UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Culture and Distance Learning in Hong Kong:
A Case Study of an Overseas Distance Learning Programme Offered to Chinese Learners in Hong Kong

Doctor of Philosophy
Thesis

Pansy Mi-ying Lam

May 2006
Culture and Distance Learning in Hong Kong: A case study of an overseas distance learning programme offered to Chinese learners in Hong Kong

Pansy M.Y. Lam

Abstract

This research aims to initiate a critique of the prevailing beliefs about Hong Kong educational culture, particularly with regard to the culture-specificity of Chinese learning styles. It explores this theme through examining distance learning. The central research question pursued concerns the extent to which distance learning is compatible with Hong Kong adults’ learning styles.

This central research question is addressed by conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on Chinese culture, focusing on the learning styles of Hong Kong Chinese adults. This review is supplemented by a case study using a threefold research method that involved all the Hong Kong course members of a two-year distance learning Master’s programme with the Centre of Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester. Focus groups were conducted to identify themes before a questionnaire based on these was sent to all course participants; then 22 in-depth qualitative interviews were held with a sub-sample of the course participants to discover how participants reacted to the distance mode of learning.

There were three main findings:

1. Contrary to common misconceptions, this case study indicated that not all Chinese learners are passive, reserved and reluctant to challenge a teacher’s authority. They are active in group work, intrinsically motivated and are not always concerned about the issue of ‘face’.

2. Distance learning is acceptable to those Hong Kong Chinese adult learners who are autonomous learners and can make good use of the infrequent face-to-face tutorials to receive feedback from the teacher.

3. The respondents in this case study feel more comfortable making use of technology as a resource generator rather than as a learning platform.

The aim of this research has not been to test theoretical propositions against a representative sample but rather to explore key theoretical premises in relation to a specific case study. That is to say, if these theoretical premises and assumptions do not apply to this particular case study, then we may be able to question the accuracy of the depiction of Hong Kong Chinese learners as a whole.

This research provides insights into a hitherto somewhat under-researched group of Hong Kong adult learners in an informal learning environment. It has significance for overseas distance learning course providers in catering for their learners’ needs.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following friends and colleagues for their help in the process of this research: Dr Joan Snow, Mr John Cribbin, Mrs Y.L. Cheng, Dr B.K. Choy, Mr Kam Chuan Aik, Dr Johnny Sung, Ms Arwen Raddon, Mr Dennis Chan, Ms Juliana Chiu, Mr Edward Li, Ms Karen Ngeow, Mr Peter Kennedy, Ms Polly Kwok, Ms Candy Cheung and Ms Sandy Wong.

I am also grateful to my supervisors, Dr Katharine Venter and Dr Jason Hughes for their unfailing support and guidance in the whole research process. Dr John Goodwin also provided me with some good insights into qualitative research at the early stage of the study.

Special thanks also go to Albert, Gavin and Karen for their understanding and for allowing me to be absent from many family functions during the six long years of the research.
## CONTENTS

Abstract i

Acknowledgements ii

Contents iii

List of Tables iv

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>Distance Learning</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Chinese Culture and Chinese Learning Styles</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>Research Design and Analysis</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Findings – Confucianism and the Hong Kong Learner</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>The Chinese Learner and Distance Learning</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bibliography
Appendix A Focus Group Questions
Appendix B Questionnaire
Appendix C Interview Guide
Appendix D Interview Analysis Index
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Age Profile of Distance Learning Students at the Open University of Hong Kong</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2</td>
<td>Gender Ratio of Distance Learning Students at the Open University of Hong Kong</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.3</td>
<td>Previous Educational Level of Distance Learning Participants at the Open University of Hong Kong</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.4</td>
<td>Occupations of Participants</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.5</td>
<td>Applicants’ Main Consideration When Pursuing Further Studies</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.6</td>
<td>The Most Popular Academic Qualification Pursued</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.7</td>
<td>The Most Preferred Teaching and Learning Mode</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Effects of Approaches to Learning</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.1</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.2</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.3</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.4</td>
<td>No. of Children</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.5</td>
<td>Family Composition</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.6</td>
<td>Education Level Completed</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.7</td>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.8</td>
<td>Job Position/Title</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.9</td>
<td>The Empirical Findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Cultural Traits of the Hong Kong Learners</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Learning Styles of the Hong Kong Learners</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Motivation for Learning</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Social Issues</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Family Commitments</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.1</td>
<td>F. Distance Learning</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.2</td>
<td>G. Use of Technology</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.3</td>
<td>Reasons for Undertaking Continuing Education Programs</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.1</td>
<td>Summary of the Major Themes in Distance Learning and a Comparison of the Hong Kong Distance Learner</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis aims to explore various aspects of distance learning, a common mode of learning in continuing education, in order to investigate if such a method of learning is compatible with adult learning styles in Hong Kong. It seeks to achieve this aim by conducting a case study of a group of adult Chinese learners in an overseas postgraduate distance learning programme to examine the learning styles among adult learners in Hong Kong. To understand the learning styles among such learners, one has to trace the cultural traits of Hong Kong people. As Hong Kong comprises 98% Chinese inhabitants, Chinese culture is necessarily closely examined. However, the social, economic and political history of Hong Kong has transformed this former British colony into a unique place with a culture that differs from other Chinese societies like Taiwan, Singapore and mainland China. In this respect, this thesis also seeks to examine the unique culture of Hong Kong to determine if the respondents in this case study demonstrate similar learning styles to those of other Chinese learners, as described in much of the literature.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the specific aims of the research, provides definitions of concepts and explains the organisation of the thesis.

The Research Question

The central research question to be addressed is:

Is distance learning a mode of educational delivery which suits the characteristics of Hong Kong Chinese adult learners?

To answer this question it is necessary to cover several areas of research, which are outlined below in order to explain the specific aims of this study.

(1) To review and critically examine the nature of Chinese culture

The research reviews the description of Chinese culture provided in the literature, the most prominent works being by Hofstede (1980, 2001), Trompenaars (1993) and Bond
Existing researchers have identified dimensions along which cultural
differences can be measured (e.g. Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Trompenaars, 1993). Chinese
culture is also examined critically through looking at Confucianism, which is the basis
of Chinese culture.

(2) To establish the characteristics of Chinese culture in Hong Kong
This research carries out an in-depth review of the literature on Hong Kong Chinese
culture to establish the cultural characteristics of the Chinese in Hong Kong. The
research will look into the effect Confucianism has had on this unique group of Chinese
people. It also takes into account the other effects that politics, the economy and the
social environment have had on the group. The unique behaviour of Hong Kong people
is in fact described as “the Hong Kong Identity” (Lau, 1982,1984; Lau & Kuan, 1988).
This research collects empirical data to examine the characteristics of Hong Kong adult
learners. This is achieved through a case study of a group of learners in a postgraduate
distance learning programme organised in Hong Kong by an overseas university.
Quantitative data is collected through a questionnaire and qualitative data is also
collected through interviewing a group of the adult Chinese learners in the programme.

