

*East Asian Learners' response to intercultural themes as part of the year abroad in the UK*  
Tricia Coverdale-Jones

**Pedagogical Research Fund for Languages, Linguistics and  
Area Studies in Higher Education**

January 2005 - January 2006  
Tricia Coverdale-Jones

**East Asian Learners' response to intercultural themes as  
part of the year abroad in the UK**

## **CONTENTS**

Abstract	
1. Introduction	Page 3
1.1 The year abroad	Page 4
1.2 The course	Page 4
2. The Project	Page 5
2.1 The student respondents	Page 5
2.2 Methodology	Page 6
2.3 Online questionnaire responses	Page 6
2.3.1 Student Profile for two cohorts compared	Page 6
2.3.3 How the intercultural experience had effected changes in the individual's self-perception	Page 8
2.3.4 Shopping	Page 9
2.3.5 The effect of learning about intercultural differences	Page 10
2.3.6 Sources of stress - How do students deal with stress?	Page 11
3. Interview results – some examples of change	Page 12
4. Final position at the end of the year	Page 14
5. CONCLUSION	Page 16
Acknowledgements	Page 17
References	Page 18

## **Abstract**

*The intercultural experience of a year abroad can be extended as concept to East Asian students studying in the UK. This research project considered the ways in which these students can benefit from intercultural learning within the course as well as the more generalized life experience which a year abroad brings. The aim was to gather and contrast student perceptions about their own intercultural learning and the perceived benefits of a course in Intercultural Communication. Two separate cohorts of students were sampled at an early and a late stage of their course.*

*Students were asked to say whether and how this course had helped them on a personal and academic level. In addition, their views on their own experience were sought and the factors which had caused stress were identified.*

*Through online questionnaires and interviews with a random sample of students, it was established that the majority of students sampled found the course helped them to understand their own experience. This can contribute to a more positive understanding of the "other" culture or cultures. By the end of the academic year the majority of students felt that they had acculturated and were in a stable state. This would enable them to obtain a positive outcome in both academic and personal terms from their "year abroad".*

## **Introduction**

The aim of this project was to answer the question of the potential benefits of intercultural learning. It was aimed at international students who were effectively undertaking a "year abroad" in the UK.

### **1.1 The year abroad**

Many previous studies have looked at the experience of British students who have spent a year abroad, usually as part of a languages degree (Coleman, 1996; The Interculture Project, 1999) but sometimes also for science subjects (e.g. University of Bath, Natural Sciences with European and US universities). Other studies have looked at the experience of students from other Anglophone countries. However, the similarity of the experience for our international, mostly Chinese, students is striking to one from a background which is shared by many EFL colleagues who have taught not only in EFL but also in modern foreign languages. The internationalisation of British and other countries' universities The intercultural experience works in both directions, from west to east or east to west, as can be seen in a vast array of literature on sojourners and refugees. Much literature in the intercultural area has a "Western" focus, as evidenced by papers concerning the British/ North American experience abroad as a student (ibid.), a traveler or a business person.

There is a considerable amount of research on the "Chinese Learner" or the "East Asian Learner" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1996, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001, The East Asian Learner Journal). The discussion of whether the "Chinese Learner" is active or passive, or indeed an entity rather than a Western creation, is not the focus of this paper. A discussion of this can be found in the journal issue arising from the conference held at this university in July 2004 "Responding to the needs of the Chinese learner" (Rastall and Coverdale-Jones, 2006, forthcoming). The preponderance of students in this study were from Hong Kong, but a number were from mainland China (which is still culturally different from Hong Kong, as acknowledged by the respondents themselves) and from France or its dominions; this can be seen in the results below.

The year abroad is frequently seen in terms of deep learning and holistic learning (Crawshaw, 2005; Jordan, 2002) as well as being a language or subject knowledge boost. A related view describes this learning as an improvement in criticality, in terms of self-awareness and problem-solving (Mitchell et al, (2005). Crawshaw (2005). gives an overview of various learning and teaching methods which can be used to deepen the learning experience through activities, before, during and after the sojourn abroad. Many of the approaches currently favoured in UK universities are based on an ethnographic approach plus games and other activities (e.g. The Interculture Project, recent BALEAP Professional Interest meetings in Intecultural Communication and the Chinese Learner).

