (1997) points out, management education and management development are increasingly overlapping. In particular, management education is urged to become more practically relevant and to offer theories and ideas that address wider problems. As a result, a new disciplinary area, management learning, has emerged in some academic institutions as a subject area and at the same time a research community studying management education as well as management development. More specifically, management learning studies the whole range of professional approaches to management and seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice of management education and development.

However, it is unwise to come to the conclusion that management learning will replace management education and/or management development. In fact, these three areas are increasingly influencing each other, and management education is inevitably approaching a more practical perspective, for the purpose of contributing to and improving organisational effectiveness and the performance of individual managers (Grey and

Mitev, 2004).

2.3 Internationalisation of management education

Another inevitable fact about the development of management education around the world is its internationalisation. Following the trend of globalisation, the world's economies are inevitably becoming more and more interdependent. Moreover, the world has been seen as integrating through booming information technology, electronic media and communication, mass travel and the growing dominance of English as the business language (Elkin et al., 2005). Consequently, there has been a growing concern with internationalisation of higher education in general and in management education in particular, in the light of globalisation's implication for curricula, course contents, modes of delivery and research.

Business schools around the world have surged dramatically in the last 30 years, especially due to the increasing demand for management education since the 1990s. However, business schools worldwide are increasingly facing more challenges to make the best response to ensure national competitiveness (Thomas, 2007; Vinten, 2000). As a result, a number of pressing issues have emerged for management education in terms of a more balanced global view. The key implications are summarised by Thomas (2007: p.16) as the followings:

- the need to understand global competitive rules and regulations;
- the growth in customized executive education programmes for MNC

- (multi-national corporation) clients;
- the requirement to form cross-functional teams to manage global accounts;
- cross-cultural content becomes critical in teaching;
- business education offered on a global bases;
- business education operating in a 'think global – act local' mode.

Influenced by these implications of globalization for management education, business schools around the world, including both those in high-growth, developing economies and those in mature, developed countries, have started searching for strategies to embrace a global view into their course curricula. As Sharma and Roy (1996: p 9) conclude, popular forms of globalisation of management education include:

- joint ventures between business school in two countries;
- educational networks;
- diversification of faculty and students;
- globalised multidisciplinary action projects; and
- international faculty exchanges.

These different forms of globalisation can be also categorised in three major types of internationalisation strategies for management education summarised by Hawawini (2005), namely import, export and network model.

Firstly, the import model of internationalisation aims at 'importing' or bringing the world to the school. In other words, business schools which adopt such strategy will try to recruit not only students but also faculty with a maximum number of

nationalities, and English is quite often the preferential language of instruction and communication. However, as Hawawini (2005) points out, it is easier to create a truly international-oriented business school from scratch because it is rather difficult to convert a local school into an internationalised one, given the former's strong attachment to national roots and cultural context.

The second model is the export model of internationalisation. Instead of bringing in students and faculty, the export model attempts to send them abroad, which means off-site courses are delivered in a host country. The aim of this strategy is to expose the faculty as well as students to other cultures, through which they can enrich their knowledge and skills from an international perspective, and then such experience and knowhow could be transferred back to the main campus. In this way, the home business school benefits from sending students and faculty abroad and to become more internationalised. However, as Hawawini (2005) warns, as one of the most popular forms of sending students abroad, there is a danger in student exchange programmes, which is that they may turn into a routine with little added value apart from providing students with a visit to a foreign country.

The third model is the network model, which is contended by Hawawini (2005) as the model of a truly global school. This model involves the creation of a multiple-site institution with branch campuses located in different regions globally, i.e. America, Europe and Asia as the main economic regions of the world. The essential principle of this network model is to maintain multiple-site campuses as interconnected and complementary to each other, rather than 'cloning' campuses abroad. The reason behind this is that unconnected campuses may miss the opportunity to learn from each

other about the local context as a part of the globalised business and management practice and education.

Moreover, it is argued that, underpinning these three models, an internationalised curriculum is essential for business schools to become a truly global player. In this case, internationalisation of curricula is described by Knight (1997: p.8) as:

'a process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education, with the aim of strengthening international education – understood as education which involves and/or relates to the people and culture and systems of different nations'.

The rationale underlying the above discussed strategies of internationalising business and management education presumed that the more transfer of western management knowledge, the better, from not only the perspective of western universities but also from that of universities in developing countries as the receiving end. Therefore, western business schools have become one of the most important and popular conduits for the transfer of so-called 'best practice' in various business and management related fields, for instance, operations management, marketing, organisational studies, human resource management and so on (Howe and Martin, 1998).

However, this rationale is deemed a questionable proposition (Thomson and O'Connell-Davison, 1995), and usually ends up with a pre-packaged portfolio of management courses based on the work of Western, most often American, academic

and practitioners. It is even more problematic when these Western ‘best practices’ are adopted without critical and contextualised consideration in other areas with different context and cultural perspectives from the West. As a response, Howe and Martin (1998) argue that for some practices, a universal application is possible, especially when these practices are applied within similar conditions of common technologies, markets and competitive strategies; while for some other practices, e.g. human resource management, it is incapable of direct transfer or even modified transfer in some cases by reason of the underlying cultural influencing factors. This is also highly concerned by the school of critical perspective of management education, which will be discussed in more details after a review of MBA curriculum below.

2.4 MBA curriculum

The traditional model of MBA courses is usually referred to as the “Harvard model”, which was widely adopted by business schools around the world in their early days, especially in Europe (Macfarlane and Ottewill, 2001). However, due to the new challenges posed by changing management practice and developments in knowledge, the traditional “Harvard model” of teaching has now been called into question, and it is no longer dominant in Europe. (Cameron, 2005; Grey and Mitev, 2004; Macfarlane and Ottewill, 2001)

This proto-typical “Harvard model” of MBA programmes originated at Harvard Business School in the US and normally involves two years of full-time study, and it is highly selective and highly pressured. The first year concentrates on the basic management disciplines, including managerial economics, finance, marketing,

organizational behaviour, human resource management, product and operational management, etc. The second year is focused on a range of electives, organizational placements and/or consultancy projects. According to this model, teaching methods of such programmes are heavily based on case studies (Cameron, 2005; Fox, 1997).

Case study

Case study is typical teaching and learning method of MBA education, which was innovated in Harvard Business School and has been widely used in various management education programmes around the world, and is also a quintessential part of the aforementioned 'Harvard model' of MBA teaching (Banning, 2003). Normally, a MBA student needs to go through dozens of cases during the course, and even hundreds of cases in some highly reputable business schools. The rationale underpinning the popular usage of case studies is that it is argued students can develop relevant management knowledge and skills through the practice of analysing numbers of cases which describes real business issues (Sharpio, 1984). More specifically, cases studies are used as a pragmatic attempt to engage the attention of students through the use of business cases occurring in real organizations. The essence of cases study is the process of analysing those cases by participants, either individually or in a group (Mumford, 2005).

However, as Ross (1998) contends, assumptions, perspectives, mental models and management philosophies are also conveyed to students through cases, in addition to pure knowledge and skills development. Therefore, it has come under scrutiny whether those cases used in MBA education are value-neutral. What underpins this scrutiny is that a case is a story of the 'real business situation', told by case protagonists, however according to Denzin (1989), a story is always an interpretive account and all

interpretations are biased; in other words, the underlying assumptions and mental models of cases could potentially lead to biases in terms of economic, political, cultural and other context-related issues.

As a result of an empirical study of examining the underlying frameworks and assumptions embedded in MBA teaching cases, Ross (1998) reported significant and pervasive biases in 36 best-selling Harvard Business School (HBS) cases, which are overwhelmingly rationalistic, executive-centric, instrumentalist and objectivist. Based on the same methodology², Liang and Wang (2004) analysed 30 Chinese MBA teaching cases and found a similar bias towards rationalistic in those cases as in the HBS cases.

Nevertheless, Liang and Wang (2004) also found out that, compared to HBS cases, Chinese cases have significantly more 'political' content and less 'human' content. This is because most U.S. businesses are started by entrepreneurs and HBS cases often include detailed descriptions of the business founders, which is seen as content in the 'human' domain; while on the other hand, most of the Chinese enterprises appearing in the MBA teaching cases are either state-owned enterprises or joint-ventures, which inevitably have more government involvement and leads to the more content in the 'political domain'.

Furthermore, according to Ross (1998), most HBS cases are 'executive-centric', i.e. written exclusively from the perspective of a senior executive, while on the contrary,

² Bolman-Deal (2003) four domain model was used in both Ross (1998) and Liang and Wang (2004) studies. The model was initially published in 1984, based on comprehensive review of relevant literature and in-depth interviews of practicing managers, Bolman and Deal identified four dimensions as essential to the understanding of organisations. These four different, but interrelated and partially overlapping domains are rational, human, political, and symbolic.

Liang and Wang (2004) found out that Chinese cases are mostly written in an executive-free fashion, and there is no existence of a decision-maker. This is inevitably a result of the existence and emphasis of different enterprises and organisational structures of the 'strategy-driven' private enterprises in the West and the state-owned enterprises in China.

The potential for case-bias becomes particularly problematic when cases are applied in a different context, more often in different countries with different social and cultural backgrounds. The findings of Liang and Wang's (2004) research also indicate that many Chinese cases have been imitating the same style and formats of those Harvard cases, which raises concern that the implicit models are not totally appropriate for the objective of management education in the Chinese context. Hence, it is suggested by the research (ibid) that management educators should adopt a better-balanced view of organisational realities in writing and teaching cases as to capture the complexity of the managerial work in the real world and avoid a distorted picture which may result in students reacting to problems in inappropriate ways.

It is a fact that this traditional Harvard model has been increasingly criticized. Especially from the 1950s onwards there has been a growing level of criticism of MBAs. It is argued that the curriculum developed by US business schools were too mathematical, analytical and academic in their orientation, largely because of the pressure of establishing legitimacy for business and management studies as an emerging profession, and the pressure of establishing relevant academic subjects (Carnall, 1995). In this view, business schools worldwide are increasingly facing a choice between two approaches: a more analytical approach focusing on theory and knowledge acquisition with lesser

attention to practical realities and, on the other side, a more experience-based, project-based approach with an emphasis on personal and management development and adopting more interaction-oriented teaching methods.

Categorisations of MBA curriculum

The development of MBA curriculum may also be explained by a category of three generations of MBA, which is articulated by Carnall (1995), as shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Three Generations of MBA

| | 1st generation (traditional model) | 2nd generation (alternative model) | 3rd generation (the year 2000) |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Curriculum | Rational Analytical Scientistic | Rational Analytical Scientistic | Balance of rational/ analytical intuitive Judgmental |
| Delivery systems | Traditional and often intensive and limited (e.g. case method lectures) | More integrative Project-based Use students' experience | Genuinely informational Integrates delivery systems including action learning, projects, distance learning and traditional methods |
| Learning and learning context | Younger, less experienced Full-time programmes Learning "in college" | More experienced Part-time executive learning "in-college" but draws on in- organization experience | Learning takes place both in-college and in-company through action, importance of partnership models of learning; multinational learning opportunities |
| Assessment and evaluation | Academic orientation Theory-cognitive Orientation | Theory-practice orientation | Theory-practice Active learners Focus on skills and competence in addition to cognitive orientation Quality of international focus |
| | Academic and in-college | Theory-practice | |

Source: Carnall (1995: p.23)

It is clear that MBA education is moving towards a more practice-based approach, in respect of curriculum design, teaching or delivery methods, learning context and assessment methods. More specifically, the emerging third generation MBA focuses more on the balance between theory and practice; thereby it encourages more linkage between the course itself and the organisation in which the course candidate is

working, so as to provide more direct solutions to practical problems. Consequently, a wider range of learning/teaching modes, especially interactive teaching methods, are increasingly adopted in MBA courses, aiming to overcome the drawbacks of traditional lecture and case study methods and facilitate knowledge acquisition and application.

Along with the trends towards a more practical-orientation, the length of the MBA programme and its delivery pattern has also changed from the traditional mode. As Cameron (2005) notes that there has been a strong pressure, particularly in Europe, to reduce the course from two years to 18 months or even 12 months. In fact, MBA recruitment to full-time programmes has fallen in recent years, while more people are willing to take part-time programmes instead, with the result that managers are able to apply what is learned almost immediately to their work.

Similarly, Kleiman and Kass (2007) constructed a curriculum-focused categorisation of MBA programmes in terms of three different approaches of developing MBA curriculum, which is summarised in Table 2.2 below. The first category is *normative MBA*. Business schools following this normative model build their core curricula around a set of modules that are routinely assumed should be placed in the course to expose students to the full range of business operations and functions, such as management, accounting, finance, marketing, MIS, and business law, etc. Hence, it is no surprise that such normative MBA programmes are remarkably similar around the world. It is especially true when the Harvard model is copied as the golden rule in the rest of the world. However, as argued by Kleiman and Kass (2007), this normative approach is problematic because of *'the underlying assumption that there is a single knowledge set that all MBA students should acquire, and, moreover, students are learning a little bit about a lot of*

topics without any in depth' (p82-83).

Table 2.2 Curriculum-focused categorization of MBA programmes

| Category | Normative MBA | Reactive mission-based MBA | Proactive mission-based MBA |
|------------|--|--|---|
| Curriculum | Single knowledge set Routine modules cover a full range of business areas | Reactive to external stakeholders' preferences | Collective knowledge from all relevant stakeholders |

Source: Kleiman and Kass (2007)

Referring to Kleiman and Kass (2007), the second category is the *reactive mission-based MBA*, by which business schools develop their curricula based on a specific outcome that they try to achieve as their unique mission. This approach is called 'reactive' because business schools are reactive instead of proactive to the missions, which means in most cases they are in favour of the preferences of external stakeholders, i.e. students and potential recruiters. As a result, whether a specific module is included or eliminated from the core curricular depends on the students' and potential recruiters' preferences in terms of the module's practical usefulness and relevance. However, it is very likely that students will ignore some of the core areas which are important in developing essential business and management relevant skills. Furthermore, Trank and Rynes (2003) also point out that media ranking plays quite a negative role in curriculum development since this imperfect measure of course quality more or less drives business schools to give too much priority to the preferences of students and recruiters whose opinions ultimately influence the ranking.

The third category, which is advocated by Kleiman and Kass (2007), is also mission-based, but in a proactive way. The curriculum of this *proactive mission-based MBA* is developed by a more methodical approach and attempts to involve all relevant

stakeholders in order to obtain collective knowledge of faculty members, alumni, and business managers/potential recruiters. The rationale behind this approach is that faculties are experts in their fields in terms of academic expertise; alumni could provide insightful perspective on the practical usefulness of the subjects covered in their previous courses, while business managers could give practical advice on what types of knowledge and skills are needed for graduates to perform in real work. Baruch and Leeming (1996) also suggest seeking feedback from alumni to evaluate and maintain the level of adaptation of the existing MBA curriculum in terms of how well the course has prepared the graduates for their work.

As an outcome of this proactive approach of developing curriculum, external stakeholders will be able to assist faculty in determining the focus of the course without unduly imposing their preferences on the process and outcome. In specific, a detailed step-by-step design of how to develop a proactive mission-based MBA is also proposed by Kleiman and Kass (2007). Six phases are included which are adapted from a routinely used method by human resource development professionals in determining the learning needs of employees. These phases are summarised as below:

Phase I – prepare for resistance to change;

Phase 2 – devise a clear mission statement;

Phase 3 – develop a list of mission-related tasks that graduates are likely to be required to perform;

Phase 4 – identify the knowledge, skills and ability that graduates must acquire to perform the mission-related tasks;

Phase 5 – create a set of courses that collectively teach the most

important knowledge, skills and abilities;

Phase6 – evaluate the success of the new programme, making modifications suggested by the evaluation result.

These six phases are very much in line with the Knowle's (1995) eight-step process model based on his andragogy theory, which also emphasises preparation to learning, clarifying objectives, choosing the right teaching pattern and evaluating the teaching process. More discussions of Knowle's andragogy theory and the accompanying assumptions and the eight-step model will be discussed in section 2.6.

To build the above discussion on the challenges MBA education has been facing in terms of curriculum design, the next section will review the critiques of MBA education from a broader perspective, and also the rising school of thought advocating critical MBA education.

2.5 Critiques of MBA education and critical management education

Major critiques of MBA education

As Hay and Hodgkinson (2008) summarise, management education in general and MBA in particular have been subject to persistent critiques in both the US and the UK. The starting point of these critiques can be traced back to the 1980s reports (Constable and McCormick, 1987; Porter and McKibbin, 1988), which criticized MBA programmes for not producing individuals of sufficiently high calibre to perform managerial work. As a result, a number of MBA programmes turned to emphasising quantitative and

analytical subject areas for the purpose of preparing candidates with practical 'hard skills'. This trend was again criticized in the following years for its neglect of softer and transferrable skills, such as interpersonal and leadership skills (Cheit, 1985; Lataif and Mintzberg, 1992).

Although MBA programmes have been undergoing reform to address such problems, critiques of these programmes are still emerging with regard to the course content as well as the educational approach or pedagogy. For instance, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) have criticized the relevance of management education to business and management practices, and even they assert that there is little evidence that an MBA degree has any positive effect on career outcome or usefulness at work. Moreover, Mintzberg (2004: p.6) criticizes US MBA programmes in that they 'train the wrong people in the wrong ways with the wrong consequences'. In other words, partly due to the fact that most of the MBA programmes recruit relatively young people with little or no management experience, the courses only train candidates in the functions of business without any general education in the practice of management.

Blass and Weight (2005) also criticize the young age and little management experience of the MBA students and complain about the quality and relevance of the course content which is often delivered by research-oriented faculty. In addition, they are also concerned about whether MBA programmes are more about networking, screening and recruitment services than about professional education.

Although some of the criticisms tend to oversimplify the relationship between management education and management practices, as Hay and Hodgkinson (2008)

contend, the concern about MBA programmes' small practical relevance have been indeed taken on board by both management academics and practitioners. It has caused evaluation and reflection on MBA programmes in terms of course structure, content, and teaching approach. In this regard, critical management education has emerged from the backdrop of the increasing demands of a more critically reflective approach to the education of managers.

Critical management education

Critical management education emerged as a branch of education in the 1990s, which started from Alvesson and Willmott's (1992a,b) first exploration of critical management studies, while later on a number of scholars have contributed in developing the concept of critical management education and proposed possible approaches of critical pedagogy in MBA education (e.g. Grey and Mitev, 1995; Grey et al. 1996; Grey and French, 1996; Reynolds, 1997, 1998).

Grey and French (1996) argue that management education and research are crucial for the development of management practices, which itself has become of central importance to the world and different societies, so that it must inevitably come under scrutiny as the subject of critical evaluation. They contrast this with the traditional managerial perspective, which is concerned with the acquisition of techniques and skills that are subsequently applied in the workplace, regardless of the context of their application. Conversely, a critical perspective is advocated, which is to understand and analyse management in terms of its social, moral and political practice and context. In this regard, critical management academics tend to challenge management practice rather than seek to sustain it without considering the context that it will be applied in.

In specific terms, according to the critical perspective, the primary concept of management education is defined by the traditional managerial approach according to an erroneous distinction between “academia” and the “real world”. By contrast, the critical perspective argues that the concepts and techniques of management should not be regarded as neutral, technical terms and activities, and the questions of moral, political, social and even philosophical issues cannot be avoided, since they are in fact where management theories are raised. In this respect, this critical perspective advocates a related set of concerns that education should be useful, practical and relevant to the real world, and it should be context-specific rather than context-free. (Grey and Mitev, 2004)

As Perriton and Reynolds (2004) assert, there has developed a set of identifiable pedagogical beliefs or principles for critical approach. A typical set of criteria is concluded by Reynolds (1999: p.173) and Perriton and Reynolds (2004: p.65) as the below:

- A commitment to questioning the assumptions embodied in both theory and professional practice, and to raising questions about management and education that are moral as well as technical in nature, and are concerned with ends at least as much as with means;
- An insistence on foregrounding the processes of power and ideology subsumed within the social fabric of institutional structures, procedures and practices, and the ways that inequalities in power intersect with factors such as race, class, age or gender;
- A perspective that is social rather than individual. Notions of community are

likely to figure in critical pedagogies albeit with problematized interpretations of the construct;

- An insistence on confronting spurious claims of rationality and objectivity and revealing the sectional interest which can be concealed by them.

Based on these principles, Mingers (2000) insists that a critical approach of pedagogy should be rigorous and structured rather than purely destructive, Mingers (2000:p.225-227) suggests a pedagogical approach in terms of four aspects:

- the critique of rhetoric – critical thinking
- the critique of tradition – being sceptical of conventional wisdom
- the critique of authority – being sceptical of one dominant view
- the critique of objectivity– being sceptical of information and knowledge

Furthermore, as Reynolds (1999) argues that critical management pedagogy would ideally involve both content and process. In other words, critical approach principles are supposed to be embodied in not only what is being taught but also how it is taught. Figure 2.1 shows four different pedagogical approaches in terms of the level of involvement of critical ideology in content and process.

Table 2.3 Four types of pedagogies

| | |
|---|---|
| Traditional education traditional content-traditional process | Content-focused radicals critical content-traditional process |
| Strategy-based radicals traditional content-critical process | Critical pedagogy critical content-critical process |

Source: Reynolds (1999)

However, it is argued that such critical approach of management education might lead to 'disruptive consequences' (Reynolds, 1999). Grey et al. (1996) also identify the problem of critical approach from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, there is an inherent contradiction of critical pedagogy approach that on the one hand students are encouraged to question the validity of knowledge and authority, while on the other hand such views are imposed upon them. Practically, there is the inevitable tension of teaching a critical course within the context of a degree programme, which is very much influenced by a number of stakeholders. The problem of implementing critical pedagogy in management education is also noticed by other scholars (Fenwick, 2005; Hagen et al, 2003; Perriton and Reynolds, 2004), among whom some address practical problems of operating a critical pedagogy and impact on participants, lecturers, and on course content and teaching methods.

A more comprehensive view of pedagogy for MBA education is presented in the next section; in addition, a brief overview of Knowle's andragogy will also be included.

2.6 MBA pedagogy and andragogy

In terms of MBA pedagogy, Grey et al. (1996) have identified three approaches: disciplinary, staff development and critical approaches, within which the first two are seen as traditional approaches to MBA pedagogy while the third one is advocated by the authors as an accompanying approach to the emerging ideology of critical management education. In this section, these three pedagogical approaches are reviewed with the implications of the relationship between the management teacher

and students.

Firstly, the disciplinary approach focuses on the content of management education, and the assumption of this approach is that management can be taught and acquired by the students as a body of knowledge covering various business functions, and that there is little connection between different subjects, or, in other words, the content of the course is compartmentalized based on different business functions. According to Grey et al. (1996), the content of this disciplinary approach is not necessarily uncritical, i.e. critical thinking and scepticism of conventional knowledge can also be found within this approach. Therefore, this approach can be located in both traditional education and approaches that are more content-focused and radical, as two of the four types of MBA pedagogy discussed previously, as proposed by Reynolds (1999).

Hence, it is the teaching process of this approach that makes it 'disciplinary'. Since management knowledge is seen as an object which can be delivered by the teacher and possessed by the student, hence teaching relies on the authority and expertise of the teacher and established texts and students are presumed to be passive recipients of the teacher's wisdom and knowledge from textbooks. In other words, interaction between teacher and students is minimal and not encouraged within this disciplinary approach.

This approach is criticized by students for its lack of practical relevance as well as analytical thinking. Moreover, the reliance of teacher's authority and expertise also makes MBA education 'simply a matter of transmission of established and accumulated truth' (Currie and Knights, 2003:p.32). As a result, students are expected to memorize the facts that are given by the teacher to achieve high scores in exams and coursework.

Secondly, the staff development approach pays more attention to delivery or teaching methods, while attempting to balance between theory and practice. Therefore, student participation is advocated in various more interactive teaching methods, such as group exercise, in-class discussion, role-playing, etc. The rationale underlying this approach is that student participation could generate students' interests and persuades them of the usefulness of their study (Grey et al, 1996). It is also suggested that participation, especially in those group-oriented exercises, could be helpful in developing students' interpersonal and transferable skills, which are seen as important attributes in recruiters' eyes (Currie and Knight, 2003).

Consequently, the staff development approach advocates a more interrelated relationship between teacher and students, in which students may also affect the way knowledge is transmitted or even generated from the educational process. In other words, knowledge is no longer transmitted by the teacher to students in a one-way process as in the disciplinary approach. The interaction between teacher and students may yield some success in increasing the quality of learning experience for students, as asserted by Currie and Knight (2003).

However, although the way that knowledge is transmitted is improved by encouraging student participation, the management teacher is still in a more privileged position to inform the students of the 'best' solution to the problems in their exercise. More importantly, as Grey et al. (1996) point out, the staff development approach fails to problematize existing management knowledge. Hence, this approach can be categorized as 'strategy-based radical' in Reynolds' (1999) four-fold typology of MBA pedagogy, in which there remains a traditional content while adopts a critical process.

The third approach, the critical approach, advocates critical scrutiny of conventional wisdom. Students are asked to problematize management theories and assumptions by referring to their own work and non-work experiences (Grey et al, 1996). As the scholars of critical management education argue that management knowledge is to be understood and reflected in a certain context, with concern for social, political, economic and even cultural issues, this approach encourages students to evaluate and think critically according to the context before accepting the existing knowledge. Therefore, this approach is in line with Reynolds' (1999) critical pedagogy and involves both critical content and critical process.

By adopting the critical approach in MBA pedagogy, existing knowledge is no longer seen as the universally right solution for any management problems, while the teacher is no longer seen as the expert in classroom, whose job is to transmit authorized knowledge to passive students. Instead, the management teacher act like a facilitator facilitating discussion, dialogue, or even debate between the teacher and students and also among students. In this way, both the teacher and student will develop their knowledge and understanding about management, which in turn may contribute to the development of existing management theories and practices (Currie and Knight, 2003).

However, problems may emerge when implementing a critical pedagogy in MBA education. Just as with Kleiman and Kass's (2007) notion of people's resistance to change when introducing a proactive mission-based MBA programme, the same resistance is also found when adopting a critical pedagogy. For example, Currie and Knight (2003) notice students' and teachers' discomfort about such pedagogy in an MBA programme in a UK-based business school. More specifically, students may doubt

their legitimate right to question management teachers, and become confused and hesitated when they are asked to challenge academic expertise.

On the other hand, changing from a disciplinary to a more supportive role may cause anxiety in management teachers in that not only do they have less power in controlling the class but also they may be threatened by the fact that students are questioning their knowledge. Moreover, teachers who are committed to a critical pedagogy may have the assumption that they are the enlightened superiority, and rationalize the pursuit of such pedagogy the best for students, which has been referred by Reynolds (1999) as the 'dark side' of critical management education. According to Reynolds (1999), this may appear when management teachers expect students to become critical while at the same time imposing critical content and process on students rather than working with them. Consequently, this imposed implementation of critical pedagogy may well lose its very purpose of developing students' critical thinking and reflection skills on their own.

At this point, it is noteworthy that the term 'pedagogy' as employed in the discussion up to this point refers to teaching and instruction strategies and methods from a broader educational perspective rather than its original meaning in Greek to describe the education of children. Therefore, in this view, Forrest and Peterson (2006) advocate that the term 'andragogy', which refers to teaching and instructional strategies for adult learners, should be used to replace 'pedagogy' in respect of teaching in management education. Since educating managers is a different proposition from educating school-leavers or undergraduate students, it belongs to the domain of adult education and learning, which recognizes that adults learn differently and this difference

is particularly compounded when they learn subjects which are relevant to their professional practice. The next section will give a brief overview of the essential elements of andragogy and steps towards implementing such strategy in practice.

Andragogy

Malcolm Knowles first introduced the term “andragogy” in the 1970s. Knowles (1980) argues that adults must be taught differently from children and that the learning process of adults is drastically distinct when compared with children or the traditional pedagogical approach. Andragogy is defined by Knowles (1990: p57) as

A theory which is vastly in contrast with the traditional pedagogical model and it advocates both the self-directed learning concept and the teacher as the facilitator of learning.

By emphasising the experience of the adult students, Knowles (1990: p.61) also argues that:

Adults are motivated to devote energy to learn something to the extent that they perceive that it will help them perform tasks or deal with problems they confront in their life situations. Furthermore, they learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real life situations.

Initially, Knowles (1984) illustrated the differences between traditional pedagogy and the newly defined andragogy in terms of five assumptions. In the later years, another assumption was added to these five original assumptions, which finally constituted the six principles of andragogy, as follows:

- (1) The learner's need to know;
 - (2) Self-concept of the learner;
 - (3) Prior experience of the learner;
 - (4) Readiness to learn;
 - (5) Orientation to learning, and
 - (6) Motivation to learn
- (Knowles et al, 2005)

Based on these principles, Knowles (1980, 1984) articulated a seven-step-process model of andragogy. But it became apparent that it was necessary to add a separate step to this original model, because adults have not learned to be self-directing inquirers on their own. Therefore, a preparatory learning-how-to-learn activity should be added prior to any further steps. As a result, this step will help the candidate to feel more secure in entering into an adult educational programme. This eight step process model consists of the following elements:

- 1. Preparing the learner
 - a brief explanation of the concepts and skills of self-directing learning;
- 2. Establishing a climate conducive to learning
 - set physical environment, human and interpersonal climate and

- organizational climate to create a relaxed, trusting environment;
3. Creating a mechanism for mutual planning
 - involve candidate's participation in planning;
 4. Diagnosing the needs for learning
 - help learners responsibly and realistically identify what they need to learn;
 5. Formulating programme objectives that will satisfy these needs
 - objectives need to be stated clear enough to indicate exactly what is intended;
 6. Designing a pattern of learning experience
 - design methods and materials that are able to utilize experiential learning;
 7. Conducting these learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials
 - teacher to perform as a facilitator or developer of learning;
 8. Evaluating the learning outcomes and re-diagnosing learning needs
 - so as to improve teaching and learning rather than to justify what is being done. (Knowles et al, 2005)

It is worth noting that, although Knowle's andragogy theory has been extensively analysed and criticized due to the lack of empirical evidence to support them (Davenport and Davenport, 1985; Hartree, 1984; Pratt, 1988 cited in Knowles *et al*, 2005), its core principles of adult learning have endured. Brookfield (1986) asserts that andragogy is the single most popular idea in the education and training of adults. Many other scholars have also found andragogy to be the guiding force in the practice of

teaching adults (e.g. Caffarella, 1993; Collins, 1991; Cotton, 1995; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Moreover, Knowles et al (2005: p.2) assert that andragogy is applicable to “any adult learning transaction, from community education to human resource development in organizations”. In this respect, the core principles presented in andragogy theory are deemed to enable those designing and conducting adult learning to build more effective learning processes for adults.

To sum up, a brief review of the andragogical principles has been given in this section. While management education falls into the field of adult education, this andragogical strategy could be applied as the basic guidelines of designing and conducting the programme. The emphasis on learning process and experience by andragogy is consistent with the current practice-oriented trends in management education, and *vice versa*. In this respect, teaching methods are required to be more inter-reactive, and helpful in solving practical problems, while at the same time considering specific social and business context and personal needs.

The andragogy framework discussed in this section will be referred to as a possible framework for MBA education in China in discussions and suggestions at the end of this thesis. However, because it is still more commonly accepted, the term ‘pedagogy’ may still appear in the rest of the thesis, referring to educational strategies and teaching techniques from a broad perspective instead of the narrow meaning of education of children.

2.7 Chapter summary

Based on the review of the development of western management education, in particularly MBA education, it may be concluded that the traditional content and teaching methods are no longer dominant and have been challenged and influenced by management development and learning to some extent. Consequently, a more practice-oriented approach is preferred to achieve a better balance between theory and practice and provide practical solutions to real problems. In line with this development trend of MBA programmes, traditional teaching methods are being criticized for lack of linkage with practice, which is insufficiently effective. Therefore, more interactive methods, which are able to recognize the difference between contexts, are becoming more and more popular in management education in the Western world.

However, when western management knowledge is transferred to China, via the educational conduit, it is still open to question whether these trends have been realized and if the increasingly popular teaching methods can be applied in Chinese context. The next chapter will address these issues by reviewing the development of management education in China and the current concerns about it.

Chapter 3 MBA education in China

3.1 Introduction

This chapter concerns itself with business and management education in China, focusing on MBA education in particular. MBA education has been undergoing a rapid growth in China in the last two decades as a response to an urgent demand for business-oriented people with management knowledge and “soft” skills.

This chapter begins by looking at China in terms of economic and social development, followed by the challenges China is facing, providing a background to the subsequent discussion on the transfer of business and management knowledge from the West to China. A brief review of the development of business and management education in China will then be provided, emphasising the development of MBA education in China in three stages. Details of MBA curriculum in China will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

3.2 Background information of China

For a long part in history and human civilization, China was the largest and most advanced economy in the world. Although China had developed some radical innovations in history, for example, printing, gunpowder, shipping, calculus, many of them were not for commercial exploitation. Furthermore, China also closed itself from most

interaction with the rest of the world and did not benefit from many innovations and advances that took place in the other countries for hundreds of years. As a consequence, China missed out on the most important economic transition in human history, the Industrial Revolution, and stagnated for ages until it undertook economic reform in 1978.

Since then, China has been undergoing four major transformations: 1) from a rural agriculture-based economy to an urban-industrial economy; 2) transition to a service economy; 3) major restructuring to integrate into the global economy; and 4) from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy. China has made enormous progress in economic development and enhancement of social well-being and people's standard of living in the past three decades. (Dahlman and Aubert, 2001)

3.2.1 Economic growth

Owing to its success in market-oriented economic reform, the Chinese economy has been experiencing the greatest growth in its history. There was a sustained growth in the 1980s and 1990s, with an average annual growth rate of real GDP at around 9.2 %. Though this growth slowed down in late 1990s, it still achieved a rate of 8.3% in 2001, and it even mounted to around 11.4% in 2007³. The estimated growth rate of GDP is further reduced, but this growth is predicted to continue in the coming decade (The Economist, 2008).

China's economy has also achieved greater integration with the global economy over

³. National Bureau of Statistics of China, *China Statistical Yearbook 2007*, China Statistics Press, Beijing.

the past 25 years; its exports have increased dramatically from US\$13.7 billion in 1979 to nearly US\$970 billion in 2006. China has now become the seventh largest exporting economy in the world. Moreover, China has also been successful in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). From 1988 to 2004, actual or utilized FDI in China increased at an annual rate of over 20% to reach a cumulative total of US\$543 billion (Fung et al., 2004). Moreover, FDI inflows to China reached an estimated \$69 billion, which represented 10% of the world's FDI flows (UNCTAD, 2006). As a result, China has become one of the leading FDI recipients in the world and is receiving over \$80 billion in 2007; China's total foreign exchange reserves have also surpassed those of Japan in 2007 and become the largest in the world⁴.

Undoubtedly, this rapid growth over two decades has effectively strengthened China's economic power and dramatically improved its people's standard of living. It has also transformed China from a centrally-planned economy to a "socialist market economy". However, many structural problems still remain. Moreover, in the context of knowledge revolution, China is facing increasing pressures to keep up with new knowledge and restructuring economic activities to take advantage of new and better ways of producing goods and services (Zeng, 2005). This pressure has become even more acute since China's accession to the WTO, since China is exposed to greater global competition. Therefore, it is urgently needed for China to make systematic responses, not only from the government but also from enterprises and individuals (Sheehan, 1999).

⁴. National Bureau of Statistics of China, *China Statistical Yearbook 2007*, China Statistics Press, Beijing.

3.2.2 Challenges to China

As Sheehan (1999) asserts, 'coming to grips with the global economy is not optional for any country', thus catching up with the pace of the global knowledge economy is also not optional for China. What reaction China is taking to knowledge-based economy and how effective China is in addressing these challenges will be important determinants of its prosperity in the future. It is also pointed out (Sheehan, 1999; Dahlman and Aubert, 2001) that many of the challenges or pressures China is facing are common to all developing countries, some of which are even shared by developed countries. Meanwhile, China has some particular advantages as it addresses these challenges; the most significant advantage is China's long and sophisticated intellectual tradition. It is believed that the alliance of this tradition and the scale of the potential Chinese market will definitely benefit the long term prospects for developing advanced industries (Sheehan, 1999). Nevertheless, the transition from planned to market and the adjustment from the industrial era to the knowledge-based economy, have brought daunting challenges for China, and the major ones are summarised as follows.

Underdeveloped service sector

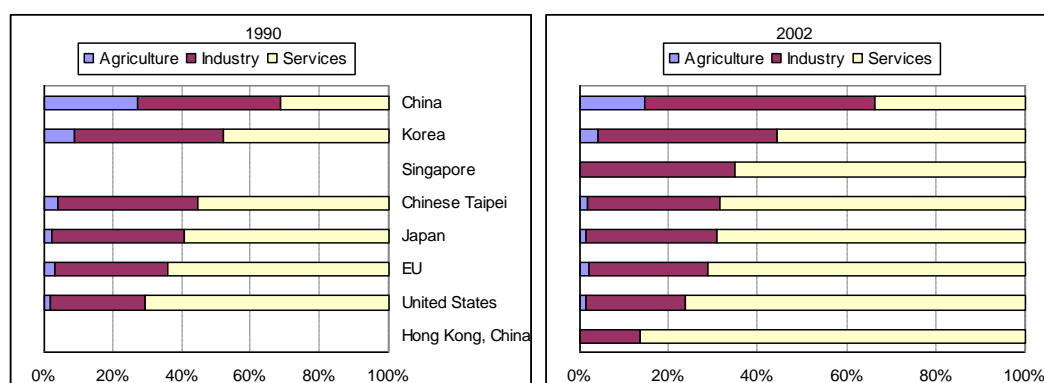
Firstly, although economic growth in China has outpaced other economies substantially, its GDP per capita is still much lower than that of the other major economies. Furthermore, the main contributor to GDP in China is industry, which moved up to 51% in 2002, at the expense of agriculture, of which the share has declined to 14.5% in 2002. This declining share in agriculture was absorbed largely by industry, rather than services, whose share grew from 31.1% in 1990 to only 33.7% in 2002. (World Bank, 2003)

As Schaaper (2004) claims, instead of levels of total GDP, the composition of GDP usually provides better indication about a country and the functioning of an economy. Thus, by comparing the composition of GDP in China with those in other countries, especially the advanced economies, like United States and other more developed economies in East Asia, it is clear that for China the share of agriculture in total GDP is still much higher than the share in the other economies. It is claimed that less than 5% of value added is generated from agriculture in developed countries, which are also in transition to more knowledge-based economy. For industry as well, the share of value-added generated in industry even increased in China during the 1990s, while this share declined in the other advanced countries. Lastly, services only account for one-third of the total GDP in China, whereas the advanced economies are now two-thirds to even 90% based on services.

Figure 3.1 shows this comparison of composition of gross value added in total GDP among eight economies. The large share of agriculture indicates the still large rural population in China. The increasing share of industry in total GDP supports the notion that China is becoming one of the major sources of manufactured goods in the world. As to the share of services, there were large increases in the other economies in the period of 1990-2002, starting with shares already much higher than those in China. The underdevelopment of the service sector in China is largely because of past policy inclined toward traditional industry. However, it is beyond doubt that China is in its transition to a service economy though the share of service in total GDP increased slightly during the 1990s. In this respect, the service sector will be growing gradually in the coming decades, and it will also be a major source of employment growth. In particular, after the accession to WTO, China needs to pay special attention to finance,

law, accounting, design, marketing, education, technology, and consulting, which mainly fall in the service sector. (Dahlman and Aubert, 2001)

**Figure 3.1 Composition of gross value added (based on current price),
1990 and 2002**



Note: composition of GDP instead of gross value added for China and the United States; 2001 instead of 2002 for Japan, the United States and Hong Kong, China.

Source: OECD, National Accounts and Main Economic Indicators databases.

Structural Changes

As Sheehan (1999) points out, the process of reform of the SOEs is at the heart of China's response to the global knowledge economy. The network of more than 305,000 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) once formed the backbone of China's economy. However, its contribution to the nation's gross domestic product fell from nearly 100% in the early 1980s to about 30% in 2000, though still employing 53 million people and accounting for about 60% of government revenues in 2001 (Zeng, 2005). Therefore, the transformation or restructuring of SOEs has become the most challenging industrial policy problem faced by Chinese government.

Besides the reform of SOEs, encouraging private sector and promoting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are another two major structural changes undergoing in China. On the one hand, the emergence of the domestic private sector is the most important result of the reform from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy. The private sector is increasingly contributing to economic output and the creation of new jobs. An IFC (2000) study reveals that privately owned enterprises account for 33% of the Chinese gross domestic products. Moreover, some empirical studies also show that the private sector has even achieved greater R&D efficiencies and productivity gains than have the other sectors (Lo and Tian, 2002; Zhang et al, 2003). Nevertheless, the full potential of the private sector in China is far from being realised; its informal status still needs to be changed and enhanced through a better policy environment and better framework of legal, financial and market structures.

On the other hand, the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is still in its primary stage in China, while they tend to be the most dynamic part of economy in the other more advanced, or high-income countries. For example, SMEs make up 93% of firms in the EU, with nearly two-thirds of employment; this is especially true of the service sector, where SMEs are prevalent (OECD, 2000). However, a large number of SMEs in China are facing many constraints and challenges in an increasingly competitive environment. In this respect, the experiences of promoting SMEs by favourable policies and programmes in developed countries could be used as instructive references in China.

Moreover, China's open door policy has attracted enormous amount of foreign investments. As a result, a large number of foreign invested enterprises (FIEs) and joint

ventures (JVs) have been established since the economic reforms. It is stated that 'a total of 19 out of 20 of the largest industrial firms in the USA; 19 out of 20 of the largest industrial firms of Japan; and 9 out of 10 of the largest industrial firms in Germany have already invested in China', and more than 120,000 foreign funded enterprises with 18 million employees were already in operation across China (Sun, 2000:p.380). Consequently, the nature of operations and ownership structure of these foreign-invested (fully and partly) enterprises have accelerated the integration of the Chinese economy into a regional or global production and trade system. Meanwhile, it has also intensified the demand for well-trained Chinese managers equipped with Western management knowledge and skills. Those large multinational companies' successes have also placed pressure on Chinese domestic companies to speed up the process of internationalisation.

Finally, the arrival of the knowledge-based economy has also benefited high technology and other new economy sectors in China. As a result, competitive advantages from the old sources are becoming less important to these new knowledge-based enterprises, and, instead, knowledge capital has become the biggest and most vital asset. Consequently, this new competitive framework requires a broader set of skills including both 'hard' skills (technical knowhow) and 'soft' skills (managerial skills). In response to the demand for such skills, the Chinese government has been increasingly focusing on education and training, in particular management education and training, in order to reinforce technological innovation and fuel the development of high-technology industry with a better level of management expertise.

Skill shortage

As a consequence of the above discussed organizational and structural changes occurring in China, there is shown to be a skill shortage existing in most of the industrial sectors in China. Overall, the most deficient skills include HRM, financial management, intellectual property management, marketing and strategic planning. A list of existing skills and deficient skills in the Chinese economy concluded by Bai and Enderwick (2005) is presented in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Skill gap by sector in the Chinese economy

| Economic Sector | Likely Existing Skills | Likely Deficient Skills |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| State-owned sector | Production Technical, Engineering Administrative Budgeting Supply chain Multi-plant management Large scale operations Social welfare provision Political and personal relationships | Research, innovation Marketing distribution Quality management Effective cost management Effective HRM Competitor intelligence Market intelligence Competitive advantage Financial management Strategic planning Change management Leadership and governance skills International markets Risk management Holistic management Competing for resources |
| Private sector | Product or service idea Holistic management Project management Flexibility/small scale Niche or limited markets Family and personal relationships Competitive advantage Risk management Market intelligence | Effective HRM Financial management Strategic planning Stakeholder interests Large scale operations Political skills Market development International markets IP management |
| Foreign-owned and JVs | Range of functional skills Access to world class capabilities | Market knowledge Competitor intelligence Cultural understanding |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| | Financial management Brands, Experience, Scale | Risk assessment Communication |
| High technology, New economy | Small scale, limited experience Working with limited resources Partnerships with universities and government institutions Highly skilled employees Technical risk management | Market making Commercialisation skills IP management Commercial risk management Effective HRM Knowledge management |

Source: Bai and Enderwick (2005): p. 39

In summary, the growing service sector indicates a development in specialized, more knowledge-based services, for instance, finance, law, accounting, design, marketing, education, technology and consulting (Dahlman and Aubert, 2001). It is also worth noting that besides the demand for people with high-technical skills and knowledge, like science and engineering; there is a large demand for well-trained, state-of-the-art, business-oriented people with “soft” skills in contemporary China.

As discussed in the above sectors, the undergoing structural change and a transition to a more service-based economy, as well as the need to compete internationally and understand the global market, have all led to a demand for an understanding of organisational behaviour, strategy and marketing, and for the development of transferable skills (Ituma, et al, 2007). In this perspective, management provisions have to obtain specialized and general business knowledge, such as management, human resource management, financial and risk management, marketing, foreign language fluency and so on.

In the mean time, the development of key business skills is equally essential, which by and large consist of various transferable skills. Dacko (2006) identified top five business

transferable skills from the extant literature review, which are decision-making, analytical, leadership, interpersonal and communication skills. To develop these skills, for instance, people are required to shift their attention from individual competition to teamwork, problem-solving and creative thinking, etc. In this light, as Kleinmann and Lu (2005) argue, MBA programmes in China will need to pay particular attention to the development of 'soft' skills in such extremely competitive global business environment.