(3) To investigate Chinese learning styles
This study seeks to investigate Chinese learning styles and the special characteristics of
Hong Kong Chinese learners. Many of the features of Hong Kong learners can be
found in the literature (Biggs, 1987,1991; Watkins et al., 1991; Kember & Gow, 1991;
Murphy, 1987) but it has often been felt that Hong Kong learners do not manifest many
of those characteristics (Kennedy, 2002c; Venter, 2002a, 2002b; Nield, 2004). This
research aims to look specifically into the characteristics of Hong Kong adult learners
by combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods in the case study.

(4) To examine features of distance learning and the behaviour of Hong Kong adult
learners
As the need for continuing education has been increasing, distance learning has become
a common mode of study all over the world, including Hong Kong. This research seeks
to review the literature on distance learning, especially focusing on the various common
themes related to distance learning, namely learner autonomy (Moore, 1986), isolation
of learners (Venter, 2001, 2003; Dickey, 2004), “distance” between teachers and
learners, student motivation (Ehrman, 1990; Kember, 2000; Venter, 2003), face to face tutorials (Fung & Carr, 1999), the role of the teacher (Garrison, 1995), and the use of technology (Nipper, 1989; Kennedy, 2002a). The behaviour of adult learners in Hong Kong will also be critically examined.

An examination of these areas will allow the central research question of whether distance learning is a compatible mode of educational delivery for the Hong Kong Chinese learners to be answered. Through a case study of a group of adult learners from Hong Kong in an MSc distance learning programme run by the Centre for Labour Market Studies (CLMS), Leicester University, in collaboration with the Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE), in-depth information regarding Hong Kong learners is collected. Quantitative and qualitative research methods are combined in this study. Quantitative research provides data on the opinions of Hong learners and facts on learning behaviour and practices. Qualitative research provides in-depth personal descriptions of respondents' individual thoughts and practices concerning their learning behaviour. These responses will give insights into how various Hong Kong learners handle a distance learning programme.

Contributions

This research contributes to the existing knowledge on Hong Kong adult learners by beginning to provide a critique of the prevailing beliefs about Hong Kong culture. One of its main aims is to critically examine the different interpretations of culture in the literature. The importance of Confucianism in moulding Chinese culture and Hong Kong culture is also an issue that is examined in this research. Besides providing such a critical analysis, the research also seeks to identify some special characteristics of Hong Kong adult learners. Many previous studies of Chinese culture have been done by foreign writers, whose views may be biased and ethnocentric (Hofstede, 1991). The contribution of this research is that it provides the perspective of a Hong Kong Chinese researcher. Although many Hong Kong–based writers (Lau, 1982, 1984; Lau & Kuan, 1988, Abbas, 1997; Kennedy, 2002c) talk about Hong Kong culture, they have not gone into the effect culture has on learning. This research looks at the impact Hong Kong culture has on learning, again from the point of view of a Hong Kong Chinese
researcher. This cultural relativity is an important aspect when research into culture is a very sensitive issue and when a culture is viewed through the relative norms of the culture itself.

Another contribution of this research is that it attempts to add more depth to the study of Chinese culture as it seeks to study a specific sub-group of Chinese learners rather than focussing on an ethnic group in general as does most research on culture. The Hong Kong Chinese, as well as the overseas Chinese (Bond, 1986; Hofstede, 1991), have always been regarded as being the same as the ethnic Chinese in China. Yet the group here in Hong Kong is unique in the sense that they have undergone various economic, social and political changes as a result of which they demonstrate different attitudes and behaviours. This study attempts to identify the special cultural traits of this small group of Chinese via some local literature, namely Lau (1982, 1984), Lau & Kuan (1988), Abbas (1997), Kennedy (2002c) and an expert in studying Hong Kong culture, Venter, (2002a, 2002b, 2003). It tries to determine if the Chinese in Hong Kong demonstrate similar learning behaviours to other Chinese as described by the various writers.

The Hong Kong Chinese learners studied in the previous literature were usually students in English or Mathematics classrooms (Biggs, 1991, 1987, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). It is through this early research that professional and adult learners became the focus of research. This current research is in fact a case study of a group of adult professionals in an overseas distance learning programme organised for Chinese learners in Hong Kong. The group consists of adult learners doing 3 Master's in Science programmes specialising in Training, Training and Human Resource Management, and Training and Performance Management, offered by the Centre for Labour Market Studies (CLMS), Leicester University in the United Kingdom, in collaboration with the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE), the Hong Kong University. A few writers have written about Chinese adult learners, but they have mostly studied overseas Chinese (Chan, 1999). This research focuses on a specific group of Chinese adult professional learners in Hong Kong and explores the limited amount of literature regarding Hong Kong adult learners. This is a great leap forward in understanding this unique group of learners more thoroughly. Empirical data is generated to provide a clearer insight into the adult learners in this unique group.
Then in-depth interviews providing the personal views and feelings regarding the distance learning mode of studying further demonstrate the characteristics of distance learning.

The aim of this research has not been so much to test theoretical propositions against a representative sample as the distance learning population in Hong Kong is relatively small. Data on distance learners among the local Chinese population is not readily available to the researcher. Due to the limited evidence available from one overseas distance learning programme organised jointly by Leicester University and Hong Kong University SPACE, a case study approach is adopted. Key theoretical premises are explored in relation to this specific case study. That is to say, if these theoretical premises and assumptions do not apply to this particular case study, then we may be able to question the accuracy of the depiction of Hong Kong Chinese learners as a whole. Even though this is a case study of one programme, analysis of distance learners and their learning styles could be undertaken on a relatively homogenous group.

Even though the group of Chinese adult learners is not a representative sample, it is a unique group to study as they are all Hong Kong Chinese learners, 90% female, mainly Human Resource Management or Management professionals in their mid career pursuing a distance learning MSc programme in Training and Human Resource Management. They are local Chinese, educated in the British colonial education system, middle class and middle aged and they have witnessed many changes in Hong Kong politically, socially and economically. This group, though relatively small, is very useful in testing out the assumptions put forward by the existing literature on Chinese learners.

This research also contributes to knowledge on distance learning. This type of learning has been researched widely in the US, the UK and Australia, where the Open University has been heavily involved. This study, the first of its kind, not only aims at studying what distance learning is, but also concentrates on various themes in distance learning that merit further research. The case study in this research aims to develop a working definition of distance learning as a backbone to the study of it as a suitable mode of educational delivery for the particular group of learners studied. The findings of this
research will provide insight for distance learning providers in catering for the needs of their learners.

The Background to the Study

Continuing Education in Hong Kong

A diverse range of economic, social and political factors has led to a dramatic increase in the number of adult learners taking up continuing professional education programmes (CE) in Hong Kong since the 1990s. These include Hong Kong’s rapid shift from a manufacturing to a service and then to a ‘knowledge-based’ economy and the consequent need for the workforce to be retrained; the opportunities that new modular and distance learning programmes provide for adults to study part-time after work or at weekends; the greater availability of overseas qualifications as governments around the world cut back on funding and overseas universities seek to recruit students and market their degree programmes in Hong Kong; restrictions on the number of full-time places available in local tertiary institutions; the emigration of graduate professionals in the early 1990s; the role of continuing education in meeting the changing social aspirations of the population; the effects of the economic downturn in the late 1990s and the need for adults to acquire new skills and qualifications so as to compete for jobs (Kennedy, 2002b).