## **1.2 The course**

The course in Intercultural Perspectives on Communication (IPC) which provides the students for this study follows a line of applying theories (e.g. Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1991,1994; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997; Schwartz, 1992,1994) to case studies, with the addition of critical incidents (Cushner & Brislin, 1996) and other intercultural learning games . This model is in line with much of the commercial intercultural training currently available for business clients, but with a much stronger academic emphasis.

The aim of the accredited course was to teach about this subject from an academic point of view; at the same time it was anticipated that personal benefits in the form of enhanced understanding, deep holistic learning and intercultural competence would also ensue. The view was that, as most of these students were only in Portsmouth for one year (but see exceptions in table below) their experience was equivalent to the "year abroad" taken by home students studying a foreign language in the same school, SLAS. Other studies have looked at the benefits of ethnographic research to be undertaken by "year abroad" students but this has not previously been applied to students studying EFL and business or communications in the UK.

## **2. The Project**

The aim of this research project was to evaluate the perceptions of students (i.e. the group of students of IPC who had learnt about intercultural communication) on the benefits of this course and intercultural learning in general. This is a fairly difficult area for which to collect data, so the emphasis here is on students' self-perception, collected anonymously.

### **2.1 The student respondents**

The Cohort 1 students had taken a course in Intercultural Perspectives on Communication, most over two semesters although a few took the course in semester 2 only, including all the French participants. Cohort 2 students were in the middle of their first semester (Weeks 6-9) studying this subject. Most students were taking a degree in Communication and English Studies, however a small number were studying International Trade and English. The profile of the respondents is given in the tables Figures 1 & 2 (See appendix).

Both cohorts of students are a fairly homogeneous group of young students, with the predominant national group being from Hong Kong, recently arrived, and with little or no experience of living or working in other countries, or of working life in general. The remaining students are from China, with a similar background, plus a small number from other East Asian countries such as Taiwan or Malaysia. This experience profile is a similar profile to that of British students doing a year abroad as part of their language degrees. It also gives an indication that the small number of students with more experience, such as working before the start of

their study or living in another country may have different reactions to learning about intercultural perspectives. The focus here is on the students from East Asia, for whom a typical profile is that of a young student in the early twenties with no prior experience of work or living abroad. French students were included in the sample for contrast only.

## **2.2 Methodology**

The methodology was based on gathering and analysing student perceptions of their learning experience inside and outside the classroom. For the first cohort of students questionnaires were administered online and interviews were conducted in May/June 2005, after the students had almost completed the second semester. For the second cohort these were administered in the period November 2005 to January 2006. The intention was to compare relatively recent arrivals (cohort 2) with students almost at the end of the academic year abroad (cohort 1). For practical reasons arising from the start date of the project these cohorts were surveyed with the longer-term residents first. The means of gathering data were:

- Student evaluations on their experience of Teaching and Learning in a British university via an online questionnaire on the WebCT course set up for this unit. Answers were sent anonymously to an Excel or Access database. Questions were a mix of open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions with in some cases more than one choice possible. (See appendix for further details.)
- Semi-structured interviews with a randomly selected sample of students to collect qualitative data and to probe deeper into responses to online learning environment. Interviews were audio-recorded, two examples video-recorded.
- Use of Discussion lists and résumés to encourage student reflection on own learning. This was to support student thinking on intercultural learning rather than for the collection of data.

## **2.3 Online questionnaire responses**

The questions were framed to elicit answers on the areas of academic intercultural learning as well as perceived personal and academic benefits from studying the course. Questions were framed either as open-ended questions or as set of choices with one choice or in some cases more than one choice possible. All response text is in the students' own words with no corrections. Details of the answers are given below:

### **2.3.1 Student Profile for two cohorts compared**

Cohort 1 consisted of students in their second semester of the course.