3.4 Development of business and management education in China

Historically - in fact, for thousands of years - education has always been considered of the utmost value in China. However, students studied mainly Ancient Chinese and Classics until the 20th century. Modern education began to develop only at the beginning of this century, which is one hundred years later than in the West. Owing to both internal and external factors, China's education is still less developed than its Western counterparts. As to Chinese higher education (HE), there were only 117,000 college students and 207 higher education institutions in China when the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. After this, the new government took over the administration of all universities and colleges and restructured higher education based on Russian models, which emphasised the training of scientists, technicians and teachers. Accordingly, technical colleges and comprehensive universities continued to be reshaped and developed until the Culture Revolution took place in 1966. As a result of this event, HE in China was suspended for nearly ten years and it was only in the early 1980s that the government resumed HE development along with economic reform. (Hawkins, 1999; Qiang, 1996)

During the past thirty years, a series of HE reforms have been implemented, including decentralization, structural, curriculum and financial system reforms. A number of new subjects have been introduced and developed, such as business and management, information technology, logistics, etc. At present, there are 1,909 HE institutions (HEIs) in China (Ministry of Education, 2007), constituted by four main types of HEIs: general universities (Human and Natural Sciences, Social Sciences), technical universities, specialized institutions (Medicine, Agriculture, Foreign Languages, etc.) and teacher-training colleges. (State Education Commission, 1994)

It is claimed (Newell, 1999; Southworth, 1999) that under the planned economy there was little need for marketing, financial controls or human resource management, which are three of the most striking skill shortages in China today. Thus, in accordance with China's rapid economic development, transition towards a market-oriented economy, and fast growing service sector, the demand for managerial talents is significantly expanding. As Stewart and Him (1991) state, well-trained managers are needed not only to manage indigenous firms and reforming SOEs but also to manage foreign subsidiary enterprises that are increasingly attracted to the potentially large markets in China. Hence, the changes that have taken place in the Chinese economy have implied a shortage of a range of various management skills, as listed in Table 3.1 at the end of last section.

In response, there has been a rapid growth in business and management education in China since the early 1980s, initially in the top universities and later in many other HEIs. Thereafter, prospering international trade and increasing demand for management talent in newly established private and collective firms, FDI enterprises and JVs have

accelerated the popularity of business and management studies among students and increasingly drawn people's attention to this area in the whole society. Resulting from this sustained demand and rapid expansion of management programmes on offer, many universities embarked on establishing business schools and/or management schools in the 1990s. Until recently, over 80% of HEIs in China are running business and/or management related programmes, which are available at degree levels of undergraduate, postgraduate and MBA (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Meanwhile, China's "open door" policy and its large potential market have prompted many HEIs in developed countries to explore the possibility for entry into this market. Educational joint ventures (JVs) are the most feasible and popular pattern of Chinese-foreign educational co-operation. After more than ten years' development, there are currently more than 800 approved jointly run educational institutions in China, encompassing activities ranging from co-developed new institutions, to a foreign degree franchised to an existing Chinese university, and sub-degree and non-degree provisions (Garrett, 2004). In 2004, the establishment of The University of Nottingham Ningbo Campus in China was recognized as a stepping-stone in the development of educational JVs in China - moving from joint centres and programmes to branch campuses. This new mode of co-operative education reveals more ambition and greater commitment than the educational JVs (Mazzarol et al, 2003).

It is also worth noting that among these educational JVs in China, a large proportion of them are running programmes in the area of business and management, with IT, Law, and education as the other prominent disciplines. For instance, The International College of Excellence at University of International Business and Economics, Lambton

College at Jilin University and Sydney Business School at Shanghai University and some other educational JVs are running programmes that are accredited to award undergraduate degrees. Also, a number of JV business schools are running MBA programmes, for example, the CEIBS (China Europe International Business School) in Shanghai, BiMBA (Beijing International MBA) at Peking University and MIT programme at Fudan University. (www.cfce.cn)

Like their counterparts in other countries, business schools in China tend to focus on provisions of functional management education in subjects. The typical provisions of programmes in business schools include accounting, financial management, human resource management, marketing, and information system management. In this respect, the result of a survey in 26 top business schools in China carried out by Li et al. (2003) reveals the top ten modules on offer in Chinese business schools: Human Resource Development and Management, Strategic Management, Commercial English, Socialist Economic Theories and Practice, Managerial Economics, Organisational Behaviour, Financial Management, Marketing, Information System and Information Technologies and Accounting, Financial Analysis and Financial Risk Management. Hence, it is clear that the learning of main functional management skills is emphasised. In the following section, MBA curriculum in China will be discussed in more details.

3.5 MBA education in China

Since the early 1990s, MBA education in Mainland China has been experiencing rapid growth as a major milestone in the development of management education there. Soon

after the open-door policy was launched, Western management education was first imported to China on a small-scale trial basis. The subsequent rapid expansion of MBA education in China has been influenced heavily by the Western approach. Three development stages will be reviewed in this section to provide a basis for better understanding the current situation of MBA education in China.

Stage I: 1949-1978 traditional management education

Western management theories had in fact been introduced into China in the late 1890s, and a handful of economic and business administration departments had existed in some universities in the country, such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, Nankai University, and Fudan University. However, this early development of management education was gradually replaced by Soviet style textbooks and socialism ideology because of the denial and ignorance of management itself as a sophisticated and separated body of knowledge (Li and Maxwell, 1989).

The education system of China was restructured in the early 1950s on the Soviet model, so that universities were set up or reformed with emphasis on study of Marxist-Leninist political economic concepts and engineering. Two of the top universities in these areas were the People's University in Beijing and Harbin Polytechnic Institute, which were established as models for other universities and institutes around the nation on the setting up of management programmes. Thousands of managers and officials were trained through these programmes, which focused on Socialist ideologies and quantitative techniques instead of qualitative skills. These managers formed the core management force of China's State-owned Enterprises until the 1978 economic reforms. (Wang et al, 2005)

During this stage, China was a centrally-planned economy following the lead of the former Soviet Union. Under that economic system, the government planned all the production activities; raw material allocation, production quota setting and goods distribution were also planned and implemented by economic planning committees at different administration levels. Accordingly, Marxist-Leninist principles were believed to be the key for such a centrally-planned management system. Therefore, no specific management knowledge and skills were needed except those principles to implement orders from the government (Borgonjon and Vanhonacker, 1994). To sum up, during this period, management education was a function for meeting political and economic requirements in China rather than a system of academic schooling providing professional training for general managers of independent organisations (Zhou, 2003).

Stage 2: Early 1980s initial attempts of Western management education

China has been undergoing the transition from a central-planned economy to a market-oriented economy since it embarked on economic reform and open-door policy in 1979, causing dramatic change in China's economic environment as well as social life. To a large extent, the ongoing reform of State-owned Enterprises (SOEs), increasing inflow of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and emerging private and rural enterprises, have been the three major organisational factors that have driven the change from old management ideologies and practices. Moreover, the rapidly expanding service industry and open market for banking and financial sectors have also placed pressure on the increasing demand for well-trained managers, who are familiar with the norms of a market-oriented economy and also competent in managing independent organisations with relevant management knowledge and skills. (Wang et al, 2005)

At the time of these reforms, most Chinese managers were trained in the previously discussed Soviet style universities with exposure limited to Marxism and pure engineering domains. Therefore it was a huge challenge to improve their managerial competence and skills in order to cope with the changing business environment, and to gradually build up a cadre of managers for the future. In response, the government set up several China-West joint management training projects in the 1980s, as the first attempt to introduce Western management knowledge into China. Among these projects, two were important in terms of influencing management education in China and forming the basis of MBA education later on.

Resulting from these two major projects, two institutions were established in 1984: the National Centre for Industrial Science and Technology Management Development in Dalian, and the China Europe Management Institute (CEMI) in Beijing. The first was a cooperative management training programme set up by the Chinese government and the United State's Department of Commerce; MBA programmes were offered in this Dalian-based centre by Buffalo College of Administration, New York State University. The second was a joint programme sponsored by the European Commission and the China Enterprise Management Association, with teaching faculty from leading business schools across Europe. (Fischer, 1999; Southworth, 1999)

After ten years of operation, both of these institutions have successfully trained around 240 MBA-qualified graduates, many of whom have attained high-profile positions in the Chinese government and major SOEs (Zhou, 2003). However, these two joint projects ended with different stories. The Sino-US programme in Dalian was terminated, following the withdrawal of involvement of the American side. The Sino-European

programme in Beijing was relocated to Shanghai and renamed as the Chinese Europe International Business School (CEIBS), which is now a leading international MBA education institution in China, known for its high level of involvement from leading European business schools and the quality of its programmes (Southworth, 1999). In 2006, CEIBS was ranked 21st on the *Financial Times* Top 100 Global MBA rankings, which had been the highest ranking for an Asian business school on this list (Flew, 2006).

To sum up, it is widely agreed that these two international co-operation projects formed the basis of Chinese domestic MBA education, because the idea of the Western style MBA was first introduced through these two projects to Chinese managers. Furthermore, the 'soft' side of business management and western pedagogical methods, like case studies, were also imported into China for the first time (Zhou, 2003). It is also worth noting that the acquisition of management education teaching skills by local lecturers was an important part of this early development phase. For instance, the People's University in Beijing started a training course for Chinese MBA teachers with the cooperation of Canada's McGill University in 1988, and education experts were also sent to study overseas MBA programmes in the same year as the preparation for the subsequent domestic trail programmes (Goodall et al., 2004).

Stage 3: Late 1980s- present recent development of MBA programmes

Along with the rapid economic development after ten years of ongoing economic reform, the Chinese government had realized that it was urgent to upgrade Chinese managers' management knowledge and skills in order to maintain the high growth of its economy and secure the future competence of Chinese enterprises. In response, based on the successful experience from the aforementioned two joint management

education institutes, the government set up a task force to develop China's domestic MBA programmes. Nine universities were authorised by the State Education Commission to run MBA programmes on an experimental basis in 1990, with only 86 intakes altogether (Wang, 1999). A further seventeen universities were added to make twenty-six universities authorized to offer MBA programmes in 1993. This number has increased during the following years, and there are now a total of one hundred and twenty-seven universities eligible to run MBA programmes for the 2008 intake (Ministry of Education, 2007).

In order to ensure the quality of these domestic MBA programmes, a National MBA Coordination Group was set up in 1991 for the initial management of programme development, to be replaced by the National MBA Guiding Committee, which was established in 1994. The committee's tasks include supervising academic standards of MBA programmes and unifying student admission standards and recruitment procedures nationwide. The Committee also designed guidelines for the MBA curriculum, to be followed by individual universities when designing their own courses. Moreover, for the aim of unifying entrance standards across the country and ensuring the academic quality of new students, a national MBA entrance exam named GRK (an abbreviation for a Chinese term which means Admission Examination for Managerial Master Students) was established in 1997 for part-time MBA applicants who are sponsored by the government. Another entrance exam was implemented in the same year for all the other full time and/or self-sponsored applicants. For both of these two exams before 2005, applicants were required to sit for the test in five subjects: Chinese language and logic, English, mathematics, management and politics (Zhao, 1997). In 2005, these five subjects were combined and replaced by two exams: English and General

Paper. (Ministry of Education, 2005)

On the other hand, in 1995, the committee implemented an accreditation system to evaluate teaching quality of MBA programmes in China. The evaluation process covers student admission, programme administration and implementation, curriculum review, teaching staff qualification verification, and appraisal of teaching materials and methods. This programme evaluation is carried out by task forces staffed by reputable professors and Education Ministry officials. In recent years, some of the premier business schools in China have started seeking accreditations from international MBA accreditation bodies, such as AACSB and AMBA. In 2006, the MBA programme run by Zhejiang University has become the first MBA programme accredited by AMBA in Mainland China (Li, 2007).

Zhou (2003) provides a chronological overview of major events of Chinese MBA education development up until 2002, which are included in Table 3.2 with additional events that took place until 2007. The number of MBA graduates has indeed increased dramatically since the course was introduced into China, from only 86 intakes in 1991 to over 20,000 new recruits annually from 2005 onwards⁵. However, as McKinsey & Co. (cited in Lavelle, 2006) estimate, China will require 75,000 top-level executives with global experience by 2010, not mentioning the huge number of middle managers required for hundreds of thousands of SOEs, JVs, FDIs and private enterprises. Similarly, the Shanghai Education Commission also estimates China will need 37,500 MBA graduates each year and well over 1.5 million MBAs over the next 10 years to sustain its booming economy (Jelen and Alon, 2005). In this light, there is still a huge gap

⁵ Figures sourced from www.mba.org.cn

between MBA supply and demand in China to tackle the critical shortage of well-trained managers for the booming economy.

Table 3.2 A chronological overview of major events of Chinese MBA education development

| Year | Major events |
|------|---|
| 1984 | The Sino-American cooperative management training programme was established at Dalian with 40 MBA intakes in 1985 |
| 1984 | The Sino-European cooperative management training programme was founded in Beijing with 34 MBA intakes |
| 1988 | Management professors were assembled to conduct feasibility study on setting up MBA programmes in Chinese universities |
| 1989 | A task force was set up to formulate a working plan regarding training objectives, admission criteria, course structure, teaching methods and degree conferment |
| 1990 | A national decree was issued to legislate setting up MBA programmes on a trial base in 9 selected Chinese universities |
| 1991 | A National MBA Coordination Group was organised and 9 Chinese universities were authorized to offer experimental MBA programmes with 86 intakes in total |
| 1993 | A further 17 Chinese universities were added to the experimental list to make 26 universities eligible to offer MBA |
| 1994 | The previous National MBA Coordination Group was renamed as National MBA Guiding Committee, which proposed a guiding MBA curriculum for individual universities to follow |
| 1995 | 30 more Chinese universities were approved to offer MBA programmes, which increased the total number to 56 |
| 1996 | Random quality assessments were conducted of the 56 experimental MBA programmes and several national training projects were organised for core MBA subjects |
| 1997 | The GRK national MBA entrance examination system was introduced and all Chinese MBA applicants are required to sit for the test in five subjects |
| 2001 | Another 6 Chinese universities were approved to run MBA programmes and this totals the eligible Chinese MBA institutes to 62 |
| 2002 | 30 of the 62 MBA eligible Chinese universities were permitted to offer EMBA programmes |
| 2003 | Another 25 universities were authorised to make to total number to 87. Over 82,000 MBA students so far recruited and over 4,000 EMBA's awarded |
| 2005 | The national MBA entrance examination was changed from tests on five subjects to two: English and Comprehensive |
| 2006 | The total number of universities approved to offer MBA programmes increased to 96 |
| 2007 | Another 31 universities were approved to offer MBA programmes, makes the total number to 127 |

Source: Zhou (2003); Goodall et al. (2004)

3.6 Chinese MBA curriculum

An MBA programme in China usually takes two to two-and-a-half years to finish for full-time students and three years for part-time students. Under the guideline given by the National MBA Guiding Committee, three blocks of modules are recommended to individual universities when they construct their curriculum. Table 3.3 shows these modules with recommended teaching hours and credits.

Table 3.3 MBA curriculum recommended by the National MBA Guiding Committee

| Module Type | Name of Modules | Hours/Credits* |
|--------------------|--|----------------|
| Degree modules | Socialist Political Economics | 48/3 |
| | Foreign Language (English) | 110/6 |
| | Management Science | 48/3 |
| | Managerial Economics | 48/3 |
| | Data, Model and Decision (Business Statistics) | 48/3 |
| Compulsory modules | Accounting | 48/3 |
| | Financial Management | 48/3 |
| | Marketing Management | 48/3 |
| | Operational Management | 48/3 |
| | Organisational Behaviour | 48/3 |
| | Human Resource Management | 48/3 |
| | Management Information System | 48/3 |
| | Strategic Management | 48/3 |
| Elective modules** | Business Law | 48/3 |
| | Macroeconomics | 48/3 |
| | Security Investment | 48/3 |
| | Management Ethics | 48/3 |
| | International Business | 48/3 |
| | Decision Simulation | 48/3 |
| | Electronic Commerce | 48/3 |
| | Management Communication | 48/3 |
| Other requirements | Research Project/Dissertation | 3 months |

As shown in the table, degree modules are the compulsory modules that students need to take if they wish to obtain an ordinary Master's degree along with the MBA certificate, which is chosen by the majority of MBA students in China. Compulsory

modules are the core modules for the MBA programme and are usually taught in the first year. Students can choose from elective modules for their second year of study. After finishing all the modules, students are required to do three months of field practice for a research project and complete a dissertation at the end of the programme as required for other postgraduate students.

The above table also shows that Chinese MBA programmes adopt the Western style MBA curriculum as the main part with added Chinese characteristics, i.e. the Socialist Political Economics module and English modules. Although individual universities are not required to follow this guideline strictly when they construct their MBA curriculum, this one-for-all purpose guideline still restricts their autonomy in designing their course structure and sometimes it makes it difficult to make room for innovative and/or specialised modules with their own cutting edge competitiveness (Zhou, 2003). This is also partly the reason why there are so few specialised MBA programmes on offer in China; most of the programmes are titled 'General MBA'. Accordingly, MBA graduates are deemed to be generalists rather than specialists, with rather limited knowledge of broad issues rather than in-depth knowledge in particular areas (Shi, 2000; Wang, 1999).

As shown in Table 3.2, 30 elite universities have been running EMBA (executive MBA) programmes in China since 2002. Interestingly, unlike the West, where EMBA programmes attract mostly mid-level up-and-coming managers, EMBA programmes in China are aimed at senior Chinese business executives and expatriates seeking to do business in China, hence the intakes for such programmes consist of the nation's most senior executives: as reported by Lavelle (2006). For instance, as one of the largest EMBA programmes in the world, CEIBS EMBA programme has around 500 enrolments

each year, of which 60% are chairmen, presidents or chief executives of their companies (Flew, et al, 2006).

Accordingly, EMBA's tuition fees could reach as much as ¥250,000 (\$36,000), far more expensive compared with those of ordinary MBA programmes, which usually cost between ¥50,000 (\$7,300) to ¥120,000 (\$18,000)⁶. Nevertheless, the structures of EMBA programmes in China are also monitored by National MBA Guiding Committee, which makes the programme curricula more or less similar to other MBA programmes, though with a concentration on organisational strategy studies, appropriate for the higher management level of the students.

3.9 Chapter summary

To sum up, the development of management education in China in general and MBA education in particular has been reviewed in this chapter, highlighting the background of China's economic and social development in the past thirty years, and the management skills shortage across the country. Management education in China is heavily influenced by Western approaches, and current major concerns focus on the appropriateness and applicability of transferring this context-specific knowledge from the West to China, which in turn highlights the importance of cultural influences in this process of transfer.

In this respect, Chinese history and culture, management perspectives, and learning style, become the key issues that need careful and serious consideration when transferring Western business and management knowledge to China. In Chapter 4, key

⁶ Figures sourced from www.chinabusinessreview.com

features of Chinese culture will be discussed before moving on to Chapter 5, which explores the transferability of Western management knowledge in China by considering the cultural effects on managerial practices and Chinese students' preferred learning styles.

Chapter 4 Chinese culture

4.1 Introduction

Culture is a crucial element that needs to be carefully considered when transferring management knowledge to China, since this kind of knowhow is contextual and culture-specific. Thus it is appropriate to find out how Chinese culture is different from the Western culture. This chapter will explore the Chinese culture on its own by focusing on its essential and unique cultural values, in order to provide the context and necessary knowledge for the later discussion about transferability of management education in the Chinese context in Chapter 5.

In this chapter, a definition of culture and its basic classifications will be provided first. Then, Chinese culture will be investigated in terms of different types of classifications of culture: single-dimension model - Hall's high-low context; multiple dimension models - Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, Schwartz's seven cultural dimensions and GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions; and finally China's historical-social model - Confucianism.

4.2 Culture

Culture has long been recognized as important in explaining people's beliefs, attitudes and behaviour in different nations and/or societies, be they similar or different. However, although the concept of culture has been around for centuries, there is still no definitive answer as to what culture is, because culture is complex and multidimensional. After examining more than 100 definitions of culture, Kroeber and

Kluckhohn (1952: p.181) distilled a definition as follows:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditioning elements of future action.

Since then there have emerged several popular definitions of culture that reflect in one way or another the above distillation of definition (Gannon, 2008). Geert Hofstede (1980: p.10) defines culture as "... the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a group's response to its environment". This definition of culture has been redefined by him in more recent years and it has been demonstrated in the latest edition of his widely cited book 'Cultures and organizations: software of the mind' (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005: p.4) as:

Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others.

In this view, culture "consists of the unwritten rules of the social game", which is collective because "it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it was learned" (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005: p.4). Alternatively, Triandis (2002: p.16) articulated a definition of culture by emphasising the importance of language:

Culture is a shared meaning system found among those who speak a particular language dialect, during a specific historic period, and in a definable geographic region.

Hence, according to this definition, cultural differences and changes are predominantly influenced by the prevalent language in a specific geographic area.

Similarly, Hooker (2003), a scholar and practitioner on cross-culture management, defines culture in his book “Working across cultures” as:

Culture is the way that human beings learn to live with one another and their environment... it is based on a set of behaviours, attitudes, and ideas that human beings learn while living together... it gives meaning to practices and institutions.(p.58-60)

Although academics and practitioners in cross-cultural management, psychology and many other related fields tend to identify all the critical features of culture by a single definition, researchers for the GLOBE study of 62 national cultures (House et al, 2004) argued that any definition should be tailored and specified to the different goals and purposes of each research study, by which each definition may enrich the current perspective on culture as a whole.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to review all the definitions of culture, or even provide a definition of culture on its own. However, from the definitions discussed

above, in summary, that culture is cultivated and shared by people who live in the same geographical area, which is commonly referred to as a society. People in a certain society interact with one another much more than with people from outside the area, which formulates the basis of a dominant culture in this certain society, and the core of this culture consists of traditional ideas and attached values, which reflect people's beliefs and in turn guide their behaviours.

Given the complexity of culture, how to measure it has become a crucial question, and the first attempt to measure it in quantified terms was undertaken only in the middle of the twentieth century. This was Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions study, carried out in 40 nations and based on questionnaire responses from 117,000 IBM employees. Since then the number of cultural dimension measurement techniques has multiplied dramatically: as Taras (2008) concludes, more than a hundred instruments have been developed and hundreds of studies have been published in the attempt to measure cultural values and behaviours by assessing different dimensions of culture.

Among all these instruments of measurement, it is common to classify and characterize different cultures in order to better understand them. For the purpose of characterizing different cultures, researchers have attempted to develop a composite picture of culture by studying the differences among cultural values and classifying them by their structural properties. These classification schemes provide a useful cultural vocabulary, although none of them are able to classify culture perfectly. The ensuing section will briefly review the most influencing culture classification schemes in order to better understand national cultures and provide a basis for further discussions on Chinese culture in particular.

4.3 Classifications of culture

Classifications or models of national culture mainly have been arrived at by looking at the cultural dimensions that reflect similarities and differences among cultures. Some researchers have also used these established classifications to group countries into clusters with similar cultures (e.g. Ronen and Shenkar, 1985). In this case, the dimensions of culture have been defined in terms of different cultural values, which shape people's beliefs and attitudes and guide their behaviour in a certain society. As cultural values establish the norms or standards by which everything in a society is judged, they represent what is expected or hoped in a society (Fan, 2000; Rokeach, 1973).

Researchers in cross-cultural studies have attempted to develop different models of cultural dimensions as complementary to each other and provide a more complete picture of national cultures, resulting in different forms of classification of cultural dimensions. As summarised by Morden (1999), there are mainly three clusters of cultural dimension models: single-dimension models, multiple-dimension models and historical-social models. In order to provide a basic framework of the following discussion on the cultural influences on Eastern/Western management characteristics and learning styles, models with representative features from each of the above discussed clusters will be discussed: high-low context cultural dimensions from single-dimension models; Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, Schwartz's seven cultural dimensions and GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions from multiple dimension models; and Confucianism from historical-social models.

4.3.1 Single dimension models

One of the most important single-dimension cultural models is Hall's (1976) High-Low context model. This model originated from a theoretical model of culture variability based on information processing, time orientation and the interaction patterns used by particular cultures, and developed by anthropologist Edward Hall (1976). In this respect, context is defined by Hall (1976: p.6) as the "information that surrounds an event", representing how individuals and their society seek information and knowledge.

Hall (1976) observed and proposed that all cultures lie on a continuum from low to high information processing, albeit with no culture existing absolutely on one or the other end of the scale. He (1976: p.39) defines high-context culture as a "culture in which people are deeply involved with each other and where subtle messages with deep meaning flow freely", with low-context cultures as "those highly individualized, somewhat alienated, fragmented cultures in which there is little involvement with people".

More particularly, people from high-context cultures are guided by relationships in a relatively stable and long-persisting social system (Hall, 1976). Therefore, people tend to obtain information from personal information networks, by which people have developed efficient signals for communicating their expectations of others. In this circumstance, there is no need to write out the details (Hooker, 2003). Also, people in this cultural dimension will expect others to pick up what is bothering them and do not feel the need to specify the problem directly. As a result, people prefer to talk around the point but avoid clarifying the crucial pieces. (Kakabadse et al., 2001)

On the contrary, people from low-context cultures rely more on an internalized disposition to obey the rules; thereby people's behaviour is more easily regulated or changed by laying down rules (Hall, 1976; Hooker, 2003). As to the acquisition of information, unlike high-context people, low-context people tend to seek information from a research base, emphasising the use of documents, reports, data-bases and information sources (Morden, 1999). Moreover, low-context people prefer to get to the point as quickly as possible and they are much more direct in delivering messages (Hall, 1989).

To sum up, people in high-context cultures, for example Chinese and Japanese, rely more on trust, friends and family relationships, tending to discuss matters with friends, relatives and business acquaintances before they make decisions. Meanwhile, people in low-context cultures, for example Germans or Americans, seldom take the time to build relationships and trust in business, but to rely more on regulation, law and litigation. As Kakabadse et al. (2001) point out, Hall's (1976) high-low context culture dimension is an effective starting point for further exploration of other cross-cultural theories. Accordingly, the following section, which concerns itself with multiple-dimension cultural models, will give a more composite view of the differences existing among national cultures.

4.3.2 Multiple dimension models

Hofstede's four cultural dimensions

Among all the attempts of measuring cultural dimensions, Hofstede (1980) developed a cultural dimension model based on a survey of 117,000 employees in IBM subsidiaries

located in fifty countries and three multi-country regions. The model consists of four-value dimensions by which a society may be classified. These are the following: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism-individualism and masculinity-femininity. These cultural dimensions are deemed to represent basic elements of common structure in a culture system; therefore they provide an important framework for not only analysing national culture but also examining the impacts of cultural difference on management and organization (Hofstede, 1980).

In this regard, a brief review of their definitions will be given below before further discussion of Chinese culture in particular. These four cultural dimensions are defined by Hofstede (1980, 1983) as:

Power distance: the extent of power inequality among members of an organization or society;

Uncertainty avoidance: the extent to which members of an organization or society feel threatened by and try to avoid future uncertainty or ambiguous situations;

Individualism and collectivism: this dimension describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that is reflected in the way people live together;

Masculinity and femininity: firstly, the extent of role division between men and women on which people in a society put different emphasis for work goals, and, secondly, assertiveness as opposed to personal goals and nurturance.

Nevertheless, this classification of cultural dimensions may well not be exhaustive (Hofstede and Bond, 1984). The Values Survey Modules (VSMs), which is based on Hofstede's original IBM questionnaire, have been applied in many replication studies, in order to use statistical tests for verifying the degree of similarity in the results by increasing the number of countries included (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). In 1980, a new questionnaire, which was called the Chinese Value Survey (CVS), was designed with a deliberate non-Western bias by Michael Bond from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. As a result of the survey, Hofstede and Bond (1984) added another cultural dimension to the original four dimensions - "Confucian dynamism", which appeared on Hofstede's (1991) book as the fifth dimension.

According to Hofstede (1991), this dimension deals with time orientation to the future, past and present; thus it is also called Long and Short-term Oriented National Cultures, replacing "Confucian dynamism" as the title of the fifth dimension in the latest edition of Hofstede's book (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). In this fifth dimension, long-term orientation refers to a positive, dynamic and future-oriented culture, whereas short-term orientation represents a negative, static, traditional and past-oriented culture. These two time orientations are linked to positive and negative Confucian values respectively, which are two poles of the "Confucian dynamism".

However, this fifth dimension does not seem to have been received as enthusiastically by the cross-cultural research community as the other four dimensions, and researchers into cross-cultural issues, who usually refer extensively to Hofstede's classification of cultural dimensions, avoid engaging in discussions about this fifth dimension (Fang, 2003). What is more, this fifth dimension even attracts criticism from

some other researchers (Fang, 2003; Yeh and Lawrence, 1995), who argue that the simple two-pole classification of the Confucian dynamism is theoretically problematic. As Leung (2008) argues, the Chinese may be long-term oriented in some contexts, e.g. invest heavily in their children's education over a long period of time, while they could also be short-term oriented at work, i.e. expect immediate reinforcement for their efforts and actions.

Therefore, in the following discussion about Chinese culture, the dimension of Confucian dynamism or long-term/short-term orientation will not be involved as part of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. However, it does not mean that Confucian values will not be discussed at all, since they are in fact at the core of Chinese culture and will therefore be further discussed in the next section as a separate historical-social cultural model. Thus, the Chinese culture by starting from Hofstede's four cultural dimensions model will be discussed first.

Based on the Hofstede's (1980) definition of power distance, a high power-distance culture tend to accept centralized power and individuals rely heavily on superiors for structure and direction. Chinese culture is clearly classified as belonging to a high power-distance dimension, which mainly stems from its traditional culture and value system and even religious believes, for instance, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Based on these traditional moral doctrines, which have been successful for thousands of years, it is believed that certain behavioural principles must be followed to ensure a harmonious society. Rules and principles for every relation are spelled out for the social behaviour of each individual. Therefore, loyalty, respect and duty as the defined principles between superiors and subordinates could well explain the dominance of

paternalistic management style in China (Fan, 2000; Hsiao et al., 1990).

In contrast, people from a low power distance culture, often Western countries in this case, do not tolerate highly centralized power and expect at least to be consulted in decision-making. In some circumstances, people may even show resentment towards an instructor who dictates specifically what they should do (Hofstede, 1980; Rodrigues, 2005).

Secondly, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) classify the culture in some nations as strong uncertainty avoidance. People in these cultures feel uneasy in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity and prefer structure. China is classified as a weak uncertainty avoidance culture since its score on Hofstede's (2005) list is as low as 30 while those countries score around 100 are deemed strong uncertainty avoidance cultures, which suggests that Chinese people are considerably less bothered by uncertainty and ambiguity, and more easily accept and adapt to changes.

However, this uncertainty avoidance dimension has been scrutinized and criticized by researchers for its credibility in measuring cultures because of its irrelevance to Chinese culture in particular. For example, Yeh (1988) questions why uncertainty avoidance in Hong Kong and Singapore is so low compared with that in Taiwan, even though they are all categorized as areas of Chinese culture. As there are no clear reasons given by Hofstede, Yeh (1988) concludes that it is because Hofstede's treatment of Chinese culture is 'inadequate and seriously flawed' (p.158). More specifically, Chinese people may either have different interpretations of the same value scale or have other value dimensions not featured in Hofstede's framework.

More recently, McSweeney (2002) argues that none of the factors in the 'Chinese Value Survey', (leading eventually to the addition of the fifth dimension of 'Confucianism'), is correlated to Hofstede's 'uncertainty avoidance' dimension. Therefore, this dimension should be downgraded from a universal dimension of national cultures to a non-universal one. After all, the score for China, which appeared in Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) book, was calculated as 'based on replications or estimates' (p.169) rather than from the original IBM database. Hence, given the ongoing dispute about this cultural dimension, the classification of China as low uncertainty avoidance by Hofstede will not be regarded as beyond dispute here, and findings of other studies will also be taken into account.

For example, as a result of an exploratory study, Low and Shi (2002) conclude that Chinese culture has strong uncertainty avoidance; people tend to establish more formal rules, reject deviant ideas and behaviour, and are inclined to believe there exists absolute truths and unchallengeable expertise. Also, people are more concerned with security in life. On the opposite side, the culture of some other countries is classified as weak uncertainty avoidance. Accordingly, people in these cultures tend to be relatively tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity and require considerable autonomy and low structure. This cultural dimension exists in developed countries, including both Western and Eastern, for example the US and Singapore. (Low and Shi, 2002; Rodrigues, 2005)

Thirdly, according to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), people in those cultures classified as Individualism tend to think of themselves as "I", and identify themselves and each other by individual characteristics, rather than group membership. Conversely, people in cultures recognized as collectivist, like China, are less focused on differentiating the

individual from the group and thereby, put less emphasis on self-actualization. In this case, it is argued that the value of collectivism in China not only stems from traditional Confucian principles but also from Communist ideology, which has been affecting people's social, political life for more than fifty years. (Rodrigues, 1998)

Lastly, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) classify many societies as Masculinity culture, where material success and assertiveness are stressed and different roles are assigned to males and females. Males are expected to perform the assertive, ambitious, and competitive roles in the society; females are expected to care for the non-material quality of life, for children, and for the weak in other areas- to perform the society's caring roles. Although the situation is changing in contemporary China, it is still believed that Chinese culture leans towards masculinity rather than femininity. On the other hand, femininity culture stresses interpersonal and interdependent relationships, a concern for others, the overall quality of life, and defines relatively overlapping social roles for males and females. (Rodrigues, 1998)

Schwartz's seven cultural dimensions

Nevertheless, over a hundred different instruments have been developed to measure national culture, among which Schwartz's (1994) value dimensions has become a popular alternative to Hofstede's cultural dimension model. It is based on a cultural value survey mainly distributed to teachers and students sample from 41 cultural groups in 38 nations. Ng et al. (2007) suggest that Schwartz's model overlaps and also adds to those of Hofstede's by measuring cultural values in a more comprehensive set of seven value types:

Conservatism: A cultural emphasis on maintenance of the status quo, propriety, and restraint of actions or inclinations that might disrupt the solidary group or the traditional order.

Intellectual Autonomy: A cultural emphasis on the desirability of individuals independently pursuing their own ideas and intellectual directions.

Affective Autonomy: A cultural emphasis on the desirability of individuals independently pursuing affectively positive experience.

Hierarchy: A cultural emphasis on the legitimacy of an unequal distribution of power, roles and resources.

Egalitarianism: A cultural emphasis on transcendence of selfish interests in favour of voluntary commitment to promoting the welfare of others.

Mastery: A cultural emphasis on getting ahead through active self-assertion.

Harmony: A cultural emphasis on fitting harmoniously into the environment.

(Schwartz, 1999: p.27-28)

And these seven value types are summarised into three cultural dimensions (Schwartz, 1999), which are:

Conservatism versus **Autonomy**

Hierarchy versus **Egalitarianism**

Mastery versus **Harmony**

In recent years, Schwartz's cultural dimension study has been extended and validated by a larger database, which includes 73 countries, and the first value orientation, Conservatism, has also been renamed as Embeddedness, as has the first cultural dimension, but the specifications remain the same (Schwartz, 2006). A world wide empirical mapping of 76 national cultures that identifies 7 transnational cultural groups has been generated based on the analysis of the above listed 7 value types. These 7 cultural groups are: Western European, English-speaking, Latin American, Eastern European, South Asian, African and Middle Eastern, and Confucian-influenced.

The findings reported by Schwartz (1999; 2006) reveal that China is in the centre of Confucian-influenced cultures, and is relatively high in Embeddedness/Conservatism (e.g. inclination to protect public image and social order), Hierarchy (e.g. respect for authority and superiors), and Mastery (e.g. ambition in choosing and achieving one's own goals, being very success-driven). The former two value orientations seemingly correspond to Hofstede's Collectivism and Power distance, while Mastery is not a commonly identified characteristic of Chinese people in various cross-cultural studies.

As Leung (2008) points out that China's high score in Mastery echoes Abramson and Inglehart's (1995) observation on value changes, indicating that industrializing nations tend to exhibit materialism in their value profile. More specifically, as a result of China's open door policy and fast economic growth, materialism is now widely accepted and many Chinese now crave for wealth and status, in other words, to be rich and powerful has become an ultimate goal for many Chinese under the current economic and social context.

GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions

More recently, a set of nine dimensions of cultural variations has been identified by the Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) project, which initially aimed at 'developing an empirically-cased theory to describe, understand, and predict the impact of specific cultural variables on leadership and organisational processes and the effectiveness of these processes' (House et al., 2002: p.4). The project was mainly based on a survey carried out with more than 17,000 middle managers from three specified industries, namely food, finance and telecommunication, in 59 nations. The following nine dimensions developed from the GLOBE project provide a new perspective on measuring cultural similarities and differences and more or less overlap with Hofstede's and Schwartz's models:

Performance Orientation: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence;

Assertiveness: The degree to which individuals are assertive, dominant and demanding in their relationships with others;

Future Orientation: The extent to which a collective encourages future-oriented behaviours such as delaying gratification, planning and investing in the future;

Humane Orientation: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others;

Institutional Collectivism: The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective

distribution of resources and collective action;

In-group Collectivism: The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organizations or families;

Gender Egalitarianism: The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality;

Power Distance: The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally;

Uncertainty Avoidance: The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.

(House et al., 2002: p.6)

Although some of these dimensions reflect the same constructs of Hofstede's(1980) model and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) work, as asserted by House et al. (2002), the GLOBE project is still deemed a major landmark in the development of cross-cultural psychology for its three main innovations, which have made it different from other cross-cultural studies:

1. Respondents were asked to rate and describe not only themselves but their organisation and society, which means a collective culture is defined as the aggregate of individual's conceptions of others as a social group;
2. Respondents were split into two sub-groups, rating and describing their organisation and society respectively, hence the possibility of testing the interrelation of these two sets of measures ;

3. Each respondent completed two sets of ratings, the first describing their organisation or society 'as it is' and the second 'as it should be', which are referred as measures of practice and of values correspondingly.

(House et al., 2004; Smith, 2005)

According to the findings of the GLOBE project, China scored high for several cultural dimensions in terms of people's perceptions of the current practices in their society. More specifically, Chinese culture tends to be high in performance orientation, collectivism: both institutional and in-group, and uncertainty avoidance. For gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, power distance and humane orientation, China has also scored relatively medium to high scores; and future orientation was the only one dimension that China was ranked in the band of countries with low scores (House et al, 2004).

From the above discussion about Chinese culture in terms of Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, Schwartz's model and GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions, it was concluded that Chinese culture is different from its western counterparts in respect of core values, beliefs and many other related aspects. These differences thereby will inevitably result in different social customs, rules and principles. Table 4.1 below provides a brief summary of Chinese cultural values based on the cultural dimensions discussed before.

Table 4.1 Summary of Chinese cultural values

| | |
|--|--|
| General Cultural dimensions | |
| High-context | rely more on trust, friends and family relationships; people tend to obtain information from personal information networks |
| Conservatism | inclination of protecting public image and social order |
| Power distance Hierarchy | accept centralized power and individuals rely heavily on superiors for structure and direction; respect for authority and superiors |
| Collectivism --Institutional and in-group | less focused on differentiating the individual from the group |
| Uncertainty avoidance | people believe there exist absolute truths and unchallengeable expertise; people tend to establish more formal rules, reject deviant ideas and behaviour |
| Performance Orientation | encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence |
| Mastery | ambitious in choosing and achieving one's own goals and success-driven |
| Masculinity Assertiveness | material success and assertiveness are stressed and different roles are assigned to males and females |
| Humane orientation | encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others |
| Future orientation | encourages future-oriented behaviours such as delaying gratification, planning and investing in the future |
| Gender egalitarianism | focus on minimizing gender inequality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese culture shows a strong tendency to these dimensions <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese culture shows a medium tendency to these dimensions | |

Nevertheless, the continuing emergence of different models exemplifies the fact that national cultural values cannot be simply measured by a model including a certain number of dimensions. In this case, Chinese culture may contain some other definitive aspects that are not measurable by those universally applicable cultural dimensions.

The reason is that no matter what cultural values are included in the above discussed models, all of them adopt an 'etic' approach, which assumes that there is a set of universal cultural dimensions that are equally relevant to all cultures. The term 'etic' is

originally used in linguistics and refers to sounds common to all languages, and the opposite term '*emic*' means sound specific to one language or a group of related languages (Gannon, 2004). When applied in cross-cultural studies, the '*emic*' approach holds the assumption that not all the cultural dimensions are universally applicable; hence some of them are culture-specific and can only be used to analyse one culture or similar cultures. Nonetheless, as Gannon (2002) asserts, '*etic*' and '*emic*' measurements should be complementary to each other when analysing national cultures, i.e. '*etic*' approaches can provide a general profile for a culture while '*emic*' approaches can provide a profile that is more specific.

A good example of an '*emic*' approach is Gannon's cultural metaphors, which are built upon the perspective of cross-cultural dimensions and could be any activity, phenomenon, or institution that people in a given culture consider important and identify themselves with emotionally or cognitively (Gannon, 2004). This approach has started gaining more attention and popularity in recent years after nearly 30 years' dominance of '*etic*' approaches (e.g. as listed by Taras, 2008, Denny and Sunderland, 2005; Gannon et al., 2005-2006; Paulson, 2005). In China's case, 'family altar' has been used as the cultural metaphor reflecting the importance of family tradition in Chinese society.

Another inevitable '*emic*' term in analysing Chinese culture is Confucianism, which also forms the basis of some other Asian cultures, which are termed collectively *Confucian Asia* in the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004) and many other cross-cultural studies, namely: Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The next section will explore the unique Chinese culture by discussing the most influential ideology that has shaped and affected Chinese people's value system for thousands of years, which is

Confucianism.

4.3.3 Historical-Social model ---- Confucianism

As Fan (2000) states, although there exists differences in terms of political, social and economic dimension between Mainland China and other places where Chinese culture dominates, it is still possible to identify core values and beliefs held commonly by Chinese people, regardless of where they live. The core values of Chinese culture are unique and consistent, giving the Chinese people their unique identity and maintained by the same language (although there are different dialects, e.g. Mandarin and Cantonese, Chinese written characters always have the same meaning). As Pye (1972) states, Confucianism is undisputedly the most influential doctrine which forms the foundation of Chinese cultural tradition and still provides the basis for the guidelines and norms of people's behaviour and beliefs, inherited historically and socially. Confucianism, as Yao (2000) asserts, will be forever linked to Chinese culture, and to some extent, East Asian culture. It is beyond the remit of this thesis to explore this unique tradition extensively. Therefore in this section, which is a brief summary of the history of Confucianism, key inherent values and principles at its core will be discussed, so as to give a composite picture of the uniqueness of Chinese culture.

The term "Confucianism" originates from "Confucius", a Chinese sage who lived from 551 to 479 B.C. (Jacobs et al., 1995). However, Confucius was Latinized from *Kong Fuzi* (meaning 'Master Kong' literally) by European Jesuit scholars in the Sixteenth century (Clements, 2004). Accordingly, Confucianism is somewhat a misleading translation by those Christian missionaries of the Chinese terms referring to the tradition of scholars

or literati whose central character is 'ru' (Yao, 2000). The meaning of 'ru' can be roughly translated as 'the doctrine, or tradition, of scholars' (Yao, 2000: p.17). Also, Confucianism was not created by Confucius alone, but is a value system that has been nurtured by Confucius himself and numerous followers for more than 2,500 years.

Confucianism is basically the behavioural or moral doctrine that is based on the teaching of Confucius regarding human relationships, social structures, virtuous behaviour and work ethics (Fan, 2000). It is also a theological and metaphysical doctrine of interaction between Heaven and humans (Yao, 2000). Hence, there is still an ongoing debate about whether Confucianism is a religion or not, upon which contemporary Western scholars have diverged into two distinct groups. On the one hand, Confucianism is recognised as a religion for its enormous influence on Chinese culture and the formation of cultures in other East Asian countries, e.g. Japan and Korea, its strong ritual dimension, and its understanding of the relationship between Heaven and human (Smart, 1998; Taylor, 1986). On the other hand, Confucianism is considered not a religion because it focuses on interpersonal relationships rather than the relationship between humans and God, a concept lacking existence in Confucianism as a supernatural being or element (Needham, 1970; Sharpe, 1994).

There has been no agreement on this issue among Eastern scholars either, mainly due to the fact that there are different understandings of the term 'religion' in Chinese and in Western languages. It is beyond the aim of this research to go further into the religious dimension of Confucianism in respect of different interpretations of religion between the East and West; therefore, Confucianism is considered as a 'tradition open to religious values' in this research, as stated by Yao (2000: p11). No matter whether it

is recognised as a religion or not, Confucianism is widely accepted as a set of pragmatic rules for daily life and is generally rooted in Chinese culture as a tradition. Moreover, both political and religious practices of the Confucian doctrine have reflected as well as refreshed Confucian learning, and vice versa.

As a tradition, Confucianism has changed and adapted itself according to political and social changes throughout the history of China. The transformation of Confucianism is not only linked to dynastic changes but also enriched by different schools evolved from the stem of Confucianism as well as other great thinkers and philosophers throughout Chinese history. Among those philosophers and disciples or successors of Confucius, Lao Tzu (founder of Taoism, one of the most influential philosophical thoughts in China), Sun Tzu (author of *The Art of War*) and Mencius (known as the 'second sage' in Confucianism) are the most widely studied and researched in both ancient and contemporary times, not only for their contribution to Chinese culture and tradition, but also because of their influences and applications to modern management theories and practices.