In 1999, the Education Commission in Hong Kong announced that the ‘... age of lifelong learning has dawned. Learning is no longer the prerogative of those aged 6 to 22’ (1999:15). As part of its review of the Hong Kong education system, the Education Commission put forward a number of specific policy recommendations for continuing education. The reform holds out the promise of a radical overhaul, a major reappraisal of the entire education system:

Our education system still caters to a selected few while disadvantaging the majority...there is an urgent need to introduce fundamental reforms to our education system...Everyone should be given the opportunity to learn anywhere, anytime and be given recognition for what they achieve...learning is not limited to school...lifelong learning is the key to Hong Kong’s success.
This document sets out an agenda for CE reform that makes reference to social inclusion, open access, a qualifications framework and an accreditation mechanism as well as to the provision of information and resources for learners. However, the situation became such that, to quote Elliot (1999):

...when policy makers adopt the concept of lifelong learning without specifying what resources are to be added in order to bring about the socio-political changes that is at the heart of the concept...their claims amount to little more than empty rhetoric and patronizing generality.

(1999:38)

Chung et al (1994) argued that the development of CE was best left to market forces. Even though the government has adopted a "hands-off" (Kennedy, 2002b) approach, market needs have generated a total of 12,000 continuing education courses for 550,000 students. These courses are mostly offered by the Continuing Education units of the Universities: the University of Hong Kong (School of Professional and Continuing Education, 'SPACE), the Chinese University of Hong Kong (School of Continuing Studies, SCU), the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology (College of Lifelong Learning, CL3), the Baptist University (School of Continuing Education, SCE), the Polytechnic University, (School of Professional and Executive Development, SPEED), the City University of Hong Kong (School of Continuing and Professional Education, SCOPE), the Open University of Hong Kong (Li Ka Shing Institute of Professional and Continuing Education, LiPace), Lingnan University (Lingnan Institution of Further Education, LIFE) and the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Other local public providers like Caritas and the YMCA, quasi government bodies like the Trade Development Council, Productivity Council, the Employees Retraining Board, the Vocational Training Council and the government’s evening adult provision, as well as many private providers like the British Council and the Hong Kong Management Association also organised continuing education programmes in response to the economic changes. In 1999, the HKCAA also produced a 630-page guidebook on programmes offered in Hong Kong by non-local institutions. Many of these
programmes are award-bearing programmes in professional areas and many of these are in partnership with overseas partners. This is because the mainstream universities were preoccupied in their commitment to teaching and research in the context of a rapidly expanding full time undergraduate population.

**Distance Learning**

These continuing education programmes are organised in the form of face-to-face teaching as well as distance learning mode. In 2004-05 academic year, the Hong Kong Open University offered 133 distance learning programmes from certificate to master's degree level with a student headcount of 19,941 (Planning Unit, The Open University of Hong Kong, 2005). In the same academic year, the School of Continuing and Professional Education, Hong Kong University offered 29 distance learning programmes from certificate to master's level with a total enrolment of 1114 (Research and Development Unit, HKU SPACE, 2005).

The majority of programmes at the Open University of Hong Kong are distance learning programmes. Much of the teaching and learning is achieved by means of course packages that contain specially structured learning materials such as printed study units, supplementary readings and assignment questions. These are supplemented by part-time face-to-face tutorials. Other media, such as video and audio programmes, computer software, CD-ROMS and broadcast TV programmes, as well as online components are incorporated (The Open University of Hong Kong, 2005).

The most common model of distance learning offered by SPACE takes the form of supported distance learning (Cribbin, 2002). This usually involves collaboration with overseas institutions who provide the distance learning materials in the form of printed study units to support the teaching of the course and to supplement the teaching organised by the local institution. This model may also include visits by the overseas university staff at particular phases of the course as well as local tuition. Examples here are the Leicester University programmes in training and human resource management, public order and criminal justice, and the Bath University course in construction project management. The programme under study in this research is SPACE's collaboration with Leicester University's MSc in Training and Human Resource Management. One
of the strengths of this model is that it incorporates locally relevant teaching in what could otherwise be somewhat culture bound learning material, thus offering Hong Kong students an enhanced academic programme.

Distance education, as defined by Moore & Kearsley (1996), is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from the teaching and as a result requires special techniques of course design, special instructional techniques, special methods of communication by electronic and other technology, as well as special organisational and administrative arrangements.

At its most basic level, distance education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e., voice, video, data, and print), often in concert with face-to-face communication, is used to bridge the instructional gap. These types of programmes can provide adults with a second chance at a college education, reach those disadvantaged by limited time, distance or physical disability, and update the knowledge base of workers at their places of employment.

In 2000, Asia was already home to the greatest number of distance learners in the world. This is due to the urgent need for higher education when personal wealth, mobility, migration, and Internet usage are generally increasing. The numbers are increasing in distance-oriented universities with more than 3 million students in China's Central Radio and Television University (RTUVs) and 1 million students in India's Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) (Zhang & Perris, 2004). Distance learning programmes arrived in Hong Kong some 20 years later than in Britain but their development has been rapid. In 2001, Hong Kong probably had the highest number of offshore distance education programmes, with 550 non-local programmes mainly from Australia, the UK, Canada and the US offering more than 60,000 places. (Jedege & Shive, 2001). In the 2004-2005 academic year, there were 19,941 students in distance learning programmes offered by the Open University of Hong Kong (The Open University of Hong Kong, Planning Unit, 2004). As cited in Cohen (2000), Carr states that they were very concerned about some of the overseas distance learning providers at one point when the growth was so rapid that the government had not had a chance to examine the credentials and accreditation of some overseas institutions.
Many educators ask if distant learning students learn as much as students receiving traditional face-to-face instruction (Richardson et al., 1999). Research comparing distance education to traditional face-to-face instruction indicates that teaching and studying at a distance can be as effective as traditional instruction, when the method and technologies used are appropriate to the instructional tasks, there is student-to-student interaction, and when there is timely teacher-to-student feedback (Moore & Thompson, 1990; Verduin & Clark, 1991).

The purpose of this research is to critically examine various themes in distance learning to see if this educational delivery is suitable for Hong Kong adult distance learners, given the particular characteristics of such learners.

E-learning and distance learning have been widely talked about in the 21st century. In the US the two terms are frequently held to be synonymous. The use of technology has the potential to represent a great leap forward in the development of distance learning (Metrotra et al., 2001; Nipper, 1989; Kennedy, 2002a). However, this case study only focusses on one particular distance learning programme that is based on hard copy study packs and face-to-face occasional lectures augmented by email, Internet and telephone contacts. There is little use of synchronous lectures even though there is the use of a web-based conferencing system blackboard™ for real time discussion. One of the aims of this case study is to find out if this group of Hong Kong learners are keen on using these technological backups in their learning activities. However, it is somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the differences between e-learning and distance learning and the implications of adding technological support in the delivery mechanisms to existing distance learning programmes.