Questionnaire given to 60 students online

- Electronic questionnaire completed at different dates April-June 2005
  - 47 responses
  - 19 male, 28 female

A further breakdown of the students by age, origin and nationality can be seen in the table (Appendix, Figure 1). Interview will be discussed in section 3.

Most students in cohort 1 had been in Britain for 6-8 months. Three students had previously studied in another country, however for short periods only. Eight students out of the forty-seven had worked full-time before they became a student. Eleven students had studied Intercultural Communication before at the City University HK for between one and two years.

For Cohort 2 most students were direct entry students into the final year of a degree, although one or two had been at the University of Portsmouth for the second year as well.

- Questionnaire given to 27 students online
- Electronic questionnaire completed at different dates Nov 2005-Jan 2006
  - 21 responses
  - 6 male, 15 female

(See Figure 2 in appendix for a further breakdown)

Most students had been in Britain for 3 – 4 months. Two students had previously studied in the UK for four or five years. One student had lived in Mauritius for ten years in childhood, another had worked for four years in Japan. Two students had worked full-time before their course of study.

The replies given in response to the question of whether they had heard of well-known intercultural theorists can be seen in Figure 3. Hofstede is clearly the most well known amongst these two groups of university students, who had already shown in their selection of course that they were interested in culture and communication. This shows some awareness of this area of study, which is very current at present, especially in Business Studies and shows how Hofstede's fame has spread across the globe, whether from Hong Kong or mainland China (Cohort 2). However, most of the students from Hong Kong were self-selected, as they were studying Communication, both here at UoP and in their previous studies.

When asked to rate their home culture according to well-known dimensions which had been studied in the course (Hofstede, 1991; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997; Hall, 1976), the responses showed distinct but varying differences between the Hong Kong and the Chinese students (however, the sample was for small numbers of students in cohort 2 especially). (See Figure 4.) For cohort 2, we can note here that these groups of Chinese students view themselves as more individualistic, in contrast to the students from Cohort 1. The two cohorts agreed in their ratings for achievement-orientation (HK 3.5 & 3.2;

China 3.9 & 4.1 respectively) but not on much else. In this case it seems that the numbers sampled are too small and the interpretations of the dimensions by students may be too varied to give reliable results.

### **2.3.3 How the intercultural experience had effected changes in the individual's self-perception**

The first group of students, who were at the end of their year abroad, were asked the question "*Has the experience of studying abroad changed your view?*" (Cohort 1 only, more than one answer possible. See Figure 5) The choices (more than one option available) were:

- I see my home country in a different way
- I prefer the culture in my home country
- I have a different attitude to study now
- I prefer the culture of learning in my home country

The evidence for a change in the individual is clear here, with almost or over half of the respondents showing some personal change. They had learnt to view their own country differently or to view study as a different type of activity, or both. A significant number preferred the British culture of learning, whilst 33 out of 47 noted a significant change in their attitude to their home country following a period of study abroad. 26 out of 47 had changed their attitude to study. Considerably more preferred the British than the Chinese/home culture of learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). In comparison with the second cohort they had adapted more to the newer learning style (See Figure 6.). The second cohort were not asked to come to conclusions on these points as they were at a relatively early stage in the acculturation process; instead they were asked about aspects of life where they had noticed differences in behaviour (figure 6) and had noticed these in almost every aspect, especially as this had been the focus of discussion in seminars and online. Attitudes to males and females was the least mentioned item here (9) followed by shopping behaviour (11), despite the fact that many commented in seminars and on the discussion list in WebCT on the slow service in British shops where only one customer is served at a time ( a source of frustration to many East Asian students).

Examples of this change in attitudes for students in Cohort 1 can be seen in the following quotes from students who had learnt about aspects of the British or Western culture, when asked to explain their choice of response (Figure 5). Some of these are at a deeper level, whilst others are at a more surface level, as anticipated by the course tutor.

- *I like Uk much more than my own country, it'd be wonderfulif HK can be a colony of Uk again. Here is more systematic and nocorruption in politics.* (22 F HK) (sic)
- *As British classmates and hallmates may have expressed their views and feelings on my behaviourand life style, it just provides me a chance to*

*think 'am i really like that?' i have never thought about myself in this way.*  
(21 M HKSAR) (sic)

The next section of the online questionnaire concentrated on changes in the students' self-awareness in this context or understanding of cultural differences.