In the search for the applicability of such ancient wisdoms to modern management theories and practices, a number of studies have been carried out. For instance, it was found out that some important attributes of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* could be effectively applied in facilities management, property management and leadership (Heider, 1992; Low, 2003; Low and Lee, 1993); Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* has been not only taught in military schools around the globe but also effectively applied in business management, marketing and project management (Low and Yeo, 1993, 1994; Wee et al, 1991); Mencius's thoughts and philosophy are even deemed to be the foundation of modern

production management (Cauquelin et al, 2000; Low 2001).

From the Han dynasty (206BC–AD220), Confucianism played an essential role in reinforcing the centralized monarchy and shaping social ideology. It held a dominant position throughout China's dynastic history. The wisdom of the sage was transmitted from generation to generation through formal education as well as informal mechanisms. However, from the early 20th century, along with the fall of the imperial system in China and the outbreak of 1911 revolution, Confucianism was heavily criticized as an impediment of liberation. It is true that this criticism was to fall out of the mainstream as a social concern during the Second World War (during which China went to war against Japan from 1937 to 1945), the civil war afterwards, and the early periods of the republic - 'New China' (Low, 2003). However, Confucianism came under heavy criticism again during the Cultural Revolution, in a way that was more mass-organised.

Confucianism was officially discredited by Mao during the Cultural Revolution, and it was criticized as a symbol of feudal despotism, a tool for enslaving people's minds and a source of further evils (Rarick, 2007; Yao, 2000). Consequently, Confucianism was not in official vogue in China for years. However, along with the fast economic development and more open policy of the last two decades, which has revived China's cultural confidence, people have come to rethink their traditional values more positively and reconnect with their historical and cultural past. With this background, Confucianism has been experiencing a revival of its popularity in China in recent years and has even been reintroduced into the Chinese education system (Osnos, 2007). Moreover, this time, Confucianism is also advocated by the government, partly due to the fact that

Confucian traditions are in line with the government's current policy for a 'harmonious society' (McGreger, 2007).

However, the revival of Confucianism is not simply a return to the old tradition nor a restoration of the old social rules and practices. As asserted by Yao (2000), the revival of Confucianism and the continuous rise and awareness of Confucian values are related to the renewal of Chinese culture and the transformation of traditions, which enable people to reclaim their lost identities and to search for a new form of Confucianism as a guide to social and economic developments. In this respect, the revival of Confucianism is related more to its doctrinal and moral values rather than social structure aspects. Moreover, the new understanding of the nature and functions of Confucianism has led to a combination of Confucian values and modern entities. As a result, a number of new terms have emerged, for instance, 'Confucian entrepreneurship', 'Confucian Marxism' and 'Confucian Capitalism' etc, from all of which may be seen the demonstration of the Confucian virtues in economic, industrial and commercial activities. (Yao, 2000)

As Spence states, 'despite its incredible pace of change, China continues to carry echoes of its past' (2005: p44). Accordingly, Chinese people are still deeply influenced by Confucianism and the other great thinkers in Chinese history, e.g. Lao Tzu, Sun Tzu and Mencius, in terms of not only philosophical ideologies but also various social rules and practices. More specifically, as Martinsons and Hempel (1995) argue, the evolution of the mandarin governance system in China and the business networks of the overseas Chinese have both been significantly influenced by the Confucian cultural tradition and its core values. More broadly speaking, these core values serve as the ethical and moral

foundation for Chinese business and social life, and influence Chinese thinking style profoundly.

Five Constant Virtues and Five Relationships of Confucianism

As a moral system, Confucianism focuses on human relationships, social structures, virtuous behaviour and work ethics (Fan, 2000). The revival of Confucianism adds the new blood of modern qualities to the old tradition; nevertheless, the essential virtues of Confucianism are still profoundly rooted in Chinese culture and people's beliefs and behaviours. These behaviours or moral doctrines are commonly defined by some constant virtues, most commonly known as the Five Constant Virtues, which provide a moral framework for society and stress the importance of harmony (Chen, 2004; Jordan, 2003; Morden, 1999). These Five Constant Virtues are:

1. **Humanity/Benevolence** (*ren*): the highest virtue of Confucianism, which involves benevolence, humaneness and patronage in the treatment of others. Man, as a social being, should interact with others under the guidance of *ren*, which is commonly translated as 'goodwill' or goodness towards others.
2. **Righteousness** (*yi*): this virtue is strongly associated with moral action, faithfulness to contract and loyalty.
3. **Propriety/Ritual** (*li*): this virtue has a very broad application, including: formal ritual; etiquette (formal and informal); and proper behaviour in terms of one's position in certain social context.

4. **Wisdom** (*zhi*): this virtue refers to not only the mere accumulation of knowledge, but also its culmination in understanding righteousness (*yi*), experiencing good will (*ren*) and practicing etiquette (*li*). Hence, wisdom is closely associated with age and education in Confucian beliefs.
5. **Trustworthiness/Sincerity** (*xin*): this virtue always refers to a sense of fidelity and trust, being both trusting and trustworthy.

Based on these five constant virtues, the ultimate orientation of Confucianism is the achievement of social harmony and social order within a hierarchically arranged society (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; Morden, 1999). In this context, harmony is preserved through respect and sensitivity for the feelings of others, rather than by observing abstract rules or fairness or efficiency, which appeals more to Western rationality (Hooker, 2003). According to Confucianism, in a society or social order, there are many kinds of human relationships of which the five cardinal relations are the most fundamental, referred to as the *wulun* in Chinese (Chen, 2004; Jordan, 2003). Each of them is set forth as a pair of social statuses with rights and duties that obtain between them. These five relationships and their appropriate characters are:

- **Righteousness** between ruler and subjects
- **Sincerity** between father and son
- **Distinct and separate duties** between husband and wife
- **Respect** from younger to older siblings
- **Faithfulness/mutual trust** between friends

It is clear that these five cardinal relationships are based on differentiated orders among individuals, which implies the importance of differentiation in social hierarchical order. Chen (2004) concludes that these five relationships can be classified into predetermined relationships and voluntarily constructed relationships.

In the first category, such as the relationships between father and son, brother and brother, the sense of individual or self is underdeveloped, as individual behaviour is more or less dictated by fixed status and responsibilities. In this view, a Chinese is enmeshed within a network of family, work unit, party or even broadly the whole society. In this collectivism, the individual *per se* is less important. A strong ego has been deemed improper or even unacceptable in China for thousands of years.

In the second category, voluntarily constructed relationships, such as that between friends, the self is active and takes initiative, being thus capable of defining roles for itself and also located in the centre of the relationships. In this way, the self plays a dominant role in defining groups beyond his own family, and building up relationships in different groups and even across these groups. This strong group-orientation plays an important role in shaping Chinese people's learning style as well, which will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

4.6 Chapter summary

It is difficult to cover every aspect of a culture due to its complexity; hence the dimensions and values of Chinese culture summarised in this chapter are the most representative and relevant for the purpose of this research. As discussed above,

Chinese culture is high-context, indicating that communication is deemed as a multidimensional process involving much more than written words, which are viewed as much more important to rely on in low-context Western cultures. High power distance explains people's orientation towards order and hierarchy in China, while Chinese people also tend to be strong in uncertainty avoidance and less comfortable with changes than Westerners. In Chinese society, men and women are expected to carry different social responsibilities due to its masculinity culture dimension, and, as a whole, Chinese culture differentiates itself from Western culture as collectivist rather than individualist.

As the core of Chinese culture, Confucianism still provides the basis for the guidelines and norms of people's behaviour and beliefs. Confucian principles, emphasising social harmony, hierarchy and people's proper relationships, have formed Chinese's relationship-oriented sensibility. In other words, China is relationship-based, unlike the West, which is rule-based. It is worth noting some important tenets of this relationship-oriented sensibility that affect not only people's social life but also business management in China, which derive from the Confucian principles.

The next chapter will explore the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context by referring to cultural effects, in particular Confucian values related to business and management practices in China. Besides the contextual and cultural differences, concerns over implementing western management pedagogy in China will also be discussed along with distinct features of Chinese learning style.

Chapter 5 Transferability of Western MBA in China

5.1 Introduction

Along with the rapid development and rising popularity of MBA education in China, more and more attention has been placed on the transferability of Western management knowledge to China in respect of different context and cultural barriers. The relevance of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context is open to question given the fact that MBA programmes in China still rely heavily on the Western model, which was developed for the Western context and a very different culture. Furthermore, questions still remain as to the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices on Chinese MBA programmes in respect of the clash between Chinese students' learning styles and Western management teaching ideologies.

Firstly, key features of business and management knowledge will be explored, together with potential problems in transferring such knowledge to China. This will be followed by an account of previous research on transferring management knowhow from the West to other areas of the world. Then emphasis will be placed on concerns about transferability of Western management knowledge to China via MBA education. Finally, learning style, another important issue which affects the transfer of western management knowledge to China, will be discussed, a factor also derived from cultural differences.

5.2 The transfer of management knowledge from the West

Currie (2007) pointed out an isomorphic tendency of the adoption of a North American model of management practice and management education pedagogy as the development of business schools and MBA programmes globally. In this light, management education in Asian countries is no exception heavily influenced by the Western model (Chow, 1995), or more precisely the Anglo-American model (Currie, 2007). Since there was no previously defined discipline of management in China and, as Fan (1998:p.203) asserts, China “rushed in desperate search for new management concepts and techniques”, management education is largely imported from Western countries and most of the programmes are based on the transfer of management knowledge from the West. In this case, most of the textbooks adopted are based heavily on Western management practices and business behaviour, and even the teaching materials and case studies are imported directly from the West, especially from the US and the UK (Newell, 1999).

According to Wang (1999), there are three types of formal management education in China: formal programmes of academic degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate), professional degree programme: Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes, and management personnel on-the-job training programmes. However, existing research concerning all these three types of programmes revealed worries and doubts as to the transferability of Western management knowledge or “best practice” to Asian countries, especially China, on the part of both academics and practitioners (Berrell et al, 2001; Chow, 1995; Fan, 1998; Howe and Martin, 1998; Newell, 1999; Southworth, 1999; Vinten, 2000).

There are three most commonly discussed elements in transferring management knowledge from the West to China, and it is claimed that few of the management educational institutions have successfully overcome them all. These three elements or challenges are mainly concerned with language, social and cultural environment, and learning and teaching styles, which will be discussed in detail in the sections below after a review of relevant literature on management knowledge and the problem of transferring it from the West to the rest of the world.

Business and management knowledge

In order to understand the transfer of management knowledge properly and effectively, it is necessary to define both the nature and key features of business and management knowledge first. With reference to Polanyi's (1966) recognition of the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, it is argued that human knowledge exists in various different forms but it can be articulated into two fundamental types: explicit or tacit (manifested implicitly). Explicit knowledge can be codified and generated through logical deduction and acquired by formal study, which can be easily expressed in formal, systematic language. Tacit knowledge, in contrast, is intuitive and unarticulated, and can only be acquired through practical experience in a relevant context; thus, in other words, tacit knowledge is rooted in action and involved in a particular context and has both cognitive and technical elements (Nonaka, 1994). Therefore, tacit knowledge cannot be easily codified and transferred from one person to another or from one country to another.

Furthermore, according to Polanyi (1966), the cognitive element of tacit knowledge, i.e. know-what, relates to the mental models which are developed to make sense of

people's experiences. It usually refers to the individual's view of what an object is or what it ought to be. While the technical dimension to tacit knowledge, i.e. know-how, refers to the skills needed in a particular context. More importantly, as Popper (1972) points out, tacit knowledge cannot be communicated, understood or used without the "knowledge subject". Further, as noted by Nonaka (1994), the 'variety' of experience and the individual's commitment and involvement in the 'context' are both critical factors in determining the generation and accumulation of tacit knowledge.

This is particular true when operational skills and know-how can only be acquired through practical experience. Although explicit and tacit knowledge are distinguished from each other, they are not separate and discrete in practice but mutually constituted (Tsoukas, 1996); instead, it is argued that new knowledge is generated through the dynamic interaction and combination of these two types of knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

In this respect, as with most other social knowledge, business and management knowledge is constituted by both tacit and explicit knowledge, rather than simply classified as either purely tacit or purely explicit knowledge. In terms of business and management, explicit knowledge can be transferred through lectures and textbooks, which is codified in forms of theoretical frameworks and models, or tools and techniques. It is this explicit knowledge that provides the backbone of management education in the West.

However, as Newell (1999) claims, tacit knowledge is essential to effective management, not only because Western business and management knowledge is established on a

Western cultural and value system, and embedded in a Western social context, but also because developing various transferable skills forms a crucial part of management education. Therefore, communication of this type of knowledge is only possible between people who share the same system of meaning. In other words, when transferring knowledge from someone else, or from some other country, it is the tacit part of the knowledge needs particular attention. It is necessary to have a shared code or mental model that enables the counterpart to understand, value, and accept that knowledge; and further facilitating the development of essential transferable skills (Schwenk, 1986; Trompenaars, 1995).

5.3 Transferability of western management knowledge in the Chinese context

Previous research on transferring Western management knowledge

The debate around whether western management knowledge can be transferred to and applied in other non-western countries and whether this kind of know-how is universal or culture-bound is not new (Negandhi and Estaten, 1965). Research in this particular field has been growing steadily since the 1960s, mainly due to the trend of globalization, increasing number of international companies and the internationalization of education. The earliest research on the issue of cross-cultural transfer of management knowledge is perhaps Gonzalez and McMillan's research in the early 1960s (cited in Gennaro, 1969), which questions the universalism of Western management know-how. They claim that American philosophy is not universally applicable and management know-how is culture-bound.

Furthermore, Farmer and Richman (1964, cited in Gennaro, 1969) established a model including four types of external constraints that have impact on the transfer of management knowhow, being: educational characteristics; sociological characteristics; political and legal characteristics; and economic characteristics. Along with the same idea of categorizing constraints, Cavusgil and Yavas (1984) identified 13 impediments in their study of transferring management knowhow to Turkey. The major variables include political and economic instability, educational and social background of recipients, and negative attitudes and resistance toward new ideas and technologies.

By considering cultural perspectives in transferring western management knowledge to developing countries, Jaeger (1990) states that the uncritical use of Western management theories and techniques in developing countries could contribute not only to organizational inefficiency and ineffectiveness but also to resentment and other negative feelings. He claims that the perception of “cultural imperialism” is a major concern in transferring western management knowledge to developing countries. In other words, the transfer of management knowledge will be impeded if it is forced to adopt and accept practices, which run counter to deeply held values and assumptions of the local culture.

In respect of management teaching techniques, Richard (1997) contends that students are often required to hold certain values in order for particular pedagogical approaches to be workable and that these values may be culturally specific. For instance, Western or typically Anglo-American pedagogical approaches often involve volunteering answers, commenting, criticizing or seeking clarifications from students, but these common classroom behaviour in the West may be seen as bold, inappropriate and immodest by

Chinese students (Holmes, 2004) . In other words, some of the Western management educational techniques may not be equally effective in all global locations since students from different cultures may have different opinions about the impact of the various pedagogical approaches that are predominant in the Western context (Clarke and Flaherty, 2002).

However, as Currie (2007) contends, there is insufficient reflection upon the interaction of diverse cultural characteristics of MBA students with the Anglo-American cultural assumptions that underpin the Western style MBA programme and pedagogy. Although the discrepancies between Western culture and Chinese culture are particularly large, very few studies have been carried out on the transfer of management knowledge to China, let alone any special focuses on the impact of the collision of two very different cultures, which leaves a gap in literature about the transferability of Western management knowledge in China in terms of the cultural issues. The next section will focus on exploring the discussions on transferring management knowledge to China.

Concerns of transferability of western management knowledge to China

Based on the features of the Western business and management knowledge, transferring this kind of social knowledge or technology is complex because it is interdependent with the social context even though it is well codified (Tsang, 1999). Therefore, a fundamental problem of transferring business and management knowledge from the West to China lies in the cultural and contextual differences between these two counterparts, as recognised by many scholars and practitioners (Berrell et al, 2001; Chen, 2005; Chow, 1995; Howe and Martin, 1998; Li, 1999; Lindsay and Dempsey, 1985; Newell, 1999; Southworth, 1999; Vinten, 2000).

Although MBA programmes have a relatively higher degree of autonomy compared to other formal higher education programmes in China, the operation of MBA courses is still under the guidance of National MBA Guiding Committee as stated in Chapter 3, section 3.5. As a result, very few ‘outside of the box’ changes have been made by those MBA programme providers. As Flew (2006) points out, the nature of course on offer and the profile of MBA students in China have been changing slowly as a result of observation of MBA programmes in three leading Chinese universities. In this case, the concerns about the transferability of Western management knowledge via MBA education in China suggested by existing literature have been fairly consistent during the past few years.

Goodall et al. (2004) and Southworth (1999) identified three recurring problems that have emerged along with concerns over the transferability of western management knowledge to China:

- the barrier of language in terms of textbook translations and of using English as the teaching language;
- the need for a more interactive teaching approach in the light of the cultural perspectives and learning styles of Chinese students; and
- the difficulties of adapting Western management knowhow and practices to the distinct social, economic and cultural context of China.

5.4 Concerns of contextual and cultural differences

As Hofstede (1998) argues, management practices that work in one country do not necessarily work in another, because they are largely culturally dependent. The level of acceptance and application of managerial knowledge and practices in China depends largely on the extent to which they fit in with the values and beliefs of Chinese people, while value and belief are heavily influenced by a nation's culture, which is unlikely to be changed overnight. In this regard, Livingstone (1987) warns of the facile application of Western marketing techniques to China. As Li (1999) also states, overseas management concepts and methods cannot be copied as easily and directly as technological know-how.

In the following section, Confucian values related to business and management practices in China are to be discussed first, followed by a comparison of Chinese and western management styles.

5.4.1 Confucian values related to business and management in China

As summarised in the previous section, Confucianism, with its emphasis on harmony, social rank and ethics, without doubt, admirably served the needs of a strong centralized monarchy, which explains its long dominance under the feudal system in ancient China. Although Confucianism has been under heavy attack in contemporary Chinese history, its influence still exists in almost every aspect of people's lives in China. Moreover, it still forms the basis of business practices in China. The significance of its influence on business and management practices is increasingly being recognized,

especially due to the revival of Confucianism in recent years against the background of China's rapid economic development.

Besides the 'five constant virtues' and 'five relationships' as the highest Confucian moral doctrines, there are also some other tenets of Confucianism defining the common rules or system, which apply in various social settings and business and management practices in particular in China but in a more practically interpreted way. The following key tenets stemming from Confucianism have profoundly influenced and are continuously influencing not only people's everyday lives but also business and management practices in China.

Strong sense of hierarchy

As stated above, the five cardinal relationships clearly demonstrate the hierarchical differences between people. According to Confucius, everyone has a fixed position in society and accordingly people should behave in accordance with their ranks, so as to achieve social harmony (Jacob et al., 1995). Therefore, the relationship between superiors and inferiors is fixed and stable, as Lewis (2003: p.185) describes: "Superiors may command freely, while demonstrating kindness and compassion as well as wisdom. Inferiors are happy to obey wise instructions and they benefit from benevolent advice, while demonstrating loyalty and trust".

This strong sense of hierarchy has profound manifestations in Chinese business and management. Rank and hierarchy are important aspects of Chinese organisations. Typically, leaders at top of the management are supposed to make decisions, which are to be carried out by everyone else without any question. Employees are expected to

be loyal and devoted to the organisation and in return, the organisation provides a holistic concern for the employees with regard to housing, training, childcare, recreation and other benefits, which is uncommon in the West. Furthermore, young managers are expected to listen, obey and respect their seniors and it is uncommon for young managers to get promoted over more senior managers, even if the younger one is more qualified for the position. This strong hierarchy based upon position contributes to China's paternalistic and autocratic style of management.

Since everyone is supposed to behave according to their place in the hierarchy, open exchange between colleagues of different ages and ranks is not prevalent in Chinese office routine. In other words, this phenomenon undermines the sense of active participation between colleagues. As a result, people are reluctant to present their ideas and thoughts that may lead to the improvement of the business or management operation. This lack of employee initiatives and this low business efficiency is especially prevalent in some State-owned enterprises (SOEs) in China. (Jacob et al., 1995)

“Rule by man” rather than “rule by law”

Confucianism's five constant virtues and five cardinal relationships all indicate the importance of relationship between people, and the loyalty and obedience toward superiors. Consequently, this has led to the development of a “rule by man” management style. (Jacob et al., 1995)

Under the management system of ‘rule by man’, managers are presumed to be good-natured and to manage with kindness. The manager usually focuses on relationship-building and also values dedication, trustworthiness and loyalty rather than relying only

on performance. Moreover, Chinese managers are responsible for maintaining trust among employees, which is facilitated by maintaining a harmonious organisation. Therefore, Chinese managers commonly act as mentors and positive role models for employees.

However, as a presumption of “rule by man”, the top decision makers are bright and of high ethical integrity, and will use their power correctly. In this regard, the top decision maker or manager always has the final authority, and his decision should never be questioned. This unlimited power inevitably leads to the problem of business management when the decision-maker refers to his or her feelings, instead of objective criteria for management; and it is dangerous since there is no mechanism ensuring these powers are not abused.

There has been a long debate between Confucian scholars, who advocate “rule by man”, and legalists, who advocate “rule by law”. Since there is no doubt that the legal system in China is undergoing reform, there is now increasingly raised awareness of law as an instrument of self-defence. However, the tradition of “rule by man”, which has prevailed in China for thousands of years, still exists in China and influences people’s lives and business practices.

Collectivism and Egalitarianism

The strong sense of family and group, and of the importance of social harmony, which is advocated by Confucianism has led to Chinese’s strong collective feeling – that of belonging to a group. Therefore, as Lewis (2003) argues, Western egoism or persistent individualism is an entirely alien concept in China, though among younger generations

in China this tentative individualism is on the rise. Because Confucianism values group achievement and social harmony, each employee is expected to employ his/her abilities so as to work for the goodness of the group and also to maintain group harmony. In this regard, differences in individual performance are not seen as particularly important as long as the group functions effectively.

In some extreme situations, individual self-interest will even be sacrificed for the good of the group or organisation. This group orientation explains in a major way the great value accorded to a social interconnection in a Confucian society, and these interconnections are usually family-based, especially in Chinese entrepreneurial culture. It is worth noting that concerns for the welfare and survival of the group or organisation and its members are of paramount importance in such a group-focused entrepreneurial environment. However, this strong group orientation consequently also brings egalitarianism, the most significant impact of which is a lack of motivation and sense of responsibility.

Guanxi

The term “*Guanxi*” is probably the most popular catchword when people are talking about doing business in China. Morden (1999: p.37) refers *Guanxi* as “cultivating, developing, and maintaining personal relationships on the basis of the continuing exchange of favours.” Similarly, Chen (2004) defines *Guanxi* as special relationships that two persons have with each other, governing the exchange of favours and usually involving position or rank. Through *Guanxi* two people are linked eventually in a relationship of mutual dependence, or even the practice of accumulating debts by doing favours for each other (Hooker, 2003; Lewis, 2003). More particularly, building up one’s

Guanxi network may begin by presenting gifts or taking someone out to dinner and progresses to making concessions in a business deal or some other occasion. It is worth noting that this gift giving and exchange of favours are not seen by the Chinese as a form of bribery, and actually sometimes building *Guanxi* does not have to be based on money.

On a personal level, this exchange of favours can lead to satisfying lifetime relationships. In the business world, it is understood as the network of relationships among various parties that cooperate together and support each other. The exchange of favours is expected to be performed regularly and voluntarily. In this respect, Chinese prefer to work with people that they know and trust, and the strong relationships between people can extend between companies on an ongoing basis. (Hooker, 2003)

Face

Besides *Guanxi*, *Face* is another catchword that cannot be missed. As Hooker emphasises, in a Confucian culture “no action is undertaken and no word spoken, without first calculating the effect on face” (2003:p.183). Face is a person’s dignity, reputation, self-respect and honour; it may also involve moral reputation, basic integrity, trustworthiness and even kindness, competence and conscience. Since harmony is preserved through respect and sensitivity for the feelings of others, the maintenance of an individual’s face is required to achieve this harmony. Meanwhile, face can also be given, when respect or praise is paid to someone else.

From the previous discussion on Confucianism’s five constant virtues, relationships and the other important tenets, it can be concluded that the most commonly referred

Confucian characteristics related to business and management practices in China include the following: authoritarian and paternalistic leadership, centralized control, collectivism and group achievement, a belief in the value of hard work and self sacrifice for the interest of the group, strong organisation network and business connections, a love of education and wisdom, and a concern for social harmony and propriety. These characteristics form the elements of the Confucian work ethic, which is argued to have positive effects on economic and societal development (Rarick, 2007).

Table 5.1 provides a brief summary of the Confucian values that are related to Chinese business and management practices:

Table 5.1 A summary of Confucian values related to business and management practices

| | |
|--|--|
| Strong sense of Hierarchy | everyone has a fixed position in society and accordingly people should behave in line with their rank |
| Group orientation/ social harmony | strong sense of family, group and the importance of social harmony; belonging to a group; value group achievement and social harmony |
| Rule by man | the importance of relationship between people, and the loyalty and obedience toward superiors |
| Guanxi | cultivating, developing, and maintaining personal relationships on the basis of the continuing exchange of favours |
| Face | no action is undertaken and no word spoken, without first calculating the effect on face |

These cultural principles and values will inevitably result in different social customs, rules and principles, people's different behaviour and different approaches to business and managerial work compared to the West (Berrell et al., 2001). Therefore, different cultural background has become a major concern in transferring Western business and management knowledge to China, since it is questionable whether this Western "best

practice” is applicable in such a different culture and to what extent Chinese people can digest and apply this knowledge.

5.4.2 Chinese management style vs. Western management style

Given the contextual and cultural differences existing between China and the West, different management styles of Chinese and Western managers have also been identified (e.g. Haley et al., 1998, 2004; Nisbett, 1999; Redding, 1995). Haley and Haley (2006) have summarised some of the previous findings and explored the different cognitive styles in decision-making between Chinese and Western managers, as illustrated in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 Chinese versus Western management cognitive styles

| Characteristics | Chinese | Western |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Information processing | Holistic | Particularistic |
| Focus | Relational | Differentiation |
| Validities | Multiple | Single |
| Analytical preference | Experience/empirical models | Formal explanatory models |
| Decision-making preference | Reasoning-based | Rule-based |
| Solution preference | Unique | Universal |
| Locus of control | Situational | Individual |

Source: Haley and Haley (2006)

More specifically, Chinese managers generally tend to employ a holistic perspective when processing information rather than the particularistic perspective, which is generally adopted by Western managers. In other words, Chinese managers tend to generate possible solutions based on the evaluation of interdependent relationships between different variables surrounding a problem, while on the contrary, Western managers tend to generate possible solutions by distinguishing the problem from its

surroundings. Moreover, as Haley and Haley contend, Chinese managers often accept and inhabit multiple realities and truths and rarely completely discard plausible realities, and in contrast, Western managers tend to concentrate on one or two realities or strategic choices.

Moreover, Chinese managers tend to make decisions based on reasoning from their experience to provide a unique solution to a problem, while western managers tend to rely heavily on rules and formal explanatory models in order to find universal solutions that can fit various situations. And last but not least, Chinese managers tend to insist on control over situations, and deny their overall individual abilities to control so as to avoid losing face if they lost control; however, Western managers would feel embarrassed if they did not claim control generally and at the beginning of a problem, and loss of control at a later stage is not deemed as the same stigma as it does in the case for Chinese managers. (Haley and Haley, 2006)

These different characteristics of management cognitive styles are supported by the distinct cultural features existing in China and in the West, which can be explained by various cultural measures and/or dimensions, e.g. high-low context, Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Confucianism, which have been discussed in Chapter 4. For instance, the importance of hierarchy and a respect for age in China, together with a high power distance, has meant that Chinese middle managers, in particular those in SOEs, have less decision making powers than those in Western enterprises (Ituma, et al, 2007). Consequently, Chinese managers, in particular, middle managers, tend to be risk averse and reluctant to make independent decisions based on their own judgments.

Nevertheless, China is considered as an information-void economy compared with those information-rich economies in the West (Haley and Haley, 2006). Although it is hard to define the richness of information in a multi-level economy, market research expenditure may more or less give some hints on how much effort has been expended on providing more market information for the sake of research, doing business and developing the economy. Although China has an enormous population base, it is a fact that there is still a serious lack of market information and business intelligence in China (Haley, 2004). Therefore, it could be problematic when Western management style confronts such an unfavourable data environment, where scarce formal information hinders a manager's decision-making, which is heavily information-reliant.

Based on different levels of reliance on information, Li and Maurer (2005) summarise that the Chinese governance structure is more relation-based, while in contrast, the Western governance structure is more rule-based. Accurate public information, e.g. auditing reports, financial data and credit ratings, are essential for the functioning of Western rule-based governance. However, such public information is scarce in China, and in some cases less accurate, which is one of the underlying reasons for the Chinese relation-based governance structure (Li and Filer, 2004). Table 5.3 below presents Li and Maurer's (2005) summary of different features of relation-based and rule-based governance:

Table 5.3 Differences between relation-based and rule-based governance

| Relation-based Governance (predominant in China) | Rule-based Governance (predominant in the West) |
|---|--|
| Relying on private and local information | Relying on public information |
| Implicit and non-verifiable agreements | Explicit and third-party verifiable agreements |
| Person-specific and non-transferable contracts | Public and transferable contracts |
| Costly to develop business relations and thus requiring mutual commitments, implying high entry and exit barriers | Low entry and exit barrier |
| Requiring minimum social order | Requiring well-developed legal infrastructure |
| Low fixed costs to set up the system | High fixed costs to set up the system |
| High and increasing marginal costs to govern relations and transactions | Low and decreasing marginal costs to develop and govern transactions |
| Effective in small and emerging economies | Effective in large and advanced economies |

Source: Li and Maurer (2005: p.52)

Hence, as Li and Maurer (2005) argue that relation-based governance has a cost advantage when the market is small due to its avoidance of significant costs in legal and information infrastructure; however, it will become more costly when the market expands to national or even international level, where rule-based governance is more efficient and competitive. This is a key reason why Western management knowledge and skills are so badly needed in China, given the background of the country's ongoing transformation into a market-oriented economy and increasing integration into the international business world. On the other hand, the preference for relation-based governance on the part of Chinese people also exemplifies the importance of relationship or *Guanxi* in the Chinese culture, which is regarded as essential for doing business in China (Luo, 2000; So and Walker, 2005).

Indeed, lack of business information hinders the effective implementation of Western management ideologies in China; however, Chinese cultural values also influence

Chinese managers' management styles and skills. As Bai and Enderwick (2005) argue, Chinese cultural values such as high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and masculinity, which differ so dramatically from Western low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, individualism and low masculinity, are all essential in forming the unique characteristics of Chinese management ideologies and styles, which are also very different from those of the West. Below, a brief summary of the most distinct traits of traditional Chinese management is presented in Table 5.4 below:

Table 5.4 Three essential traditional Chinese management traits

| Traditional Chinese management traits | |
|--|---|
| Top-down decision-making | Subordinates simply follow orders from upper level; promotion and reward based more on age and service time than individual performance |
| Vertical communication | Lack of flexible, multi-directional communication between different layers; takes a long time to deliver feedback, sometimes even fails to deliver mid- process |
| Focus on production | Primary goal for managers is to achieve production target; lack of understanding and implementation of 'soft' side of management, e.g. HRM, advertising, inventory control. |

Source: Bai and Enderwick (2005)

Therefore, because of the different management ideologies and the underpinning cultural values existing between China and the West, the appropriateness is questioned of transferring Western management knowledge to the Chinese context, and to what extent this Western knowhow can adapt to the local context (Berrell et al, 2001; Chen, 2005; Chow, 1995; Howe and Martin, 1998; Newell, 1999). In this circumstance, Howe and Martin (1998) raise concerns on the problem of cultural barriers in transferring management ideas across borders in their study of the internationalization of management education. They point out that the universalism of "best practice" is being increasingly questioned as some practices may not have a universal application when

they are more likely to be culturally specific and thus incapable of direct or even modified transfer.

As to management education in China, Chow (1995) points out that most of the textbooks adopted in China are based heavily on Western, especially American and British, business practice and behaviour. Moreover, teaching materials, such as video tapes and case studies packages, are also imported from the West. In this case, it is a fact that western management concepts and practices are biased explicitly towards Western culture and values; hence it would be inappropriate to transplant Western management knowledge without serious consideration of their applicability to the Chinese culture.

Furthermore, as Newell (1999) contends, Chinese students do not share a system of meaning with the Western academics and managers who have codified the system of business and management knowledge, which means that this knowledge, even if translated into Chinese, is unlikely to be understood or used by Chinese students. She (ibid) concludes that to a large extent the problem of transferring Western business and management knowledge to China lies in the different value and belief-systems between these two counterparts. In other words, as she (ibid: p.288) states: “the underpinning tacit knowledge of the learner (Chinese students) is fundamentally different to the tacit knowledge of those articulating the knowledge (Western academics and managers)”.

In this regard, another problem, which also stems from cultural differences and may affect the transfer of western business and management knowledge, should be

addressed, i.e. learning style, which will be discussed with other aspects of teaching for MBA courses in China in the next section.

5.5 Concerns over teaching for MBA courses in China

5.5.1 Language barrier in teaching and learning

There is no doubt that English is an important language in international businesses; therefore, along with the fast growing international trade and the increasing number of foreign invested enterprises (FIEs) and joint ventures (JVs) in China, proficiency in English is regarded as an important language skill. Consequently, it has forced educators to put more emphasis on improving business students' English skills. As to the imported Western-style management education, it is particularly true that English plays a vital role in the teaching process.

More specifically, as Zhou (2002) concludes, there are mainly two approaches in adopting English in Chinese MBA programmes in terms of teaching material and language. The first approach is to use English as the sole instruction language, which means not only are original English textbooks, cases and other teaching materials used in the course but also all the modules are taught in English. This approach commonly appears in those premier MBA programmes run by top universities or management education institutions, such as BiMBA at Peking University and CEIBS in Shanghai. The second approach is to translate essential Western MBA textbooks and teaching materials into Chinese and then deliver the course with Chinese as the major instruction medium. This approach is popular with most of Chinese MBA programmes.

Therefore in reality the majority of MBA programmes in China use translated textbooks, or sometimes a combination of English and Chinese textbooks, and students are usually taught in Chinese.

Chow (1995) warns that the problem of using a second language, i.e. English in this case, as a medium for learning, should not be underestimated, because the learning will be neither efficient nor effective when the student's English is not good. The use of first language in teaching and learning is supported by existing literature, and Schermerhorn's (1987) study has revealed that using English as a second language in teaching could cause problems in a Chinese higher education setting. Chee (2002) also warns that some words have different meanings in the two cultures. Therefore, given the importance of language in conveying information between cultures, it is argued that students should be taught in their first language so as to enable them to learn faster and more effectively. After all, the objective of management education is to develop students' business and management knowledge and skills, rather than to improve students' English proficiency.

Nevertheless, English is still very important as a universal language in the business world. Thus MBA students in China are encouraged to improve their English language skills by reading English textbooks and taking English classes and some modules may even require students to give answers in English for an essay or in an exam. Moreover, the quality of the translation of Western management textbooks has inevitably become important when Chinese versions are used in MBA courses.

5.5.2 Implementing Western management pedagogy in the Chinese context

As Shi (2000) reports, MBA programmes in most Chinese universities are developed by directly transplanting Western curriculum into their original management and economic courses, and the majority of MBA faculty members consist of the same university's original management and economic faculty. Although there are an increasing number of faculty who have received training and/or professional qualification in Western countries, a large proportion of the MBA faculty in China still follow traditional Chinese teaching ideology and are still influenced by the legacy of the socialist training and education system from the previously dominant centrally-planned economy. Inevitably, most of the subjects in Chinese MBA programmes are more or less still taught in a traditional way though the curriculum design is similar to that in western business schools.

Therefore, as Johnstone (1997) asserts, the lack of qualified teaching staff is a major obstacle to implementing MBA education in China. Furthermore, as Shi (2000) repeatedly argues, although differences between MBA programmes and other business and management related master's programmes are recognized in general terms, the teaching methods of many Chinese MBA programmes are still not adapted to the new endeavour. Also, due to the short history and shortage of expertise in specific business areas of Chinese MBA education, specialised and focused academic areas in individual universities are still underdeveloped. In this case, Shi (2000) claims that MBA teaching in China is more or less descriptive and essential Western MBA teaching methods still lack substantial presence or attention.

The difficulties of implementing western management pedagogy in the Chinese context have been recognised by academics and practitioners both in China and in the West (e.g. Chow, 1995; Greenholtz, 2003; Shi, 2000; Thompson, 2001; Wang et al., 2005). Most of them have noticed that Chinese students are reluctant to participate and criticize fellow students and the teacher, which has hindered the implementation of Western interactive teaching methods, such as case study and role-play exercise.

As Currie (2007) states, to facilitate or implement Anglo-American pedagogic strategy or methods, students are expected to be as proactive within the learning process as the management teachers themselves. In particular, this approach requires students to be engaged and contribute to the lecture with an ability to critically analyse management theories and practices by drawing upon their own knowledge and experience. Moreover, students' ability to construct and verbalize an argument is considered an essential element of the learning process, hence the teacher often encourages debate in class, either between students or even between students and the teacher them self. This Anglo-American pedagogical approach draws upon the Socratic ideology of education, which is very different from the pedagogical framework that Chinese students are accustomed to or familiar with, i.e. Confucian learning style. In other words, Western pedagogical methods seem not to match with traditional Chinese teaching and learning approaches, which are more teacher-centred instead of student-centred (Chee, 2002).

In this case, it is argued that it is necessary to adapt teaching and learning approaches in management education to the Chinese context and those Western instructional methods and technique can be used with adjustments in the light of Chinese culture,

teaching and learning ideologies, and Chinese students' learning styles (Chow, 1995; Newell, 1999; Berrell, et al., 2001; Thompson, 2002). In the next section, details of Chinese learning style will be examined along with the differences from its Western counterpart.

5.5.3 Chinese learning style

Different measures of learning style

According to Shade (1989a), learning style refers to the elements of individual differences that are important to knowledge and skills acquisition. Generally, people who share a common historical and geographical setting or culture usually adapt collectively to a unique set of environmental demands. Thus a distinctive learning style will emerge among these people (Shade, 1989b). This unique learning style is also institutionalized and reinforced, usually through a nation's education system.

There are various learning style theories and models, for instance the Honey and Mumford model of Learning Style Questionnaire (LSQ), Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI), Dunn and Dunn's Productivity Environmental Preference Survey (PEPS), and Entwistle's Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students (ASSIST) (Bostrom and Lassen, 2006; Evans and Sadler-Smith, 2006). However it is beyond the scope of this thesis to illustrate them all; and systematic reviews of learning styles can be found in reports by Cassidy (2004) and Coffield et al (2004). However, special emphasis is placed on the effects of cultural influences on learning style preference, particularly the impact of Chinese culture on Chinese students' learning styles, and consequently on business and management education in China.

Enquiries as to differences in learning style between the East and the West in general terms have been carried out referring to surface vs. deep approach framework, which were distinguished as two broad types of approaches of learning by Marton and Saljo (1976) in a qualitative research in the West. On one hand, surface-oriented learners tend to memorize phrases or words in the textbook and aim towards utilitarian ends and reproduction of bare essentials. On the other hand, deep-oriented learners tend to understand the main meaning of the text and are motivated by interest in the subject matter (*ibid*). Based on this framework, Biggs (1987) developed the Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) by adding a third dimension named achieving orientation, which assesses learner's objectives for high grades or other practical achievements.

The SPQ has been employed in some studies aiming to find out the differences in learning style between East and West. Some reports indicate that Asian students are more surface-oriented and passive, and are more used to rote learning than searching for the underlying true meaning (see Barker et al, 1991; Pratt and Wong, 1999). However, SPQ is also criticized and deemed problematic when it is applied in different cultural contexts not only because of the Western cultural assumptions underlying the scales but also due to the comparability issues raised by translation problems. Consequently, contrasting results may come up even by using the same SPQ scales in the same context (Biggs, 1987; Volet et al, 1994).

Conversely, it is argued that Chinese learners are in fact deeper in their approach to learning than these surveys suggest (Kember and Gow, 1991; Stevenson and Stigler, 1992). As to the reason, Kember and Gow (1991) argue that Westerners usually misperceive Chinese study methods; Biggs (1996) also suggests that it is typical for

Western instructors to evaluate Asian learning approaches negatively. For instance, memorization is found as a typical learning method by Chinese students, which falls into the category of surface dimension in the framework discussed above; however, it is argued that Chinese culture encourages students to use memorization as a path to understanding and *vice versa*, not as an end in itself (Marton et al, 1996). In other words, Chinese students only progress onto creative thinking when they feel that they have mastered the subject and have accurate recall of texts (Beaven et al, 1998). Contrary to the perception of deep-surface learning scale, students adopting this learning process achieve higher academic levels of understanding than do Western students (Gow et al, 1996; Volet and Renshaw, 1996).

Confucian vs. Socratic learning style framework

In response, Tweed and Lehman (2003) proposed a culturally constructed learning approach framework: **Confucian vs. Socratic** approaches to learning. This provides a structure for considering culture-influenced aspects of academic learning and is less value-laden than the surface vs. deep framework. The rationale behind this framework is situated in the beliefs of these two ancient exemplars, i.e. Confucius and Socrates, and their profound influences on the development of philosophy and educational ideology in the East and the West respectively.

As Tweed and Lehman (2002) argue, Confucius values effortful learning, behavioural reform, pragmatic learning, acquisition of essentials, respectful and collectivist learning. In particular, the primary goal of learning is to reform behaviour, and the learning itself is pragmatic-oriented, i.e. in the aim of gaining academic accreditation. Learners are expected to respect and obey authority figures and, more importantly, it is seen as

wrong and inappropriate to innovate or criticize without extensive preparatory knowledge of the subject. These approaches to learning are in line with the Confucian values discussed earlier in Chapter 4, which emphasise social hierarchy, social harmony, people's relationships and respect for wisdom.

On the contrary, Socrates, as one of the founders of Western philosophy, values the questioning of widely accepted knowledge both privately and publicly, and also knowledge that is self-generated. Moreover, according to Socrates, whom the Socratic Method was named after, learning begins with doubt, and teaching begins with implanting doubt, which explains that for Socratic learning the starting-point is always focus on error, on questioning, and on challenging. Socrates also believes that we must not be content with truth that is prescribed by authority figures, but that it is rather found within the learner self. (Tweed and Lehman, 2003)

These philosophical as well as learning ideologies from Socrates have also influenced and can still be seen in many of the modern Western education theories and practices; for example, Carl Rogers' commitment to 'student or person-centred' learning and the teacher being the facilitator (Rogers, 1969); and David Boud's theory on problem-based learning (Boud, 1985) and his dedication on developing student autonomy in learning (Boud, 1988); and reflective and experiential learning (such as Kolb, 1984 and Moon, 2004). All of these theories or believes have something in common, which is putting the learner or student at the centre of the learning process,

Therefore, as Tweed and Lehman (2003) argue, compared to Western students, Chinese students tend to focus on pragmatic outcomes of the learning, which requires guidance

and instructions from an authority figure, and overt questioning is obviated as a sign of respect for instructors and the tendency to avoid criticism and challenge without deep understanding of knowledge. In accordance with this Confucian---Socratic learning approach framework, similar characteristics of Chinese learners can also be found in key Chinese cultural dimensions, e.g. high power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and masculinity.

Chinese learning style — some of the cultural dimensions

Firstly, since Chinese culture is classified within the dimension of high power distance - as Rodrigues (2005) notes, students from societies holding this cultural orientation are usually not encouraged to make independent decisions. Also, due to this high power distance, or strong sense of hierarchy in Chinese culture and Confucianism, the teacher is respected by students because he or she is considered as the sole provider of knowledge. Students rely heavily on the teacher and seek specific instructions; meanwhile the teacher must lay down clear directions that the students must follow. Moreover, students would consider it as disrespectful to ask questions and disturb the teacher in class, especially questions that challenge their teacher or conflict with the teacher's viewpoint (Liu and Littlewood, 1997).

Besides, students with strong uncertainty avoidance are less likely to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, and are likely to prefer strong direction. Therefore, as Chow (1995) states, Chinese students prefer regular, sequential assignments on structured problems rather than the more ambiguous case studies with no standard right or wrong answers. Accordingly, they seek neat solutions to the assignment just as if they were solving mathematical problems. Also, Chinese student prefer examinations with questions that

require definitive answers, in which they are likely to perform well (Chan, 1999; Nield, 2004).

As to the collectivism in Chinese culture, especially in-group collectivism, students are less likely to relish standing out among the others. They are unwilling to participate in open discussion, and generally do not respond favourably to classroom discussion. In this view, the Confucian values of modesty and maintaining social harmony influence Chinese students to avoid speaking up in a large class and also to avoid expressing their true opinions so as not to embarrass or offend others. Thus, individual students will speak up in class only when called on personally by the teacher to do so; meanwhile, the other students tend to be very quiet and commonly make no comments nor ask questions. In this case, Chinese students tend to be more group-oriented and more inclined to work in a small group than to work independently, which also reflects the aforementioned fear of making independent decisions (Biggs, 1994; Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996). In this regard, Tang (1996) argues that collaborative learning is central to Chinese culture and reports that students who learned collaboratively within a group tended to describe their learning as more deeply oriented than students who worked individually.