The themes of isolation and level of interaction are crucial in studying preferences among distance learners in Hong Kong. Student isolation and alienation (Dickey, 2004) has always been a big issue in distance learning. Students feel the isolation from teachers as well as from other learners. They also see isolation from the classroom (Venter, 2002a; 2003). The role of the teacher is another issue to be discussed. The face-to-face interaction with the teacher and the presence of the teacher to reassure students that they are "on the right track" is a key issue in distance learning (Venter, 2003). There is also the issue of the lack of a teacher providing non-verbal and visual
cues in the classroom (Demeester & Elander, 1999). Feedback from teachers and peers (Garrison, 1995) helps learners in constructing knowledge and to increase motivation and enhance performance. Students' persistence in finishing programmes and the number of dropouts (Cookson, 1990; Venter, 2003) has also been a major concern to distance learning programme providers.

Chinese Culture and the Hong Kong Learners

Biggs and Moore (1993) defines culture as "...the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is transmitted from one generation to another" (1993:24). Culture is not only a matter of overt behaviour – what people in particular societies wear, eat etc. – it is also the (social) rules, beliefs, attitudes and values which govern how people act and how they define themselves. It is "...the fabrics of meaning with which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions" (Geertz, 1973:42).

Hofstede developed a framework for measuring cultural differences in 40 countries and advocated four dimensions of cultural differences (1980). He called them individuality vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity vs. femininity. Later in 2001 he added a fifth dimension of Confucian dynamism. Trompenaars (1993) in his study of 50 countries, developed five similar measures of cultural orientation. These are universalism vs. particularism, individuality vs. collectivity, neutral vs. emotional, specific vs. diffuse and achievement vs. ascription.

In Hofstede and Bond (1984) and Hofstede (1980), Hong Kong Chinese culture is characterised as low on individualism and high on collectivism, high on power distance, weak on uncertainty avoidance and medium on masculinity and femininity. Trompenaars (1993) concludes that Hong Kong Chinese culture is high in collectivism, i.e. having a strong sense of belonging to a social group and a preference for working together in groups to solve problems. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) remark that although Chinese students constitute a major group of the world's learners, roughly 25%, as yet there is very little data-based research into their culture of learning.

The learning styles adopted by Chinese learners are often attributed to "Confucian
values” and, therefore, a study of Chinese culture cannot be complete without looking at Confucianism in detail. Confucianism is the set of moral principles and the political philosophy handed down for over 2000 years in China and it has had a great impact on the way people think and behave. It is the teachings of Confucius, who lived between 551 B.C. and 479 B.C., and those of his followers. His ideas were adopted as state orthodoxy in the Han dynasty, which lasted from 206 B.C. to 220 A.D. For the next thousand years, they contributed to the stability of the state and to the flourishing of a very advanced civilisation, clearly pre-eminent in world terms by the Sung period. During this same period however, alternative philosophies flourished, most notably Taoism and Buddhism. The thirteenth century brought a period of intellectual consolidation, which attempted to fuse the essentially social philosophy of Confucianism with the more nature-related Taoism and more spiritual Buddhism. This synthesis became known as neo-Confucianism, the original ideas of which, having developed from an ethical code to a full philosophy have lasted until the present day (Redding, 1990).

Confucianism, according to Wei & Li (1995), has permeated Chinese thought and personal relationships as well as national regimes for more than two millennia. The main ideas of the five-fold cardinal relationships described by Confucius, the wu lun, provide the strong foundation of the Chinese social order. These five relationships are those between sovereign and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and between friends and friends.

Confucius taught by the example of his own personality. The five virtues that Confucius taught are ren (humanity-benevolence), yi (righteousness), li (propriety), zhi (wisdom) and xin (trustworthiness). He considered a virtuous character to be more important than knowledge itself. He also stimulated thinking and understanding in his students. He expected his students to be well versed in history, philosophy, poetry and ritual but he did not only want mere memorisation (Lee, 1996).

Confucian education is, similar to American education, one of self-realisation (Scollon & Scollon, 1994). However, the difference lies in the fact that self-realisation in the Confucian system is concerned with a public self rather than, as in the American system, with the ability to express oneself freely in an individualistic society. Confucian
education is thus described as moral education. In the Book of Rites, Li Chi, a child, is taught such things as how and when to speak to elders and how to step into a room on the right, that is to say, the correct behaviour for one's social role.

Hong Kong Chinese are said to have been influenced by Confucianism and one of the purposes of this research is to determine if Hong Kong can be considered a Chinese society with dominant Confucian ideals. Yet one should bear in mind that social, economic and political influences have had a great impact on the behaviour and way of thinking of the Hong Kong Chinese in the last 50 or 60 years. The post-war boom and the pre-1997 affluence, as well as the political empathy under the British rule, have moulded the Hong Kong Chinese into a different type of Chinese people (Lau, 1982, 1984; Lau & Kuan, 1988; Abbas, 1997). Confucianism is said to have given way to materialism, political and social changes.

The Hong Kong Identity

Hong Kong is a society of immigrants. The older generation of immigrants, who suffered from World War II and the economic hardship of the 1950s, still has close links with their kin in mainland China. The present middle-aged Hong Kong Chinese struggled for survival in the 1960s. They witnessed the riots of 1966 and 1967 and experienced unfair colonial rule. Younger generations have increasingly enjoyed the prosperity brought by Hong Kong's marvellous economic development from the 1970s onwards. More youngsters, therefore, identify with Hong Kong, and the older Chinese identify with China. Leung (1999) reported on a survey of 20,586 respondents where 75.9% of the 18 to 39 age group identify themselves with Hong Kong, but only 24.1% with China. Among the 40 to 59 age group, 63.5% identify with Hong Kong and 36.5% with China.

Since the news of the inevitable return of Hong Kong to China broke in the mid-1980s, Hong Kong people have had to face again their once suppressed Chinese identity. No longer can we see the unrestrained stigmatisation of mainlanders in the vivid social imagination of the popular media of the 1970s and the 1980s. The Hong Kong people have turned their attention to the historical "roots" of Chinese culture. In the media, the Chinese mainlanders have been represented in more favourable terms. However, the
irony still exists today of Hongkongers who were themselves originally immigrants from China differentiating themselves and their descendants as Hongkongers compared to “non-Hongkongers”, that is to say, the mainland Chinese. This Hong Kong identity may not imply a rejection of China but has the intention of marking the people out from the mainland Chinese as a distinctive group of Hong Kong Chinese (Lau & Kuan, 1988; Abbas, 1997; Ma, 1999).

Hong Kong learners are described in several studies in the literature (Biggs, 1991; Pierson, 1996; Murphy, 1987) as typical Chinese learners who are portrayed as passive, reserved, quiet and reluctant to openly challenge authority, especially teachers. They are inclined to favour rote learning over creative learning, dependent on the syllabus, and lacking in intellectual initiative. They are also described as demonstrating unquestioning acceptance of the knowledge of the teacher or the lecturer, which may be explained in terms of the Confucian ethic of filial piety (Murphy, 1987) or Hofstede’s (1980, 1986, 2001) dimensions of power. The teacher is the carrier of wisdom and “face” is an issue in the classroom situation.