*How do you think about your home country now?*

(Figure 7)

Whilst no students in either cohort preferred being in the UK, 26% or 29% were able to enjoy being in Britain, enjoying it equally. However the students who had been here longer had found many things they liked, presumably as they had reached a later stage on the acculturation curve and had learned more about what was available in Portsmouth, as well as experiencing better weather in the summer semester. In comparison with the students from Cohort 2, the more recently arrived show a greater degree of missing home. In other words, a learning process seems to have taken place with the students had been here longer. The students have acculturated and are feeling relatively more positive about their experiences. Whether this is attributed by the students to their course of study is explained in later answers (section 2.3.5). (See Figure 7.)

When asked what they missed about their home country, similar points were mentioned by both groups. The points most frequently mentioned were predictable and not culture-specific in that it is a common experience to miss family, friends and food. Whilst this could be interpreted as a superficial response to cultural difference, the students were being asked to describe their personal experience here rather than to analyse it.

(See Figure 8)

Some students chose, rather than to say what they missed, to nominate aspects they preferred in Britain, such as

- clean, fresh air (several comments from both Hong Kong and China)
- the "free living style of Britain" (China, M,24)
- living independently (HK, F, 21)
- "learning a lot of things" (Réunion, F, 21)

### **2.3.4 Shopping**

The less predictable item for us as Western researchers is the fairly frequent mention of shopping as one of the things they missed about their home country, both in this question and in responses to later open-ended questions. Discussions with colleagues who are familiar with Hong Kong as well as informal observation in South China and student interviews have confirmed how much shopping centres form an essential part of the lifestyle and are viewed as

“entertainment” in Hong Kong and other cities in South China, especially for the younger generation.

Shopping was one of the most frequently mentioned items, for both cohorts in interviews as well as in online discussions. Further questioning in interviews revealed that shopping in the evenings was part of the lifestyle for Hong Kong students, their main means of relaxation. They would go to the shopping centres where they could walk around with friends, look at the displays, have a drink or snack or go to a karaoke bar together. The early closing times for most UK shops (even in shopping malls) were interpreted by some as laziness on the part of the shopkeepers or shopworkers – a typical misattribution of motive in a cross-cultural situation where negative characteristics or interpretations are assigned to the “other” and positive ones to one’s ingroup (Hinton, 2000). There was also the perception that pubs were nasty and violent and to be avoided at all costs. It would be easy to dismiss this love of shopping as trivial information given by immature respondents (once again a negative misattribution). However, in terms of acculturation, this very different lifestyle factor reflects difficulty in being able to relax in the new culture. In a new culture the same purpose may be achieved through different means which the stranger will not recognise or will be loath to accept. The students may not know alternative means of relaxation, although some, such as the person who took walks by the sea, find these in the course of time, as with any cultural adaptation process.

### **2.3.5 The effect of learning about intercultural differences**

Students were next asked:

*Do you think learning about cultural differences has helped you to understand the new culture more easily? (more than one option available)*

The responses are summarised in Figure 10. Only one item *It has helped me in my daily life in practical terms* was chosen by a majority of students in Cohort 2. However, a sizeable proportion of both cohorts (ranging between 29% and 52%) chose the first three positive responses.

These predominantly positive reactions show that for both cohort 1 and 2 the study of intercultural perspectives had helped them in dealing with experiences within and outside the university context. Half or nearly half or one third of the Cohort 1 students chose the positive answers and in some cases they chose two positive answers. The perceptions of the respondents are the focus of this study, in terms of what the year abroad brings in terms of life experiences. These benefits were further explained in the interviews. Students referred to being better able to understand fellow students from a number of countries, as well as being better able to understand their own feelings in the intercultural situation and the culture of their own country. (See section 3 for some examples of their comments in interviews.)