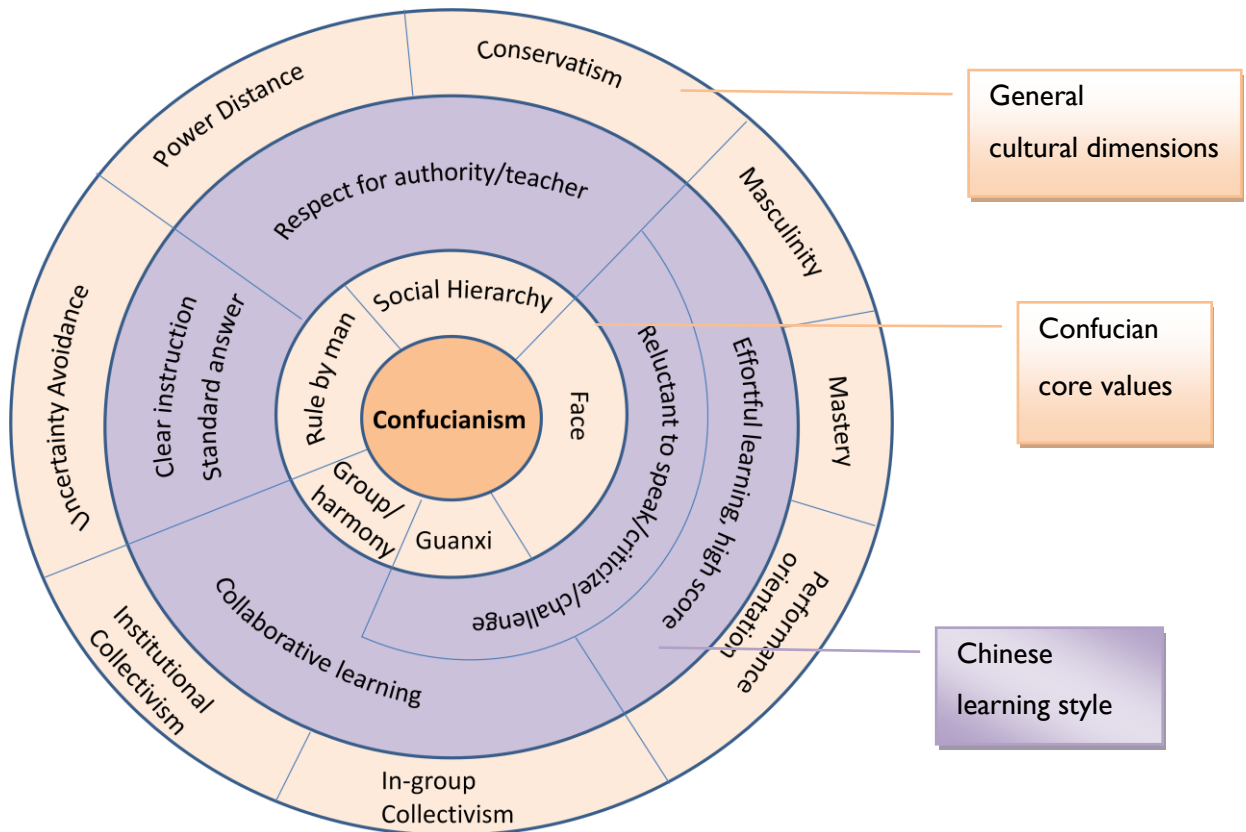
Moreover, the masculinity dimension as well as the strong performance orientation of Chinese culture implies that students normally get rewards for excellent academic performance rather than any other social adaptation, which is also a reflection of emphasis on effortful learning in Confucian cultures. Hence, the student's academic failure is most commonly deemed a disaster and may lead to serious accusation from parents and teachers and consequent loss of face. In this circumstance, the best

students in the class are usually set up as norms for the other students rather than average students, who tend to be favoured in a more feminine-oriented society. (Hofstede, 2002; Littrell, 2005)

From the above discussion on Chinese learning style, it could be concluded that the learning style of Chinese students is very different from that of Western students. As Chow (1995) summarised, Chinese students prefer to adopt a passive role in the learning situation, and expect clear and certain instructions and answers from the teacher. Conversely, Western learning style places greater emphasis on flexibility and less on rigidity; accordingly, students are more active in class.

A wheel chart is drawn in Figure 5.1 below in order to show a composite picture of how the general cultural dimensions and also Confucian core values are interrelated with Chinese learning style. The core of Chinese culture is Confucianism, which is surrounded by its core values, namely strong sense of social hierarchy, *Face*, *Guanxi*, group orientation and emphasis on social harmony, and Rule by Man. These values are relatively similar to or distinct from general cultural dimensions, which are placed on the outer circle of the wheel, including Power Distance, Conservatism and Masculinity. In the middle of these general cultural dimensions and Confucian core values are listed some of the distinct features of the Chinese learning style, with each reflecting one or more cultural dimensions and Confucian values, and vice versa. This circle chart is extendable by adding more cultural dimensions and/or Confucian values to the designated circles, and therefore generates more features of Chinese learning style as a result of spinning circles clock-wise (or anti clock-wise), which may work in a similar way as spinning a colour wheel.

Figure 5.1 Wheel Chart of Chinese cultural values and learning style



With regard to particular teaching methods or techniques, Chinese students prefer teaching techniques with clear instructions, such as lectures, reading textbooks, and assignments, and are reluctant to respond well to active or experiential teaching techniques, like role-play exercises and classroom discussions. However, these active teaching techniques, which usually include two-way communication, are encouraged in western management education. For instance, some classic management teaching and training techniques such as case studies, role-play and business games rely heavily on abstract thinking and self-generated knowledge, thereby potentially causing nervousness and anxiety for Chinese students, who are not used to open discussion and expression of opinion. (Greenholtz, 2003; Pratt, 1992)

Furthermore, as Currie (2007) argues, Chinese students may encounter major problems with 'critical analysis', which is deemed the essential part of Western management education. This is because 'Chinese students are not accustomed to analysing theories, comparing and contrasting ideas, and selecting from a range of ideas and approaches, then providing a written response' (ibid: p. 542). As discussed before, Confucian philosophy of education neither encourages students to challenge their teachers, nor to form their own personal hypotheses, hence those critical learning methods are in fact very different or even opposite to what Confucian learning style advocates.

Most importantly, as Currie (2007) points out, Chinese students may confuse 'being critical' with criticism of another person publicly, which is against the Confucian value of maintaining social harmony and may result in loss of face. Therefore, Chinese students would be disadvantaged when encounter and judged by Western pedagogical approaches and assessment criteria, within which assertive and verbal behaviours are highly rewarded.

In summary, learning cannot be seen in isolation, but must be viewed in a wider context, which includes various factors, such as curriculum, teaching, assessment, student's prior experience and their perceptions of learning (Ramsden, 1992). Therefore, it is argued that examining students' learning styles could assist in discovering their experience and outcomes of learning, identifying the effectiveness of different teaching strategies in order to achieve a more systematic approach to academic teaching and improve the quality of teaching and learning (Duff, 2003).

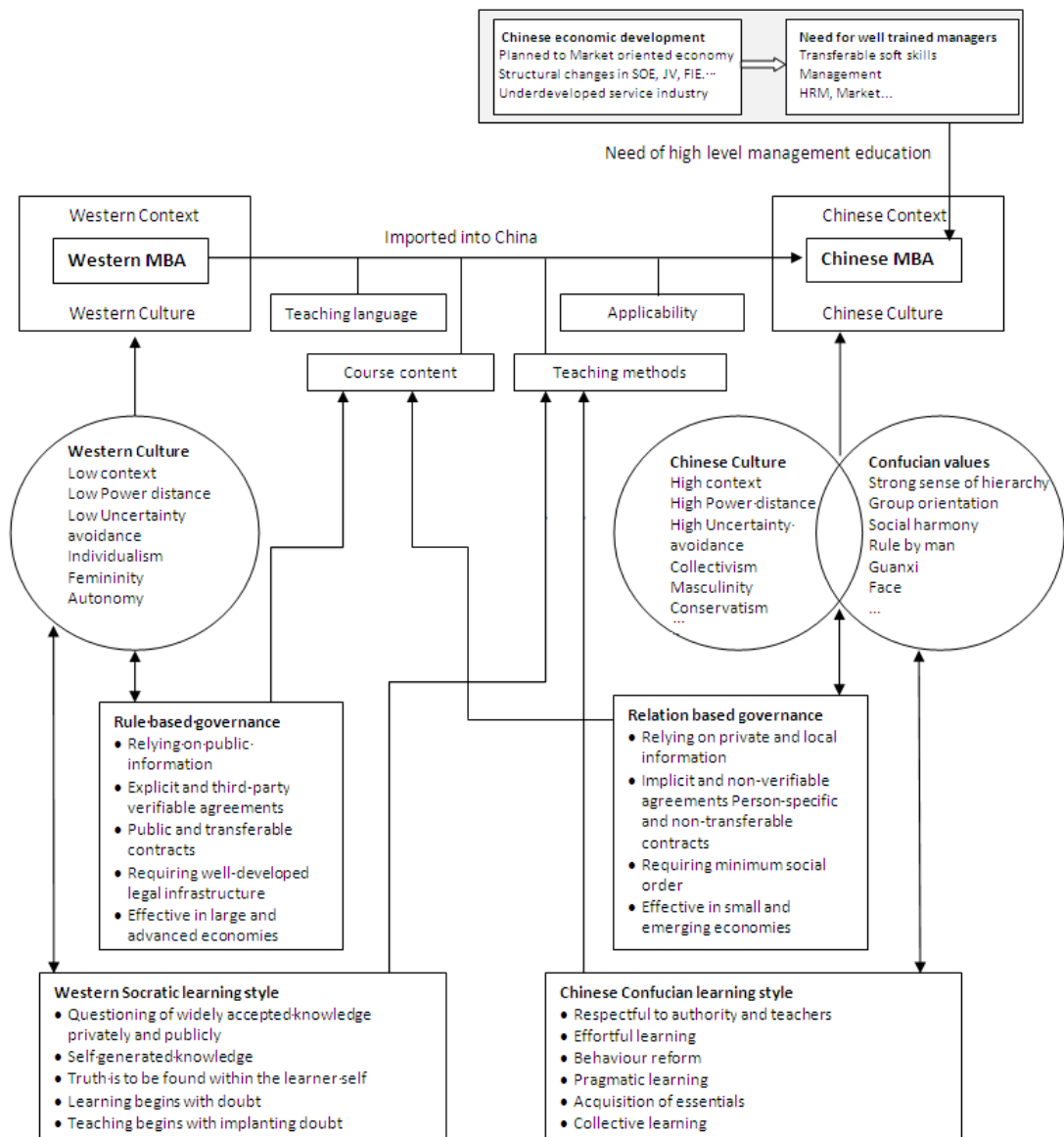
In response, some academics (see Chan, 1999; Chow, 1995; Greenholtz, 2003; Newell, 1999) suggest that Western management practices must be modified in terms of curriculum design, teaching techniques and some other fundamental ways to fit the culture of the host country. By considering the particularities of Chinese learning style, Chow (1995) suggests that teaching materials should be well-organized and unambiguous, and that traditional methods including formal lecturing are likely to be more effective than more dynamic and active approaches, such as, role-play exercises and competitive teamwork. Wang et al. (2005) also argues that what is needed for Chinese MBA programmes is to utilize a unique Chinese management education model, by combining Western benefits and Chinese values. This approach resonates with that of Lau and Roffey (2002), who propose that management education should be culturally sensitive.

5.6 Chapter conclusion

From the discussion in this chapter, it can be concluded that Confucianism has profound impacts on people's daily life and Chinese management perspectives. Consequently, Chinese people have a different value system from their Western counterparts, which in turn, defines their distinctive ways of dealing with personal and business relationships. Moreover, Chinese culture also influences people's learning style, which can explain Chinese students' reluctance to be active and accept interactive teaching methods. In this respect, it is suggested from the existing literature that it is problematic just to import or copy the whole package of western MBA to China without considering China's own cultural and contextual circumstances and speciality, and Chinese students' learning styles.

The last four chapters have provided a literature review of critical issues relevant to this research. Figure 5.2 below summarises the findings from literature review into a conceptual model, which forms the basis of the research design (including questionnaire survey and focus group discussions), and also the later on data analysis in this research.

Figure 5.2 Conceptual Model of Transferring Western MBA to the Chinese Context



Now it comes to the research question whether Western management knowledge can be transferred properly to China by considering distinct characteristics of Chinese culture; and whether popular western teaching methods can be applied in Chinese management education by taking account of Chinese learning style. The next chapter will outline the methodology, employed to address these research questions.

Chapter 6 Research Methodology

6.1 Introduction

Management education has experienced a rapid growth in China, in particular the MBA courses, and many business and management programmes use Western textbooks and other complementary teaching materials (either translated into Chinese or in their original English version) as their main teaching resources. Western management knowledge is by and large considered “best practice” in the world, such that it is perceived that this ‘gold standard’ is transferable to the rest of the world. However, it is increasingly questioned whether this direct transfer of context-specific management knowledge from the West to China is appropriate, and whether and to what extent this knowledge can be accepted and digested by Chinese students and managers in the application of solving practical problems in China.

This research aims to explore the transferability of Western management knowledge in China’s MBA education. In particular it will examine transferability in terms of the content, process, context, and cultural issues of management education.

More specifically, the objectives of this research are:

- to explore to what extent Chinese MBA course curricula embrace both Western “best practice” and China’s own cultural and business context;

- to examine the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods on MBA programmes in China, and their compatibility to Chinese learning styles; and
- to investigate the applicability of western management knowhow in practice to management work in China.

In order to address these questions, theoretical, methodological and data triangulation has been adopted in this research in order to achieve valid and reliable finding by integrating different theories, methodologies and data source rather than relying on any single one of each.

The rationale for choosing triangulation will be explained first in this chapter, and then emphasis will be placed on questionnaire, and focus group discussion. The reasons for using these two methods, together with their respective strengths, will also be discussed. Next, the sampling procedure will be demonstrated, followed by a discussion of validity and reliability of the research design. Lastly, details of the fieldwork will be explained under sections of each research method and data analysis methods will also be discussed at the end.

6.2 Rationale for the use of triangulation

Before discussing the rationale of adopting triangulation for this research, it is appropriate to review first the debate between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms and the emergence and increasing popularity of triangulation in social studies.

6.2.1 Quantitative vs. Qualitative research methods and Triangulation

It is widely recognized that there are two essential methodological approaches in social research: quantitative and qualitative research methods, which are distinct strategies of inquiry encompassing different paradigms. These paradigms define certain assumptions about how the researchers will learn and what they will learn during their inquiries. In other words, as Guba and Lincoln (1994:p.107) state, “a paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs that deals with ultimate or first principles”. In this regard, the following paragraphs will discuss the qualitative approach, together with a comparison with the quantitative approach, in terms of their supporting philosophy, the role of the researcher and data collection methods.

Quantitative paradigm

Quantitative research method is usually consistent with a positivist philosophy (Maxwell and Delaney, 2004; Schrag, 1992). It is believed that scientific methods which were originally applied in natural science should be used in social observations; thus independent facts about a single apprehensible reality can be measured quantitatively, allowing this method to be “value-free” (Robson, 2002). Moreover, the researcher or observer is separated from the object or phenomenon under study, and the personal self should remain emotionally detached and uninvolved with the objects of study (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

Therefore, quantitative research methods are always concerned with well-developed and codified methods for data analysis, which is a pre-determined technological tool with less flexibility. This type of research involves the use of numerical measurements, i.e. the use of numbers to measure and analyse social phenomena. Flick (1998:p.3)

summarises this by stating that quantitative research is used for the purpose of 'measuring and quantifying phenomena and allowing the generalisation of findings'. In quantitative research, reality can be defined in terms of separate and observable variables, and the purpose of the research is to define and measure those variables in a large-scale sample. Therefore, quantitative researchers normally focus on facts of the object rather than meanings. Large-scale survey is the most common method adopted in quantitative research. (Mangan, 2004)

Quantitative research is relatively easy to replicate on different populations, and can generalise research findings when the data are based on random samples of sufficient size. Moreover, by using statistical software data analysis, quantitative research is also relatively less time-consuming. However, it is also criticized when applied in social science: the findings might be too abstract and general because the theories used by the researcher may not reflect deep understanding of the object; too much emphasis on theory and hypothesis testing rather than generation may make the researcher miss out on occurring phenomenon. (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004)

Qualitative paradigm

In contrast, qualitative researchers advocate a phenomenological philosophy, which is also discussed as constructivists and interpretivists (Guba and Lincoln, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Smith, 1984). It is argued that the world is socially-constructed and subjective, and it is impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects; thus explanations should be generated inductively from the data and the research is value-bound. As a result, the researcher cannot be separated from the phenomenon, and the researcher who implements qualitative research should get close to the people and situations which are

under study in order to understand the realities of their daily lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002; Robson, 2002).

As Van Maanen (1979:p539) states, the prime analytic task of qualitative research is to “uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation”. Thus the major purpose of qualitative research is to ‘explore, explain, or describe the phenomenon of interest’ (Marshall and Rossman; 1999: p.33). As Patton (2002) claims, the task for the qualitative researcher is firstly to provide a framework that allows respondents to represent their points of view of the world, and the world they are talking about accurately and thoroughly, and then to use the credible, high-quality data to describe and explain the phenomenon as completely as possible. The data used by qualitative researchers are usually in the form of words that have been recorded to represent the observation.

Qualitative research is useful for describing complex phenomena that are situated and embedded in local contexts. Since qualitative data are usually in the form of words, the research is able to understand and describe phenomenon and people’s experiences in detail. More importantly, qualitative researchers are responsive to changes that occur during the research process; thus the focus and methods of the study may be shifted due to the changes in the research object or phenomenon. However, qualitative research also has some limitations; for instance, the result of the research may not be generalised to other people or other settings, and it may take more time to collect and analyse data as compared to quantitative research. (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004)

The emergence of triangulation

The debate between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms has been ongoing for more than a century; purists have emerged from both sides to advocate their own views. It was argued that a single piece of research would always have to make a choice between qualitative and quantitative methods: either to be intensive by examining the topic in great depth or to be extensive by examining a wide range of data (Sayer, 1992). However, in recent decades, there has been a move among social and ethnographic researchers to develop approaches to combine different methods for data collection in a single study, in order to bridge these two extreme paradigms (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). This mixed method approach falls under the concept of “triangulation”, which is defined by Denzin (1970: p.297) as ‘the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon’.

It is claimed that the use of different research methods to collect data from alternative sources has greater validity and reliability than a single methodological approach to a problem (Gill and Johnson, 2002). It is also argued that by integrating the qualitative insights with the interpretation of quantitative survey data, which is obtained from combining multiple methods and empirical materials, researchers can overcome the weaknesses or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method studies (Brewerton and Millward, 200; Olsen, 2004).

In contrast to the purist views of research paradigm, which insist that qualitative and quantitative research methods cannot and should not be mixed (Howe, 1988), methodological triangulation considers both of them important and useful, and the purpose of this mixed-method research is to “draw from the strengths and minimize

the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: p.14-15).

Moreover, it is also worth noting that instead of pure positivism or phenomenology, triangulation tends to be in line with an assumption of Pragmatism, which argues that practical decisions about theories, data and research methods should be made according to the demands of the context or by the requirements of the study *per se* (Greene et al, 2005). Therefore, due to the fact that research issues are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, complex and dynamic, using triangulation or mixed methods can help to mix and match design components and thereby offer the researcher the best chance of answering their specific research questions.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) advocate this triangulation or mixed methods as a need-based or contingency approach to research methods. They claim it is productive because it offers “an immediate and useful middle position philosophically and methodologically”; “a practical and outcome-oriented method of inquiry that is based on action and leads”; and “a method for selecting methodological mixes that can help researchers better answer many of their research questions” (ibid, p. 17).

As summarised by Johnson and Turner (2003), researchers should not be restricted or constrained in choosing methods; instead, they should take an eclectic approach to method selection and be able to collect multiple data using different strategies and methods in order to achieve a result with complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses. In other words, research approaches can be mixed fruitfully as long as this triangulation offers the best solution or opportunity for gaining data and

answering research questions. Therefore, no matter which paradigm the methods belong to, they can be mixed when they work best for answering research questions.

However, on the other hand, there are also some criticisms of the triangulation of research methods. For instance, Bryman and Burgess (1994) argue that it is a much more difficult exercise to analyse data obtained from multiple sources than to add together the data sets obtained using a single-method procedure. Moreover, it is more difficult to replicate the findings obtained by a triangulation procedure and to compare them with those of other studies than in the case of a single-method procedure (Sarantakos, 1998). In addition, Arksey and Knight (1999) also state that it is not unfamiliar for researchers to find that triangulation is a tedious, time-consuming strategy to follow, with resource implications.

6.2.2 Triangulation in this research

It is clear that the process of collecting valid and reliable data in the context of ethnography is a complex and diversified one, and applying more than one procedure at the same time, whether they come from related or different methodologies, should not be considered as a negative step (Crawford and Christensen, 1995; Keesee, 1997). Therefore, although there are some criticisms of triangulation as stated above, this strategy is still, nevertheless, supported by many researches leading to the view that conclusions derived from different data sources are often far stronger than those derived from a single data source. Hence, given its advantages, a triangulation methodology has been used in this research, for the purpose of integrating different types of data to enrich the findings and thereby improve the quality of the data and the

research *per se*.

There are various kinds of triangulation, and Easterby-Smith et al. (1991) identified four major types:

- data triangulation, where data are collected at different times or from different sources;
- investigator triangulation, where different investigators independently collect data;
- methodological triangulation, where both quantitative and qualitative techniques are employed;
- theory triangulation, where a theory is taken from one discipline and used to explain a phenomenon in another discipline, or more than one theoretical scheme is used in the interpretation of the phenomenon.

This research applies theory, methodological and data triangulation. Firstly, in order to explore the transferability of Western management knowledge to a Chinese context, several aspects are involved, and there are three perspectives that need to be examined: teaching, learning and practical application. Secondly, data has been collected from not only one source, two methods are proposed here: questionnaire and focus group. Lastly, quantitative and qualitative data has been obtained sequentially.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) also state in summary that the majority of methodological triangulation or mixed methods can be developed from two major types: *mixed-model*, where qualitative and quantitative approaches are mixed within or

across the stages of the research process; and *mixed-method*, where a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase are included in an overall research study. For the *mixed-method* design, two primary decisions should be confirmed: whether it is within one dominant paradigm or not, and whether the phases are conducted concurrently or sequentially. Figure 5.1 illustrates nine mixed-method designs based on time order decision and paradigm emphasis decision, and the one that this research has chosen is highlighted.

Figure 6.1 Mixed-method design matrix

| | | Time Order Decision | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|---|
| | | Concurrent | Sequential |
| Paradigm Emphasis Decision | Equal Status | QUAL + QUAN | QUAL → QUAN QUAN → QUAL |
| | Dominant Status | QUAL + quan QUAN + qual | QUAL → quan qual → QUAN QUAN → qual quan → QUAL |

Note. “qual” stands for qualitative, “quan” stands for quantitative, “+” stands for concurrent, “→” stands for sequential, capital letters denote high priority or weight, and lower case letters denote lower priority or weight.¹¹

Source: Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004)

In this research, a questionnaire survey has been conducted first, for the purpose of collecting relevant information to form the emphasis of later qualitative data collection via focus group discussion. Since there is little existing research concerning the transferability of western management knowledge in the Chinese context from a management education perspective, and this research has been looking in particular at the cultural influences in particular, therefore discussion on the expected findings will

rely more on the narrative qualitative data, which will be gained largely from the focus group discussion by talking to MBA candidates, with the aim of finding out about their perspectives of the teaching and learning of Western management knowledge and its applicability to their practical work.

To sum up, there are two sequential phases in this research: phase 1 is to obtain quantitative data via questionnaire, and phase 2 is to collect qualitative data via focus group. Although the quantitative data will be indicative to the later collection of qualitative data, the emphasis of this research is on the qualitative data analysis.

6.3 Questionnaire survey and Focus group

By adopting a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative approaches in this research, a questionnaire survey has been implemented in the first phase of the field work, and two focus group discussions have been conducted as the second phase. This section will discuss the details about these two methods, with regard to the rationale of using them and their major characteristics and limitations.

Questionnaire Survey

As Frazer and Lawley (2000) state, a questionnaire is a formalized set of questions for obtaining information from respondents. A structured questionnaire is used in this research to collect data because of several advantages of this research format. Firstly, questionnaires are very cost-effective for collecting large-scale data for quantitative analysis. Secondly, questionnaires are easy to analyse. Data entry and tabulation for nearly all surveys can be easily done with many computer software packages (e.g. SPSS).

Thirdly, questionnaires are familiar to most people. Nearly everyone has had some experience completing questionnaires and people generally do not find them confusing. Moreover, questionnaires reduce bias. The uniform question presentation minimizes middleman bias, i.e. the researcher's own opinions will not influence the respondent to answer questions in a certain manner by any verbal or visual clues. Finally, unlike other research methods, questionnaires are less intrusive since the respondent is not interrupted by the research instrument. (Frazer and Lawley, 2000)

It is worth noting that there are two main types of questionnaire survey in terms of its purpose: analytic and descriptive. The intention of a particular research determines which type of survey is adopted in the enquiry. An analytic survey is chosen when the research intends to test a theory deductively by examining causal relationships among a set of phenomena, and dependent and independent variables need to be defined for the survey; while a descriptive survey is more appropriate for inductive studies and when the researcher aims to assess the attributes of a population of subjects (Gill and Johnson, 2002).

Descriptive survey is considered an effective data collection method in attitude research, which has been widely applied in various management researches, e.g. job satisfaction, motivation, reaction and appraisal, etc (Gill and Johnson, 2002). Therefore, due to the fact that there are no well established studies with regard to the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context, and the purpose of this research is to explore the current position of MBA education in China rather than testing any existing theories deductively, a descriptive survey has been adopted in this research in order to complement qualitative data findings as the other

part of the triangulation methodology.

Generally, there are three main types of response format for constructing a questionnaire: open-ended (unstructured), close-ended (structured), and scale-response.

- *Open-ended questions* are suitable where precise information is required, but to list all possible answers would be difficult or lengthy. They can also be used to encourage respondents to express themselves freely, as in an exploratory survey.
- *Close-ended questions* can be categorized as either single (where one response is required), dichotomous (where two response items are provided), or multiple-choice (where several alternatives are listed)
- *Scale-response questions* require the use of a scale to measure the attributes of the construct. They are commonly used to measure the respondent's attitudes towards particular issues.

(Hague, 1993; Gillham, 2000)

In this research, all of these three response formats have been used to construct the questionnaire, for the purpose of obtaining answers or data which can be meaningfully compared, and achieving a higher response rate with less missing data. Regarding its administration, in this research the questionnaire will be conducted personally, rather than via telephone or mail. The content of the questionnaire may include various facets of the MBA course: the contents of the curriculum, teaching methods, teaching materials, effectiveness of the course in terms of developing knowledge and skills, the learning experience, etc. As a result, a general understanding of the transfer of Western

management knowledge via MBA programmes is expected, which also formed the direction and emphasis of the later qualitative data collection. Meanwhile, numerical data have been obtained as a source of quantitative analysis.

Focus group

In the second phase of this research, data collection via focus groups has been implemented. The focus group is an important method of collecting qualitative data in social science research, and it is defined by Powell and Single (1996: p.499) as “a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research”. Unlike group interview, which involves interviewing a number of people at the same time with the emphasis placed on questions and responses between the researcher and the participants, focus group emphasises the interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1997).

According to Morgan and Kreuger (1993), the main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions about a single topic or a narrow range of topics, while these issues may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction among respondents. Therefore, people who are invited to the group discussion are similar in some way, or share something particular or in common regarding the research topic. The potential outcome of the focus group is to elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes among these participants within a group context. Moreover, because of the emphasis on the interaction, the role of the group facilitator or moderator becomes critical, since, as Kreuger (1994) reveals,

the moderator needs to have good interpersonal skills and personal qualities, being a good listener, non-judgmental and adaptable, so as to facilitate the interaction between group members while keeping the session focused on the research topic.

As Morgan (1997) and Vaughn et al. (1996) state, focus groups can be utilized as a self-contained technique as a supplement to quantitative or other qualitative techniques, especially for triangulation. It is beneficial in collecting data, firstly because greater amounts of information can be gathered in shorter and more efficient time spans (Krueger, 1994), and secondly because more creativity and a greater range of thoughts, ideas and experiences can be fostered in the group context (Vaughn et al, 1996). However, there are also some limitations in focus group technique. The researcher or group moderator has less control over the data produced due to the strong emphasis on interactions between group members. Also, it may discourage some people from sharing personal information because focus groups are not fully confidential or anonymous. After all, the data collected from this research method is limited in terms of its ability to generalise the findings; this may well explain why focus group is normally utilized as a supplement in triangulation research. (Morgan 1997)

More specifically, the typical size of a focus group is around 6 to 10 people, and the researcher or group moderator often uses an interview guide containing a limited number of open-ended questions, typically 10 or less. Moreover, the locations for holding the focus group could differ according to the research topic and group nature, but if the participants are a pre-existing group, it could be held in the place where they hold their regular meetings. (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997)

In this research, focus groups of current MBA candidates in selected institutions (selection procedure will be discussed in the later sections) have been organized to obtain information on their experiences of teaching and learning in the programme. Particular emphasis has been placed on teaching materials (text book, case study materials, etc.), the content of the course, teaching methods, perspectives towards the tutors, cultural effects, and so on. The main purpose of adopting focus group exercises in this research is to draw out and collect MBA programme candidates' attitudes, motivations and experiences by encouraging group discussion and interaction between group members. In this way, maximum information could be obtained in respect of the overall perspective of the MBA programme, as well as other aspects referring to the transferability of western management knowledge in the Chinese context. The next section will explain the sampling procedure adopted in this research.

6.4 Sampling procedure

Sampling is an important step in any research because it is rarely practical or efficient to study the whole populations. The aim of all sampling approaches is to draw a representative sample from the population, and then the results of studying the sample can be generalised back to the population (Patton, 2000). The most common approach for quantitative research is random sampling, or probability sampling, which is adopted for the purpose of testing pre-determined hypotheses and producing generalisable results. There are also some of the variants of random sampling e.g. cluster sampling, stratified sampling and systematic sampling, being used quite often in real world research. However, this random sampling strategy is not appropriate for qualitative

research, not only because it is not the most effective way of developing an understanding of complex issues relating to human behaviour, but also for the following reasons.

Firstly, small sample size is very common for qualitative research; therefore bias is inevitable if the sample is randomly selected. Secondly, it is rarely possible to generalise the characteristics of a random sample to the whole population in a complex qualitative study. Thirdly, research findings with any random sample could be generalised to the population only if the research characteristics are normally distributed within the population, which rarely happens and is also difficult to define in social science subjects related to human behaviour. Finally, it is recognized that some informants are likely to provide richer insight and understanding than others; in other words, some informants are more representative than the others in terms of revealing characteristics of the subject under study. Therefore, qualitative studies often adopt non-probability sampling strategies, which normally do not involve random selection as probability sampling strategies do. Some commonly used non-probability samplings methods include convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, and theoretical sampling. (Gill and Johnson, 2002; Patton, 2000)

Since a triangulation methodology is adopted in this research, the sampling procedure has also been designed by taking into account both quantitative and qualitative data collection. On the one hand, the questionnaire survey is descriptive rather than analytic and aims to give an overall picture of the research issue and highlight the key issues that need to be focused on in the later phase of the research. On the other hand, as part of the triangulation approach, qualitative analysis has been given more emphasis.

Therefore, a purposeful sampling procedure is more appropriate even though quantitative data collection is part of this research project.

This type of sampling method is more often used in qualitative research in order to avoid large amounts of missing data and unexpected 'outliers', which is a term used in statistics to describe unusual cases. Adopting a purposeful or focused sampling strategy involves being the selective study of particular people, groups or institutions that are expected to offer especially illuminating examples (Patton, 2000).

According to Gill and Johnson (2002), when a research is exploratory, the researcher may choose a sample with a specific purpose in mind and the sample should be selected based upon the researcher's judgment about the population of interest. Furthermore, even though such purposeful sampling strategy will not generate fully representative results, it is still an appropriate choice since it will provide useful and rich data from a sample judged to be typical of the wider population. In other words, characteristics that are prevalent among sample members may provide meaningful insights into the wider population.

To summarise, a non-probability sampling procedure is adopted in this research, more specifically, a purposeful sampling procedure has been adopted. The rationale of choosing such a sampling strategy is to explore the current status of the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context, with attention paid to the MBA programmes in particular. Samples carrying prevalent characteristics and deemed typical have been selected to obtain quantitative data via questionnaire survey and qualitative data via focus group discussions. Details of the sampling procedure carried

out in the fieldwork and the reasons for choosing the samples will be provided in the later sections.

6.5 Validity and reliability of the research

The purpose of any kind of research is to explore the notions of truth; hence, validity and reliability are involved as two widely recognized measurements to assess if the research is consistent, and are commonly applied in quantitative studies from a positivist perspective (Yin, 1989). Traditionally, there are constant definitions and measurement components of both validity and reliability when they are applied to assess quantitative research. Generally, validity is concerned with the degree to which the research accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher sets out to measure.

Normally, validity can be assessed by dividing it into construct validity, internal validity and external validity. Construct validity refers to establishing correct operational measures for the concept being studied; internal validity concerns itself with establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions; and external validity means the extent to which a study's findings can be generalised (Silverman, 2005). On the other hand, reliability refers to the replicability of research. In other words, it tends to measure the extent to which it is possible to generate similar conclusions when the same research is carried out by others (Yin, 1989).

However, contrary to quantitative research, qualitative research is rooted in a naturalistic approach which seeks to understand a phenomenon within context-specific settings (Patton, 2002). Therefore, it is argued that it is difficult to measure validity and reliability of qualitative research in terms of the same criteria for measuring quantitative studies (Neuman, 2006). This is because qualitative researchers produce findings from information-rich narrative words rather than from statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Besides, non-probability sampling strategies are commonly adopted in qualitative research instead of large-scale probability sampling methods, which are essential to generate reliable and valid results in quantitative studies. (Ratcliff, 2002)

Regarding the inappropriateness of applying measurement criteria for quantitative research in qualitative studies, some researchers have tried to develop their own concepts in terms of measuring the quality of qualitative research (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). Among these new measurement concepts, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify 'trustworthiness' as the major quality concern for qualitative research, and it can be measured by four constructs: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility is parallel to internal validity and refers to the way the study is conducted to ensure accurate description of the subject. Transferability is parallel to external validity, and implies the extent to which the research findings are generalisable to other situations and settings. Dependability is parallel to reliability, and refers to the researcher's responsibility for accommodating changes in the study setting and ensuring the research process logical, traceable and well-documented. Confirmability concerns

the extent to which data confirm subsequent interpretations and findings and the implications that these data lead to. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

Ratcliff (2004) provides some practical suggestions in terms of enhancing the validity and reliability of qualitative studies. To ensure the validity of a piece of qualitative research, the following techniques could be used: divergence from initial expectation, convergence with other sources of data, extensive quotations from field notes and interview transcripts, and independent checks or recruitment of multiple researchers in the same project. On the other hand, as Ratcliff (2004) continually argues, reliability of qualitative research could be achieved by listening to interviews recorded multiple times by the same person or different people, and having multiple transcripts of the interview which is done by the same person or different people. In addition, another useful procedure for establishing both dependability and confirmability is auditing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which refers to establishing an audit trail of the research process, consisting of tools for data collection, the raw data, personal notes, memos, and documented procedures for analysing the data and generating theory.

Furthermore, it is argued that the validity and reliability of research could be enhanced by using triangulation in terms of data, method and theory. Neuman (2006) explains that triangulation enables the researcher to view the object of study from different viewpoints. De Vos (2002) and Leedy (1997) also argue that using triangulation as a validation method enables the researcher to observe all the aspects of the research topic. In particular, the researcher has to be self-conscious and make the research systematic in the research design, data collection, interpretation and communication of findings throughout the research report for the purpose of making it possible for

others to evaluate the research methods and analyse data as to achieve a similar conclusion. In addition, sufficient background information and enough data should be provided to enhance the reliability (Creswell, 2003).

To summarise, as discussed in previous sections, a triangulation of research methods, theory and data is applied in this research, which aims to obtain more representative data so as to accomplish investigation for the research question with a high level of validity and reliability. Moreover, a thorough description of the research setting is given based on literature review and the researcher's practical understanding of the issue; interview transcription and survey data entering as well as the data analysis procedure are monitored and rechecked and also documented to ensure a high consistency. Also, data from various sources, e.g. questionnaire survey, focus group discussions, documents, observation, have been converged and integrated to overcome limitations of quantitative and qualitative. As a result, credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable results are expected to be generated from this research.

6.6 Fieldwork

The literature review has revealed that, although there are increasing concerns about the effectiveness of management education in China, there is little, if any, published research data on the topic of transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context. Therefore, for the aim of exploring the current extent to which Chinese MBA courses embrace both Western management knowledge and China's own situation and the effectiveness of teaching, a triangulation of qualitative and

quantitative methods is adopted in order to obtain credible in-depth data. As discussed in previous sections, questionnaire survey and focus group discussion are chosen as the major data collection methods, accomplished by field observation and document content analysis.

The literature to date, indicates that there is no generally accepted or preferred ways to measure student learning and relevant educational outcomes (Beale, 1993), notwithstanding the purpose of exploring cultural influences during the learning process. Regarding this lack of existing measurable instrument, a scale of items relating to the Chinese MBA programme has been developed by the researcher and constructs the major part of the questionnaire survey. Furthermore, focus group questions were then developed on the basis of the questionnaire. Details of developing the scale of items and interview questions will be discussed in the following sections.

The process of data collection will be explained in three sections: questionnaire survey, focus group discussion and field observation. Description of data and detailed analysis will be discussed in the next chapter.

6.6.1 Questionnaire survey

As little research has been published regarding the teaching and learning of Chinese MBA programmes, the researcher has constructed a questionnaire survey based on existing literature. First of all, as a reminder, the aim of this research is

- to explore the current extent to which course curriculums embrace

both Western 'best practice' and China's own cultural and contextual circumstances;

- to examine the effectiveness of teaching and learning in MBA programmes, in respect of various teaching methods and Chinese learning styles;
- to investigate the applicability of Western management knowhow in practical work in China.

Therefore, the aim of investigating MBA programmes in China in terms of their content, teaching and learning process becomes more or less similar to an evaluation of management education programmes. In this regard, the questionnaire scales have been built upon basic aspects of an evaluation system of management education or training courses.

Easterby-Smith (1994) constructed a framework of evaluating management programmes and management development training courses. There are five elements in this framework: context, administration, inputs, process and outcomes, which are the basic aspects that need to be considered in the evaluation of a programme. Details of each element are explained as below:

- *Context*: the circumstances outside and beyond the programme itself;
- *Administration*: general policy decisions and the decisions surrounding specific training and developmental activities;
- *Inputs*: the contribution of various methods, techniques, and people involved in the course;
- *Process*: what takes place during a learning or developmental event or

period, and participants' experience towards it;

- *Outcomes*: learning and development as a person's potential, and the implementation of that potential in the form of behaviour, relationships, attitudes at work or elsewhere.

(Easterby-Smith, 1994: p46-54)

Based on different purposes of the evaluation, different focuses of each element can be applied during the evaluation process. This research focuses on the content, teaching methods, and students' learning experience and outcomes of MBA programmes in China. Therefore, input, process and outcomes were three major concerns while developing the questionnaire survey. It is also worth noting that knowledge and skills development are two important aspects when assessing the learning outcomes while ability to learn from experiences and confidence/self-efficacy are essential in assessing a person's development outcomes (Easterby-Smith, 1994).

A questionnaire has been developed according to this evaluation framework, in which the participants are asked to answer questions related to their programme of studies. The questionnaire consists of four sections:

- Overall evaluation of the programme
 - measuring learning and development outcomes
- Assessment of the course content
 - measuring inputs, process and learning outcomes
- Assessment of the teaching methods
 - measuring inputs, process and learning outcomes

- Applicability of western management knowledge in China
 - measuring implementation outcomes

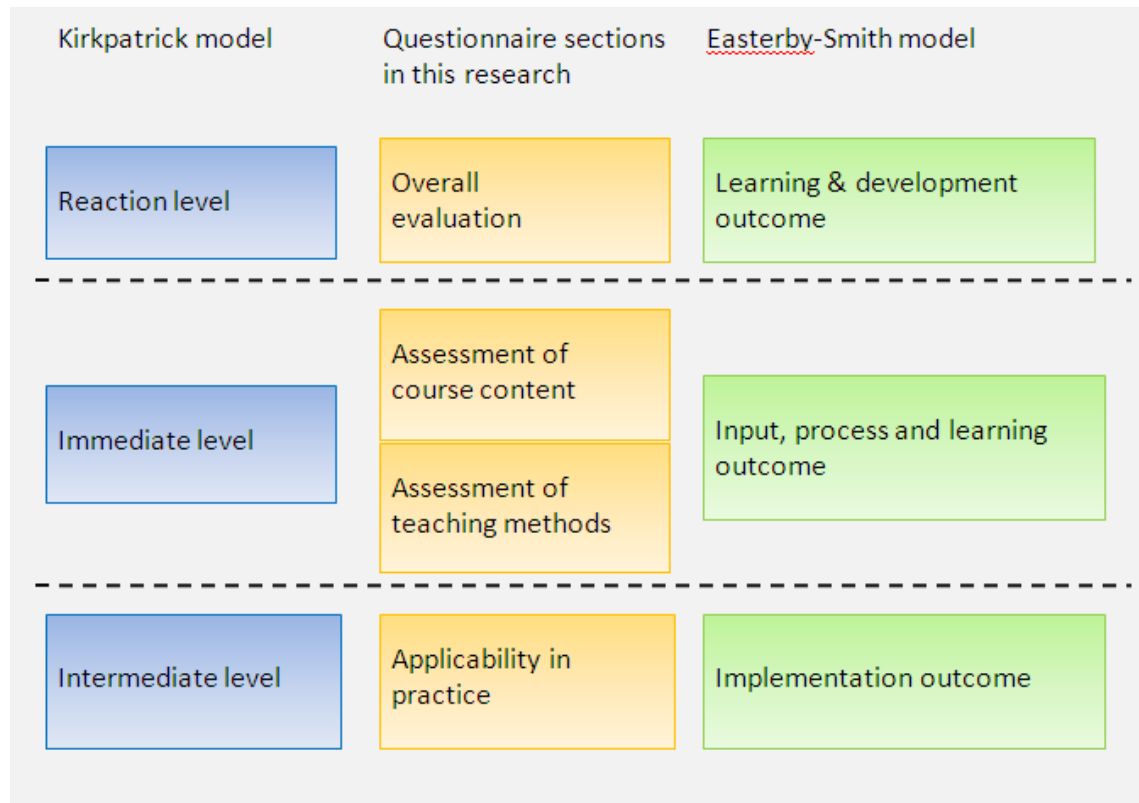
By referring to the traditional model for evaluation of training, which was created by Donald Kirkpatrick (1967), the above four sections of the questionnaire in this research also falls in line with the first three levels of his original four-level evaluation model.

In Kirkpatrick's model (1967), four levels of evaluation are:

- Reaction level — measures what the participants think and feel about the training;
- Immediate level — measures what the participants learned from the training in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- Intermediate level — measures how participants apply what they learned during training on their practical jobs;
- Ultimate level — measures the result of the training on organisational performance and subsequent reinforcement.

Since the Ultimate level is only applicable in evaluation for organisational trainings, the questionnaire sections in this research only reflect upon the first three levels of this traditional training evaluation model. Figure 6.2 below illustrates an interlinking map of the Kirkpatrick's model, questionnaire in this research, and Easterby-smith's model.

Figure 6.2 Evaluation model



After developing the questionnaire, each question/variable was checked by the researcher's research supervisors to make sure whether they were properly phrased and structured. As a result, several amendments have been made in the section of biography data and about the course content in order to have clearer statements without minimal ambiguity. Then the revised questionnaire was translated into Chinese by the researcher. In order to ensure the accuracy of the translation, a back-translation was carried out by several people who were briefed about this research to check whether questions had been translated into Chinese while keeping faith with their original meanings in English.

6.6.1.1 Pilot study of the questionnaire survey

In order to refine the questionnaire design and obtain credible and useful data from the later field work, a pilot study was carried out to test the effectiveness of the questionnaire and to detect any mistakes in the layout of the questionnaire and expression of each question.

20 completed questionnaires were collected in the pilot study, of which participants were all MBA students from the Research Institute of Tsinghua University in Shenzhen, a special economic zone in south China. The institute is an authorised branch of Tsinghua University, one of the top universities in China, providing a range of management training and educational programmes.

As a result, amendments were made to make the questionnaire more accessible and effective in getting credible data. The final version of the questionnaire contains four major sections. Each section focuses on one aspect of exploring the input, process, and outcomes of MBA programmes in China. Next, details of each section in the questionnaire will be presented, including the changes made as a result of the pilot study.

6.6.1.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire starts with a brief introduction and another separate section about the participant's biographic data, such as gender, age, occupation and previous education and work experiences. Then questions are grouped into four main sections.