This case study aims at collecting quantitative and qualitative data to look into the special characteristic features of our respondents, who are Hong Kong Chinese. However, we are looking at a group of adult professionals who are in their thirties to fifties, and not groups of secondary school learners, as is the case in most of the literature studied. Their feedback can inform us as to what Hong Kong learners are like based on the question of whether Hong Kong’s social, economic and political background has impacted upon learning.

**Thesis Outline**

Following this introduction, in chapter 2, the concept of distance learning is introduced and the various themes in distance learning are then elaborated on. The last section deals with the Hong Kong model of distance learning and special emphasis is given to Hong Kong adult learners.

Chapter 3 moves on to review the literature on culture. The different interpretations of culture by various authors are examined. The concept of “Hong Kong Identity” is then
discussed. The issues on learning styles among ethnic Chinese are studied. The identity of the “Hong Kong learner” is also clarified and justified.

Chapter 4 presents details of the methods used in this research to investigate Hong Kong culture and Hong Kong learning styles.

The findings of the research are presented in Chapters 5 and 6. The qualitative research findings are presented in the interviewees’ own words, as closely as possible, in order to present their own portrayals of their behaviour and attitudes.

In Chapter 7, the conclusions of the research are presented. Hong Kong distance learners are studied to determine if the distance learning mode of education is compatible with their learning styles.
Chapter 2: Distance Learning

Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the concept of distance learning and explore its various themes in distance learning for further discussion on the compatibility of distance learning with the learning styles of a particular group of learners. It starts with defining distance learning and open learning. Characteristics of distance learning are then discussed in greater detail. The various themes identified and discussed in this chapter are: the learner profile, the study of andragogy, learner autonomy, learner isolation, learner self motivation, persistence in learning, the role of the teacher, the importance of face-to-face teaching, and the role of technology in distance learning programmes.

The last section deals with the Hong Kong model of distance learning and Hong Kong adult learners. The chapter ends with a brief conclusion summarizing the debates about distance learning and sets the scene for the discussion of findings related to the compatibility of distance learning with the learning styles of a particular group of Hong Kong learners in later chapters.

Distance Learning

Open learning, distance learning and e-learning are three terminologies that need to be defined and distinguished if we wish to study distance learning in more depth. Open learning is defined as:

...both a process which focuses on access to educational opportunities and a philosophy which makes learning more client and student centred. It is learning which allows the learner to choose how to learn, when to learn, where to learn and what to learn as far as possible within the resource constraints of any education and training provision. (Paine, 1985: xi)

Distance learning is defined as:
...any formal approach to instruction in which the majority of the instruction occurs while educator and learner are not in each other's physical presence.

(Mehrotra et al., 2001:1)

The term ‘e-learning’ is defined in the following way:

The term e-learning covers a wide set of applications and processes, including computer-based learning, Web-based learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration. We define e-learning as the delivery of content [and interaction] via all electronic media, including the Internet, intranets, extranets, satellite broadcast, audio/video tape, interactive TV, and CD-ROM. Yet e-learning is defined more narrowly than distance learning, which would include text-based learning and courses conducted via written correspondence.

(Urdan & Weggen, 2000:8)

From this definition it can be seen that e-learning is a subset of distance learning. The "openness" of open learning refers not only to maximizing access to education, in terms of enabling the individual to learn at a personally convenient time and place, but also to supporting the learning process through allowing the individual a choice regarding method and mode of learning (CLMS, 2001). Distance learning systems are mainly concerned with reducing geographical barriers, while open learning systems are concerned with reducing geographical, socio-and psychological barriers (CLMS, 2001). Distance education is not identical to open learning, but can be one method of delivering open learning.

In this research, the focus is on distance learning and its compatibility with culture-specific learning styles. The term ‘distance learning’ will be brought up more often than the terms ‘open learning’ and ‘e-learning’ which are not within the scope of this paper.

Distance learning is not a new concept. It has been in existence for over 100 years. Distance learning as a concept began in colleges and universities in the 19th century as a way for students to receive credit by correspondence courses. These were found in extremely large and sparsely populated countries like Russia or the Australian outback.
and even in the United States where face-to-face tuition could not take place regularly (Jarvis et al., 1998). It began in the 1800s when lessons were mailed out in the United States, completed, returned to the instructor, graded, and then returned to the student along with the next lesson. Formal course credit (high school or college) could be completed in this manner, and eventually entire diplomas or degrees could be earned (Mehrotra et al., 2001). This arrangement continues to the present, with a number of colleges and universities in the United States and overseas offering courses by mail (Mehrotra et al., 2001). In 1969 the birth of the British Open University was to be the catalyst in the new information society in education. Liberal education courses could be delivered at a distance, through print, radio and television with little face-to-face contact. Modules could be taken off the shelf and studied in the students' own time, in their own place and at their own pace (Jarvis et al., 1998).

That mode evolved from the use of and television during the middle of the twentieth century to modalities such as the telephone, radio, e-mail, and the Internet. Although the mode of delivery has changed dramatically over the years, the concept remains the same; distance learning is learning that occurs away from the standard classroom involving a separation of teacher and learner (Peters, 1993; Sherry, 1996).

Various definitions of distance learning are examined in this research. Holmberg initially describes distance education as:

...the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance, and tuition of a tutorial organisation.

(Holmberg 1977:9)

This definition seems to over emphasise the function of the tutorial organisation as compared to a teacher. Another point to note is that there is no mention of the need for mediated communication, which is one of the major concerns of distance learners (CLMS, 2001). Yet this early definition of distance learning embodies the idea of planning, guidance and tuition from the provider even though the provider is a "tutorial organisation" whose role is not clear. However, the planning, guidance and tuition
functions later became very important elements in the development of distance learning programmes in the next few decades.

Moore (1973) states that

*distance teaching may be defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviours are executed apart from the learning behaviours, including those in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learner’s presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices.*

(Moore, 1973:664).

This definition, in contrast to Holmberg’s, stresses the importance of the communication between the teacher and the learner. There is also the “family of instructional methods” that leads to his later idea of “transaction” between the teacher and the learner (CLMS, 2001:946). This idea of communication between the teacher and the learners is one of the major themes that is widely discussed in the study of distance learning.

Keegan (1986) also analysed a number of definitions and produced a ‘descriptive definition’ consisting of seven elements. The first five of these, which he described as constant essential components of distance learning, are: (1) the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner, (2) the influence of an educational organisation, (3) the use of technical media, (4) the provision of two-way communication, and (5) the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group. The last two are socio-cultural determinants: (6) the presence of more industrialised features than in conventional oral education and (7) the privatisation of institutional learning.

Keegan calls these necessary pre-conditions and necessary consequences of distance education. However, these have been criticized as being too narrow as, according to Garrison and Shale (1987), “the basic difficulty with Keegan’s definition is that in his enthusiasm to show that distance education is a unique and distinct field of practice he views it largely as a private, print based form of study” (Garrison & Shale, 1987:9). Even though Keegan’s view seems a bit narrow, he has emphasised the importance of
two-way communication, which is a major concern that Garrison & Shale (1987) emphasise. He also felt that the use of technical media is an important element of distance learning and a decade later, this has proven to be developing rapidly.