In response to the question *How has it helped?* (16/47 responses in all) the following examples show a range of responses:

- when i worked with groupmates from other countries, I would always apply the theories that i learnt to cope with the conflicts that we encountered. (sic)  
HK 22 M
- I think you get to interpret some certain cases you've seen in your daily life by using the theories we've learned in class which is quite interesting. They are like the real life examples of the theories. (sic)  
Taiwan 20 F
- because in course book, there are many cases about uk, so i can know more about uk culture, for example, uk is a masculine and individual country. therefore, when i talk with british, i use another angle to think about them.  
HK 22 M
- I have encountered a lot of cultural differences and firstly just couldn't understand the British. And just I misinterpreted their words and behaviour, I got very upset with these attitudes because Japanese culture is so different from the one in Britain  
Japan 25 M

### **2.3.6 Sources of stress - How do students deal with stress?**

One question which was added at the end concentrated on the stressful experience of acculturation (cf. UKCOSA, 2004, Spencer-Oatey, 2006)). Areas which caused stress to international and EU students were in many cases no different from those which cause stress to home students, such as assignment deadlines and money worries. Others reflect cultural aspects or difficulties. (See Figures 10 & 11.) The sources of stress most frequently mentioned revolved around study (getting assignments in by the deadline, a lack of guidance from tutors) and the different lifestyle, although a handful in each group did mention aggressive behaviour which some described as racism (cf UKCOSA, 2004)

Some students found ways to deal with these sources of stress through modifying their own behaviour, not always in the best possible way, as can be seen in the comments in sample answers below:

#### **Cohort 1**

- *Eat and Drink and smoke...as a result ,i am 2 stones heavier than I was.*
- *Now the situation is better as I have enough money for the rest of the days that I will stay. I have tried to find other kinds of entertainment which do not cost money, such as strolling around the sea front, reading books, listening to music and radio*
- **JUST FACE IT POSITIVELY.GET A PART TIME JOB.**

## Cohort 2

- *I will discuss my problems with my friends. And we will play some sports or exercises to reduce the stress*
- *I think the most useful and only way to get a good mark is to work hard.*
- *I cry a lot*

The ways students found of dealing with stress show how they had adapted and modified their own behaviour. Others had adapted less well, as in the last example. Some students or other sojourners do not adapt well – they adopt the “fight or flight” response to culture shock. This may be displayed as “anger, irritation, rejection or escape” (Ockert-Axelsson & Norman, 1993). Clearly we are concerned for the students’ well-being as well as their learning, both of which associated factors can be eased by increasing self-awareness.

As Spencer-Oatey (2006) has noted, we need to take our responsibilities towards international students who are undergoing a life-changing experience very seriously. The aim of this course extended beyond the academic goals to the more intangible goal of helping students to understand their situation. As noted above, the difficulty of collecting data in this area leads to this study’s reliance on perceptions of the students, who may not all be applying the criteria equally. A small number of students referred to their own depression in the early stages of studying in the UK, a well-recognised phenomenon on the acculturation curve, recognised by, inter alia, Hofstede (1994; 210). (See Section 4.)

### **3. Interview results – some examples of change**

Interviews were conducted with a random sample of the sixty students in May and November 2005. One in six students were chosen. The sample presented here also demonstrates the real changes which had taken place in the deep learning and self-awareness referred to in the introduction above.

#### **3.1 Cohort 1**

In interviews the effect of prior experience showed more, as it was possible to go into greater depth in discussing the issues. This was especially clear with the students who had been in Britain for longer. Students were asked to relate any changes they had noticed in themselves.

On learning style:

*Mmm.. I think ... maybe ... by the communication with others, we exchange with others ideas and then in the process I find I learn more than before, so I-I find that I learn more than ... appreciate the learning style here.*

*Tricia: Do you think that you will continue to learn in this newer way?*

*Emily: Yes, I will*  
(E, HK, age 25, spent 7 months in UK)

*Changed style, e.g. asking questions in class, not after class. It related to all the teachers here because they like inviting questions.*  
(N, 24, F, Foshan, spent 1 and a half years in UK)

And on personal interactional style:

*I will change the way to express my idea. Because in China if my father ask me to do something, although I don't like, I will say OK. Now I always argue, I will say no. ( N, 24, F)*