Overall evaluation

In the first section, the participants were asked to indicate their overall evaluation of the MBA programme in terms of their learning and development outcomes. Among the measure of learning outcomes, two questions/variables are assigned to the knowledge aspect of their learning outcomes, while another two questions/variables are assigned to the skills aspect of their learning outcomes. The remaining two questions/variables are related to individual development outcomes. Each variable is measured by a five point Likert scale ranging from *none* to *very much*. Initially, there were five questions in this section; the final question was added after the pilot study, which aims to measure participants' responses towards how well the course has developed students' ability to assess learning materials, i.e. critical thinking ability.

Assessment of course content

The second section, which is about the course content, is divided into three sub-sections. In the first sub-section, participants were asked to rate the degree to which each module has improved their academic knowledge and practical skills respectively. 16 modules from the first draft of the questionnaire were reduced to 12 modules/fields after the pilot study, as a result of combining several modules into a cohort in the same field, for instance finance/accounting combines three modules: corporate finance, financial accounting and financial management. These 12 modules/fields include modules in major business and management areas, such as strategic planning, marketing, HRM, finance, operation management, research methods, etc. The second and third sub-section has four questions in each, attempting to measure participants' attitudes towards the course content, in terms of its relevance to China's own situation and organisational practice.

The third sub-section was added as a result of the pilot study, because the researcher recognised that a different measurement scale needed to be added to the five-point Likert-scales ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, which are used in the second sub-section. The reason for doing this was to reduce response bias, i.e. the tendency of respondents to give the same answer to every question. As a result, another four questions were added as the third sub-section and the answers were measured by a five-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much*.

Assessment of teaching methods

The third section is focused on investigating various teaching methods and participants' overall experience of the teaching process. Besides obtaining information on teaching language, case study background, and the effectiveness of nine specific teaching methods, another eight questions are asked to obtain participants' opinions towards some statements about the teaching methods and materials, which are measured by a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Moreover, an additional five questions concerning participants' feelings about the whole teaching process are included in this section, and the answers are measured by the five-point Likert scale as well, ranging from *dislike it at all* to *like it very much*.

Applicability in practice

The last section of the questionnaire contains six questions which are intended to obtain participants' opinions about the applicability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context, based on their own experience and expectation. These items are used as indicators of students' development outcomes in respect of the implementation of what they have learnt from the course in their practical work.

Open question

Moreover, there is a final open question where participants can write down any suggestions on the current course. Any information obtained from this open question has been treated as a source of qualitative data, and converged with the other qualitative data in the analysis process.

A complete version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix I.

6.6.1.3 Questionnaire distribution

As discussed in the last chapter, a focused/purposeful sampling procedure has been applied in this research (which is the selective study of particular person, groups or institutions that are expected to offer particularly illuminating examples). This sampling procedure was also chosen to avoid unexpected 'outlier' or unusual cases and avoid large amounts of missing data. Moreover, given the limitations of time and scale of this research and practical obstacles of getting first hand data in China (Chee, 2002), would also be unrealistic to operate data collection on a large-scale basis for this research.

The sample for this study was drawn from the Business and Management Departments of two Chinese universities, both of which are located in Beijing. One is Guanghua School of Management in Peking University; the other is School of Business in the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE). Peking University is a comprehensive higher education institution and one of the top universities in China while UIBE is one of the top universities that specialise in the field of economics and business. Both of these institutions were among the first few groups of universities

authorised to grant MBA degrees in China in the 1980s, and they have both been running their own MBA programmes as well as joint MBA programmes in co-operation with Western institutions during the past two decades.

Peking University is a comprehensive higher education institution consisting of 30 colleges and 12 departments, with 93 undergraduate majors, 199 postgraduate majors and 173 majors for doctoral degrees. At present, it has more than 45,000 students in total and around 1,300 MBA students. Guanghua School of Management was established in 1993 from merging two academic departments: the Department of economics and management and the Centre of management science. The school has more than 100 teaching faculty members, and a wide spread of international collaboration with dozens of management education institutions across the globe (data from <http://www.pku.edu.cn/eabout/>, 2007). Guanghua School of Management has always ranked in the top 3 in various rankings surveys in respect of the quality and influence of MBA programmes in China, e.g. China's best MBA ranking 2006, published by Manager Magazine (Oct. 2006: p.32-46).

On the other hand, UIBE is one of the top universities in China specialising in the field of international business management and economics. It consists of 20 academic schools with over 30 undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes, most of which focus on international trade, economic law, business management and English. There are more than 20,000 current students in total and around 100 enrolled MBA students. The School of Business in UIBE was established in the early 1980s, and was in the second group of colleges qualified to award MBA degrees in China in the early 1990s. As a result of China's booming economy, studies in business and management

have become increasingly popular in the past two decades; UIBE has therefore become a popular choice for students who intend to pursue a degree in the field of business and management. The MBA programme run by the School of Business in UIBE is a widely recognised programme in China, and has been a leader in this field since it started. Therefore, it has been selected as a site of fieldwork for this research because of the consistency of its MBA programme as well as its representativeness of other MBA programmes in China.

Due to the limitations of resource and time, the questionnaire survey was carried out on a small scale at Guanghua School of Management in Peking University. 50 MBA students were approached, and 35 of them returned a completed questionnaire. On the other hand, in UIBE, thanks to the help of officers in the MBA centre, most of the current MBA students participated in the survey, and 110 completed questionnaires out of 120 were received after a two-week period. As a result, a total of 145 completed questionnaires were obtained, indicating a very good response rate of 85%. A visual check of all the completed questionnaires was conducted in order to pick out some invalid ones, such as those with more than three sections blank. As a result of the screening process, 14 questionnaires were discarded and 131 analysable questionnaires were finally obtained.

6.6.2 Focus group

The questionnaire survey was followed by focus group discussions with the aim of obtaining in-depth qualitative data and providing opportunities for the participants to express feelings, attitudes and understandings of this particular research topic. To begin

with the data-gathering process, the researcher developed a question protocol covering the major aspects of transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context, i.e. general comment on the course, contents of the course, teaching methods, and applicability of Western management knowledge in practical work.

Two focus group meetings were conducted with 8 MBA students in each group. Participants in both of the groups were in their final semester of the MBA programme run by the School of Business in UIBE. To ensure contribution by all members of the focus groups, participants were asked for their views in turn. The order by which participants were asked for their views was rotated each time. In this way, every participant was offered the opportunity to provide the first input. Both of the focus group meetings were conducted in Chinese. The reason for choosing Chinese as the medium rather than English was to let the participants better express their views without any interruption of speaking a second language. Although all of them had a good level of English, it was mutually agreed that it would be better to use Chinese to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. Interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later stage. Each meeting lasted between one and a half hours to two hours.

The recorded focus group discussions were first transcribed into Chinese, and all transcribed interview notes were read through by the researcher and shown to the participants to ensure that transcripts captured the points they were making accurately. Then the Chinese transcript was translated into English by the researcher, and a back-translation was done to facilitate the accuracy of the translated transcripts.

Generally, both of the focus groups went well. More specifically, conversations were guided by a set of semi-structured questions, by which participants' answers were not constrained in a certain frame. Meanwhile interactive conversation within the group was moved forward step by step, in order to cover all the relevant fields of the research question. Furthermore, the rotated order of asking participants to express their views was particularly effective in encouraging each group member to be part of the conversation. It was especially important at the beginning of each focus group discussion to break the ice and establish a trusting and relaxing atmosphere. It also proved useful to make a statement to the participants at the beginning that all the conversation would be kept confidential and every one of them would be anonymous in the research report. This helped to eliminate any hesitation and worry on the part of the participants, which helped in gathering as much information as possible from the focus group discussion.

6.6.3 Field observation

During the period of carrying out questionnaire surveys and focus group discussions, the researcher also attended several classes with MBA students in UIBE. This research method was not primarily included in the research frame, but it effectively complemented the questionnaire survey and focus group discussions; by the researcher attending some classes, in order to observe how classes were structured and see firsthand the status of relevant teaching methods and learning mode.

The researcher attended four lectures in four different modules: Management Accounting, International Business Law, Business Research Methods, and Operational

Management. Lecture notes were taken, while the researcher also noted down general impressions about the classroom atmosphere, interaction level between students and the lecturer, level of student participation and lecturers' teaching methods. These notes have also been added as supplements in the later data analysis.

6.7 Data analysis methods

By using triangulation methodology in this research, both quantitative and qualitative data have been gathered to provide a more rounded picture of the research issue. Different data analysis methods have also been applied to get the most out of the data while maintaining validity and credibility of the data itself. Analysis has been carried out by converging data obtained from the questionnaire survey, focus group discussions and other aforementioned research methods in terms of triangulating quantitative and qualitative data. Research findings from data analysis will be presented in the next chapter with quantitative and qualitative data organized under the same sub-section or theme with reference to relevant literature.

In particular, quantitative data has been analysed by using SPSS, a widely used and recognised statistical software package in academic research. Data have been analysed where applicable, in terms of various statistical parameters, e.g. frequency distribution, standard deviation, correlation, comparing means, Chi-square, etc. As to the analysis of qualitative data, NVivo, one of the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), has been applied to analyse the focus group meeting transcripts as well as other qualitative data gathered from observation and documentation. As stated above, interview transcripts have been interpreted under the same theme with

relevant quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire survey.

The reason for choosing CAQDAS, and NVivo in particular, for this research is because it is useful in organizing and managing data, and it is also possible to use the tools in NVivo to assist moving beyond mere data description to generating theory. In addition, such analysis software is also beneficial for its capability of precise record keeping, which is essential to maintain a consistent research journal and audit trail. Another advantage of using NVivo is that it makes it more efficient to view data in a dynamic rather than static way, in that it features the ability to make relationships between categories of data more visible by using text formatting and hyperlinks to other documents and data.

Specifically, as CAQDAS programmes are designed to facilitate iterations within data coding and analysis (Bazeley and Richards, 2000), NVivo allows for open coding, axial coding, matrix search to explore potential links between categories, and exploring ideas visually with a modeller, etc. Nevertheless, the researcher still needs to ask the questions, interpret data, decide what to code and identify categories and generate concepts. Accordingly, NVivo is only used for the purpose of managing data and maximizing efficiency in the research process.

To analyse qualitative data in this research, the focus group discussion transcript was firstly imported into Nvivo, with the participants' initials assigned to each piece of their transcript to differentiate individual narratives. Secondly, as initial exploration of the data, free nodes⁷ were created to identify as many categories or themes as possible,

⁷ Nodes in Nvivo are the containers for categories or coding, which can represent concepts, processes, people,

which were related to the research topic. For example, 'communication', 'age', 'work experience', 'quality', 'textbook', 'teaching' were a few among the large number of free nodes created. As a result, narratives were grouped under all these free nodes based on their relevance to the theme. After studying all the free nodes and relevant narratives, only the ones relating to the research questions were kept, and the rest that were not particularly relevant or illuminating were discounted.

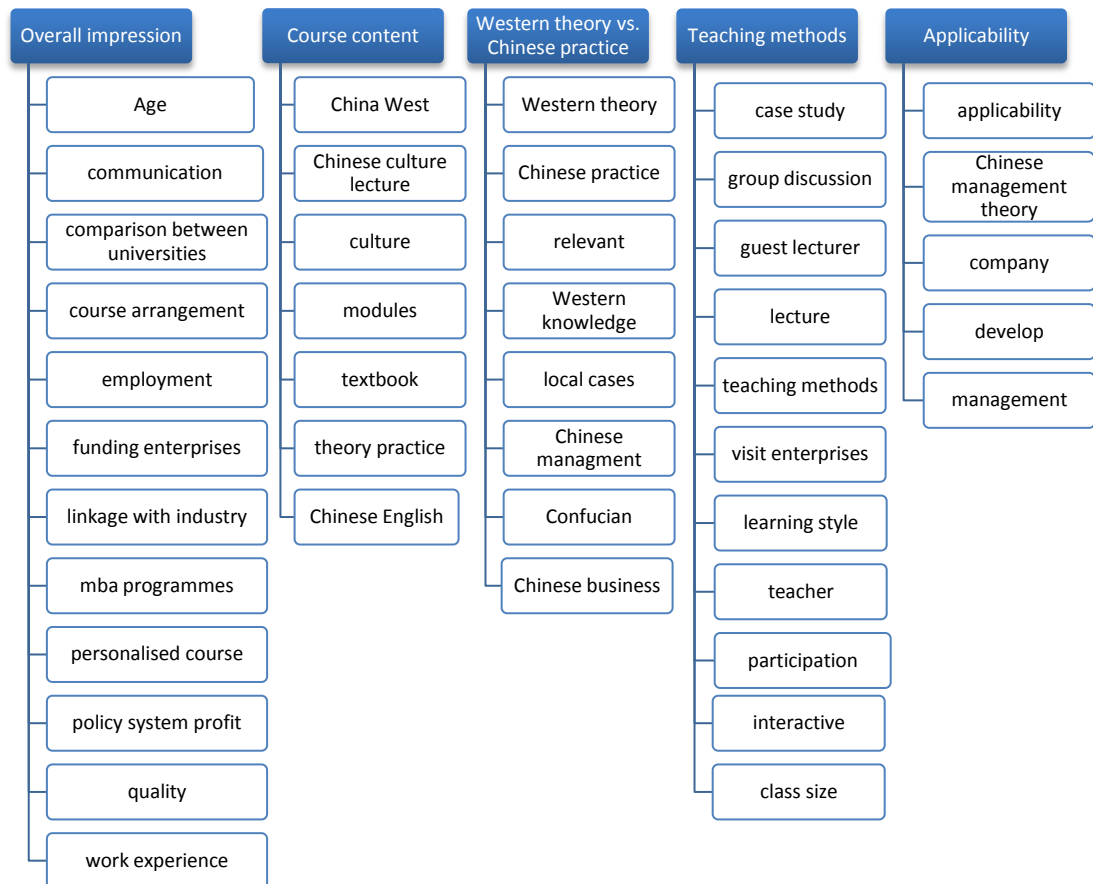
Thirdly, tree nodes (broader categories) were created to organise those free nodes hierarchically, in order to group them under the categories that match with the quantitative data from the survey. These tree nodes provide a framework and help collate and organise a selection of relevant quotations drawn from the data analysis. More specifically, these five tree nodes or categories were created:

- 1) Overall impression;
- 2) Course content;
- 3) Western theory vs. Chinese practice;
- 4) Teaching methods;
- 5) Applicability.

Figure 6.3 below shows a map of the tree nodes or categories and the initial free nodes within each:

abstract ideas, or any categories in the research project.

Figure 6.3 Nvivo tree nodes



6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodology strategy for this research. A pragmatic philosophy assumption is applied in the research, by which triangulation is chosen to achieve the best chance of answering the research questions. Fieldwork of this research consisted of two phases of data collection: the first phase was to collect quantitative data from a questionnaire survey while the second phase involved collecting qualitative data from focus group discussions. Although quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined here, emphasis of this research has been placed on the second phase, i.e.

qualitative narrative data collection and analysis. As a result, an in-depth understanding of the research issues is expected, and it is also expected to find an effective approach of fostering local knowledge in teaching Western management knowledge in China.

In general, a purposeful sampling procedure is adopted in the research, and two institutions running MBA programmes in Beijing have been chosen to offer potentially illuminating data for their representativeness of the current status of MBA education in China. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been analysed by computer-assisted analysis programmes, and the research findings will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Research findings

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the fieldwork, which focused on the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context. As discussed in the last chapter, data was gained from two major research instruments: questionnaire survey and focus group discussions. Accordingly, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data will be integrated where appropriate and reported within the same themes. In addition, notes from field observation and other relevant documentations will be added as a supplement to these two types of data.

The first section of this chapter will provide a brief summary of the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire survey in order to provide background information of the MBA students who participated in this research. Also, it is useful to summarise the demographic data of the survey participants since it will be used for further analysis in the following sections, where significant differences are found between different demographical groups. Including the sample profile, research findings in this chapter will be structured under six major sections:

1. Section 7.2: Sample profile
2. Section 7.3: Respondents' overall impression of MBA programme,
3. Section 7.4: Assessment of course content,
4. Section 7.5: Western theory vs. Chinese practice,
5. Section 7.6: Assessment of teaching methods, and
6. Section 7.7: Applicability of Western management knowledge in China.

Section 7.2-7.7 reflects both the structure and analysis of the questionnaire survey and the tree nodes in the Nvivo analysis of the focus groups.

7.2 Sample profile

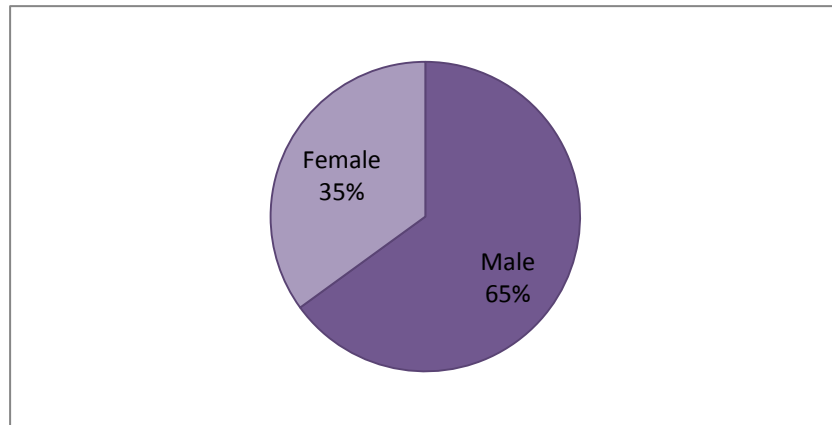
Demographic data of the research participants presented here will be used for further analysis in this chapter, where appropriate, especially for those t-tests based on quantitative data.

A total of 145 questionnaires were returned at the end of the survey, from two universities in China offering MBA programmes (see Chapter 6, section 6.6.1.3). As a result of the screening process, 131 analysable questionnaires were obtained. These 131 MBA students are defined as the entry participants in this research ($N = 131$).

Gender profile

Gender data for the responding participants indicates 85 participants were male (65%) and 46 were female (35%), as shown in Figure 7.1 below.

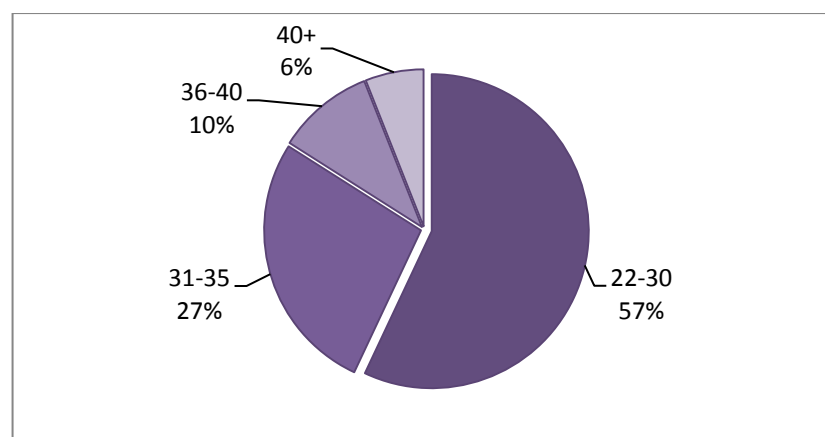
Figure 7.1 Gender



Age profile

More than 80% of the respondents were under the age of 35, as indicated in Figure 7.2, over half of all the respondents were between the age of 22-30 (57%), and 16% of all the respondents were over 35 years old, with only 8 students over the age of 40. This is very much in line with the trends of MBA education around the world, i.e. the average age of MBA students is becoming younger and younger, and accordingly the candidates possess fewer years of work and/or management experience.

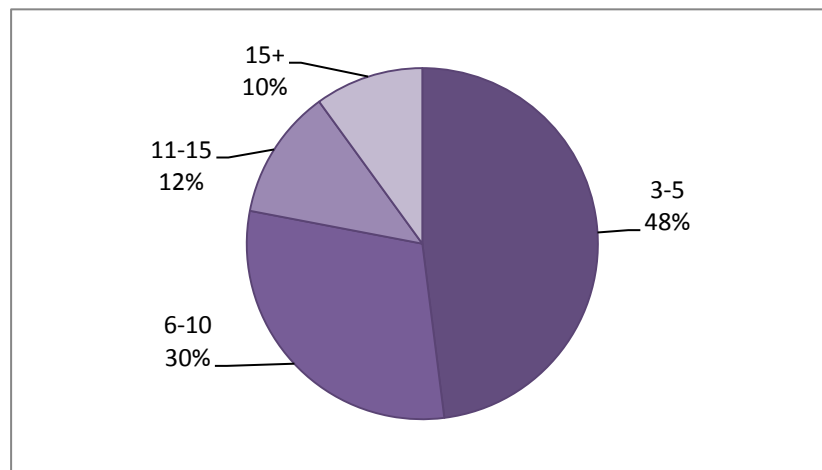
Figure 7.2 Age profile



Years of work experience

With regard to years of work experience, as one of the criteria of admission to a MBA programme in China, a minimum of 3 years of work experience is normally required. As shown in Figure 7.3, almost half of the respondents had less than 5 years' work experience (48%, $n = 63$) while 30 % ($n = 39$) of the respondents had between 6-10 years' work experience. Less than one fourth of the MBA students participated in the survey had more than 10 years' work experience, and the proportion of people who had more than 15 years work experience comprises only 10% ($n = 13$) of the whole sample.

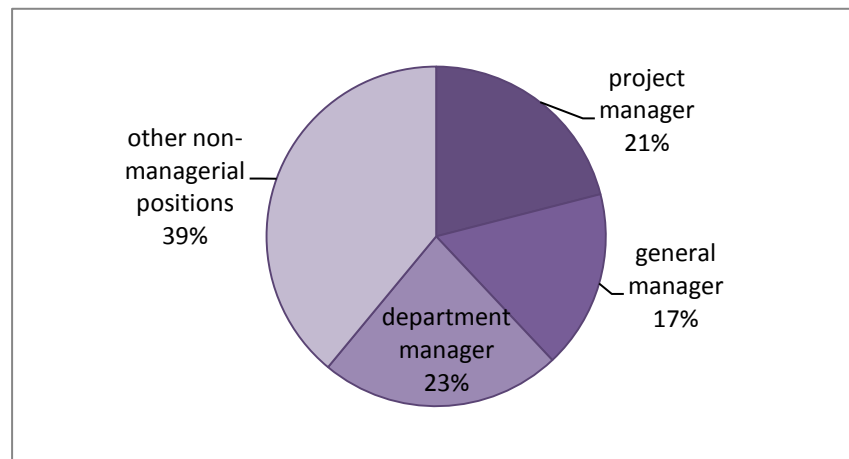
Figure 7.3 Years of work experience



Previous job position

Although previous work experience in a managerial position is one of the essential application requirements for most of the MBA programmes, only around 60% of the respondents were or had previously been in a managerial position, as shown in Figure 7.4. More specifically, 23% ($n = 30$) respondents were in the position of department manager, 21% ($n = 22$) respondents were in the position of general manager and 21% ($n = 28$) respondents were project managers. On the other hand, around 40% ($n = 51$) of all the participated MBA students were in a non-managerial position. This lack of managerial experience is inevitably related to the younger age structure of MBA students as stated above.

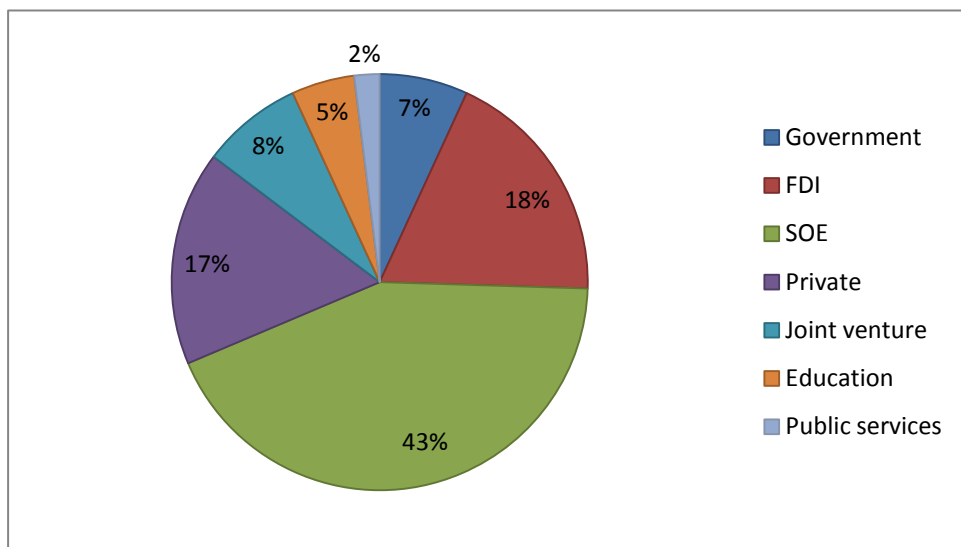
Figure 7.4 Job position



Previous employer type

As to their industrial background, the participating MBA students were from various industries and had worked or were still working for employers from both public and private sectors. As a result of China's economic reform in the last two decades, different types of enterprises have been developing enormously: for instance, foreign direct investments (FDIs), joint ventures (JVs), and other types of private companies. Among all the respondents, 19% ($n = 25$) claimed that they had worked or been working for FDI companies, while around the same number of people (17%, $n = 22$) came from a background of working in private companies.

Figure 7.5 Employer types



Only 8% ($n = 10$) of the participants had worked or were still working for a joint venture. On the other hand, 14% ($n = 17$) of participating MBA students had worked or were working for the government, in education sector and other public services in total.

However, as indicated in Figure 7.5, nearly half of the participants were or had previously been employed by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which had been the major type of economic organisations in China for nearly half a century. Most of the SOEs had been managed based on the former USSR's economic and management model until the economic reforms took place at the end of the 1970s (see Chapter 3, section 3.5). Various SOEs had been the dream choice for university graduates before the economic reforms. Although a considerable number of SOEs have undergone some major reforms in terms of financial and organisational structures and downsizing, large SOEs still remain as the leaders in crucial industries in China, such as petroleum, transportation, energy utilities, and other industrial products. Therefore, such SOEs are still opted for as ideal employers by the majority of both university undergraduates and postgraduates for the job stability, vast opportunities and good level of salaries that they provide.

Industrial sectors

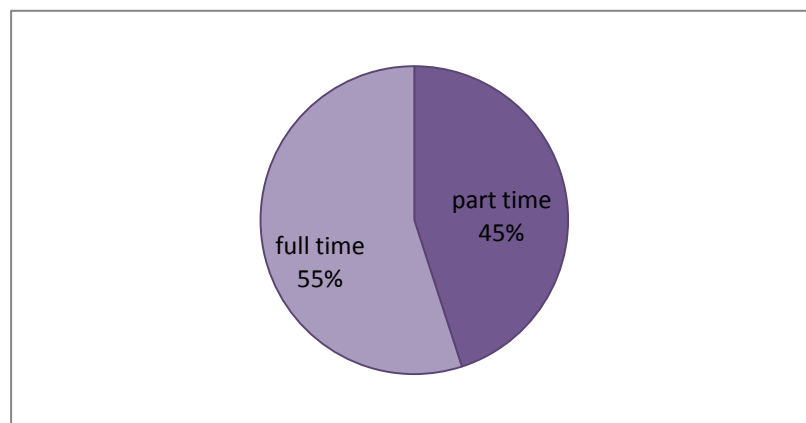
Nearly 20% ($n=24$) of the respondents were from the petroleum sector, while 10% ($n=14$) of the respondents were from the consulting sector. Following these two largest sectors in this survey, commercial banking and computer/electronics were another two sectors stated by 7% ($n=9$) of respondents for each. Details of respondents' background in terms of industrial sectors are shown in Table 7.1 below, representing a fairly wide spread of professions.

Table 7.1 Industrial Sectors

| Industrial Sectors | Frequency | Percentage% | Cumulative Percentage% |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| commercial banking | 9 | 7 | 7 |
| computer/electronics | 9 | 7 | 14 |
| Automotive | 3 | 2 | 16 |
| investment banking | 2 | 2 | 18 |
| Aerospace | 5 | 4 | 21 |
| Construction | 8 | 6 | 27 |
| transportation | 5 | 4 | 31 |
| industrial products | 5 | 4 | 35 |
| food/beverage/tobacco | 7 | 5 | 40 |
| Consulting | 14 | 11 | 51 |
| household products | 2 | 2 | 53 |
| financial services | 1 | 1 | 53 |
| Petroleum | 24 | 18 | 72 |
| Retail | 3 | 2 | 74 |
| Chemical | 2 | 2 | 76 |
| Insurance | 2 | 2 | 77 |
| non-for-profits | 6 | 5 | 82 |
| Government | 7 | 5 | 87 |
| communication | 4 | 3 | 90 |
| Media | 3 | 2 | 92 |
| international trade | 2 | 2 | 94 |
| Utilities | 5 | 4 | 98 |
| pharmaceutical | 3 | 2 | 100 |
| Total | 131 | 100 | 100 |

Study mode

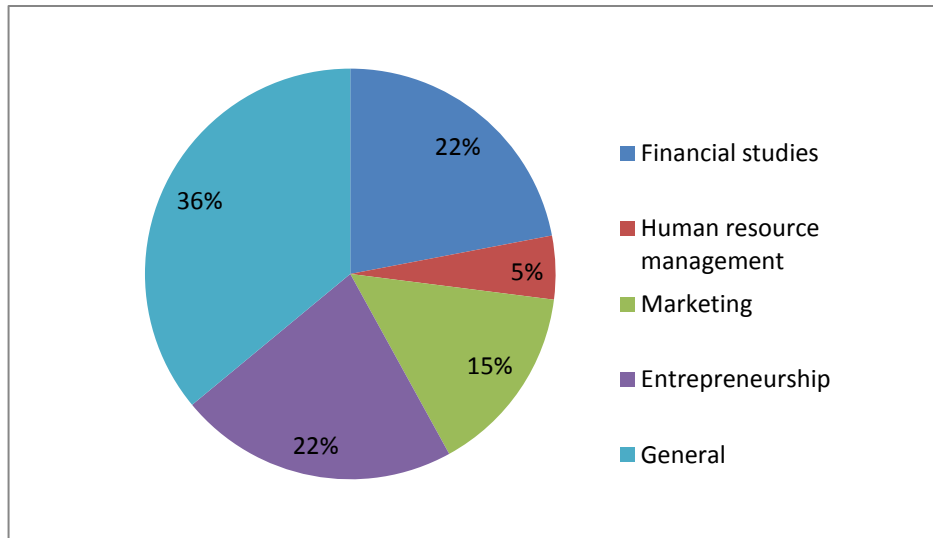
Of all those 131 MBA students, 55% were doing their MBA course on a full-time basis while the other 45% were part-time MBA students, as shown in Figure 7.6.

Figure 7.6 Course type

Course speciality

Although only one type of MBA degree is awarded to the graduates, there are different directions or speciality focuses of the course, which can be chosen at the beginning of the programme.

Figure 7.7 Course speciality

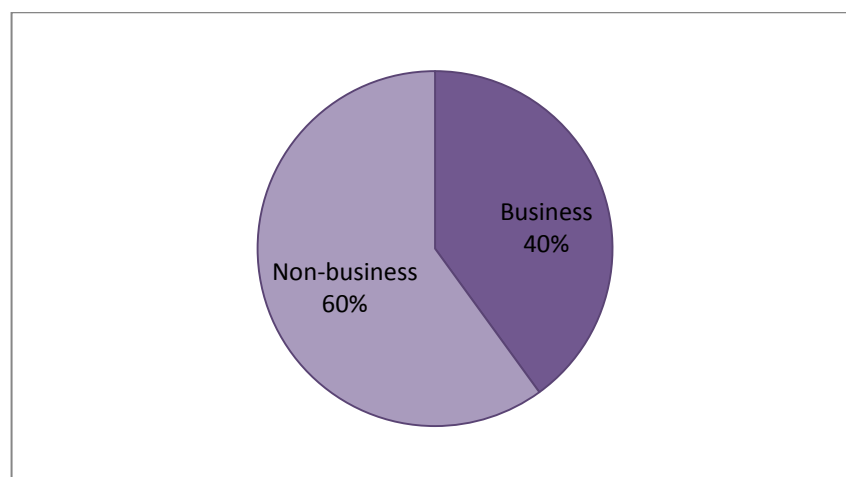


As shown in Figure 7.7, nearly 40% of the MBA students chose not to do their course in any special direction, i.e. general MBA (36%, $n = 47$). There were the same number of people choosing financial studies and entrepreneurship as their course speciality (22%, $n = 29$). The majority of the remaining students chose marketing as their speciality (15%, $n = 20$), while only 6 (5%) chose human resource management. This more or less indicates the current trends of career selection, i.e. people's preferences of their future career. Besides those who chose to do general MBA, most others opted to focus on either financial studies or entrepreneurship. This well explains the fast development of China's financial industry as a result of the opening-up policy after joining the WTO and the popular trend of starting up new businesses.

First degree subjects

Previous education is recognised as an important criteria in admission of MBA education, although applicants are usually accepted when they have minimum 3 years of relevant managerial work experience, it is still desirable that the candidates have their first degree in business and/or management studies. However, according to Figure 7.8, less than half of the respondents had their first degree in business studies, while 60% of the respondents had their first degree in a non-business subject.

Figure 7.8 First degree subjects



To conclude, more than half of the MBA students participating in this research were under the age of 30. Nearly half of the students had less than 5 years' work experience, and 40% had no managerial work experience. Also, more than half of the participants had their first degrees in non-business related subjects, and nearly 40% were doing their MBA in general without any special business direction. The next section will begin the analysis with an overview of students' overall impression about their MBA programme. Quantitative and qualitative data will be integrated in all the following analysis and discussions.

7.3 Respondents' overall impression of MBA programme

In order to find out how appropriate and effective the transfer of Western business and management knowledge to China via MBA education is, three major areas were considered:

1. course content,
2. teaching methods and
3. applicability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context.

Before going into detailed analysis, an overview of students' overall impression of their MBA programme is to be given in this section so as to provide a broad picture as the beginning of the analysis.

In the questionnaire survey the evaluation of the MBA programme from an overall perspective is measured by participants' answers to six questions. These questions are constructed based on Easterby-Smith's (1994) framework of outcomes from training and development. 'Outcomes' of an academic programme are particularly difficult to measure compared to the other aspects of the evaluation, such as context and teaching methods in the process.

Given the complexity of measuring the outcomes of a MBA programme, Easterby-Smith's framework comprises two main aspects: learning and development. Learning is further sub-divided into knowledge and skills. Also, learning may be viewed in either quantitative or qualitative terms. 'Quantitative' indicates the actual gain or addition of

more knowledge or skills, while the term 'qualitative' means a matter of seeing and feeling things differently. As the other main aspect of the outcome, 'development' refers to self-enhancement in terms of any aspect of a person's state of being - most importantly, the ability to learn from experience.

Each two of the six questions in this section are assigned to measure one aspect of the outcome of the MBA programme, namely learning in terms of knowledge, learning in terms of skills, and of personal development. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative terms were both considered in constructing these variables. The first two variables measure how the respondents rate their learning outcomes in terms of knowledge. The following two variables are assigned to measuring learning outcomes in skills, and the last two variables measure the personal development from studying the course. All of these six variables are measured by a 5-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very important contribution*) in terms of how much the course had contributed in a certain aspect of the learning and development outcomes.

The following analysis comprises quantitative data drawn from the above-mentioned six questions in the questionnaire survey; and also quotations from focus group transcript that have been categorised under Nvivo tree node 'Overall impression', where appropriate.

Overall, the statistics in Table 7.2 shows that respondents rated most of the variables at a score above 3 on average, with only one variable getting a score below that (2.92), which was for building a professional network. This also has the highest standard deviation among all these six variables, which indicates that students' opinions towards

this measure are more diverse than they are towards the others.

Table 7.2 Average scores for evaluation of the learning and development outcomes

| | Knowledge learning | | Skills learning | | Personal development | |
|------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| | Increase knowledge | enhance insight | teamwork development | competence development | professional network | ability to learn and judge |
| Mean | 3.37 | 3.44 | 3.31 | 3.14 | 2.92 | 3.44 |
| SD. | .788 | .735 | .812 | .752 | .997 | .724 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very important contribution*)

7.3.1 Knowledge and skills learning outcomes

Participating students were asked to rate how much the course had contributed to increasing their knowledge in business-related areas. This is an important aspect of the learning outcomes of an academic programme, and is measured as a quantitative gain of the learning process. As a result of the survey, most of the respondents obtained a higher than average score, indicating that the majority of the participants had positive impressions about how the course had contributed to increasing their knowledge.

Among these six variables, participants rated two aspects of their learning and development outcomes at the highest average score of 3.44, one of which indicates that the MBA programme contributed the most to enhancing students' insight and comprehension of the business world. The second highest average score (3.37) suggests that participants were also positive about the extent to which the MBA programme helped to increase their professional knowledge. For the two aspects of the skills learning outcomes, better than average ratings were obtained as well, showing that participants were fairly convinced by the course's contribution to developing their teamwork skills and the other competences for their career development.

As one of the students remarked in the focus group discussions, the biggest achievement of doing the MBA course was '*comprehensive understanding*' of business and management knowledge and theories, which was considered as one of the most important learning outcomes by the other students as well. This attests the statistical findings that students were positive on their learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills.

Different impression from people with different work experience

It is also not surprising that significant difference in scores of the course's contribution to enhancing students' insight and comprehension of the business world was found between students who were or had previously been in a managerial position and those who were not ($t(129) = -2.33, p = .021$), as shown in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 Independent samples t-tests —enhance insight

| | Managerial/Non-managerial position | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|------|------|----------------|------|------|-------|------|----------|
| | Managerial | | | Non-managerial | | | t | Sig. | Mean dif |
| | Count | Mean | SD | Count | Mean | SD | | | |
| enhance insight | 80 | 3.33 | .689 | 51 | 3.63 | .774 | -2.33 | .021 | -.302 |

Generally speaking, people who are in a higher position of the organisation's hierarchy usually have more access to various kinds of business information. As a result, they had already had more understanding about the business world than did those students who had less managerial experience. Therefore, it is reasonable that students who were not or had not been in a managerial position found the course more helpful in enhancing their insight and comprehension of the business world.

In this case, to some extent younger students found the course more useful in enhancing their business and management insights than did older students. With the current trend for younger MBAs in China and also in the West, these young students see the MBA education as an opportunity to get on the ladder of management roles for their future career development rather than a way to polish their management skills, which they are supposed to have already gained from their previous work experience before enrolling on the course. Those students who participated in this research were well aware of this trend. As one of them said:

'I think it is a fact that the average age of MBA students is getting younger and younger, even if we have gained some work experience to some extent, but I think it is just superficial knowledge rather than comprehensive knowledge, since we are still too young to extract much knowledge from our work experience'.

In this case, it seems that MBA programmes were doing fine at enhancing insights and comprehension of the business world, especially for those young students who were eager to learn more to make up for their lack of work experience and systematic knowledge for the purpose of embarking on a better career in the business world.

On the other hand, participating students also expressed positive views towards their advantage of being young, mainly due to the changes that have taken place as a result of China's economic reform:

'The traditional SOEs have changed a lot especially after some of them went public on the American stock market. Management has changed significantly. The

old ways have been abandoned gradually’.

Here, ‘the old ways’ were explained by another student when he talked about what the age-position relation was like before the economic reform:

‘In the past, what you got was based on your age and how long you had been in that position, which means, you wouldn’t get paid more even though you were doing much better than the others’.

Apparently, the more performance-based promotion system is very much welcomed and praised by these young MBA students, because:

‘It’s getting better as the age structure of managers and directors is getting younger and younger, they are willing to accept new ideas from the West, and usually they will make the change happen fast’.

Actually, the change towards a more performance-based promotion system is indeed one of the reasons why MBA programmes have become so popular in China in the recent decade, since it is believed that a higher education degree and better professional knowledge will definitely make a positive change to one’s career development. Students are hoping to obtain more comprehensive business and management knowledge and skills by doing the MBA courses, of which the learning outcome seems quite convincing from this research from an overall perspective.

7.3.2 Self development outcomes

As one of the variables obtaining the highest average score of 3.44 (see Table 7.2), the MBA course's contribution to developing students' ability to learn from experience and make judgments as independent learners was also highly rated by participants.

Different impression from full-time and part-time students

As found by an independent t-test, there was a significant difference in scores of the course's contribution to developing students' ability to learn from experience and make judgments between students who were doing a part-time MBA and those who were doing the course on full-time, $t(129) = 2.30, p = .023$, as shown in Table 7.4 below.

Table 7.4 Independent samples t-tests—ability to learn and judge

| | Full-time/Part-time course | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------|------|-----------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | Full-time | | | Part-time | | | t | Sig. | Mean dif |
| | Count | Mean | SD | Count | Mean | SD | | | |
| ability to learn and judge | 72 | 3.31 | .685 | 59 | 3.59 | .746 | 2.30 | .023 | .288 |

In other words, part-time MBA students rated this aspect of their learning and development outcomes significantly higher than did full-time MBA students. This may indicate that students who kept on working while studying found the course more effective in developing their ability to learn from experience and making judgments. On the other hand, it may also suggest that it is more practical for part-time students to apply what they had learnt from the MBA course to practical work, which therefore made them better realize how effectively the course had contributed in developing certain kinds of knowledge and skills.

Low rating on network developing

As another aspect of self development outcomes, the MBA programme's contribution in developing students' professional network was rated with the lowest average score of 2.92, and also with the highest standard deviation among these six variables, indicating students' diverse opinions. The figures in Table 7.5 show that there were a significantly larger number of respondents who rated the course contribution to developing their professional network as '*not at all*' compared to the other aspects in this section. 11% ($n = 14$) of participants gave the lowest rating, which well explains the relatively high standard deviation found with this variable.

Table 7.5 How participants rated their learning and development outcomes

| | increase knowledge | | Enhance insight | | teamwork development | | competence development | | professional network | | ability to learn and judge | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------|-----------------|------|----------------------|------|------------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------------|------|
| not at all | 4 | 3% | 0 | 0% | 3 | 2% | 3 | 2% | 14 | 11% | 0 | 0% |
| little contribution | 7 | 5% | 9 | 7% | 16 | 12% | 18 | 14% | 24 | 18% | 14 | 11% |
| moderate contribution | 62 | 47% | 65 | 50% | 54 | 41% | 70 | 53% | 55 | 42% | 50 | 38% |
| important contribution | 52 | 40% | 47 | 36% | 54 | 41% | 38 | 29% | 34 | 26% | 63 | 48% |
| very important contribution | 6 | 5% | 10 | 8% | 4 | 3% | 2 | 2% | 4 | 3% | 4 | 3% |
| Total | 131 | 100% | 131 | 100% | 131 | 100% | 131 | 100% | 131 | 100% | 131 | 100% |

The reason why students rated building a professional network as the least satisfying outcome of the MBA course was explained by students at the focus group meeting. It was a negative issue for most of the participating students that lack of communication hindered network building while taking their MBA education:

'It is true that our fellow students talk very little about their own experience during the whole programme. There is definitely not enough communication. Some of us even don't know what others have been doing for a living'.

The fact that students were not engaged with each other, or their reluctance to participate, exemplified an instrumental approach to learning or surface learning (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.1). More specifically, instrumental learning is defined by Lawton and Gordon (1993: p.104) as learning ‘not for its own sake but to achieve some other goal’. Hence in this case, MBA students’ primary reasons for doing the course were extrinsic, i.e. better job, higher salary and/or promotion, rather than intrinsic, which is an interest in studying the subject *per se*.

Meanwhile, with regard of building relationships with companies, students also complained that:

‘We still don’t have a good level of co-operation with industry, and we still lack communication with companies, which are actually potential employers of our graduates’.

Hence, it is clear that lack of communication was considered the major obstacle in developing professional networks on the MBA course, either with fellow students or with contacts in the industry.

Concern of quality of the programme

Besides affirming the positive contribution of the programme, students also expressed their concerns about the overall quality of MBA programmes in China, given the very profit-driven environment for the education market. As one of them said:

‘Most business schools are thinking much more about how to generate more

profit than how to improve teaching quality. There is not much difference between the current MBA programmes and a normal Master's programme in business and management fields. Actually there haven't been many changes that have taken place in the past few years'.

Moreover, all of the participating students were unhappy about people's common misperceptions about the credibility of the MBA degree and the hard work they had been putting in getting such a degree:

'...people even think you can get an MBA degree as long as you can afford the tuition fees'.

Overall, students' general impression of their MBA programme was positive in terms of developing their knowledge, skills and personal attributes, except the concern over lack of communication in developing professional networks. The next section will be focusing on students' evaluation of their course content.

7.4 Assessment of course content

Course content is considered an important part of the input process of any academic programme (Esterby-Smith, 1994). It is particularly important to MBA programmes because students intend not only to increase their business-related knowledge but also to improve their competences and practical skills, which in turn makes it crucial for MBA programmes to embrace both the academic and practical sides of the business

world. In this regard, the first sub-section will discuss students' opinions about the course content in terms of the balance between theory and practice; the second sub-section will explore more details with regard to students' appraisal of the effectiveness of their MBA course in developing their knowledge and skills in twelve academic fields which are commonly chosen by most of the MBA programmes around the world; then, as part of the course content, teaching materials and language will be examined in the last part of this section.