Garrison and Shale (1987) then provided three criteria which stress (1) the concept of non-contiguity between the teacher and students, (2) two-way communication between teacher and students for the purpose of facilitating and supporting the educational process and (3) the use of technology to mediate the necessary two-way communication. This definition seems to have neglected the role of the organisation or the institution.

More than two decades after his own definition, Moore states that “distance” in education is not defined by the geographic separation of the teacher and the learner, but by the quality of the instructional design (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Moore calls this an “educational transaction” where he defines “transactional distance” as the relationship between teacher and learner in independent study learning (Jarvis et al., 1998). Transactional distance is a function of two variables; namely the amount of structure and dialogue (Moore, 1993). According to Moore, transactional distance is pedagogical, not geographic, and necessitates “special organisations and teaching procedures” (Moore, 1993:33). Structure reflects the course’s design and is largely a function of the teaching organisation and communications media employed. On the other hand, dialogue is associated with the medium of communication and may include either real two-way communication or what Holmberg calls “internal didactic conversation” (Garrison, 2000). In Moore’s theory, the most distant programme has low structure and low dialogue and the least distant programme has high dialogue and high structure. (Garrison, 2000). Moore (1993) also describes the interaction between the distance education system or materials and the student as one of “open-ended and unstructured dialogue”. As Rose (1995) notes, distance is more than a geographic separation. It is a distance of understanding or perception that needs to be overcome by the learner, the instructor, and the educational organisation itself. The physical separation leads to a communication gap that affects understanding.

Holmberg further analyses Moore’s educational transaction and introduces the concept of “didactic conversation” (Holmberg, 1995). Guided didactic conversation is Holmberg’s way of describing how the distance educator should communicate with his
or her students in order to ensure that learning takes place. He uses an analogy of a conversation to describe the 'distance transaction', and derives seven postulates:

1. *that feelings of personal relation between the teaching and learning parties promote study pleasure and motivation*;
2. *that such feelings can be fostered by well-developed self-instructional material and two-way communication at a distance*;
3. *that intellectual pleasure and study motivation are favourable to the attainment of study goals and the use of proper study processes and method*;
4. *that the atmosphere, language and conventions of friendly conversation favour feelings of personal relation according to postulate 1*;
5. *that messages given and received in conversational forms are comparatively easily understood and remembered*;
6. *that the conversation concept can be successfully translated, for use by the media available, to distance education*;
7. *that planning and guiding the work, whether provided by the teaching organiser or the student, are necessary for organising study, which is characterised by explicit or implicit goal conceptions.*

(Holmberg, 1995:47)

This thinking was developed into a formal theory which generated three hypotheses.

(1) The stronger the characteristics of guided didactic conversation, the stronger the students' feelings of personal relationship between them and the supporting organisation,

(2) The stronger the students' feelings that the supporting organisation is interested in making the study matter personally relevant to them, the greater their personal involvement;

(3) The stronger the students' feelings of personal relations to the supporting organisation and of being personally involved with the study matter, the stronger the motivation and the more effective the learning.
All these postulates emphasise the personal approach of distance education. The idea of communication, support, personal feelings and motivation are all-important themes of current distance learning development. According to Jarvis et al. (1998), these seven postulates can be operationalised in the development of distance-learning materials, which is something distance course developers should be clearly aware of.

Peters (1993) also discusses “dialogue” in distance education. Merriam Webster Online Dictionary (2004) defines dialogue as “a conversation between two (or more) persons”. In distance education, “dialogue” means “direct and indirect oral interaction between teachers and students…” (Peters, 1998:33). The concept of dialogue can also consist of an internal didactic conversation where the student interacts in a silent exchange with the written word, a television program, audiotape or telecommunications (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). For dialogue to become truly beneficial in distance education, the players must go beyond their differences to a higher plane of thought for true understanding in communication to emerge. Dialogue, then, is the act or external value, while communication is the intrinsic value.

Peters notes that dialogue in distance education is of utmost importance (Peters, 1998). He states that dialogue is a pedagogical function in that it is an independent form of learning and teaching. Without dialogue, the learner can learn only in part. It is not enough for a learner to absorb knowledge silently. He must communicate his understanding to others. For learning to take place a learner must: 1) be exposed to the information, 2) process the information, 3) assimilate the material and 4) impart and share the knowledge with others.

But how can one acquire the full effect of dialogue in an environment where distance education takes place? Although the way in which conversation occurs differs in traditional face-to-face meetings and virtual conferences, the content stays relatively the same. What changes is the way dialogue is applied. In some respects, what the learner loses in an auditory environment, he gains in the opportunity to benefit by many minds of thoughtful, planned and prepared examination of the material. To many, these insights from both teacher and learner can be stored on a personal computer and accessed at any given time. However, to many distance learners, the face-to-face meetings or synchronous e-interaction are more acceptable forms of “dialogue” with the
teacher as well as other learners. It is one of the objectives of this research to identify learners’ behaviour and feelings regarding this lack of “dialogue”, which is discussed under the theme of “student support” (Tait, 2003) and also the theme of “isolation” (Venter, 2002a; 2003) in distance learning.

All this brings us closer to understanding what Tait (2003) feels a decade later when he states that more student support is essential:

*Student support, especially student guidance and counseling, tutor support, and effective information and administrative systems all provide a range of activity that impacts not only in terms of teaching but also affectively, that is to say reinforcing the student sense of confidence, self-esteem and progress.*

(Tait, 2003:3)

Tait (2003) emphasises the importance of providing support to learners as that helps not only in learning, but also in enhancing confidence and motivation. These issues are becoming more important themes in distance learning and will be explored in later parts of this chapter.

Moore adds another dimension to his discussion of distance learning: learner autonomy. He defines it as “the extent to which in a programme the learner determines objectives, implementation procedures, and resources and evaluations” (Moore, 1990:13). This dimension appears to be associated with an aspect of personality – that being that personal responsibility is associated with self-directedness (Moore, 1993, Moore & Kearsley, 1996). The greater the transactional distance, the greater the responsibility that is placed on the learner (Garrison, 2000). The concept of learner autonomy in distance learning seems to have a lot of similarities with Knowles’ (1980) andragogy when the learners are described as self-directed and independent. These concepts of andragogy and learner autonomy are major themes to be explored in this research.

In the next section, various common themes in distance learning in the operational mode in western societies will be further elaborated.
Common Themes of Distance Learning

Western models and values in distance education predominate in the literature. They represent a particular constellation of values, practices and ideals in the educational process, emphasising individual development, self-management, autonomy in learners, independent learning, learner’s choice, active learning, dialogue and two-way communication (Robinson, 1999). The focus on the individual is strong in western models of distance education. The development and learning of individual students is a prime goal in open and distance education, and the relationship between students and tutors is seen as a personal one; student assignments are often used as a vehicle for interaction with tutors. Technology has also played a vital part in the delivery of distance learning programmes in the last two decades. All these are perhaps the key elements in distance learning that need to be discussed in greater depth.