*Helped to understand her own culture shock, feeling depressed in early stages – now I can see myself going through stages (my paraphrase)  
I like to make my own decisions  
Do you experience reverse culture shock when you go back to India? yes  
(S, 23, F, India spent almost four years in UK)*

When asked about how the course had helped:

*Yes there is a lot of experiences.. example ... do things as a group, which is oriental culture ... They don't cook together ... now I won't think they are selfish or whatever, just their culture (Ni, 20, F, Taiwan)*

*It helped to understand the Chinese culture (J, 21, F, Belgium)*

*Why? I know not only theories; I could apply theories to things.  
Yes of course .. Now, not positive, not negative, neutral. I think IPC really helped. My mind has changed to... international things. (Y, 25, M, Japan)*

These comments show that the students are now able to articulate their experience and have become more self-aware. As many academics will themselves have experienced, the life-changing nature of a sojourn abroad leads one to question many things about oneself and one's own culture (the self-awareness referred to above). The course aim of giving the students the tools with which the experience can be seen within an "objective" framework<sup>1</sup> seems to have been achieved here, at least in the perception of the majority of the students taking this course. One student from Cohort 1 early on in her course also showed insight:

---

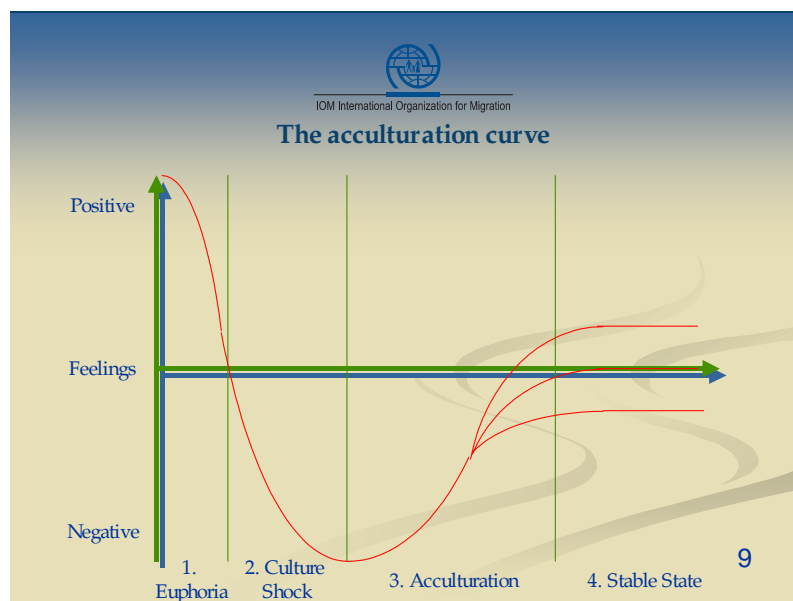
<sup>1</sup> Of course, Hofstede's dimensions have been criticized as too Western-centric and not objective (e.g. Schwartz, 1992) but they have provided a practicable framework for these learners to apply here.

*Sure. I think a very significant difference is China is masculinity country. I think in Britain, people more considerate about elder people. In China don't care about elder people. Like at Brittany Ferries even supervisor or manager show respect to elder people In China nobody would employ old people. It is age discrimination. Elder people are not looked after well in society like in family. (F, 21, PRC)*

Being able to articulate these ideas shows this student's learning and self-development, an especially good example of a good student who was sensitive to cultural issues is presented here.

#### 4. Students' final position at the end of the year

The well-known acculturation curve was presented in the online questionnaire to the students in Cohort 1 nearing the end of their year abroad. They were asked to place themselves on it. and to explain their feelings.



Weiss (2004)

[http://www.more.fi/files/IOM\\_Presentation.ppt](http://www.more.fi/files/IOM_Presentation.ppt)

Most students had adapted in the course of their two semesters or more of study in Britain. Students had previously learned about the acculturation curve. As the students who were asked to place themselves on the acculturation curve were all nearing the end of their academic year here, it was appropriate to ask them for

this self-evaluation. (This curve had not been covered in the course so far for the Semester 1, Cohort 2 students.) Here the results showed that

- 0 students considered themselves to be still in the Euphoria phase
- 2 found themselves in the Culture Shock phase
- 16 in the Acculturation phase
- 28 rated themselves as being in a stable state.