Here again, the following analysis comprises quantitative data drawn from the 'About the course content' section in the questionnaire survey and also qualitative data in the form of quotations from the focus group analysis that are under tree node of 'Course content' in Nvivo.

7.4.1 Balance between theory and practice

Participants were asked to rate two statements about the course content based on how much they agreed with the statement. As listed in Table 7.6, the statement that the MBA course content was too theoretical received greater unanimity from participants, while the statement that the course content was relevant to their organisational practice received less unanimity.

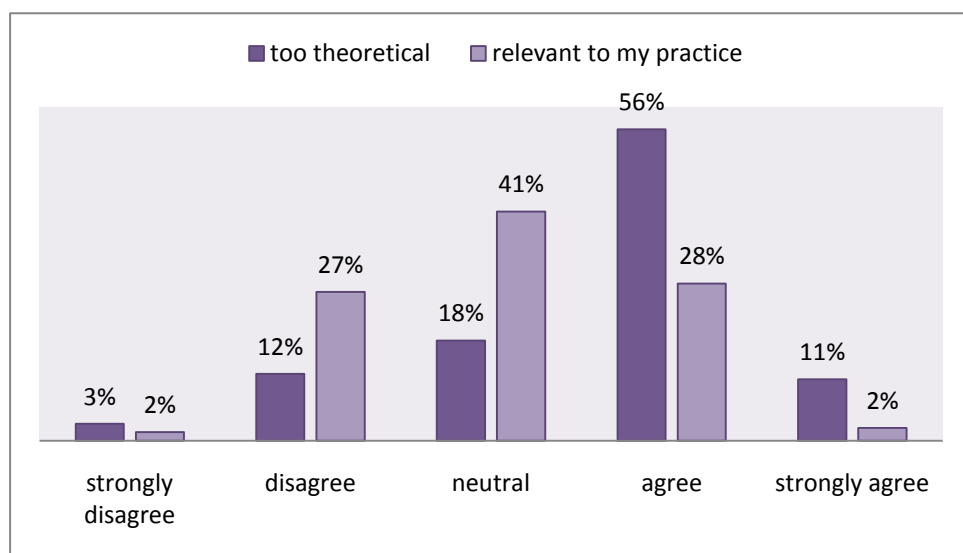
Table 7.6 Measurement on four statements about the course content

| | Mean | SD |
|--|------|-------|
| The MBA course content is too theoretical | 3.59 | 0.944 |
| The course content is relevant to my organisational practice | 3.03 | 0.841 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

According to the differences between data distributions for these two variables shown in Figure 7.9, more than half of the participants thought that the course content was too theoretical, with only a combined 15% of them disagreeing. However, nearly half of the participants tended to be neutral when asked about the relevance of the course content to their own practices, and as for the rest, nearly the same number of people either agreed or disagreed on that issue.

Figure 7.9 Participants' opinion towards the course's theory-practice balance



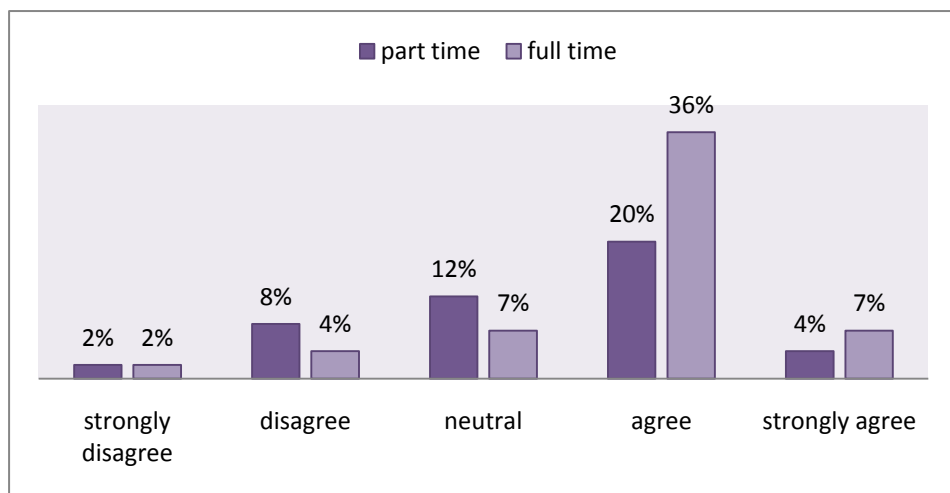
Different opinion from full-time and part-time students

Furthermore, some significant differences emerged when independent sample t-tests were conducted. As shown in Table 7.7, full-time students gave a significantly higher rating than did part-time students on the statement that the MBA course content is too theoretical, $t(129) = 2.56, p = .012$.

Table 7.7 T-tests for full time/part time students

| Course type | Full time | | | Part time | | | | | |
|---|-----------|------|------|-----------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | t | Sig | Mean dif |
| The MBA course content is too theoretical | 72 | 3.78 | .859 | 59 | 3.36 | .996 | 2.56 | .012 | .422 |

This contrast is also clear from Figure 7.10: the majority of full-time students agreed with the statement that the MBA course was too theoretical, while part-time students' views upon this were more diverse.

Figure 7.10 Full time/part time students' opinions – if the course content is too theoretical

Concerns on the course content being too theoretical

Similar to the above findings from the survey, the same concern was found from the focus group discussions as well. Most of the participants considered the course content was too theoretical and unconnected to real practice:

'I think currently the textbooks concentrate more on the theories. There are some cases, but still the point is textbook teaching...there are definitely differences between this kind of pure theory and practical implementation'.

Moreover, for the open question at the end of the survey, in which students were asked to write down comments to the course, more than half of the answers raised concerns that the course was not very related to practice, as for instance:

'The MBA course should pay more attention to practice, and the theories could be simplified';

'Some of the modules, e.g. Marketing, Information management system, are very little related to practice'

'It should be more practice-oriented with a future perspective'

'I hoped the course would be more-in-depth, with more cases and more practical contents'

In this regard, students suggested more practice-oriented modules, and also more efforts to be made on integrating theory and practice. As one of the comments said:

'It's important to integrate theory and practice. Each module should be up-to-date and innovative, and it should include how to implement certain theories in practice'.

It is clear that students believed it was up to the course provider, or the course *per se* to integrate practice with theory to a greater extent, rather than part of their own responsibilities to improve the theory-practice balance of their MBA course. Hence, it is not surprising that teachers' lack of practical experience became the focus of criticism:

'Many teachers don't have the relevant practical experience, which leads to a contradiction between their academic concepts and the practical needs of companies'.

'Most of the teachers are not qualified; we should have teachers with more practical experience'

This criticism of lack of practical relevance and teacher's lack of practical experience is very much in line with the existing critiques (Blass and Weight; 2005; Carnall, 1995; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002) of the stereotypical MBA courses, which have been discussed in the preceding literature review Chapter 2, section 2.4.

Accordingly, it was suggested by some students that more experienced teachers or guest lecturers *'with a higher level of knowledge and practical experience'* should be invited to give lectures, since thus *'it could be made possible to integrate practice in the real world*

with what the student learn from the course’.

However, while most of the comments were focused on whether the course content was too theoretical or not, very few comments were made about the extent to which the course was relevant to the participants’ own organisational practices. This more or less explains why nearly half of the participants tended to be neutral when asked about the relevance of the course content to their own practices (see Figure 7.9).

Different opinion from different age groups

Interestingly, as shown in Table 7.8, when asked if the course content was relevant to their own organisational practices, participants aged over 30 gave a significantly higher rating than did those aged 30 and under, $t(129) = 2.42, p = .017$. In other words, among those aged over 30, more students tended to agree that the course content is relevant to their own organizational practices, while more of the younger students tended to disagree.

Table 7.8 T-test for two age groups

| Age group | Age 30+ | | | Age 30 and under | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|---------|------|------|------------------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| The course content is relevant to my organisational practice | 56 | 3.23 | .809 | 75 | 2.88 | .838 | 2.42 | .017 | .352 |

To sum up, the MBA programme’s course content is generally considered too theoretical; more practice-oriented contents and teachers with more practical experience were therefore suggested. This finding leads to the conclusion that the MBA

programmes investigated in this research were more prone to fall in the category of ‘traditional model MBA’ (Carnall, 2995) or ‘normative MBA’ (Kleiman and Kass, 2007) as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.3.

Nevertheless, MBA courses worldwide by and large comprise very similar modules covering certain business- and management-related academic fields. The next sub-section will explore in more detail students’ evaluation of twelve such fields for their development of knowledge and skills.

7.4.2 Evaluation of 12 academic fields

In the questionnaire survey, students were asked to evaluate twelve academic fields in terms of their contribution to developing their knowledge and skills. The result is shown in Table 7.9 below.

Table 7.9 Evaluation of 12 academic fields for knowledge and skills development

| | Knowledge | | Skills | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD |
| Business communication | 3.44 | .887 | 3.36 | .842 |
| Management of information system(MIS) | 3.15 | .808 | 3.08 | .842 |
| Marketing management | 3.69 | .689 | 3.48 | .758 |
| Corporate strategy & planning | 3.67 | .673 | 3.40 | .782 |
| Finance/accounting | 3.85 | .692 | 3.56 | .746 |
| Human resource management (HRM) | 3.51 | .738 | 3.30 | .741 |
| Risk management and investment | 3.37 | .746 | 3.19 | .786 |
| Operation management | 3.53 | .758 | 3.37 | .788 |
| Project management | 3.40 | .762 | 3.18 | .802 |
| Quantitative analysis methods | 3.63 | .757 | 3.37 | .843 |
| Business law/policy | 3.27 | .765 | 2.96 | .817 |
| Economics | 3.08 | .755 | 3.08 | .755 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1(not at all) to 5(very much)

The course's contribution to increasing students' knowledge was generally rated higher than to developing students' relevant skills. Among these twelve popular module fields, finance/accounting scored the highest means in both knowledge ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .692$) and skills ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .746$) developments with relatively small standard deviations. Besides finance/accounting, another three categories of module were rated with fairly high average scores in developing students' knowledge: marketing management ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .689$), corporate strategy and planning ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .673$), and quantitative analysis methods ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .757$).

This result is no surprise, due to the fact that finance/accounting related modules are normally more quantitatively oriented and with less context-specific content. Therefore such modules, as expected, contribute more effectively to building up students' knowledge and skills in these specific areas, although they are always considered the most difficult modules partly due to the requirements of calculation and exercises. Undoubtedly, it does make students feel more confident when they are able to analyse the figures on a balance sheet or any other financial reports.

On the other hand, economics ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .755$) and business law/policy ($M = 2.96$, $SD = .817$) scored the lowest means in developing students' knowledge and skills respectively. Moreover, economics also received a fairly low average score in developing students' skills as well. It is possibly due to the fact that the contents of economic modules usually tend to focus more on macro-perspectives, and even with micro-economics students usually find it too abstract to relate to their daily work. It is unsurprising to see business law/policy obtaining the lowest average score in developing students' skills, since these modules usually present only a general introduction to the

rules and regulations of the business world, while rarely going into detail on the practical side, so it is reasonable that participants found it less effective in developing their relevant skills.

To further analyse how differently these modules were rated, independent samples t-tests were conducted between groups of categorical variables for all these twelve module fields. Significant differences were found between groups of seven categories of demographic variables for some of the module fields. Details of these differences will be illustrated in Table 7.10 to 7.12.

Different ratings from male and female students

Significant differences in scores between male and female were found within only one module field, which is management of information system (MIS). Moreover, for this module, male and female respondents rated differently for the module's contribution to developing their knowledge as well as relevant skills. As shown in Table 7.10, male students gave significant higher scores for their development of knowledge and skills from the MIS module than did the female students (knowledge: $t(129) = 2.79, p = .006$; skills: $t(129) = 2.36, p = .001$).

There might be a few reasons behind these differences, but it is undeniable that female students usually find IT-related modules less appealing than the other modules, and, according to the findings of a study on gender difference in computer science students, men do have more confidence in using computers or implementing IT-related activities than do women (Beyer, et al, 2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that male participants found MIS modules more effective in building up their knowledge and skills than did the

female participants.

Table 7.10 T-test for male and female

| Gender | Male | | | Female | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|------|------|------|--------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| management of information system (knowledge) | 85 | 3.29 | .753 | 46 | 2.89 | .849 | 2.79 | .006 | .403 |
| management of information system (skills) | 85 | 3.26 | .789 | 46 | 2.76 | .848 | 3.36 | .001 | .498 |

Different ratings from different age groups

In order to find out if there were any differences in scores between different age groups, participants were re-grouped into two clusters: aged 30 or under and aged over 30. The reason for doing this instead of using the original age profile is because over half of the respondents were between 22 to 30 years old, which left few people in the other categories; for instance, there were only 8 students over 40 years old. Therefore, a regrouping helped to balance the size of each group for the aim of analysing age differences in evaluating the module outcomes.

Table 7.11 T-tests for two age groups

| Age group | Age 30+ | | | Age 30 and under | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|---------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------------------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| human resource management (knowledge) | 56 | 3.66 | .640 | 75 | 3.40 | .788 | 2.03 | .045 | .261 |
| human resource management (skills) | 56 | 3.46 | .660 | 75 | 3.17 | .778 | 2.26 | .026 | .291 |
| operation management (knowledge) | 56 | 3.71 | .706 | 75 | 3.40 | .771 | 2.39 | .018 | .314 |
| operation management (skills) | 56 | 3.59 | .708 | 75 | 3.21 | .810 | 2.77 | .006 | .376 |
| project management (knowledge) | 56 | 3.63 | .648 | 75 | 3.24 | .803 | 2.94 | .004 | .385 |

Several significant differences emerged as illustrated in Table 7.11, among which two modules, human resource management (HRM) and operational management, were rated differently by respondents in different age groups in terms of both knowledge and skills development. According to the statistics, respondents aged over 30 gave higher scores for their knowledge and skills development from doing HRM modules than did those aged 30 or under (knowledge: $t(129) = 2.03, p = .017$; skills: $t(129) = 2.26, p = .026$). Similarly, for operational management, older respondents also rated both of their knowledge and skills development with higher scores than did the younger respondents (knowledge: $t(129) = 2.39, p = .018$; skills: $t(129) = 2.77, p = .006$). Besides, project management's contribution to developing students' knowledge ($t(129) = 2.94, p = .004$) was also rated differently by respondents in different age groups, with older respondents giving higher scores than did younger respondents.

It's interesting that no matter whether the knowledge or skills aspect of these modules was being evaluated, older respondents tended to give higher scores than did younger respondent. One possible reason for this result is that older students, who presumably had more work experience, were more aware of the usefulness of these modules, which contain more of the 'managerial science'; hence they tended to gain greater benefit from learning them.

Different rating between full-time and part-time students

Turning to the quantitative methods module, significant differences in scores for full-time and part-time students were found with both knowledge and skills gains. As shown in Table 7.12, participants who were doing the course on a full-time basis awarded higher scores to their knowledge and skills development from this module than did

those who were doing the course on a part-time basis (knowledge: $t(129) = 2.46, p = .015$; skills: $t(129) = 2.92, p = .004$).

Table 7.12 T-tests for full time/part time students

| Course type | Full time | | | Part time | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------|------|-----------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| quantitative methods (knowledge) | 72 | 3.78 | .755 | 59 | 3.46 | .727 | 2.46 | .015 | .320 |
| quantitative methods (skills) | 72 | 3.56 | .837 | 59 | 3.14 | .798 | 2.92 | .004 | .420 |

One of the reasons of these differences is probably that, compared to part-time students, full-time students had more time and opportunity to practice quantitative data analysis methods, possibly with certain computer-assisted analysis software (for example SPSS), due to the convenience of living in on-campus dormitories and the easy access to library and computer labs. Therefore, it is reasonable that full-time students had gained more from such quantitative methods modules in terms of knowledge and skills development.

Different rating from people with different academic backgrounds

One significant difference was found in scores for respondents with a business or non-business first degree, which is listed in Table 7.13. According to the statistics, respondents without a business-related first degree found quantitative methods more effective in building up their knowledge than did those with a business first degree, $t(129) = 2.39, p = .018$.

Table 7.13 T-tests for respondents with a business or non-business first degree

| First degree | Non-business | | | Business | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|----------------------------------|--------------|------|------|----------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| quantitative methods (knowledge) | 79 | 3.76 | .772 | 52 | 3.44 | .698 | 2.39 | .018 | .317 |

The reason for this is probably that students with previous academic studies in business had already had some knowledge of business quantitative research methods since such modules are by and large covered in most of the business-related degree studies. Hence, other students, who had their first degrees in other academic studies, may find such modules more effective in building up their knowledge in analysing business cases in a quantitative way.

Different rating from people with different employment backgrounds

Which sector the respondents worked or had been working in, i.e. public or private sector, was also taken into account in order to see if there were any differences in scores for respondents in each group. Based on the demographic data shown in Figure 7.5, students have been regrouped by merging government, SOE, education and public services as the public sector, and FDI, private companies and joint ventures as the private sector.

T-tests results are shown in Table 7.14. The two biggest mean differences were found within knowledge and skills development of quantitative methods; in other words, respondents who worked or had been working in industry gave quantitative methods much higher scores in developing their knowledge and skills than did those who worked or had been working in the public sector (knowledge: $t(129) = 4.19, p = .000$;

skills: $t(129) = 3.28, p = .001$). For the other three modules (MIS; risk management and investment; and business law and policy), participants with industrial work experience also gave higher scores in knowledge development than did those with public sector work experience (MIS: $t(129) = 2.24, p = .027$; risk management and investment: $t(129) = 2.69, p = .008$; business law and policy: $t(129) = 2.12, p = .036$).

Table 7.14 T-tests for respondents from public and private sector

| Public service/industry | Private sector | | | Public sector | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|----------------|------|------|---------------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| management of information system (knowledge) | 57 | 3.33 | .852 | 74 | 3.01 | .749 | 2.24 | .027 | .320 |
| risk management and investment (knowledge) | 57 | 3.56 | .682 | 74 | 3.22 | .763 | 2.69 | .008 | .345 |
| quantitative methods (knowledge) | 57 | 3.93 | .704 | 74 | 3.41 | .720 | 4.19 | .000 | .524 |
| quantitative methods (skills) | 57 | 3.63 | .794 | 74 | 3.16 | .828 | 3.28 | .001 | .469 |
| business law and policy (knowledge) | 57 | 3.44 | .846 | 74 | 3.15 | .676 | 2.12 | .036 | .290 |

This result more or less reflects the fact that in China's public sector, traditional rule-by-man or relation-based management style is still the mainstream (see Chapter 5, section 5.5.1 and 5.5.2), and management is more reliable on experience rather than on explanatory models, because of the lack of adequate business data/information available to public. Therefore, the emphases on different aspects of management from these two different management styles predominating in the public and private sectors respectively have caused students to focus on different modules, and consequently affected students' knowledge and skills development from these different modules. In this case, students from the private sector found it more useful with those modules based more on existing rules (management of information system; business law and policy), and relying more on existing data (risk management and investment; quantitative methods).

7.4.3 Teaching material and language

As an important part of the MBA course content, teaching material, including textbooks and other materials such as case studies, will be discussed in this section to provide an overview of the extent to which Chinese MBA programmes rely on Western contents.

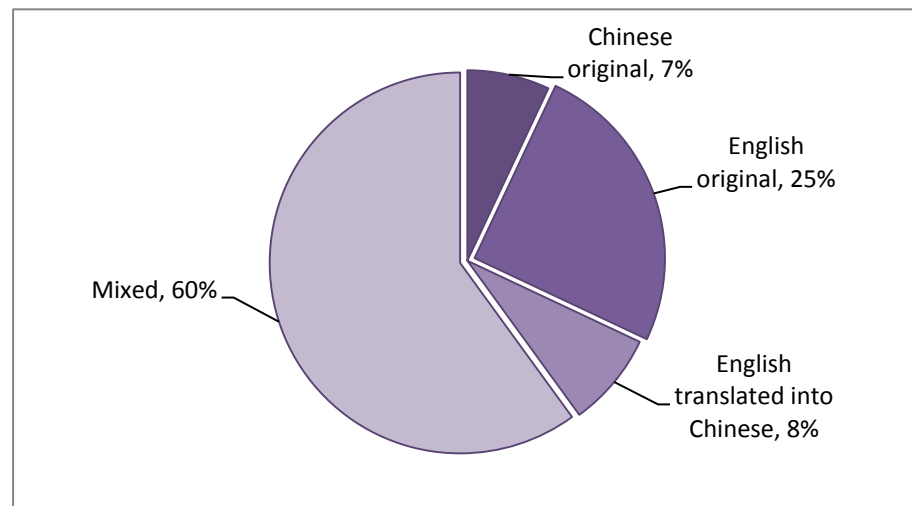
Since MBA education originated in the West, and has existed in China for no more than twenty years, much of the knowledge base for this education, i.e. textbooks and teaching materials, has been imported from the West. However, along with China's rapid economic development in the last two decades, management education institutions in China have been making efforts to gradually build up China's own management theory and teaching materials, e.g. case studies, in order to make the MBA education in China more localized and less dependent on the established knowledge directly transferred from the West. In this circumstance, what kinds of textbooks and teaching material are used depends on the purpose of individual modules and also on what types of material are available for the teaching purpose. Therefore, an individual student's impression of this area would be based on the modules they choose. For instance, students might have different impression on how much their course content is in English or includes Western cases, as discussed below in this section.

Languages of textbooks

As shown in Figure 7.11 below, more than half of the participants stated that the textbooks used in their course were a combination of different types, i.e. Chinese original, English original and Chinese translation from English. Besides, a quarter of the

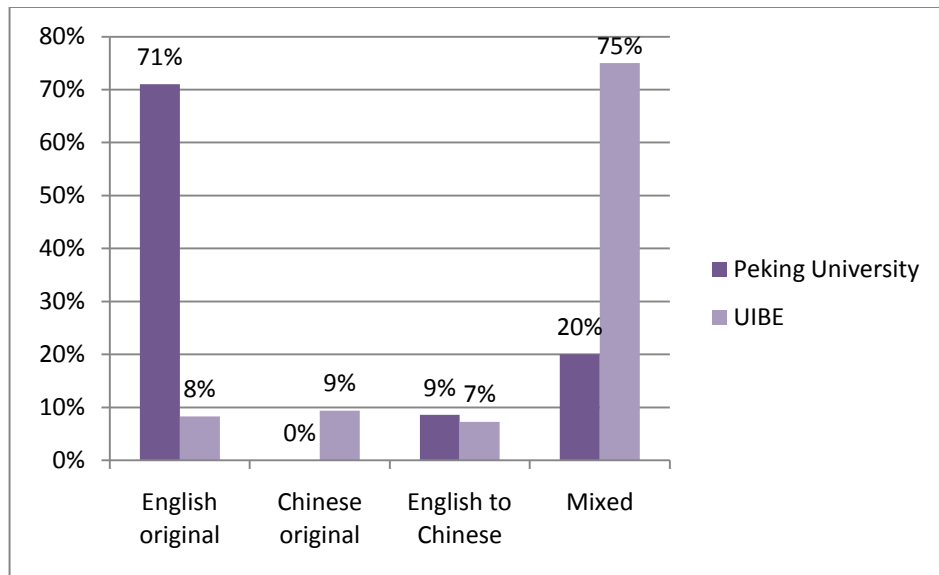
participants reckoned original English textbooks were the major source of knowledge in their course, while under 10% of participants stated that either original Chinese textbooks or those translated from English were the main published resources.

Figure 7.11 Percentage figures of different types of textbooks used in the course



However, by looking at the percentage figures from the two business schools that were surveyed, it is interesting to note that the MBA course at Peking University relied much more on English textbooks compared to the course at UIBE, where more Chinese original and a mixture of English and Chinese textbooks were adopted, as shown below in Figure 7.12.

Figure 7.12 Percentage figures of different types of textbooks used at two institutions



Whilst, it is to be expected that MBA courses would have been conducted in different ways at different institutions, they would at the same time be following the same set of curriculum guidance. Normally if there is a greater emphasis on being an 'International MBA', the course itself would contain more Western material and rely more on Western textbooks written in English. However, whilst the MBA course at Peking University tended to rely more on Western textbook, there is no significant difference found between participants at these two institutions, in terms of their perceptions of the course content, as discussed in the following sections.

It is clear that the MBA course still relied heavily on western textbooks, given the fact that only a small number of Chinese original textbooks were used in the course. In this case, language is an important factor since it still takes time for Chinese students to get used to English as the sole medium of instruction because of their lack of proficiency in English. Although English has being taught as the only second language in most of the

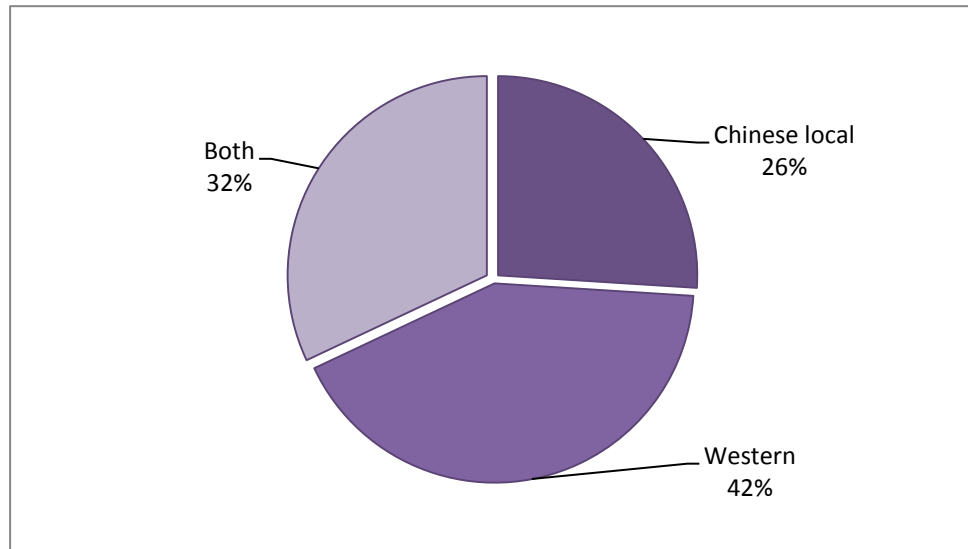
schools in China since the 1980s, Chinese is still preferred as a medium even by those students who have been successful in their English studies, owing to the fact that there is very little opportunity to use English in daily life. Hence, it is no surprise that when asked which version of textbooks they usually read, one of the students replied:

'Both of them, but most of the time, we prefer to stick to the Chinese version. Honestly, most of the Chinese students are still more comfortable with textbooks written in Chinese, since sometimes it is still not easy for us to understand some professional words in English. It may take some time to look up words in dictionary; we may not have enough time for this especially when the schedule is tight'.

Context of textbook and teaching material

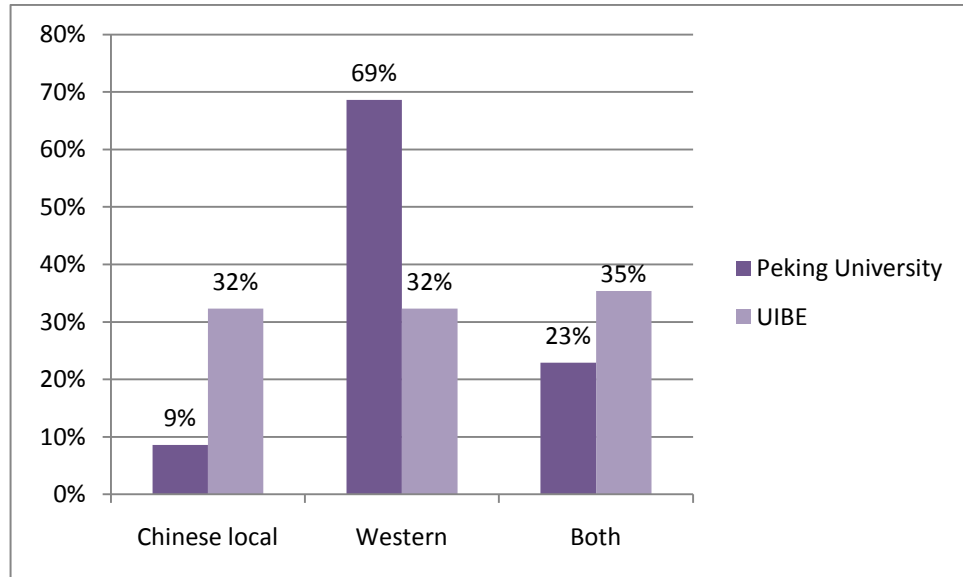
On the other hand, in terms of the context or background of textbooks and teaching materials, the research findings are summarised in Figure 7.13 below. 26% of the participants claimed that most of the teaching materials they came across used or involved local Chinese context; while still nearly half of the participants, or 42%, stated that Western teaching materials were used within most of their modules. The remaining 32% of participants declared that both Chinese- and Western- based teaching materials were adopted in the course.

Figure 7.13 Percentage figures of teaching materials based on different backgrounds



Similar to the findings in Figure 7.12, the result in Figure 7.14 again show a stronger reliance on Western teaching materials by the MBA course at Peking University, compared to UIBE, where more Chinese local materials or a more balanced proportion of Chinese and Western materials were used. However, there is still no significant difference found between participants at these two institutions, in terms of the discussions below regarding the effectiveness of these teaching materials.

Figure 7.14 Percentage figures of teaching materials used at two institutions



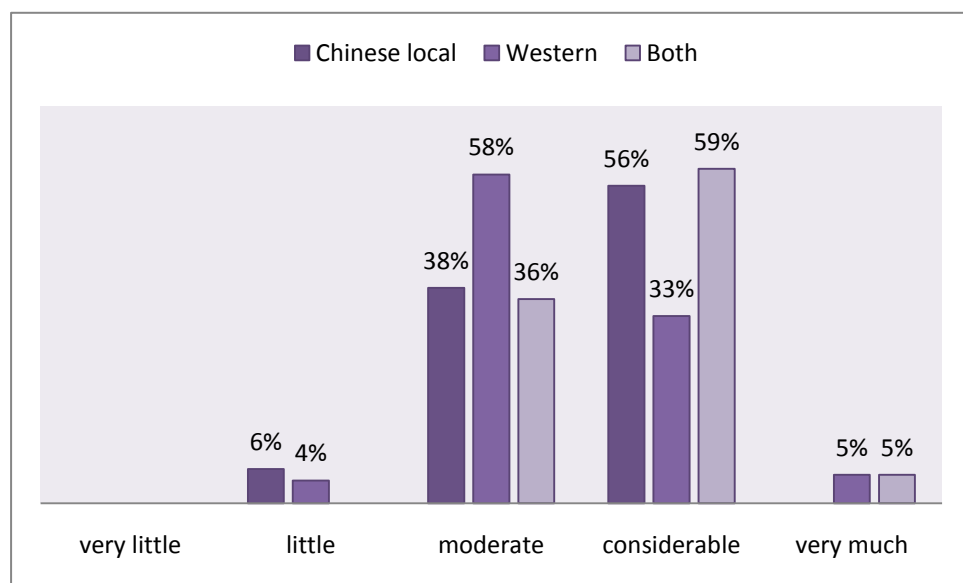
Effectiveness of teaching materials in developing students' knowledge and skills

Furthermore, participants were also asked to rate the extent to which these teaching materials had been effective in developing their management knowledge and relevant skills on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The result was analysed by categorising participants based on what teaching materials they chose in the last question.

As shown in Figure 7.15 below, a large number of participants who stated Western teaching materials were used in their course rated the effects of such materials as *moderate* in developing their knowledge and relevant skills. On the other hand, of those who declared the teaching materials used in their course were mainly based on local Chinese context, most rated the effectiveness of such teaching materials between *moderate* and *considerable*. In addition, the effectiveness of teaching materials including both Chinese and Western backgrounds was also given by the corresponding participants with a rating between *moderate* and *considerable*, with a significant larger

number of rating of *considerable* for the effectiveness of the teaching materials incorporating both. Therefore, it can be concluded that students evaluate local Chinese cases, either purely so or combined with Western cases, as more effective than purely Western cases in their studies. This finding actually echoes what critical management education advocates, i.e. MBA education should be context-specific and useful, relevant and practical to the real world (Grey and Mitev, 2004)

Figure 7.15 Effects of teaching materials based on different cultural background



Students were concerned that currently their MBA course is still heavily based on Western textbooks and teaching materials, and the MBA course content in China is too similar to those in the West. This also exemplifies students' concern about the practical implication of foreign cases in the Chinese context:

'Most of the modules are the same as abroad, we have the same compulsory modules, we use the same textbook. Some of them are English versions, the same as used in other countries; we are kind of on the same track as other foreign

universities’.

‘Some of the modules are using quite a lot of foreign cases; for example, there are a lot of Harvard cases in teaching Entrepreneurship, we have the same cases as they have..., like the teacher who teaches operational management talks about foreign cases all the time, just the same as is taught abroad’.

To sum up, Chinese MBA programmes are still heavily based on Western textbooks and teaching materials. However, students still prefer textbooks in Chinese rather than in English, since it is easier and quicker for them to understand and digest. On the other hand, although Chinese local cases are highly evaluated by students in terms of their relevance and effectiveness in learning, nearly half of the teaching materials are still based on a Western context and background. Regarding the extent to which MBA courses in China integrate both Western theories and Chinese practices, the next section will further explore students’ perceptions of this issue.

7.5 Western theories vs. Chinese practices

In both the questionnaire survey and focus group meetings, students were asked for their comments on the extent to which the course was based on Western theories and practices and how relevant the course content was to China’s own context and management practices. Analysis in this section comprises the quantitative data drawn from related questions in the questionnaire survey, and focus group quotations as qualitative data that are under the Nvivo tree node of ‘Western theory vs. Chinese practice’.

As shown in Table 7.15, the first statement scored a higher mean than the second one, which means more people agreed with the view that their MBA consists too much of Western theories, while people tended to be more neutral on rating the extent to which the course content is relevant to China's organisational management practices.

Table 7.15 Students' opinions towards course content

| | Mean | SD |
|--|------|-------|
| Course consists of too much western theories | 3.20 | 0.836 |
| Course content is related to China's organisational management practices | 3.06 | 0.848 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

Different opinion from people with different work experience

As the result of a t-test, significant difference was found between people who were in a managerial position and those who were not for the statement that Western theories dominate the course. Figures in Table 7.16 indicate that participants in managerial positions gave significant lower scores than did those in non-managerial positions, $t(129) = -2.37, p = .019$.

Table 7.16 T-test for respondents on managerial / non-managerial positions

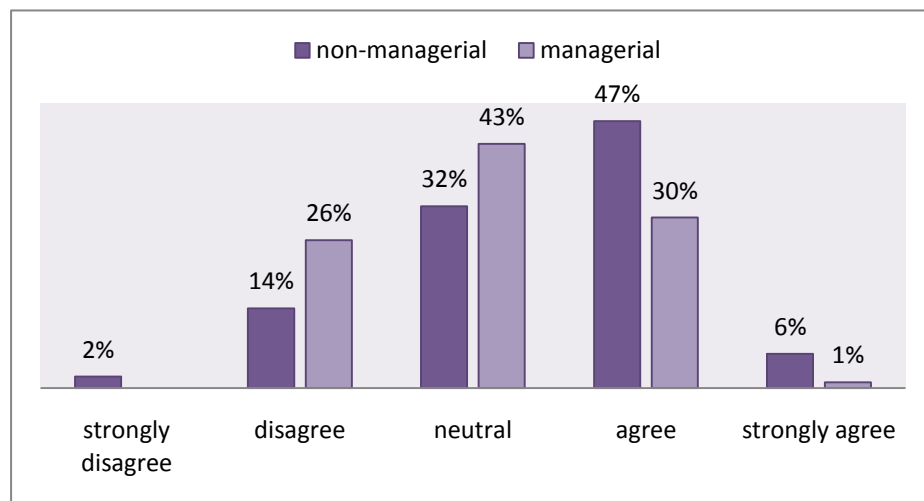
| Job position | Managerial | | | Non-managerial | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|------------|------|------|----------------|------|------|-------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| Course consists too much of Western theories | 80 | 3.06 | .785 | 51 | 3.41 | .876 | -2.37 | .019 | -.349 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

This result indicates that more participants who were in non-managerial positions

tended to agree that the course contained too much Western theory, which is in line with what Figure 7.16 shows, more than half of the people who had no managerial experience agreed that the course consisted too much Western theory. Besides, it is interesting that most of the participants who were in managerial positions were neutral about this statement, probably because Western theories are of more relevance, and have been applied more, on managerial level in practice.

Figure 7.16 Participants' opinions, based on their job positions, as to whether the course contains too much Western theory



Different opinion from full-time and part-time students

The analysis of t-tests also found significant differences between full-time and part-time students for their opinions as to whether the course content is related to China's organisational practices. As Table 7.17 shows, this received lower scores from full-time students than from part-time students, $t(129) = -2.18$, $p = .031$.

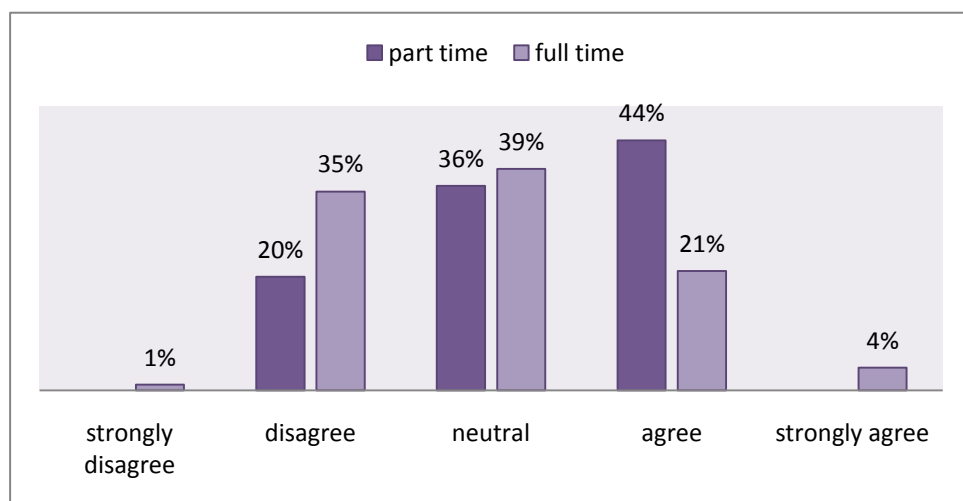
Table 7.17 T-tests for full-time/part-time students

| Course type | Full time | | | Part time | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|-----------|------|------|-----------|------|------|-------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| The course content is related to China's organisational management practices | 72 | 2.92 | .884 | 59 | 3.24 | .773 | -2.18 | .031 | -.321 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

The contrary is shown in Figure 7.17: most of the part-time students reckoned the course content was relevant to China's organisational practice, while most of the full-time students tended to be neutral or even disagree with the same statement. Apparently, part-time students could easily tell if the course content was related to their organisational practices, since they worked and studied at the same time, while it was understandable that full-time students hesitated to judge on the same issue.

Figure 7.17 Full time/part time students' opinions of the course's relevance to China's organisational practices



Participants' opinions towards Western and Chinese contexts

Table 7.18 below shows the result of students' opinions of the context of their course in terms of the relevance of Western theories and practices in general and the context of case studies specifically. The answers were measured by a five point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

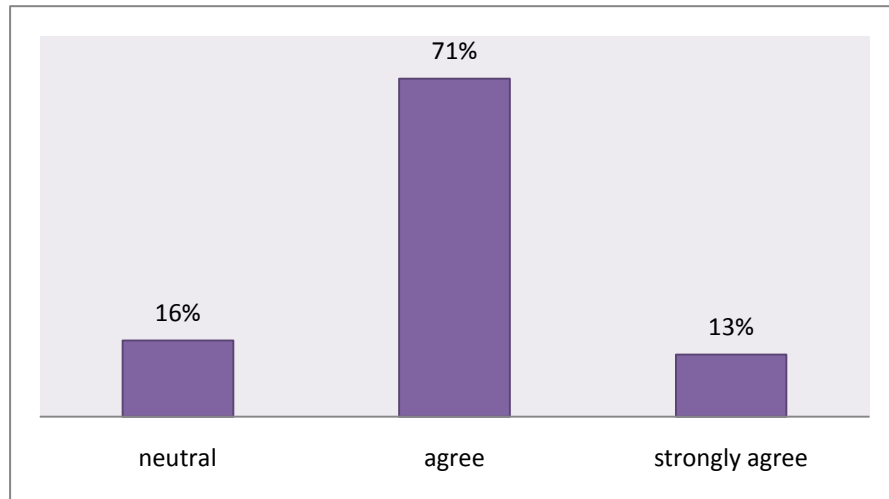
Table 7.18 Participants' opinions towards Western and Chinese context

| | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| It is helpful to learn theory and practical experience from the West. | 3.97 | .540 |
| It is difficult to understand the context of textbooks and other materials that are based on the West. | 3.20 | .935 |
| There should be more local and familiar case studies. | 3.98 | .794 |
| American case studies are irrelevant to the course. | 2.79 | .892 |
| European case studies are irrelevant. | 2.79 | .883 |
| Chinese case studies are very relevant. | 3.76 | .773 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

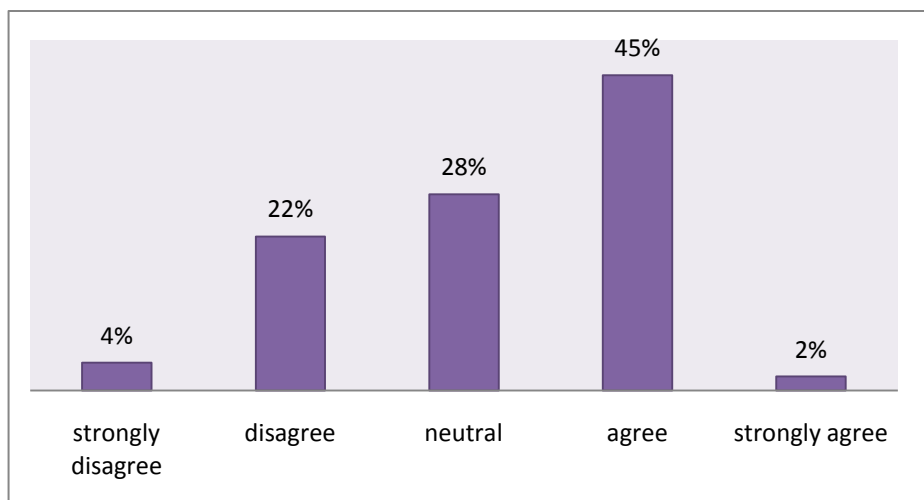
The results indicate positive attitudes from students towards the usefulness of learning Western theories and practices, with a relatively high mean of 3.97 for the first statement. It is also worth noting that none of the participants disagreed with this statement, which made it the only statement among these six to obtain no negative answers, as shown in Figure 7.18 below.

Figure 7.18 Percentage figures for participants' opinions towards if it is helpful to learn Western theories and practical experiences



However, as Figure 7.19 indicates, there were more participants who agreed with the statement that it was difficult to understand the context of textbooks and other teaching materials based on the West, with an average score of 3.20.

Figure 7.19 Percentage figures of participants' opinions towards if it is difficult to understand the western context



With regard of the different context and cultural background of the Western theories and cases, it is interesting that one student suggested that:

'Currently, most of the theories and cases in our MBA education are from the West; therefore more attention should be paid to English classes, in order to better understand the context of those theories and cases. I suggest more elective modules in English; we can even have some modules on Western literature, culture, etc'.

In this respect, instead of adding more Chinese context based cases to the course, a focus on Western cases and English teaching is adopted by some of the MBA programmes in China as an alternative approach. Normally, teaching is purely based on the English language and on Western cases for such an MBA programme (Zhou, 2002). These are usually joint programmes with a foreign business school, whose name is normally added to the title of the programme to show its international or Western background in particular.

Participants' feelings towards learning Western knowledge

Students were also asked to rate their feelings towards acquiring knowledge from the West. Based on the positive responses concerning the helpfulness of learning Western theories and practices, it was within expectation that students had fairly positive feelings towards acquiring such knowledge, as a relatively high average score in Table 7.19 indicates that students quite enjoyed the process.

Table 7.19 Participants' feelings about acquiring knowledge from the West

| | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| How do you feel about acquiring knowledge from the West? | 3.76 | .580 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*dislike it at all*) to 5 (*like it very much*)

Different feeling from different age groups

Interestingly, as found in the t-test, older students also tended to rate their feelings towards this type of learning with higher scores than did younger students, $t(129) = 2.94$, $p = .004$, as shown in Table 7.20. Although it is too early to come to any conclusion from this single result, it does more or less reflect the revival of Confucian and traditional Chinese cultural values in recent years and its positive influence upon younger generations in China (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.3), hence younger students may not have very strong feelings in favour of learning and applying western knowledge. On the other hand, it could also be owing to the fact that, for the younger generation, there are fewer differences between Chinese and Western organizational practices as a result of the greater Sino-Western co-operation and business connection, which means they are more exposed to, and more familiar with, Western values and therefore find it normal to study Western management theory and skills.