Profile of the Distance Learner

In most of the literature, on distance learning in western societies, the common denominator among today’s distance learners is that they look less like traditional college students and more often are mid-life adults with families and everyday work-lives (Carl, 1991; Dille & Mezark, 1991). They have a variety of reasons for pursuing learning at a distance: constraints of time, distance and finances, the opportunity to take courses or hear outside speakers who would otherwise be unavailable, and the ability to come in contact with other students from different social, cultural, economic, and experiential backgrounds (Willis, 1993a). They are usually in their mid 20s to early 50s (Verduin & Clark, 1991). They may be married, often have one or more children, and nearly all balance full-time work with attending school (Webster & Blair, 1998). They may choose distance learning partly to take advantage of its flexibility by scheduling college around their jobs; family responsibilities, such as caring for children, a spouse, or ageing parent; community commitments, and other interests (Mehrotra et al., 2001).

The age profile of distance learning students enrolled in the 1Open University of Hong Kong is shown in the following table (Student Profile: 2004-2005):

---

1 Information taken from The Open University of Hong Kong, 2004-2005, Planning Unit

24
Table 2.1  Age Profile of Distance Learning Students at the Open University of Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 22</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 45</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen from the above table, the biggest group is aged between 26 and 30, the second biggest group being the 31 to 35 age group. The average age is 34. The smallest group is the below 22 group, which implies these people are mostly at school doing full time studies. Fewer people attend distance learning programmes after 45 years old. We can see how the profile of our target population in chapter 6 concurs with this profile.

The same survey shows a gender profile:

Table 2.2  Gender Ratio of Distance Learning Students at the Open University of Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are slightly more female learners (53.7%) taking part in distance learning programmes than male (46.3%). This has been the trend since 1991, according to a Hong Kong University SPACE survey (Chan & Holford, 1994), where there were 48.5% male and 51.5% female, and to the Shen et al. survey (1999), when we see 42% male and 58% female. These percentages are in fact justified by Sodusta (2002), who attributes the higher participation rate for women to the need to increase their productive empowerment and to join the workforce so as to provide for the family.

The previous educational level of the participants is shown in Table 2.3.
Table 2.3 Previous Educational Level of Distance Learning Participants at the Open University of Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Degree or Above</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Degree</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK A-Level or equivalent</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCEE or equivalent</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who have taken sub-degree level courses make up the biggest group of distance learners at the Open University of Hong Kong. This may be attributable to the fact that most people cannot get into a full time degree programme after pursuing their A-level courses and thus turn to distance learning programmes at the Hong Kong Open University. However, this is beyond the scope of our research. Our target group is the group pursuing a distance learning Master of Science programme and the data in Chapter 6 shows that 40.2% of the respondents are university graduates and 36% are of sub-degree level.

Most of the adult learners are in the management and professional field, as can be seen in table 2.4 below:

Table 2.4 Occupations of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers and Professionals</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and Secretarial</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Personnel</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications, Transport &amp; Others*</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Occupations</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Including workers in communication, transport, farming, mining, construction and other manufacturing

Adult learners tend to have a greater sense of commitment and better understanding of the financial and time commitments required to pursue a college degree than traditional
first-year students coming right out of high school (Webster & Blair, 1998). They usually have a more mature ability to act independently, are more self-directed, and take responsibility for class attendance, studying, and completing requirements (Schuemer, 1993; Mehrotra et al., 2001). They are generally active in class (Schwitzer, 1997a) and are active with advisors and student services (Ancis, 1997). Mehrotra et al. also state that these adults are more goal-oriented as they want more specific job-related courses and all expect to get their money’s worth from college (2001).

The results of the Open University Walk-In Registration Survey\(^2\) regarding participants’ main consideration when pursuing further studies is shown in Table 2.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fee</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification recognition</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of Study</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Mode</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme/course choice</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligibility for CEF(^3)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that most applicants to the Open University see qualification recognition as a major consideration and many, about 30%, see study mode as a major consideration.

\(^2\) The Open University HK holds a walk-in registration every semester, during which students may register for courses in person on the OUHK campus. A survey is conducted during the walk-in registration to gather views from the students on the registration process and other matters. Table 2.5 shows the responses to one of the questions asked during the walk-in registration survey conducted in February, March 2005.

\(^3\) CEF Continuing Education Fund is the Hong Kong Government’s initiative to support and subsidize adult learners in pursuing continuing education and training programmes. The CEF will help people to achieve sector-specific competencies in specified areas, thereby preparing them for the knowledge-based economy. Hong Kong residents aged between 18 and 60 are eligible to apply and will be reimbursed 80% of their tuition fees, subject to a maximum sum of HK$10,000, on successful completion of an approved course or module.
Table 2.6 The Most Popular Academic Qualification Pursued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Qualifications to be pursued</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate certificate/diploma</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional certificate/diploma</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree/higher diploma</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short courses (non award-bearing)</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adult learners also sometimes experience confusion about college rules, feel more entitled as consumers, and have mixed feelings about relating to faculty and administrators as authorities (Schwitzer, 1998). They seek expedient ways to pursue their degree requirements, expect more individualised considerations as “paying customers” (Mehrotra et al., 2001) who expect to get their money’s worth from college and view instructors more as facilitators than experts and administrators more as resources than institutional authorities (Schwitzer, 1998; Webster & Blair; 1998; Mehrotra et al., 2001).

In distance education, the learner usually feels isolated (Venter, 2003). The motivational factors arising from the contact or competition with other students is absent. The students also lack the immediate support of a teacher who is present and able to motivate and, if necessary, give attention to actual needs and difficulties that crop up during study (Schuemer, 1993; Venter, 2003). However, this view has often been challenged by many others who feel that adult learners are highly motivated, self-directed learners with good reading and time management skills, and they are willing to work independently (Schwitzer et al., 2001; Mehrotra et al., 2001; Shen et al., 2002).

Distance learners and teachers often have little in common in terms of background and day-to-day experiences and, therefore, it takes longer for student-teacher rapport to develop. Without face-to-face contact distance learning students may feel ill at ease with their teacher as an “individual” and uncomfortable with their learning situation (Schuemer, 1993).
A HKU SPACE 2003 unpublished survey\textsuperscript{4} shows that learners prefer face-to-face delivery and distance learning programmes are not really appreciated as can be seen in the 7.1\% response rate.

Table 2.7 The Most Preferred Teaching and Learning Mode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and Learning Mode Preferred</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed mode (face-to-face + others)</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence / Distance Learning</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicum</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet (e-Learning)</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange Programme</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The low response rate in the distance learning category is perhaps due to the fact that a majority of the respondents are in the 30 to 40 age group and might not find it easy to accept novel ideas and a new learning mode totally different from a traditional teaching and learning approach. In chapter 6, this issue will be discussed again in detail.

The purpose of this research is to examine the compatibility of distance learning with the Hong Kong adult learning styles and the target population is a group of part-time students in a Master’s degree programme. The study of adult learning is a major concern. The following theme is andragogy and learner autonomy, which studies the art and science of how adults learn.