This shows how over half of these students had adapted to living in another culture. This is of course self-evaluation, which may have the drawback of varying interpretation. For example, the rating which one student gave her/himself was linked with some surprising comments:

*Stable state – i am now get used to their scream at the middle of the night, drink to get drunk, dirty dishes in sink, dress sexy when the temperature is extremely low ... etc (HK, F, 22)*

This student appears to still suffering from culture shock, which many of us from within the British culture would also suffer if living in certain halls of residence. The shock which this student feels was also apparent in one interview from Cohort 2. There were however only a small number of cases where the comment contradicted the chosen position on the scale. More typical examples can be seen below.

- *Culture shock – I think having been here for 7months is not long enough for me to fully adapt myself to a new culture. I'm perhaps acculturating but still finding quite a lot of culture shock. (France, M, 23)*
- *Stable state - I have already accommodated with the lifestyle in UK . E.g I have to buy things a bit earlier as the shops here close early which is very different in Hong Kong. (HK, F, 23)*
- *Stable state - I love the life in British, very relaxed, and like the life after retired British (HK,F, 24)*
- *Stable state - Everything are fine now (HK, F, 22)*
- *Stable state- I feel positive about the acculturation. Because people will more connect with each other under this globalizationsituation (China, M, 25)*
- *Acculturation - After 7 months I think I can handel the life in uk, but I still miss my own country, so I think it become more stable! (China, F, 22)*
- *Acculturation - I feel that the period of euphoria is finished and the time of culture shock was not very long and feel know in a period of acculturation which is longer but I do not think that I can reach a stable point in England for the moment. (HK, F, 23)*
- *Acculturation – I used to the cultural difference between me an British but sometimes I still feel annoyed by them. (HK, 22,F)*

In these more typical examples we can see evidence of increased self-awareness and deeper intercultural learning, even though sometimes this is at a fairly surface level. (Even items at a surface level; can have an effect on the respondents' well-being.) We can incidentally see how slow the pace of life in Britain is considered to be by at least one of these students! Many of these students are still young and relatively inexperienced. The important point is the improved sense of well-being and intercultural understanding which can be noted here.

## **CONCLUSION**

We are dealing here with a situation which has a large number of variables. As can be seen from this brief summary of data, the students who were the respondents in this study varied in age, gender, nationality, amount of time spent in Britain and life experience, in addition to personality differences which could account for some of their reactions to the intercultural experience.

The data confirms the view that the acculturation curve (Hofstede, 1994; Weiss, 2004) takes time to complete and the rate at which sojourners progress in their acculturation process (or otherwise) will vary considerably. However, it supports the claim that we can help the students for whom we are responsible to acculturate through giving them an understanding of what is happening to them, and we can improve their intellectual skills, e.g. criticality and problem-solving ability, through addressing the process directly and in an academic framework. The results from this survey show that a sizeable proportion of the students surveyed felt that they had benefitted from the course. Students were aware of many issues in the cultural sphere and had in most cases moved on from the negative reactions associated with culture shock. They felt that they understood British and other cultures better as a result of studying intercultural communication.

It is not possible to assert that this learning was entirely due to the study of intercultural communication, however. It is probable that these students would have learnt about culture in any case in the course of their sojourn in Britain. In fact, they seem to have avoided, in most cases, the confirmation of stereotypes and the negative attributions which can arise in intercultural experiences. Some student perceptions are unexpected – I had not intended to include “shopping” in this report but found it was so frequently mentioned as to be unavoidable.

In that the year abroad becomes a part of one's whole life experience which one may reflect on in future years, it is also likely that the learning which has taken place within the confines of the classroom and outside it. As the students who referred to working within an international or global context commented, some continuation of intercultural learning may take place after graduation, on their return to their home country or to work in other countries.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank my colleague, Lin Zheng, from the university of Portsmouth, for help with the conduct of this research and the contribution of valuable comments on the analysis of student responses.