Table 7.20 T-test for two age groups

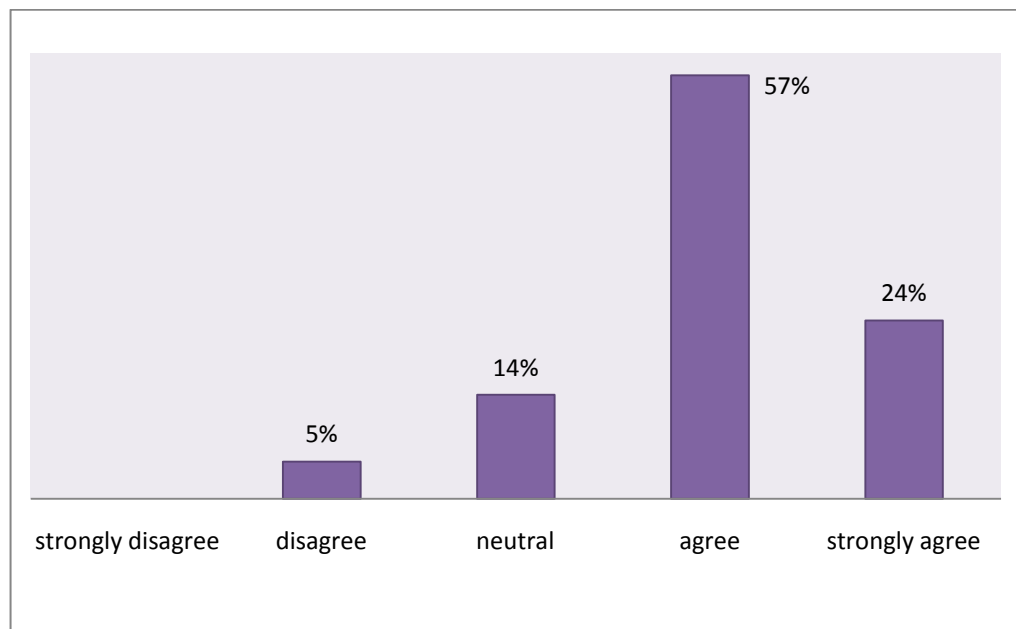
| Age group | Age 30+ | | | Age 30 and under | | | | | |
|--|---------|------|------|------------------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | t | Sig | Mean dif |
| How do you feel about acquiring knowledge from the West? | 56 | 3.93 | .535 | 75 | 3.64 | .584 | 2.94 | .004 | .289 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*dislike it at all*) to 5 (*like it very much*)

Participants' opinion towards learning local cases

While most of the participants reckoned that it was helpful to learn Western business and management theories and practices, on the other hand the majority (over 80%) of the MBA student agreed that there should be more local case studies, as Figure 7.20 shows.

Figure 7.20 Percentage figures of participants' opinions towards more local cases



More specifically, regarding the context of case studies, according to the figures shown in Table 7.20, an average score of 3.76 indicates that a large number of participants agreed that Chinese case studies were very relevant. Although statements about American and European case studies received lower average scores of 2.79, which actually means that participants thought these cases were relevant to their study rather than irrelevant because of the negative wording. Therefore, this finding confirms students' positive attitude towards learning Western context based theories and practices; meanwhile, it also emphasises the importance of making the course more

relevant to the Chinese context and accordingly the need for more local cases.

In line with the above findings from the survey, students expressed the same views in the open question at the end of the questionnaire and focus group discussions towards learning Western management knowledge and practices and the expectation of more cases and contents relevant to China's own context:

'With globalisation, western management theories are very useful and worth learning. However, it will better suit our study objectives if successful Chinese management theories or cases are added to the course. In this way, the applicability of what we learn from the course in practical work will be more effective'.

Speaking of Chinese management theories, the following quotation is indicative of the current situation:

'We have our unique theories as well, for instance, Sun Tzu's 'The Art of War'. It is even taught as a module in some programmes overseas, including MBA programmes. Although we have some knowledge about it, we still don't have enough time dedicated to learning traditional Chinese management ideologies'.

The same concern was shared by most of the participants and they also complained that there was not enough time and modules dedicated to traditional Chinese culture and literature.

The above finding has revealed a felt imbalance of the course content, i.e. not enough prominence has been given to Chinese business and management theories because of the privileging Western theories and management knowledge in Chinese MBA programmes. As a result, the course itself may have lost the relevance to China's own business context and deviated from its very purpose of preparing well-trained managers to manage Chinese organizations or organizations operating in China. In this regard, a balance between the two would arguably lead to improvement of students' learning outcome.

However, participants gave rather negative comments when asked for their opinion of the title 'Confucian MBA programme', which has been the object of a campaign by some business schools in China in order to promote their MBA programmes' emphasis on traditional Chinese ideologies:

'By calling themselves Confucian MBA programmes, what they can do is just to add another module about traditional culture'.

This scepticism or even cynicism towards business schools' marketing campaigns is not a sudden development, since business education has become a lucrative business in China along with its increasing prosperity in recent years. Regarding the same issue, another student asserted:

'Running a programme is like running a business; both of them share the purpose of profit. So it is not hard to explain why almost every business school is trying to play the Chinese culture card due to the recent revival of Confucianism'.

Despite students' doubts about simply adding a Confucianism module or any other Chinese traditional culture related subjects to the MBA curriculum, such as Sun Tzu's The Art of War⁸, participants are still positive that more Chinese local cases are needed to improve the relevance of MBA courses because

'A lot of policies are different in China from what they are in the West', and

'Things change too fast in China, including economic environment and organisations'.

It was also suggested that

'Successful and failed cases of applying Western management knowledge in China should be added';

'It is better to include those cases of successful Chinese companies (most of which have successfully combined Western management theories with their own situation), and their management philosophy, ideology, and organisational culture, etc'.

Therefore, as a Western product, MBA courses can only achieve the maximum effect in the Chinese context when the course brings in the most relevant Western theories and

⁸ The Art of War is a Chinese military treatise written by Sun Tzu in the 6th Century BC, it is one of the oldest and most successful books on military strategy. It has had a profound influence on Eastern military thinking and business tactics and beyond. There are many books applying Sun Tzu's thinking to 'office politics' and corporate strategy. It has also been the subject of various law books and legal articles on the trial process, including negotiation tactics and trial strategy. (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Art_of_War)

practices while draws out the best of Chinese indigenous management wisdoms. In other words, a 'context relevant integration' is essential to the success of MBA education in China.

Developing China's own management theories

However, when asked if it is possible to develop our own Chinese management theories and system, as happened in Japan, most participants were still quite conservative, claiming that China still does not have the supporting policy to develop its own theories, and also, as one of the students pointed out:

'A large number of theories and concepts were developed within large organisations in western countries, usually with a long business history. While in China, most of the companies are focusing on expanding the business and generating more profits. They don't want to spend a lot of time on developing a business theory. Of course they have gained lots of practical experience during their business development, but maybe it's not the right time for them to extract those experiences into theories'.

On the other hand, it was reckoned that academic faculty should be the major force in building China's own theory and case bank. However, most of the participants expressed opinions towards the current situation that were not completely positive, for instance:

'The difference is that Harvard has established huge systematic research, organised the cases in the US and around the world by the activity of so many

scholars. Conversely, we just don't have a university which is willing to play the leading role in organising a Chinese case bank. It's just the one single step, we have so many professors, and there would be thousands of cases if each one of them has worked on one or two cases'.

The question was why it was not happening in the way it should be. One of the students answered with some specific reasons:

'It must be something to do with our current incentive system. It usually takes a long time to come up with a full case study. But the problem is every teacher has his or her own target to reach ... they'd rather spend this amount of time on other less time-consuming projects. Here, doing a case study involves spending a year or two on a company or organisation, and you also need to do some field work and interviews to get your desired data; thus not only time is needed but also funding. Therefore, it's no wonder that people would like to go for a regular academic paper rather than a huge case study'.

Possible solutions were also raised by students:

'If the compulsory target of a certain number of published papers could be abandoned, or a case study could be counted as two or three papers, the situation will be much better. It's so different from Western countries, where researchers or professors can do any research they are interested in and do it at their own pace'.

In this case, it seems that time and money are among the main reasons why the pace of building China's own case bank is still quite slow, although teaching and learning local cases are considered very important and useful from both teachers' and students' perspectives.

The next section will analyse how participants evaluated their teaching and learning experience by focusing on teaching language and various teaching methods.

7.6 Assessment of teaching methods

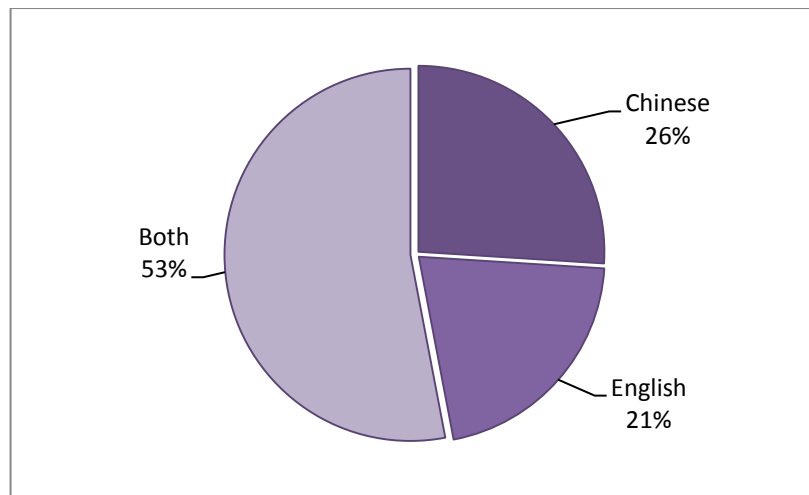
Teaching methods are inevitably an important part of the teaching process and contribute to the course's outcome to a large extent. In this research, the assessment of teaching methods is focused on comparing different teaching methods in terms of their effectiveness in achieving students' learning goals. In this section, students' perceptions of Chinese and English as teaching languages will be discussed first, followed by students' opinions of not only the overall effectiveness of current teaching methods but individual teaching methods as well. Moreover, students' feelings about the teaching process are also included.

The following analysis comprises quantitative data drawn from the 'About teaching methods' section in the questionnaire survey, and also quotations from focus group discussion that are categorised under Nvivo tree node of 'Teaching methods'.

7.6.1 Teaching language

As Figure 7.21 shows, more than half of the participants stated that the course was taught in both Chinese and English, while each of these languages was chosen as the major teaching language by around a quarter of the participants. The reason for this diverse result is that modules were taught in different ways, and the module leader could choose between Chinese and English or both according to the module context and teaching targets. Therefore, students doing different optional modules would have different experiences of which language was the major teaching language in the course. This mixture of Chinese and English in MBA teaching is very common in China, by and large depending on the different appeals of different programmes. For example, English is more commonly used as teaching language in those courses named 'International MBA courses'.

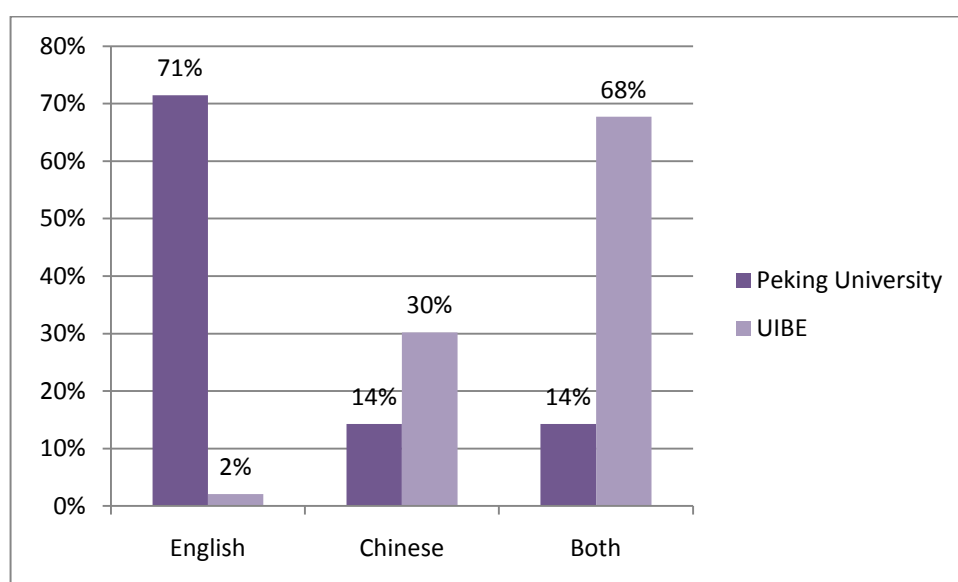
Figure 7.21 Teaching language used in the course



Again, and in accord with the findings in Figure 7.12, there is a very similar proportion of English used as teaching language as in textbooks at these two institutions, shown

below in Figure 7.22. The MBA course at Peking University was taught more in English than in Chinese, while on the other hand, it was taught more in Chinese or in both languages at UIBE. Despite these differences there is no significant variation found between participants in terms of their opinion on the effectiveness of teaching languages, as discussed below.

Figure 7.22 Difference of teaching language used at two institutions



As shown in Table 7.21, most of the participants stated that it was better to be taught in Chinese than in English, largely because it is no doubt easier for the students to understand and also more practical to achieve a smooth learning process without any language impediment. It is also suggested by Chow (1995) that learning will be neither efficient nor effective when the student's English is not good.

Table 7.21 Participants' opinions on teaching language

| | Mean | SD |
|---|------|------|
| It is better to teach in Chinese than in English. | 3.61 | .941 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

It is very much in line with focus group participants' opinions on teaching language, for instance:

'As to our current English level, I don't think it's appropriate to teach all the modules in English. Of course except English classes, like Business English'.

Teaching and learning English in MBA course

With regard to the English class, which is a special module in addition to the whole MBA curriculum in every MBA programme in China, it is supposed to enhance students' English proficiency in terms of business communications. However, students participating in this research were not very convinced of the effectiveness of the English module. As some of them complained:

'I think English is the most important, but why are we so reluctant to go to any English classes? And shouldn't we have some foreign English teachers?'

The purpose of adopting English as teaching language in MBA courses is to improve Chinese students' proficiency of English as the dominant business language, which is also very much in line with the trend of internationalisation of MBA education. To some extent, it could be argued that the overriding purpose of MBA programmes around the world is to teach students a set of shared business language. Here, business language is like other professional languages, e.g. the language of medicine, which can be used by people in any business context without any hassle in communication. In this respect, choosing Chinese or English or both as the teaching language should rely on whether it helps students of building their business language capacity. This tension will remain as a

challenge to business schools in China as China is becoming the most major player in world economy in the near future.

However, as the above findings show, it seems that the English class is not treated as important as it should be in the MBA programme, and lack of foreign English teachers might be one of the reasons why the attendance was fairly low. In fact, having an English-speaking teacher for a certain period of time (it could be from a few weeks up to a whole semester) at some point of school education or college study is quite common for a large number of Chinese students; and normally the opportunity of learning English from a native speaker is expected to be more likely with a higher level of studies. In this case, as hinted in the above quotation, inviting/recruiting more foreign English could be beneficial in this particular teaching and learning aspect of the whole MBA programme.

Different opinion from people with different academic backgrounds

However, a significant difference between students with previous business-related education and those without was found as a result of a t-test for this variable. The figures shown in Table 7.22 indicate that students with a business first degree tended to agree less with the statement that Chinese would be a better language in teaching MBA courses, compared with those who had non-business first degrees, $t(129) = -2.07$, $p = .041$. The reason for this is largely because business degree students usually spend more time on English studies in China, as there are more English related modules in business curriculum than in other non-business related degree curriculum; hence it is reasonable that students without previous business studies preferred to be taught in Chinese rather than in English.

Table 7.22 T-test for respondents with a business or non-business first degree

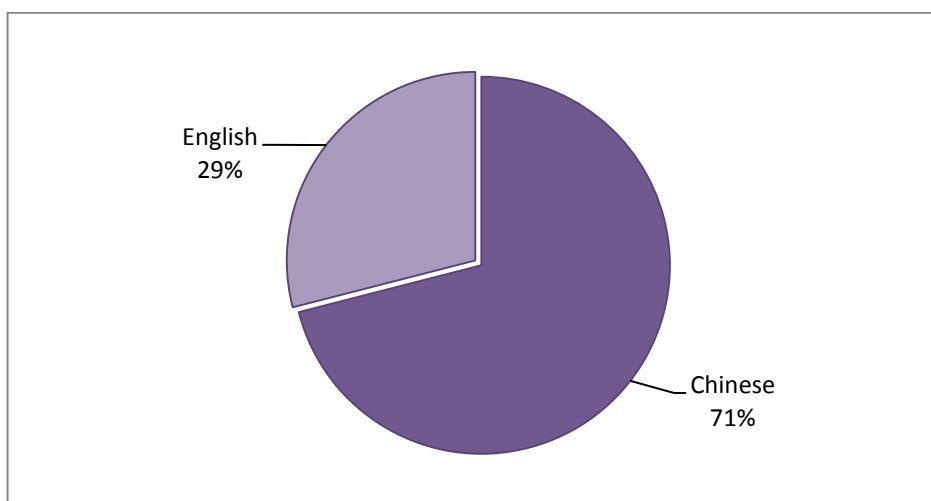
| First degree | Business | | | Non-business | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|----------|------|------|--------------|------|------|-------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| It is better to teach in Chinese than in English | 52 | 3.40 | .913 | 79 | 3.75 | .940 | -2.07 | .041 | -.343 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

Which language is better in applying knowledge at work

In addition, participants were also asked to choose which language they thought would be better for applying management knowledge at their practical work. It shows in Figure 7.23 that, over 70% of the participants stated Chinese would be more suitable and effective for applying what they had learnt to work, while the rest 30% of participants chose English instead.

Figure 7.23 Percentage figures for the question ‘which language is better for applying knowledge at work’



Different opinion from people worked for Chinese and foreign companies

Furthermore, Chi-square tests were conducted to see if there was any relation between participants' answers to this question and their different backgrounds. One significant correlation was found between participants' answers to this question and the background of their employers in terms of whether the employer was Chinese or foreign. According to the Chi-square test result presented in Table 7.23, the relation between these variables were significant, $X^2 (1, N=128) = 8.675, p = .003$, which means the background of the company that the participant worked in was very much related to the participant's opinion concerning which language would be effective for applying their knowledge at work.

Table 7.23 Chi-Square Tests: language*employer

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
|------------------------------|-----------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 10.024(b) | 1 | .002 | | |
| Continuity Correction(a) | 8.675 | 1 | .003 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 9.493 | 1 | .002 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .004 | .002 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 9.946 | 1 | .002 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 128 | | | | |

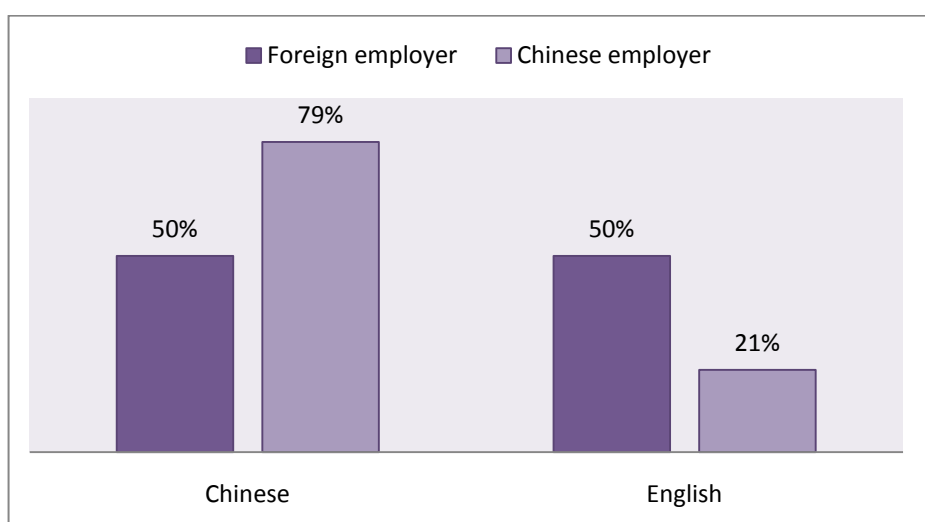
a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.83.

In this case, the majority of participants who worked for a Chinese company tended to agree that Chinese would be better for applying knowledge at work, while for those who worked for a foreign company; there was no strong tendency of preference for either English or Chinese, as shown in Figure 7.24 below. Apparently the reason behind this is that English is used much more often in a foreign company or even a joint

venture in China; conversely, people rarely have to use English at work if they are in a Chinese company, and hence feel more comfortable and find it more effective to using Chinese at work to apply any knowledge that they've learnt from the course.

Figure 7.24 Participants' preferences towards language at work based on their employment background



7.6.2 Teaching methods in general

First of all, understanding of the teaching quality of the MBA programmes was obtained from the questionnaire. Participants were asked to rate how effective the current teaching methods were in transmitting knowledge and skills, as Table 7.24 shows that a higher than average score was recorded for the overall effectiveness of the current teaching methods.

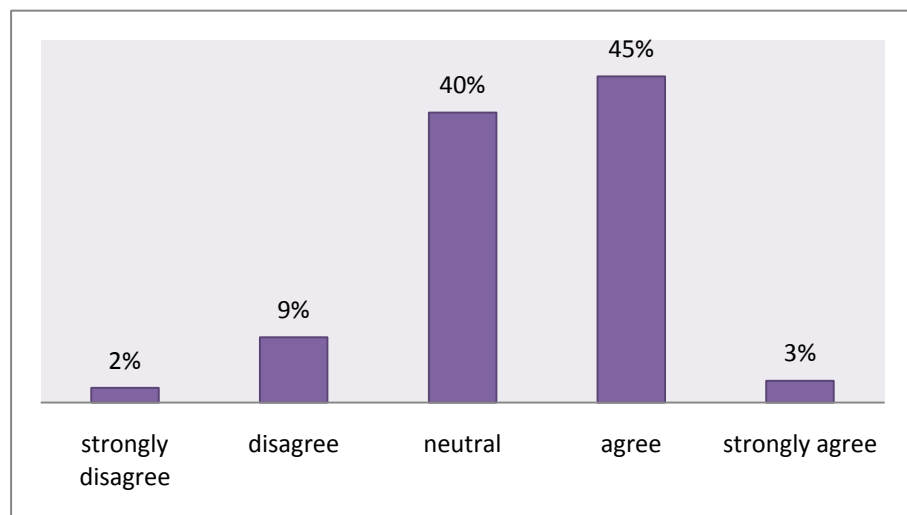
Table 7.24 Participants' overall perception of current teaching methods

| | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Current teaching methods are effective in transmitting knowledge and skills. | 3.37 | .788 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

However, although there were nearly half of the participants that tended to give positive answers (45%, $n = 60$), still 40% ($n = 52$) of the participants chose to stand neutral; the figures are illustrated in Figure 7.25 below.

Figure 7.25 Percentage figures of participants' opinion of the effectiveness of current teaching method



Different opinion from full-time and part-time students

It is interesting that a significant difference was found between full-time and part-time students. Full-time students rated this issue with lower scores than did part-time students, $t(129) = -2.25$, $p = .026$, as shown in Table 7.25. In other words, more of the part-time students found the current teaching methods effective in transmitting knowledge and skills than did those who were doing the course on a full-time basis. It is probably because part-time students had more opportunities to test and trial in their

practical work what they had learnt on their academic course than full time students had.

Table 7.25 T-test for full time/part time students

| Course type | Full time | | | Part time | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|-----------|------|------|-----------|------|------|-------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| Current teaching methods are effective in transmitting knowledge and skills. | 72 | 3.24 | .813 | 59 | 3.54 | .727 | -2.25 | .026 | -.306 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*)

Assessment of the course content

In order to find out more about participants' opinion of the MBA course contents, they were asked another four questions. These four questions are listed in Table 7.26 with their average scores and accompanying standard deviations.

Table 7.26 Average scores of answers on four questions about the course content

| | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| To what extent do you think the course is based on the authority and expertise of the teacher? | 3.95 | .821 |
| To what extent do you think the course is based on the established texts? | 3.37 | .682 |
| How much is student participation encouraged during the teaching process? | 3.40 | .751 |
| How much do you reflect critically on the learning contents? | 3.28 | .747 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*)

The average scores of each questions indicate that the participants rated the first question with the highest mean, which is very close to 4 on the 5 point Likert scale, suggesting that most of the participants thought the course was to a large extent based on the authority and expertise of the teacher. On the other hand, the last question, i.e the extent to which students reflected critically on the learning contents, was rated

with the lowest mean, which indicating not only students' low level of initiative in critical thinking but also the lack of implementation of both critical content and critical teaching methods in the MBA course.

Different rating from male and female students

Significant differences emerged as a result of t-tests based on respondents' demographic data for these four questions. Firstly, as Table 7.27 shows, male and female participants responded quite differently to the first question. Male students gave a lower score on the extent that the course was based on the authority and expertise of the teacher than did female students, $t(129) = -2.53$. $p = .013$. However, both of the average scores were quite high on the 5 point scale. In this respect, Chinese culture's strong emphasis on hierarchy and high respect for wisdom could explain people's respect towards the teacher's expertise and authority and, moreover, female students normally tend to obey the teacher's authority even more, which well exemplifies the masculinity aspect of Chinese culture (see Chapter 4).

Table 7.27 T-test for male and female

| Gender | Male | | | Female | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|--|------|------|------|--------|------|------|-------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| To what extent do you think the course is based on the authority and expertise of the teacher? | 85 | 3.82 | .819 | 46 | 4.20 | .778 | -2.53 | .013 | -.372 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*)

Different rating from people with different academic backgrounds

Another significant difference emerged with the second question. As shown in Table

7.28, when asked about the extent that the course was based on established texts, participants with a business-related first degree gave higher ratings than did those with a non-business-related first degree, $t(129) = 2.39, p = .017$.

Table 7.28 T-tests for respondents with a business or non-business first degree

| First degree | Business | | | Non-business | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|---|----------|------|------|--------------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| To what extent do you think the course is based on established texts? | 52 | 3.54 | .609 | 79 | 3.25 | .707 | 2.39 | .017 | .285 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*)

It is probably because those students, who had previous business academic studies, were more familiar with business-related contents; hence they were in a better position to tell if the course was based on established texts, compared to students without a business first degree.

Teaching based on teachers' expertise

Findings from focus group discussions also suggested that students agreed that the course was very much built on teachers' authority and expertise, and teachers are in control of the teaching process. As one of the students stated:

'I think it is a well known fact that no textbooks and no handouts are needed eventually when the teacher has been teaching the same materials for years. Even the questions raised by students on class are more or less the same, so the teacher is fully prepared for the students' reaction and how to control the progress of the class'.

He further explained that:

'Teachers have always prepared well what to say before the class. Although the content may vary a little bit, basically it remains the same from one occasion to the next. We had not met the teachers before the semester began, so we were not familiar with the teacher, neither with the module. So we just follow the teacher in classes'.

This reflects the teacher-centred teaching model in most Chinese classrooms, it was also agreed by other students. As one of them asserted:

'Actually the current mode of teaching is quite easy for the teachers, because they are always prepared while the students are not'.

Indeed, it is a fact that teacher's authority and expertise is the fundamental basis of any kind of course according to traditional Chinese teaching ideology. However, along with the economic 'open door' policy and China's fast economic development, many Western values and ideologies have rushed in, and accordingly new ways of teaching have been introduced and implemented in many educational courses. As one of the focus group participants stated:

'There have been a lot of changes in recent years, and the relationship between the teacher and students has changed as well. What the teacher says used to be the absolute truth, while it is not quite the same anymore. A lot of teachers have already realized this, and positive changes are taking place. For instance,

introducing new teaching methods, like case study’.

Textbook based teaching

On the other hand, there was a great unanimity among participants that their MBA course was very much based on textbooks:

‘Talking about the teaching methods first -in foreign countries, the teaching is based on case studies while our teaching is based on textbooks. Some of the textbooks are English versions, the same as are used in other countries’.

Besides the textbook, or theory teaching, there are indeed other teaching methods used in MBA programmes in China, such as case study. Students are more demanding on the quality of these teaching materials, as one of them stated:

‘Some of them are based on cases but some are not. For Financial report analysis, teaching is based on domestic cases, and the cases need to be renewed every year. We students won’t be happy with any case which is more than five years old. A lot of teachers would use new cases which have just taken place in the business world, which is unlikely to be reflected in classic textbooks’.

Lack of participation

However, when talking about the level of student participation in the teaching process, most of the student complained that there was not enough participation:

'Participation is not enough, there is some indeed, but definitely not enough, just a small part in teaching'.

Although they were well aware that MBA education needs more participation and also the current level is not good enough, it was also observed that very few students were active in participating in any on class activities, which is also in line with the fact that Chinese students are more reluctant to participate in open discussions. When asked why, one of the students replied:

'I think it is due to personality. Foreigners like showing their individuality, while Chinese are more humble and introvert. For example, when the teacher asks a question, usually very few people are willing to volunteer, although most of the students may know the answer. I wouldn't want to step out either if I was in the same situation. I think another issue is the class atmosphere that is created by the teacher. If the teacher has inspired an active atmosphere, then students are willing to be open about their thoughts'.

It is also agreed by another student:

'On the one hand, the teacher needs to inspire and encourage participation from the students, while, on the other hand, traditional Chinese culture is another issue that is concerned here. Moreover, it is also due to each individual. Some people may prefer finding the answer in books after class than asking foolish questions in class and wasting other people's time'.

Apparently, traditional Chinese learning style is still an important factor here, and students are quite used to being on the receiving end of the learning process. However, they did not see traditional Chinese learning style as the major obstacle to greater participation; instead, the individual's personality was considered as determinant of each student's way of responding towards more interactive teaching methods. The criticism of *'asking foolish questions in class and wasting other people's time'* well reflects Chinese students' Confucian learning style, in which learners are expected to respect and obey authority figures and, more importantly, it is seen as wrong and inappropriate to innovate or criticize without extensive preparatory knowledge of the subject.

Although as one of the students stated above, they would not be willing to participate in discussions, they were well aware that they were mature learners and more participation was needed for their MBA education. As their learning style was not declared as the major reason for lack of participation, some other reasons were identified:

'I think it depends on the teaching condition or environment. Now we have almost 80 people in a class, which is totally different from the MBA programmes abroad. The density of the programme is very high; we have 14 modules in this semester, so it is impossible to have a lot of discussions in class. It is possible to have more discussion when the class size is small and with fewer modules. But it is impossible for us to talk a lot on class; it is even good enough that the teacher could go through all the material in the given time. We only have one and a half hours for each class, so how is the teacher supposed to organise the time? He or she can't control it if all the time is assigned to in- class discussion'.

In this case, the sheer size of each class was reckoned as another reason why it was difficult for teachers to implement more interactive teaching methods and encourage more class discussions.

On the other hand, as discussed in section 7.3, lack of communication was reckoned as the main hindrance to professional network building for students. It appears that this lack of communication beyond the classroom among students and between teachers and students also played a significant role in producing the rather quiet classroom atmosphere, where there was a marked reluctance to speak on the part of the student cohort. This reflects the high power distance of Chinese culture, and the Confucian respect for authority and wisdom, which led to a low level of interaction between teacher and students.

Next, assessment of individual teaching methods will be discussed by taking into account the Chinese students' learning styles.

7.6.2 Assessment of teaching methods

For the purpose of assessing each teaching method, participants were asked to rate nine different teaching methods in respect of how effective these methods had been in achieving their desired learning outcomes. Table 7.29 shows the result by ranking the mean scores for each method from the highest to lowest.

Table 7.29 Assessment of teaching methods

| | N | Mean | SD |
|-----------------------------|-----|------|-------|
| 1 Case study | 131 | 4.18 | .808 |
| 2 Group discussion | 129 | 3.84 | .833 |
| 3 Individual presentation | 121 | 3.76 | .806 |
| 4 Individual written report | 123 | 3.66 | .787 |
| 5 Group project | 128 | 3.59 | .917 |
| 6 Lecture | 121 | 3.34 | .802 |
| 7 Guest speaker | 119 | 3.27 | .963 |
| 8 Action learning | 98 | 3.21 | 1.237 |
| 9 Seminar | 107 | 3.15 | 1.080 |

*Scores are based on a 5 point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*)

Only the case study method received a rating from all the participants, and it also scored the highest mean among all these nine teaching methods. In other words, most of the participants considered case study as the most effective teaching technique in facilitating their learning and in developing their knowledge and skills. But in general, all of these nine teaching methods received an average rating above *moderate*.

It is worth noting that the traditional teaching method, lecture, only ranked sixth and more interactive method group discussion was ranked second. Surprisingly, individual presentation was ranked third, which is an unexpected outcome as Chinese students are usually considered more reluctant to present their ideas in front of the class. Lastly, seminar was ranked at the bottom of the list, even coming below the less commonly used teaching methods, such as guest speaker and action learning. This result is somewhat similar to Thompson's (2001) findings on MBA students' preferences towards teaching methods, in which case study and group discussion were also ranked as the top two, with lecturing ranked at the bottom.

It is also interesting to note that although there is a difference between the two institutions involved in this research, in terms of textbook, teaching material and

teaching language (as seen in Figure 7.12, Figure 7. 14, and Figure 7.22 above), there is no significant difference found between these two groups of participants regarding the effectiveness of these eight teaching methods.

7.6.3.1 Four groups of teaching methods

In order to explore participants' perceptions towards more traditional teaching methods compared to those more interactive ones, a factor analysis of these nine teaching methods was conducted, and the result is shown in Table 7.30 below.

Table 7.30 Factor analysis of the effectiveness of teaching methods

| | Factor | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|------|------|------|
| | I | II | III | IV |
| Group discussion | .927 | | | |
| Case study | .807 | | | |
| Group project | .642 | | | |
| Action learning | | .844 | | |
| Seminar | | .825 | | |
| Guest speaker | | .633 | | |
| Individual written report | | | .871 | |
| Individual presentation | | | .698 | |
| Formal lecture | | | | .964 |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
 a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Four factors were extracted as the result of statistic analysis, and factor loadings above .60 are illustrated in the above table for easier interpretation. Factor I comprises three teaching methods: group discussion, case study and group project. The result suggests a block of group-oriented teaching methods, which also reflects a collaborative learning approach. Factor II comprises another three approaches to teaching and learning, namely action learning, seminar, and guest speaker. Since these methods remain under-developed in Chinese classrooms, this group reflects less familiar methods. Factor III includes more individual-oriented teaching methods, including the individual

written report and the individual presentation. Although the last factor only contains one method, i.e. the formal lecture, it still distinguishes itself from the other teaching methods as the most traditional and widely used teaching method in Chinese management educational context.

Table 7.31 presents the mean scores of each factor, namely the four types of teaching methods that are used in Chinese MBA education. Group-oriented teaching methods apparently received the highest score, which points to Chinese students' preference for a collaborative learning style, which has been developed under the influence of the collectivism in Chinese culture. Students prefer to work in small groups rather than independently.

Table 7.31 Effectiveness of each group of teaching methods

| Types of teaching methods | N | Mean | SD |
|----------------------------|-----|------|------|
| Group-oriented | 126 | 3.87 | .715 |
| Individual-oriented | 119 | 3.70 | .705 |
| Traditional formal lecture | 121 | 3.34 | .802 |
| Unfamiliar | 94 | 3.15 | .880 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*)

Group-oriented methods

However, it is worth noting that the preference of group-oriented study does not mean that Chinese students are willing to participate in open discussion in class. It is considerably easier for them to share their opinion within a group of more familiar people or even close friends than to speak up in front of the whole class and, most importantly, in front of the teacher, as this runs the risk of causing embarrassment and challenging the teacher's expertise. Such reluctance to participate has also been noted

at the end of the last section. It was also observed that students tended to work with the same people every time they were required to engage in group work. The use of the case study, which is an element of this factor, will be discussed later in this section.

Individual-oriented methods

Individual-oriented teaching methods received the second highest score, as shown in Table 7.31. This finding supports the cultural norm identified previously in the literature review: Chinese students prefer strong direction and tend to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty. Individual written reports have been a very common teaching and learning approach for Chinese students, whereby they seek neat and ‘correct’ solutions to well-defined questions and try to impress the teacher in order to obtain a high mark. The process of preparing for an individual oral presentation is also pre-determined, and it is very rare for the fellow students to criticize or even give any feedback after a presentation, as observed during this research.

Traditional formal lecture

As to the traditional formal lecture, although it received a fairly low score in terms of popularity, compared to the group-oriented and individual-oriented teaching methods, it is still the dominant pedagogical form in MBA education in China. Respondents still showed high respect towards the teachers, especially for those who are well-known experts in their specialised fields, and lectures were also expected to be of a high quality, and to fully reflect the teacher’s expertise, together with their personal insights from their academic field and from the practice of industry. However, some students indicated that a large number of their modules were the same as those for the other postgraduate students in the university’s business school, that is the same lectures were

given by the same professor, only to different audiences. As a result, MBA students considered that they were not treated as a privileged group, which they should have been, with lectures prepared specifically for them. Moreover, there were also complaints of a lack of teachers who could give exceptionally good lectures.

Unfamiliar methods

The above also supports the finding that action learning and seminar were the least effective teaching methods (see Table 7.29), largely due to their requirement for active participation in open discussion. As a result, they are less familiar methods. Also, as one of the uncommon methods, the use of guest speakers received a fairly low rating from the students. Participants in the focus group discussions stated that there was a lack of really notable academics and practitioners who could deliver genuinely interesting, enlightening and up-to-date lectures as a fresh feed from the industry and/or other academics view points:

'The major problem is the guest lecturer himself. Not many of them are really convincing and their lectures are just not worth listening to. So attendance is very low'.

'I still remember the last time we had a so-called expert, who tried to hard-sell several of his books in an hour, three for a hundred Yuan. Some of the audience did commit to buying immediately. He even tried to sell tickets to his next lecture with a special discount. I really don't appreciate such a kind of guest lecturer'.

In respect to who should be invited as guest lecturers, most of the students suggested experts with practical industry experience:

'Experts in the industry should be invited to give lectures so as to broaden our understanding and ideas and achieve a better combination of theory and practice';

'Some well-known experts on business management should be invited as guest lecturer, which could make it possible to combine practice in the real world with what we learnt from the course';

'I wish we could have experts in marketing, finance or other successful entrepreneurs giving lectures, just like what people have at other training courses';

'It'd be better to hire well-known experts in the industry as guest lecturers. For example, Tsinghua University had experts from CICC (China International Capital Corporation) to give lectures on investment banking. It's not worth inviting those who are not well-known'

Besides the expectation of gaining more insightful knowledge of industrial practices, students also expected to have better employment opportunities by building connections with guest lecturers:

'We'd be happy if more executives could be invited to give us lectures, and vice versa, it would be a great opportunity to let them know more about us. It could be

a benefit on top of all those paper tests and interviews when it comes to job-hunting. I think they are doing much better in the West regarding this'.

Chinese students' perceptions of case study

Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, it is recognized by students that participation was very important in MBA education, and most of them recognised that participation was not enough and only formed a small part of teaching, and they would like to have more discussion and exercises which could better help them to absorb knowledge by integrating theory and practice. So does it mean that Chinese students really welcome and happy with the autonomous and interactive oriented western teaching methods, for example case study and action learning? The answer is not as simple as it is shown in the above ranking.

Although case study was ranked as the most effective teaching method by the MBA students in this research, it was found from the focus group discussions as well as observation that this method is interpreted differently by Chinese students from the way it is operationalised in the West. To most Chinese MBA students it was different from formal lecturing, as it integrated theory and real business scenarios instead of repeating orally the contents of textbooks. They had access to the same cases as did the western-based MBA students together with a large number of Chinese cases, as stated in section 7.5. However, what was really different from the West was that these cases were utilised in a very different way in Chinese classrooms.

For some of the modules, cases were analysed and presented by the lecturer with very little involvement of the students. In other situations, students were expecting teachers'

unambiguous and straightforward solutions to management problems presented, with no expectation that themselves would be directly involved in working towards these solutions. One of the students' suggestions well exemplified this orientation:

'It is important to integrate theory and practice, and cases should include how to implement certain theories in practice'.

Therefore, the lecturer was virtually teaching or illustrating cases to students rather than helping students learn how to analyse cases and make decisions for themselves. As a result, illustrative or descriptive rather than decisional cases were found to be the dominant type of case study in MBA teaching, which attests the existing critiques claiming MBA teaching in China is more or less descriptive and essential Western MBA teaching methods still lack presence and attention (Shi, 2000).

In addition to the didactic lecturing method employed in case study, it was also found out that analysing a case as a group project was identified by students as means of working with a case study. Usually, each group was assigned a different case, and then one group member was chosen to give a brief presentation of their analysis in front of the whole class, which was usually followed with the lecturer's comments and very little feedback from the fellow students in other groups. This observation supports the factor analysis found in Table 7.30 above, which showed that case study is regarded as providing an example of features associated with group-oriented teaching and learning.

In this respect, it is worth noting that significant differences between genders emerged from t-tests for the effectiveness of case study and group discussion, which are both

group-oriented methods. As illustrated in Table 7.32 below, male students gave lower ratings to the effectiveness of case study in developing their knowledge and skills than did female students, $t(129) = -2.05, p = .043$.

Table 7.32 T-tests for male and female

| Gender | Male | | | Female | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|------------------|------|------|------|--------|------|------|-------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| Case study | 85 | 4.07 | .884 | 46 | 4.37 | .610 | -2.05 | .043 | -.299 |
| Group discussion | 85 | 3.73 | .896 | 46 | 4.07 | .654 | -2.47 | .015 | -.340 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*)

The same tendency was found with group discussion, with male students giving lower ratings than female students, $t(129) = -2.47, p = .015$. This result interestingly indicates that female students tended to get more effective learning outcomes from group-oriented teaching methods than did male students.

In summary, the research findings revealed a strong preference for group-oriented teaching and learning. It also indicates that the tradition of Confucian teaching and learning ideologies have influenced MBA students' perceptions towards more interactive western style management teaching methods. However, it could also be an over-generalisation that Chinese MBA students favour traditional formal lecture above other interactive and participation-oriented Western pedagogical methods.

7.6.3.2 Feelings towards teaching process of the course

In addition to the assessment of teaching methods in general, participants were also asked to express their feelings about the whole teaching process or their learning experiences. Student's feeling or emotion is an area in higher education which has had

more and more attention paid to it in recent years, due to its influence on students' attitudes towards learning and the outcome of various teaching methods. In this research, participants were asked to rate their feelings towards the teaching process of their MBA programmes on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*dislike it at all*) to 5 (*like it very much*). Six questions are listed below in Table 7.33 with the average scores of the answers.

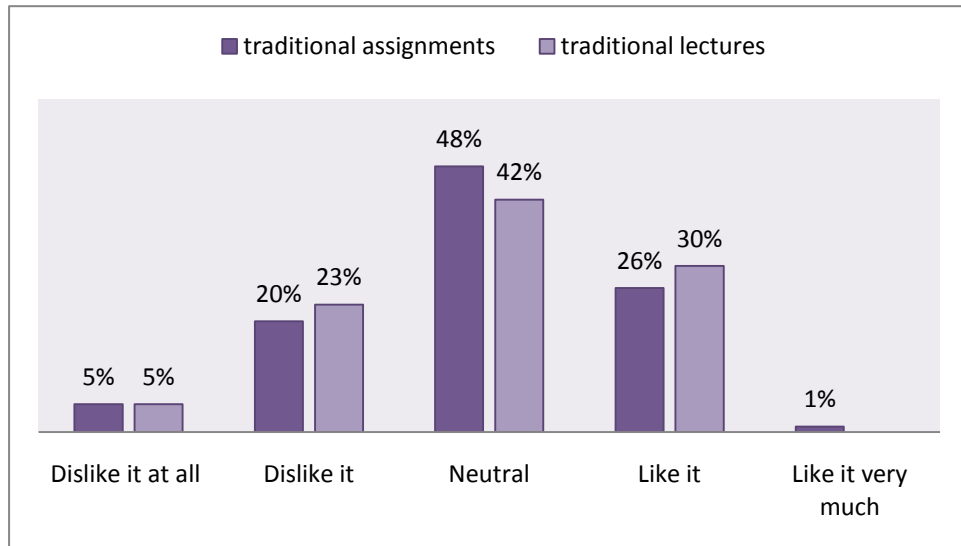
Table 7.33 Participants' feelings about teaching process of the course

| | Mean | SD |
|--|------|------|
| How do you feel about the learning experience of the whole course? | 3.52 | .798 |
| How do you feel about the group discussion? | 3.79 | .713 |
| How do you feel about the individual presentation? | 3.59 | .732 |
| How do you feel about the traditional assignment? | 2.98 | .823 |
| How do you feel about the lectures? | 2.98 | .850 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*dislike it at all*) to 5 (*like it very much*)

The lowest means of 2.98 were found with the fourth and fifth question, which on appearance indicates participants' negative feelings about the traditional assignment and lectures. Actually, most of the participants chose to express their feelings about these two teaching methods with a neutral standpoint. The percentage figures are shown in Figure 7.26 below.

Figure 7.26 Percentage figures of participants' feelings towards assignment and lecture



Therefore, except for those students who were neutral about these two traditional teaching methods, the rest of the participants could be roughly split into two groups, either liking or disliking them.

Whereas the highest mean 3.79 was scored for participants' feelings towards group discussion, individual presentation also received a fairly high average score of 3.59. It is not surprising to find such positive feelings in the majority of participants since these two methods had already received fairly high ratings in terms of the effectiveness of developing students' knowledge and skills in the previous assessment of teaching methods. Overall, the majority of participants had positive feelings about the whole learning experiences of the course and also acquiring Western knowledge, both of which scored fairly high average ratings.