I also wish to express thanks of course to all students respondents.

## References

BALEAP Professional Interest Meeting, "Intercultural Communication", University of the West of England, February 2005.

BALEAP Professional Interest Meeting, "Focus on Chinese Learners", November 2001, Sheffield Hallam University

Coleman, J. (1996). *Studying Languages: Survey of British and European Students - the proficiency, background, attitudes and motivations of students of foreign languages in the United Kingdom and Europe*. London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research.

Crawshaw, R. (2005) *Intercultural awareness as a component of HE Modern Languages course in the UK*  
<http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/paper.aspx?resourceid=2303>

Cushner, K. & Brislin, R. (1996). *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide*. CA: Sage.

The East Asian Learner Journal, Editor Dr Paul Wickens, Oxford Brookes University. [www.eastasianlearner.org](http://www.eastasianlearner.org)

Hall, E.T. (1976) *Beyond Culture*. Anchor Press: Garden City, New York

Hinton, P. R.(2000) *Stereotypes, Cognition and Culture* Hove: Psychology Press

Hofstede, G. (1991, 1994) *Cultures and Organisations; Software of the Mind. Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*. London: Harper Collins.

The Interculture Project <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/users/interculture/>

Jin, L. and Cortazzi, M. (1996). Cultures of Learning: Language Classrooms in China. In Coleman, H. (1996) *Society and the language Classroom*. Cambridge, CUP.

Jin, L. and Cortazzi (2006) Changing Practices in Chinese Cultures of Learning. In Rastall and Coverdale-Jones (2006)

Jordan, S. (2002). *Intercultural issues in foreign language learning and ethnographic approaches study abroad*.  
[www.llas.ac.uk/resources/goodpractice.aspx?resourceid=100](http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/goodpractice.aspx?resourceid=100)

Mitchell, R. Myles, F. Johnstone, B. & Ford, P. (2005) *The year abroad: A critical moment*

<http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/paper.aspx?resourceid=2270>

Ockert-Axelsson, K. & Norman, D. (1993) *Across Cultures: Coursebook*. Sweden, Studentlitteratur)

Rastall, P. & Coverdale-Jones, T. (eds.) (2006, forthcoming) Special issue of *Language, Culture and Curriculum* (19: 1. 2006) containing selected papers from conference "Responding to the needs of the Chinese learner", The University of Portsmouth, July 2004. Clevedon; Multilingual Matters

Schwartz, S. (1992, 1994) A summary of these can be found at

[http://stephan.dahl.at/intercultural/Schwartz\\_Value\\_Inventory.html](http://stephan.dahl.at/intercultural/Schwartz_Value_Inventory.html)

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2006) Chinese Students' Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustments to Britain: an empirical study. In Rastall, P. & Coverdale-Jones, T. (2006)

Trompenaars F. & Hampden-Turner, C. (1997) *Riding the Waves of Culture*. London: Nicholas Brearley Publishing.

UKCOSA (2004) *Broadening our horizons: international students in UK universities and colleges*. Report of the UKCOSA survey.

<http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/survey/index.htm>

UNESCO "The concept of Voluntary Service; Cultural Shock, The Curve of cultural adaptation during a medium or long-term stay abroad"

<http://www.unesco.org/ccivs/OldSite/servvol/htm/A2.htm>

Watkins, D.A. & Biggs, J.B (eds.) (1996) ) *The Chinese Learner : cultural, psychological and contextual influences*. Hong Kong, Comparative Education Research Centre

Watkins, D.A. & Biggs, J.B. (eds.) (2001) *Teaching the Chinese Learner: psychological and pedagogical perspectives*. Hong Kong, Comparative Education Research Centre

Weiss, T. (2004) *Safe Movement and Cultural Orientation*. Presentation at Sea Border Control Seminar, 30 Jan 2004

[http://www.more.fi/files/IOM\\_Presentation.ppt](http://www.more.fi/files/IOM_Presentation.ppt)