Different rating from different age groups

Moreover, as a result of t-tests, a significant difference emerged between two age groups. As shown in Table 7.34, participants aged above 30 gave significantly higher ratings for the lectures with regard of their feelings towards them than did those aged 30 and under, $t(129) = 2.29, p = .024$.

Table 7.34 T-test for two age groups

| Age group | Age 30+ | | | Age 30 and under | | | t | Sig | Mean dif |
|-------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------------------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| | N | Mean | SD | N | Mean | SD | | | |
| How do you feel about the lectures? | 56 | 3.18 | .765 | 75 | 2.84 | .886 | 2.29 | .024 | .339 |

*Scores are based on a 5-point Liker scale ranging from 1 (*dislike it at all*) to 5 (*like it very much*)

Based on traditional Confucian teaching and learning ideology, lecturing has always been the most popular and widely adopted approach in Chinese classrooms (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.1). Together with China's economic development and education reform, other more interactive teaching methods have been gradually introduced to, and accepted by, younger generations. Hence, it is reasonable here that older students tended to enjoy lectures much more than did younger students.

To sum up, while discussing the whole learning experience for their MBA education in terms of different teaching methods, including more traditional Chinese-style lecturing and more Western interactive methods, most students agreed that more participation and more interactive methods were needed although Chinese learning style and cultural influences were to be taken into account. In this respect, students showed no strong preferences towards either Chinese or Western teaching methods, which is well

spoken by the following quote:

'Comparing Western and Chinese teaching methods, I don't think we can easily reach the conclusion that Western methods are better. We still need to consider the cultural factors. I don't think there are bad or good methods; what really matters is the effectiveness of these different methods in giving guidance and inspiration. The Western way could make students more active, so it is good in this respect'.

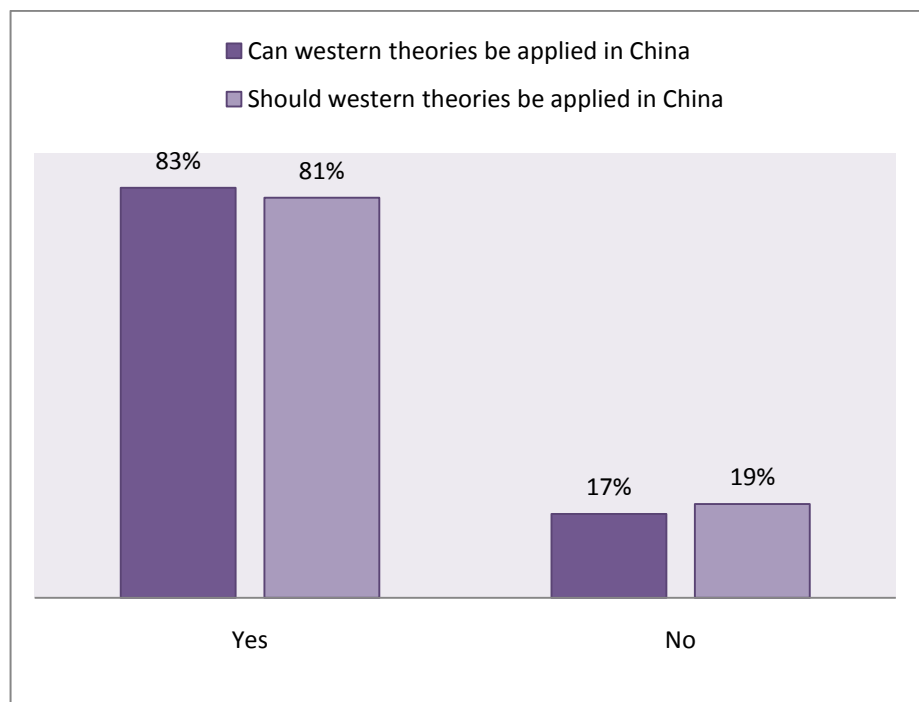
7.7 The applicability of western management knowledge in China

As the last section of the questionnaire, six questions were asked to obtain participants' opinion about the applicability of Western management knowledge in China. The first five questions were to be answered by *yes* or *no* while the last one attempted to find out which business area the participants thought would benefit the most from Western management knowhow. Quantitative data drawn from these questions constitute the following analysis, along with quotations from focus group discussions that are under Nvivo tree node 'Applicability'.

Although doing a MBA course *per se* may have already indicated that those students believed in the possibility and effectiveness of applying Western management theories and practices in the Chinese context, it is still worth finding out the students' opinions in reality, especially when instrumental learning was revealed, as students were doing the course for extrinsic reasons to a large extent (see section 7.3).

First of all, as presented in Figure 7.27, more than 80% (83%, $n = 109$) of the participants thought Western business management theories could be applied in China, while less than 20% (17%, $n = 22$) of participants thought it could not. The second question 'Do you think it should be applied in China?' also received quite similar responses. In summary, the majority (81%, $n = 106$) of participants thought Western management theories could and should be applied in China.

Figure 7.27 Percentage figures of participants' opinion of the applicability of Western management knowledge in China

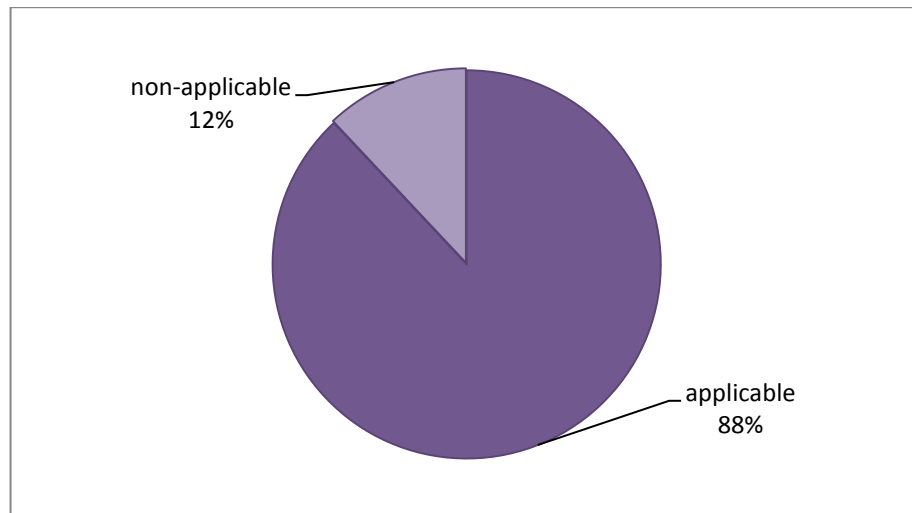


Opinion from full-time students

Participants who were doing a full-time course were asked if the Western management theories they learnt from the MBA course would be applicable in their future work. As

shown in Figure 7.28, 88% of them ($n = 63$) stated yes, while 12% ($n = 9$) of them answered *no*.

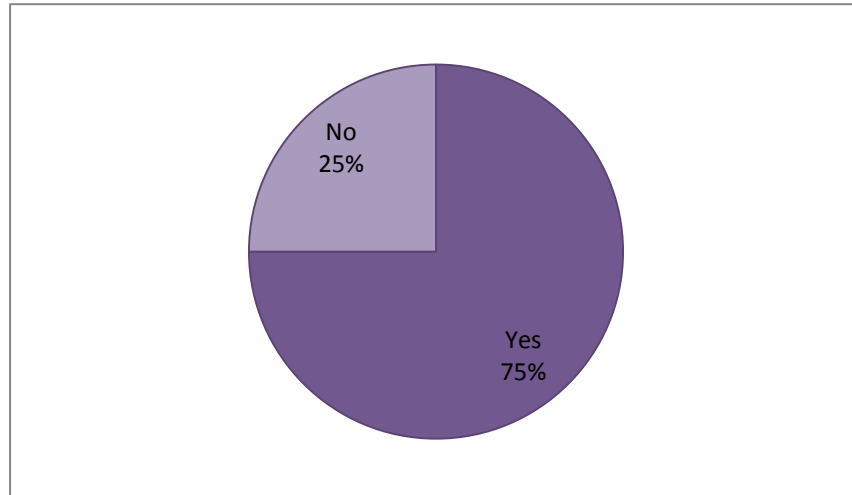
Figure 7.28 Percentage figures of full time participants' opinion towards the applicability of Western theories in their future work



Opinion from part-time students

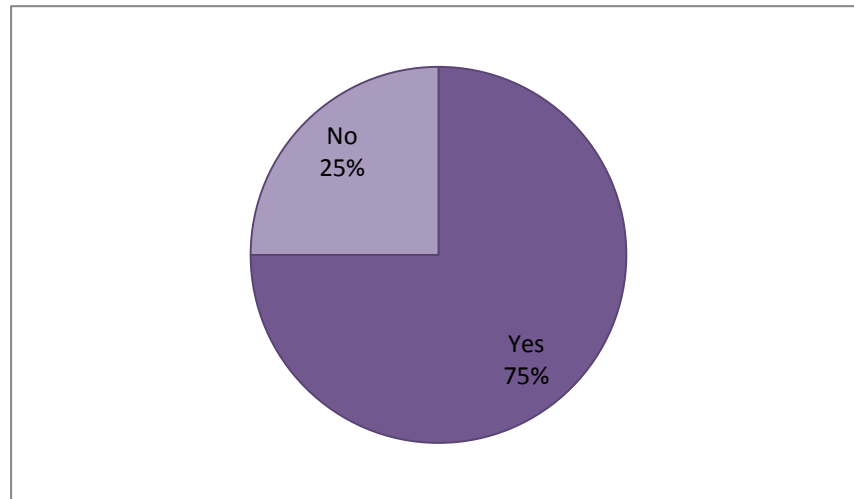
As for those participants who were doing their MBA course on part time basis, a separate question was asked because, unlike full-time students, they had the chance to see the applicability of what they learnt from the course in their daily work. Therefore, part-time students were first asked if they had used or were using any of the Western knowledge at work. As shown in Figure 7.29, 86% of them ($n = 51$) answered yes while 14% ($n = 8$) said *no*.

Figure 7.29 Percentage figures whether part time participants were using Western management knowledge



In addition, those who stated that they had been applying Western theories and management practices in their current work, were also asked a further question: whether there was any difficulty when applying such knowhow. The percentage figures are shown in Figure 7.30: only a quarter of them ($n = 13$) answered no, with three quarters of them ($n = 38$) claiming there were difficulties when applying western theories and practices at work.

Figure 7.30 Percentage figures of participants' answer to if there was any difficulty in applying western theories



Which business area would benefit the most from Western management knowhow

Finally, all the participants were asked to choose a business area which they considered would benefit the most from Western management knowhow. The result is illustrated in Table 7.35.

Table 7.35 Which area will benefit the most from Western management knowhow?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| financial system | 66 | 50% |
| strategic planning | 27 | 21% |
| human resources | 13 | 10% |
| marketing | 11 | 8% |
| accounting | 5 | 4% |
| operation | 4 | 3% |
| investment | 2 | 2% |

Financial system received the highest vote, with half of the participants stating it would be benefit the most from Western management knowledge. The second highest vote was for strategic planning, followed by human resources and marketing as the third and fourth. Among these seven business areas, investment, operation and accounting received the lowest votes, indicating participants' low expectation on the extent that Western management knowhow would be beneficial to these areas.

In line with the findings from the survey, participants expressed similar opinions towards applying Western management theory and practices in China at the focus group discussion. In general, they were quite positive towards applying such practices and also recognised the changes in management after the economic reforms, mainly for SOEs:

'The traditional SOEs have changed a lot after they went public on the American stock market; management has changed significantly, in particular. Nowadays, it is an important criterion of performance appraisal in big SOEs to see how far you are from the management level in foreign countries and if you are doing your best to make this distance smaller. I think we are doing better and better in recent years. I have been working with Sinopec for three years; it has changed tremendously during these three years, which was unbelievable'.

Another student who worked for the same company as the above one also emphasised the positive changes that have been brought to the company:

'In old SOEs, only the words from the President counts, not even from the Vice-President or other directors, so nothing will change if the president doesn't feel the necessity to reform. But after some of the SOEs have gone public abroad, the internal monitoring and control are getting much better than before. Especially after the Enron case, the Americans are getting tougher on the internal monitoring of management. At present, it is strictly monitored from management to each functional department, and some foreign experts are invited to do the appraisal on a regular basis. For instance, Sinopec has outsourced the strategic planning to McKinsey and appraisal to PwC. This concept has been accepted very fast'.

Although these changes and more westernized management system were generally welcomed by students, it was also warned that *'it still has to be suitable to the local circumstance'*, and

'Whether or not Western management knowledge could be applied in China is due to individual circumstance. We should choose what is appropriate rather than copying the whole thing'.

Also, when it comes down to implementation, there is still certain level of resistance especially from older staff:

'The old ways have been abandoned gradually. But some of them are deeply rooted and it is especially hard to change when it comes to old staff'.

To conclude, participants were positive about applying Western management knowledge in their work, and also the potential benefits of doing so. However, China's own economic, social and even cultural context has to be taken into account as well, and also it was warned that resistance from old staff or old ideology would still exist.

7.8 Chapter summary

Quantitative data from the survey and qualitative data from the focus group discussions have been integrated in most of the analysis of the research findings, which have been organised under five major sections:

- Respondents' overall impression of their MBA programme,
- Assessment of course content and teaching material,
- Western theory vs. Chinese practice,
- Assessment of teaching language and methods, and
- Applicability of the MBA course in practical work.

These sections reflect both the structure of the questionnaire survey and the tree nodes in the Nvivo analysis of the focus groups.

Narrative opinions from the focus group participants have complemented the quantitative data drawn from the questionnaire survey. In some cases, it has further explained the statistical findings. For instance, in Section 7.3.2, participants expressed their concerns of lack of communication in the MBA course, which further explained the statistical finding of a low rating for their learning and development outcomes in terms of building professional network.

In some other cases, quotations from focus group transcripts have enriched the findings in this research, by bringing in participants' in-depth opinions about the discussed themes. Narrative analysis in Section 7.5 is a good example, where focus group quotations have enriched the findings on the theme of 'Western theory vs. Chinese practice', and also added participants' concerns on developing China's own management theories.

Below is a summary of the findings presented in this chapter.

Firstly, students' general impression of their MBA programme leaned towards being more positive in terms of developing their knowledge, skills and personal attributes, except for concern about lack of communication in developing professional networks. However, the course content is generally considered too theoretical; more practice-oriented contents and teachers with more practical experience were suggested by students. In terms of different academic fields, Finance/Accounting scored the highest rating in developing students' knowledge and skills, while Business Law/Policy scored the lowest.

Secondly, Chinese MBA programmes are still heavily based on western textbooks and teaching materials. However, students still prefer textbooks in Chinese rather than in English, and it was also claimed that Chinese was better than English as the language of instruction.

Thirdly, research findings also revealed students' positive attitude towards learning Western context based theories and practices, and also the concerns for making the course more relevant to the Chinese context and accordingly the need for more local

cases.

Fourthly, in terms of teaching methods, traditional lecturing was still the dominant approach and a strong preference for group-oriented teaching and learning was found, which indicates that the tradition of Confucian teaching and learning ideologies have influenced MBA students' perceptions towards more interactive Western style management teaching methods.

Lastly, participants were quite positive about applying Western management knowledge in their work, and also the potential benefits of doing so. However, China's own economic, social and even cultural context has to be taken into account as well.

Chapter 8 Conclusion and Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of the thesis and discuss the contribution of this research to the existing academic knowledge and pedagogical practice. There are five sections in this chapter: the first section will provide a summary of the literature review and research findings; the second section will identify the principal contribution of this research to existing academic knowledge; then it will go on to suggestions for improving the current circumstances of management education practices in China based on the findings from this research. Last but not least, the fourth section will examine the limitations of this research; and finally some further research directions will be discussed.

8.2 Summary of the research

8.2.1 Literature review

Chapter 2-5 presents the literature review for this research. An overview of Western MBA education was given first, together with the critiques of the traditional 'Harvard model', and trends of MBA education as a whole and MBA pedagogy in particular. The development and current position of MBA education in China was also reviewed, as

well as cultural factors that may have influences on implementing Western-constructed management education in China.

Based on all the above discussions, the final part of the literature review examined the concerns over the relevance of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context and the transferability of this particular type of knowledge via MBA education in China. In this case, different cultural and managerial contexts between the West and China have been taken into account. More particularly, special emphasis has also been given on the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices of Chinese MBA programmes in respect of the clashes between Chinese students' learning styles and Western management teaching ideologies.

The key areas in each literature review chapter are summarised below.

Overview of MBA education in the West

Management education has been experiencing a rapid growth in the past decades, MBA programs have also become the most popular post-experience management courses around the world. However, along with the rapidly changing international business environment, the content and pedagogical methods of the programme have attracted critiques from both the academic and practical world. Moreover, critiques on the relevance of delivering such a Western education product in different cultural and social contexts are also in line with the 'Critical' school of thought for management education in general.

By contrast to traditional managerial perspective, critical perspective advocates critical course content and critical pedagogy methods, and focuses on understanding and analysing management in terms of its social, moral and political practice and context. In this regard, critical management academics tend to challenge management practice rather than seek to sustain it without considering the context that it will be applied in.

By adopting a critical approach in MBA education, orthodox Western management theories and existing knowledge are no longer seen as universally right solutions or answers to any management problems. In other words, the course content and pedagogical methods of MBA programmes need to be adapted to the local cultural and social contexts and business environment of where the courses are taking place.

In this case, the traditional Western content and teaching methods of management education have been challenged and influenced by more practice-oriented approaches of teaching and learning with the aim of finding a better balance between theory and practice and providing more practically applicable solutions to real-life problems. As a result, more interaction-based teaching approaches are advocated by existing literature, accompanied by an emphasis on a more critical approach towards Western theory and knowledge. This is also for the purpose of letting students achieve meaningful and practical learning outcomes from the MBA programmes.

MBA education in China

Along with the rapid economic and social development in China for the past three decades, there have also been radical structural changes and a fast growing service sector. Consequently, well trained managers with various 'soft' skills and knowledge are

needed, especially in the fields of finance, marketing, human resource management. As a response, Western management education has been imported to China and the MBA education has been experiencing a dramatic growth in the past twenty years. However, Chinese MBA programmes are still by and large based on the traditional Western MBA education model and course content, which raised the questions of whether it is appropriate and applicable to transfer context-specific Western management knowledge to China and whether it is effective to deliver such knowledge with Western pedagogical approaches.

On the one hand, as Hofstede (1998) argues, management practices that work in one country do not necessarily work in another, because such practices are culturally dependent. Hence the extent to which Western management theories and practices are accepted and utilised in China depends largely on whether they fit in with the values and beliefs of Chinese people, which in turn are defined and continuously influenced by Chinese culture. On the other hand, Chinese students' learning style, which also stems from Confucianism as the core of Chinese culture, has also been recognised as another crucial factor when implementing Western management pedagogy in the Chinese context.

Chinese cultural values

As summarised in Chapter 4, by using the most commonly adopted cultural dimension measurements (high-low context, Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, Schwartz's seven cultural dimensions and GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions), it is revealed that Chinese culture represents characteristics of high-context cultures, i.e. people rely more on trust, friends and family relationships, and tend to obtain information from personal

information networks. Chinese culture is high in power distance and hierarchy; in other words, Chinese people are more likely to accept centralized power and individuals rely heavily on superiors for structure and direction.

Chinese people also tend to be strong in uncertainty avoidance and less comfortable with changes than do Westerners. Moreover, Chinese culture's strong masculinity characteristics indicate that men and women are expected to carry different social responsibilities in the society and also a strong emphasis on material success and assertiveness. And in general, Chinese culture also differs from Western culture as collectivist rather than individualist.

Besides the above cultural dimension measures, the literature review in this thesis also provides more focused and specific insightful understanding of Chinese culture by looking at its core value, Confucianism, which still forms the basis of social norms and people's behaviour guidelines. Confucian principles emphasize social harmony, hierarchy and proper relationships between people, which have formulated Chinese people's relationship-oriented sensibility. Values and beliefs of Confucianism also underpin business and management norms and practices in China.

Key Confucian values include: strong sense of hierarchy, group orientation/social harmony, rule by man rather than rule by law, *Guanxi* (a popular catchword in doing business in China, defined by Morden (1999: p.37) as 'cultivating, developing, and maintaining personal relationships on the basis of the continuing exchange of favours') and *Face* (another catch word, meaning a person's dignity, reputation, self-respect and honour; it may also involve moral reputation, basic integrity, trustworthiness and even

kindness, competence and conscience).

All of these Chinese cultural values inevitably lead to a different management style and governance in China from what it is in the West. Because of these different cultural values and management styles or preferences between China and the West, as Newell (1999) argues, Chinese students do not share the same system of meaning with the Western academics and managers who have codified the system of business and management knowledge, which means that the knowledge is unlikely to be understood or used by Chinese students, even if translated into Chinese.

Transferability of Western MBA in China

The relevance of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context is open to question given the fact that MBA programmes in China still rely heavily on the Western model, which was developed for the Western context and a very different culture. Existing research revealed worries and doubts as to the transferability of Western management knowledge or “best practice” to Asian countries, especially China, on the part of both academics and practitioners (Berrell et al, 2001; Chow, 1995; Fan, 1998; Howe and Martin, 1998; Newell, 1999; Southworth, 1999; Vinten, 2000).

As with most other social knowledge, business and management knowledge is constituted by both tacit and explicit knowledge. While explicit knowledge can be transferred through lectures and textbooks, tacit knowledge can only be transferred when a shared code or mental model exists to enable the counterpart to understand, value, and accept that knowledge; and further facilitating the development of essential transferable skills (Newell, 1999). Therefore, it could be problematic of transferring

Western management knowledge to a very different cultural and business context.

In respect of management teaching techniques, Richard (1997) contends that students are often required to hold certain values in order for particular pedagogical approaches to be workable and that these values may be culturally specific. In other words, some of the Western management educational techniques may not be equally effective in all global locations since students from different cultures may have different opinions about the impact of the various pedagogical approaches that are predominant in the Western context (Clarke and Flaherty, 2002). Moreover, the level of acceptance and application of managerial knowledge and practices in China depends largely on the extent to which they fit in with the values and beliefs of Chinese people.

In this respect, Confucian values have also deeply affected Chinese people's learning behaviour and learning style. According to Confucian values, the primary goal of learning is to reform behaviour and the learning itself is pragmatically-oriented. Students are expected to respect and obey authority figures and it is also seen as inappropriate and wrong to innovate or criticize without extensive preparatory knowledge in the subject. On the contrary, as Socrates advocated, Western learning style values questioning of widely accepted knowledge privately and publicly, as well as self-generated knowledge. It is also believed that learning always begins with a focus on error, and truth is not prescribed by authority figures but rather found within the learner's self.

This Confucian-Socratic learning style framework served the purpose of examining the differences in people's learning styles in China and in the West. More specifically,

Chinese students prefer teaching techniques with clear instructions, and are more reluctant to react to interactive teaching approaches. Therefore, some popular Western management teaching and training techniques, which are heavily reliant on abstract thinking and self-generated knowledge, may not be well accepted by Chinese students and may not work effectively in achieving the desired outcomes.

Therefore, it is suggested from the existing literature that it is problematic just to import or copy the whole package of Western MBA to China without considering China's own cultural and contextual circumstances and speciality, and Chinese students' learning styles.

To sum up, this research provides a comprehensive literature review on the MBA education in the West and in China, Chinese cultural values and their influences on people's learning style and the transferability of Western MBA in the Chinese context.

8.2.2 Research findings

It was in such a context, therefore, that this research intended

- to explore to what extent Chinese MBA course curricula embrace both Western "best practice" and China's own cultural and business context;
- to examine the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods on MBA programmes in China, and their compatibility to Chinese learning styles; and
- to investigate the applicability of Western management knowhow in practice to management work in China.

Based on the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire survey and qualitative data gathered from focus group discussions, Chapter 7 has provided a detailed summary and analysis of the research findings by integrating both types of data, within five key overarching themes that in turn, reflected both the structure and analysis of the questionnaire survey and the tree nodes in the Nvivo analysis. To recap, these five key themes were:

1. Respondents' overall impression of MBA programme,
2. Assessment of course content,
3. Western theory vs. Chinese practice,
4. Assessment of teaching methods, and
5. Applicability of Western management knowledge in China.

Narrative qualitative data has been integrated with quantitative data in the analysis, by which enhances the comprehensiveness of the research findings. In other words, statistics drawn from the questionnaire survey and quotations from the focus group discussions complement with each other in presenting a rounded analysis of each of the above themes.

Findings presented in the above five themes are summarised below as 'Current position of Chinese MBA programmes', which covers the research findings as a whole; and the findings on the teaching methods is summarised in 'Problems and challenges of MBA teaching and learning in China'.

Current position of Chinese MBA programmes

In general, students participated in this research were positive on the learning outcomes from their MBA course. However, MBA programmes in China were found

still heavily based on Western textbooks and teaching materials; and the course content still emphasized the theoretical side more than the practical. With this regard, teachers' lack of practical experience has also contributed to the fact that the majority of MBA programmes in China are still somewhere between the '1st and 2nd generation' of MBA on the categorization of MBA curriculum by Carnall (1995), or 'Normative MBA' in Kleiman and Kass's (2007) categorisation (see Chapter 2, Table 2.1 and Table 2.2).

Moreover, although participants have shown positive attitudes towards learning Western context based knowledge and theories, it was suggested that the course should contain more practical knowledge and cases relevant to the local Chinese context. Besides, given the fact that traditional lecturing was still the major teaching method used in MBA classrooms in China and there was a lack of student participation via more interactive teaching techniques, it could be argued that, generally speaking, MBA programmes in China are still lingering between 'Traditional education' and 'Content-focused radicals' in Reynolds' typology of management pedagogy (see Chapter 2, Table 2.3). In other words, the course content and the teaching and learning process are still more traditional rather than critical.

When asked about the applicability of Western management theory in China, participants expressed positive perspectives on applying Western management knowledge in their work, and also the potential benefits of doing so. However, China's own economic, social and even cultural context has to be taken into account as well, and also it was warned that resistance from old staff or old ideology would still exist.

Problems and challenges of MBA teaching and learning in China

The heavy reliance on traditional lecturing and the lack of communication between students and teachers and even among students have highlighted the fact that MBA pedagogy in China is still more or less a 'Disciplinary approach', as one of the three MBA pedagogy approaches identified by Grey et al. (1996) (see Chapter 2, section 2.5). The fundamental assumption of this approach is that management can be taught and acquired by students as a body of knowledge covering various business functions without much connection between different subjects.

Although the appearance of local cases in Chinese MBA curriculum to some extent highlights a critical approach in terms of course content, however management knowledge, whether Western or Chinese, is still seen as an object which can be delivered by the teacher and possessed by the student. Hence teaching still relies on the authority and expertise of the teacher and established texts. Moreover, students are still passive learners carrying very little interaction with the teacher or fellow students.

This 'Disciplinary approach' seems to be a good match for Chinese students' learning styles, whereby students pay great respect to knowledge authority and prefer teaching methods with clear instructions, such as lectures or assignments, rather than more interactive methods that require students' active involvement. However, for the purpose of management education, i.e. to develop students' ability to critically assess and analyse real business scenarios and make judgments, more interactive teaching methods are needed because they are more effective compared to traditional lecturing in developing such critical analysis skills. Participants have expressed the same concern

in this research, and more student participation and involvement were urged so as to improve the current teaching approach.

It is interesting that, as one of the classic Western interactive teaching techniques, case study was rated the most effective teaching method by participants, but in fact it is interpreted differently by Chinese students from the way it is operationalised in the West. On the one hand, illustrative or descriptive rather than decisional cases were found to be the dominant type of case study in Chinese MBA teaching; on the other hand, it was also found that analysing a case as a group project was identified by students as means of working with a case study, whereas in the West it was the opposite.

With regard to group-oriented teaching methods, they have received the highest scores from participants in terms of effectiveness, which highlights Chinese students' preference for a collaborative learning style. This group-oriented learning style stems from the strong collectivism in Chinese culture. However, under the influence of Confucian value of modesty and emphasis of social harmony, Chinese students also tend to avoid speaking up in a large class and not to express their true opinions in order not to embarrass or offend others. Therefore, the preference for group-oriented study does not mean that Chinese students are willing to participate in open discussion in class, but, rather, that it is considerably easier for them to share their opinions within a group of friends or, at least, more familiar people.

To sum up, the findings of this research provide a better understanding of the current position of Chinese MBA programmes and pedagogical practices in particular, and also

student perspectives on the applicability of Western management knowledge in China.

8.3 Principal contribution to existing academic knowledge

With regard to the implementation of Western MBA education in China, some of the previous studies (Easterby-Smith et al, 1995; Li, 1999; Lindsay and Dempsey, 1985) have discussed the transfer of management knowhow from the West to China from an organisational perspective, while some others have placed an emphasis on management knowledge transfer from an educational perspective (Berrell et al, 2001; Chow, 1995; Newell, 1999; Southworth, 1999). However, there is still little existing literature that takes into account the transferability of Western management knowledge to China's management education in terms of the content, teaching methods and practical applicability as a whole.

Together with the growing concerns about the internationalisation of management education (see Chapter 2, section 2.6), more and more research has been focused on the cultural impact on delivering programmes constructed according to Western ideologies in a different cultural context, such as the impact of pedagogical diversity in managing overseas programmes, by paying attention to the student voice (Frame and Clay, 2009). In this circumstance, the findings from this research are adding to a growing body of literature on cultural impacts in delivering Western-constructed educational programmes in different cultural contexts.

Moreover, this research provides a greater understanding of the current position of

MBA education in China by exploring the insights and opinions of Chinese MBA students with regard to the course content and teaching methods. As discussed in the summary of research findings, not only is MBA education in China still growing significantly, but also the MBA degree is known as a prestigious degree that is helpful in career development. Students were positive with regard to the learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills development; however, they were concerned that their programmes of study were overly theoretical and without enough local cases or examples.

Understanding of Chinese learning style and preferences of teaching methods

The findings regarding student perceptions towards different teaching methods have also contributed to the understanding of Chinese students' preferences and learning styles in the context of management education by linking them to the Chinese cultural dimensions and Confucian values in education and business, as a strong sense of social hierarchy, *Face*, *Guanxi*, and group orientation.

More specifically, the results of the factor analysis of students' assessment on different teaching methods identified four types or groups of teaching methods, in terms of their effectiveness in the learning process (see Chapter 7, section 7.6.3). In accordance with the strong collectivism in Chinese culture and the collaborative learning orientation from Confucianism, group-oriented teaching methods (including group discussion, case study and group project) were rated higher than the other three types of teaching methods, i.e. individual-oriented (individual written report and presentation), traditional formal lecture and unfamiliar methods (seminar, guest speaker and action learning).

Significantly, this finding is somewhat different to the existing literature about Chinese learning styles, which tends to focus more on rote learning and/or surface learning patterns on younger students (e.g. Barker et al, 1991; Pratt and Wong; Nield, 2004). Hence, the findings of this research regarding MBA students' group-oriented learning style has enhanced the existing understanding of pedagogy in Chinese higher education (or it is more appropriate to say 'andragogy' in this circumstance for its definition of pedagogy in adult education), which in itself is a unique contribution to the field.

Localisation of case study method

An additional contribution of this research is the finding that case study is interpreted and conducted in a different way in Chinese MBA classrooms from the way it is operationalised in the West. More particularly, descriptive or illustrative rather than decisional case studies are normally implemented by the teacher and are treated by students more like group assignments or projects; and the teacher is also expected to give a standard or correct solution to the case. To some extent, the case study method has been 'localised' by both the MBA teachers and students in China in a way that it is more adapted to the Chinese learning style.

However, although this method does reduce the potential underlying culture-shock problems of exposing Chinese students to unfamiliar interactive teaching methods by localising Western management pedagogy, it also limits the advantages of Western pedagogy in developing students' critical thinking and transferable business and management skills, such as communication and negotiation skills. In recent years, employment difficulties of MBA students in China suggest that the employers' uncertainty about what MBA programmes actually do in developing the practice of

potential managers in respect of their knowledge and skills. It appears that over-localised pedagogy is a drawback in achieving the aims of MBA education in China. In other words, this additional finding adds further insights into the influence of culture regarding case study teaching methodology in the Chinese context.

Comprehensive literature review of MBA education in China

In addition to the findings from the fieldwork, the literature review in this research has provided an extensive and comprehensive review of the development of MBA education in China, and more importantly, an understanding of Chinese management style and learning style from a cultural perspective. Moreover, as the result of reviewing Chinese culture and learning style, a wheel chart of Chinese cultural values and learning style was composed by the author (see Chapter 5, section 5.4, Figure 5.1), which shows a composite picture of how the general cultural dimensions and Confucian core values are interrelated with Chinese learning style.

Lack of concern on cultural-imperialism

Lastly, given that fact that MBA education is a Western educational product, it is interesting that none of the participants in this research raised any concern about cultural-imperialism or neo-colonialism with regard to adopting Western programmes in the Chinese context. In China, the concept of cultural-imperialism is often related to some Western international companies, e.g. McDonald's, KFC, CocaCola, and even Hollywood blockbusters, for the Western cultural values and ideologies that those companies have imported to the younger generation. The lack of concern as to whether Western MBA programmes embody some kind of cultural-imperialism may well be due to the following reasons:

- 1) MBA courses in China tend to be localised with some content evidencing 'Chinese characteristics', and the pedagogical approach and language of teaching tend to be Chinese.
- 2) Students are more concerned with the result of getting the degree than the process of learning (see Chapter 7, section 7.3);
- 3) Under the current global business environment, it makes sense to study Western business and management knowledge, especially when a large number of MBA students are expecting to get a job at a foreign company or a joint venture;
- 4) The growing number of MBA courses on offer in both indigenous universities and joint ventures between Chinese and Western business schools is seen by students as purely profit-driven, rather than a mission to disseminate Western cultural values.

These are by no means sufficient explanations for the fact that Western management education is less linked to cultural-imperialism in China. However, it is an interesting topic worth further research, which will be discussed subsequently.

To sum up, the findings of this research provides a comprehensive literature review and greater understanding of the current position of MBA education in China, in particular the understanding of Chinese learning style and preferences of teaching methods. Together with the findings on people's lack of concern on cultural-imperialism, the

findings of this research are adding to a growing body of literature on cultural impacts in delivering Western educational programmes in different cultural contexts.

8.4 Suggestions to MBA education in China

The findings from this research have shed light on the current situation of teaching and learning practices of Chinese management education and MBA students' perceptions of different teaching and learning methods, which are directly linked to the underlying Chinese cultural perspectives and Confucian learning styles. Based on these findings, recommendations are given below with regard to improving the effectiveness of MBA teaching and learning in China in order to serve the programme's purpose of developing professional qualified managers in the Chinese business and economic context.

New generation of MBA programmes

In order to transform Chinese MBA programmes into 3rd generation MBA, there needs to be a curriculum with more interactive teaching and learning methods, and a better balance between theory and practice, and a greater focus on developing students' competencies and skills.

With regard to the current normative curriculum found in Chinese MBA programmes, i.e. a single knowledge set covering all business areas, there is a need to make the course curriculum more proactive to the needs of all stakeholders, so as to better prepare graduates for their work in the real business world. Hence, faculty, alumni and

business managers could all be involved in the process of curriculum making for their advice on what types of knowledge and skills are appropriate for MBA graduates in the Chinese organisational context. Thereby, the course will become more critical of the Western content due to the higher level of reflection of needs in the Chinese local context. As a result, the programme itself will be moving gradually from the traditional education format towards critical pedagogy in Reynold's (1999) typology of management education.

More interactive teaching methods

The purpose of having Western MBA education in China is to meet the demand for well-trained, business-oriented people with management knowhow and skills. However, as found in this research, Western management pedagogy has been somewhat 'localised' according to Chinese teachers' culturally determined teaching ideologies which in turn also reflect Chinese students' preferred learning style. This raises the question as to whether the alternative and localised pedagogy has served the purpose of MBA education in China.

Localising Western management pedagogy, on one hand, reduces the potential underlying culture-shock of exposing Chinese students to unfamiliar interactive teaching methods; while on the other hand, it limits the advantages of Western pedagogy in developing students' critical thinking and their transferable business and management skills, such as, communication and negotiation. Therefore, it appears that over-localisation of Western management pedagogy is a drawback in achieving the aim of MBA education in China, as previously noted is to develop students' ability to critically assess and analyse real business scenarios and make judgments.

Consequently, the localisation of Western pedagogy needs to be paid more attention to. This is because it is very easy for both teachers and students to fall back into their respective comfort zones where the taken-for-granted teaching ideology matches well with students' learning styles and preferences. Alternatively, localisation could provide a gentle introduction to Western interactive teaching methods, which in turn would develop a mixed management pedagogy which maintains the spirit of Western interactive teaching methods, while reflecting Chinese cultural perspectives and learning style.

Ways to improve MBA education in China

In order to have more interactive teaching methods in the MBA programmes in China and thus improve the teaching and learning practice and better serve the purpose of management education, the following issues need to be addressed.

Firstly, students need to be better prepared prior to encountering Western interactive teaching methods, by explaining practices such as case study (decisional rather than illustrative) and action learning. There should be a thorough induction to Western management pedagogy, clarifying the potential advantages and problems students may face in the programme. An explanation needs to be provided as to why this approach is different from the Chinese traditional teaching and learning ideologies in terms of different cultural perspectives and social contexts.

This suggestion is in line with Knowles' (1995) model of andragogy (see Chapter 2, section 2.5), because the adults have not learned to be self-directing inquirers on their own. Hence, a preparatory learning-how-to-learn activity is necessary as the very first

step to prepare an autonomous learner. As a result, students will be better prepared to adapt to unfamiliar teaching methods with less confusion, anxiety, and misunderstanding.

Secondly, communication between teacher and students as well as among students needs to be promoted. As the teacher-student relationship plays a vital role in implementing interactive teaching methods, it is feasible to build up a more flexible and welcoming atmosphere with a greater level of communication, so as to shorten the distance between teacher and students; because in accordance with Chinese culture and the Confucian belief in social harmony, people are more prepared to share their opinions when they are more familiar with each other. Moreover, it also helps to lower the emphasis on the current teacher-centred pedagogical approach and move towards a more student-centred or participant-centred approach, which better fits the purpose of management education.

This is also true of the relationship among students. Greater levels of communication bring better involvement in open discussions. Communication and network building should be important parts of the MBA education experience and thereby the development of management skills. The lack of contact among students, which this research exposed, did hinder the level of participation in class and, as a result, reduce the effectiveness of students' learning experience.

Thirdly, it would be helpful to assign credits to the student participation as an element of module assessment. It is suggested that Chinese students tend to follow a strategic approach to learning. In other words, they are willing to make an effort with activities which they perceive as contributing to their final scores. By making in-class

participation part of the assessment, it might well encourage reluctant students to express their ideas and involve themselves in discussions and other interactive pedagogical activities.

Fourthly, it must be remembered that teachers clearly play a crucial role in improving teaching and learning practices. As found in this research, a large number of faculties are comprised of Chinese-speaking but Western-trained academics. As such, they are presumably aware of the cultural differences, and the obstacles to implementing Western management pedagogies. Yet interactive teaching activities, which aim to develop students' critical thinking skills, are still not being utilized to any great extent in current Chinese MBA education. This suggests that experience in one context may not be easily applied in another. Therefore, this suggests that a significant attention needs to be paid to facilitate the teaching, and teachers should be encouraged to expand their repertoire, and to experiment with different types of pedagogical methods.

Finally, because of the nature of MBA courses as a Western product, it would be beneficial to invite professors and guest lecturers from reputable Western business schools, to teach some of the modules. Not only does it make the teaching more relevant because of the foreign teacher's background and more comprehensive knowledge of Western business environment, but also it is more effective in helping students develop their English language skills. In this respect, English is considered not just as another foreign language, but as central to the conduct of business in a global context.

To sum up, more interactive, yet culturally sensitive, teaching methods should be

utilized in Chinese MBA education, in order to transform it into the new generation MBA. More specifically, students are suggested to get better prepared for those interactive teaching methods, and teachers should be encouraged to experiment with different types of teaching methods, better communication and inviting academic faculty from reputable Western business schools are also recommended.

8.5 Research limitations

Notwithstanding the problems that come with a single method study, there remain limitations to this research that need to be identified, they are as follows.

Sampling procedure

A purposeful sampling procedure was used in the fieldwork for both questionnaire survey and focus group discussion, by taking into account both quantitative and qualitative data collection. This non-probability sampling strategy was chosen because the selective study of particular people and institutions are expected to offer especially illuminating examples, in as much as they are representative of the research topic. In this case two universities in Beijing were chosen to conduct the research field work based on the researcher's own judgment about the population of interest. Whilst purposeful sampling was used to gather both the qualitative and quantitative data, in hindsight, it would have been more appropriate to use a larger sample size to gather the quantitative data.

Therefore, the findings from this research might be limited to the two chosen

institutions. A larger sample size of MBA students from more Chinese universities would improve the validity and reliability of the quantitative analysis. Moreover, a wider selection of institutions providing MBA courses would broaden the research scope from indigenous MBA programmes (which the two chosen institutions in this research represent) to joint-programmes that are operated by joint-ventures of a Chinese business school and a foreign one. However, given the fact that the majority of MBA programmes in China are operated by indigenous business schools, the two institutions chosen for the fieldwork in this research are considered good indicators that reflect the current situation of the MBA education in China in general, and as such, were pragmatic choices.

Generalisability of the research findings

Though the generalisability of these findings could be debated, the two institutions selected for study were representative of the MBA education prevalent in China, as explained in Chapter 6. Therefore, it is more rather than less likely that these findings reflect the current perceptions of Chinese students in respect of their MBA education. Although participants' opinions towards the Western-constructed management knowledge and Western teaching methods are inevitably subjective, indeed, the findings from this research have shed light on understanding the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context.

Research time limit

The research fieldwork, including the questionnaire survey and focus group discussions, were conducted within a time period of one month, during which the researcher also attended some lectures with the participating MBA students. Participating in lectures

provided the opportunity to observe practice of MBA teaching in China. The observation has been useful in understanding the learning context, especially when a particular module or teacher was referred to in the focus group discussion. It would be beneficial in exploring the current position of MBA education in China if more observations could be done on most of the modules over a more extended period of time, for instance a whole semester.

Language issues

In this research, the questionnaire survey was originally constructed in English, and then translated into Chinese for the purpose of making it easier for the students to complete. In order to ensure the accuracy of the translation, a back-translation was done by several people who knew about this research to check whether the questions had been translated into Chinese while keeping faith with their original meanings in English. However, literal translation does not ensure that the translated instrument measures the same constructs as in the original instrument, which has long been a concern in all kinds of cross-cultural research (Geisinger, 1994).

The same issue also exists in translating focus group meeting transcripts from Chinese to English. In order to ensure that transcript captured the points accurately, all transcribed interview notes were read through by the researcher and shown to the participants. Then the Chinese transcript was translated into English by the researcher, and a back-translation was done to ensure the accuracy of the translated transcripts.

Moreover, the triangulation of data from the survey and focus group helped in overcoming the potential language issue and resulted in increased credibility of the data

and research finding itself.

To sum up, there still remain a few limitations of this research: the impact of purposeful sampling procedure on the generalisability of the research findings, research time limit and translation issues.

8.6 Further research directions

Reflecting on the process of this research and its findings, further research could be carried out in the following fields, for the purpose of obtaining more insightful understandings of the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context:

- I. Studies could be carried out on a larger scale so as to gather more statistically credible data from a quantitative survey. Such a study could also be extended to other levels of management education in China, given the fact most of the management education programmes in China (including vocational and degree courses) are in one way or another imported from the West. Hence, it is worth exploring how effective those programmes are in transferring Western knowledge in the Chinese context. Furthermore, it could also be interesting to compare the results between different levels to see if the result is different with more mature students (e.g. MBA students) and or with younger students (undergraduate business and management students).

2. It may also be interesting to investigate whether MBA graduates utilise what they have learned in the course to their paid employment.; if so, what Western management knowledge has been beneficial and what has been underestimated; or, if not, what obstacles they have encountered to the application of theory to practice. It will still be interesting from a cross-cultural perspective to see how cultural values are affecting the practical use of Western management knowhow in the Chinese context.
3. Regarding concerns over the possibility of cultural-imperialism in conducting Western management education in China, it would be interesting to see what happens to MBA graduates' work and life after completing the course and whether Western management knowledge and the embedded cultural values have a bigger impact at a later stage which may result in reflections on cultural-imperialism. Whilst participants did not identify cultural-imperialism as an issue, it may be worth to revisit this matter at a later date when those managers have had more experience of work practice to see if it emerges as an issue then.

8.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has provided a summary of this research by summarising the literature review and research findings. It is also been argued that the findings from this research have added knowledge to the existing literature with regard to the current position of MBA education in China and the transferability of Western management knowledge in the Chinese context. This research has also made a contribution to a better

understanding of Chinese students' learning style and their perceptions of Western management pedagogical methods.

For the aim of improving MBA education in China, some practical suggestions are also given in terms of making these courses more critical and adopting more interactive yet culturally sensitive teaching methods while considering the learning style and cultural perspectives of Chinese students. Because of the small sample size and the purposeful sampling strategy, the generalisation of the findings may be limited, though it is believed a good reflection of the majority of MBA programmes on offer in China. Similar studies could be carried out on a larger scale, and extended to other levels of management education in China, and the practical use of Western management knowledge at work will also be a good starting point for further research.

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Appendix I