Andragogy and Learner Autonomy in Distance Education

The current definition of distance learning is beginning to use principles of andragogy, "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1970:38). Andragogy places the adult learner at the centre of learning and the teacher as a facilitator of that learning (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1980) contends that effective adult learners are more self-

\textsuperscript{4} The survey was conducted by the School of Professional and Continuing Education, the University of Hong Kong (HKU SPACE); they commissioned the fieldwork to the Social Sciences and Research Centre (SSRC) of the University. The random telephone survey was conducted from 1 March to 8 March 2003 for seven consecutive evenings. A total of 1,626 Hong Kong adult learners aged 18 or above were successfully interviewed. The response rate of the survey was 56.7\%.
directed and independent, are able to draw on a reservoir of accumulated experience as a rich resource in learning, are aware of their learning needs and want to apply skills and knowledge to real life problems and tasks (Jarvis, 1995). Burge and Howard (1988) cite Brandes and Ginnies’ 1986 Guide to Student-centred Learning as providing seven principles for student-centred learning. They are:

1. the learner has full responsibility for his/her own learning;
2. the subject matter has relevance and meaning for the learner;
3. involvement and participation are necessary for learning;
4. the relationship between learners (should show helping styles and learner self-responsibility);
5. the teacher (is) a resource person;
6. the learner sees him/herself differently as a result of the learning experience;
7. the learner experiences confluence, affective and cognitive domains flow together (pp.4-5).

The focus is on what the learner experiences in learning rather than on the factors that make good instruction. Knowles addresses the question “What is self directed learning?” with the following definition:

....self directed learning describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes.

(Knowles, 1975:18)

This definition gives readers the idea of independence in learning, self-instruction and even the idea of learning in isolation. This idea is shared by Peters (1993) who sees distance education as lacking the vital element of face-to-face inter-personal communication, as lacking the human dimension of group interaction, and even as alienating learners from the teachers and each other (Jarvis et al., 1998). This, in fact, is a negative view towards distance learning which we will attempt to explore in this research.
In his discussion on distance learning, Moore states that learners are independent in setting objectives, methods of study and evaluation (Moore, 1986). Moore stresses that independent learners are autonomous and self-directed learners when he says:

_Thus adult learners must be treated by educators as autonomous learners who exercise their autonomy at all stages of the programme. After helping a learner identify his objectives, the educator aids him to discover the appropriate resources, define relevant goals, and specify evaluative criteria. At each stage the educator helps the learner to be as active in the educational transaction as he is able._

(Moore, 1980:26).

The flexibility of not being required to be at a certain place and at a certain time gives distance learners greater control in managing their own learning as they see fit. Learners must adapt to this control by practising wise time management, reaching out for peer support, being able to work both independently and in groups, having strong self-motivation, being self-disciplined and assertive, having optimum interaction with the teacher and obtaining the necessary books, supplies etc. (Gibson, 1996). All this must be managed to benefit from increased learner control with perhaps the most important part being reducing anxiety while managing self-regulation (Wagner, 1994). In order to achieve all this, the instructors must play the facilitator’s role in assisting the learners to explore their own strengths and limitations (Brundage et al., 1993).

It is paradoxical here that Moore, who advocates “learner autonomy”, is the one who stresses the importance of “dialogue” and “structure”. Learner autonomy is described by Moore as a situation where learners are able to decide on their own learning by themselves, of their own accord (Moore,1980). This includes establishing their learning needs, objectives, and accomplishment plans as well as learning material selection, organisation and presentation. The autonomous learner becomes what Peters (1988) describes as the subject not the object of the process. It is at this point that Peters describes the relationship of the dialogue, structure and autonomy variables coming into a balanced interplay.

However, Peters (1988) also notes that the transactional distance described by Moore is
determined by the ability of students and teacher to interact (dialogue) and is influenced by the extent to which the learning path is pre-determined (structure). It seems like a paradox here that on the one hand educators advocate a lot of support and planned learning paths for the learners with friendly, personal conversational advice provided by a "personal tutor integrating administrative, teaching, and counselling functions" (Rekkedal, 1985:9) and on the other hand advocate learner autonomy by providing a more neutral, less personal approach avoiding intervention in students' learning situations because of either academic tradition or conscious choice. It is the purpose of this research to approach Hong Kong adult learners to find out if they prefer learner autonomy where teachers only play the role of the facilitators or where teachers play the role of guidance and knowledge providers.

**Learner Isolation**

In distance education, the learner seems to be isolated in terms of face-to-face contact with the teacher (Peters, 1993; Venter, 2003). The sense of community which develops through the socialization of the students in a traditional classroom is lost. Separation by real physical distance affects the rapport of the distance learning class and coming from different backgrounds deprives all participants of a common community link (Willis, 1993a). The motivational factors arising from the contact or competition with other students may be absent (Gottschalk, 2001). In the Hong Kong situation, the sense of isolation does not arise from the distance or geographical separation. 6.5 million people live within the 380 square miles which make up Hong Kong. The real isolation or distance, according to Jegede, Director of the Centre for Research in Distance and Adult Learning (CRIDAL) at the Open University of Hong Kong,

> ...has long been the traditional centres of learning and a population where thousands and thousands of people, limited by work, finance, and time, clamour to be part of a system which until recently had no means of accommodating them.

(Cohen, 2000).

While a certain amount of isolation is unavoidable, courses can be designed to require or encourage synchronous or asynchronous student-to-student interaction to enhance
the learning experience.

This isolation is avoidable if programmes are developed based on Moore’s typology of interaction between learners, teachers and the content of the educational transaction. (Moore, 1993). He identifies three types of interaction. These are:

(1) learner-content interaction: the relationship between the learner and what he or she is learning, that is, the nature and degree of understanding;

(2) learner-instructor interaction: the relationship between the learner and his or her teacher, especially with regards to all the ways in which the teacher tries to enable the learner to learn;

(3) learner-learner interaction: the relationship between one learner and another, with or without the presence of the teacher, e.g. the situation of the peer group as a stimulus to learning.

Moore suggests that distance learning programmes need to ensure all of these forms of interaction are maximised in their structure, but not all programmes do so (Jarvis et al., 1998). Moore (1993) suggests that, to plan for all three kinds of interaction, programme providers use all media, ranging from traditional forms like print, broadcast and recording, to newer media like television and teleconferencing. Courses can also be designed to encourage or require synchronous/asynchronous student-to-student interaction to enhance the learning experience (Banas & Emory, 1998). “Loneliness” and “lack of support” have been two common complaints when distant learners encounter difficulties (Cookson, 1990) and these complaints may refer to the lack of support from the teacher or even from the peer group.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) states that learners naturally work better in learning and knowledge building communities, exploiting each others’ skills while providing social support, and modelling and observing the contributions of each member. Humans naturally seek out others to help them to solve problems and perform tasks. Isolated learners are then deprived of the opportunity of taking part in collaborative learning, which would provide them with the “environment” to learn from others and help each other learn.
Learning is inherently a social, dialogical process (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). That is, given a problem or task, people naturally seek out opinions and ideas from others. Technologies can support this conversational process by connecting learners across town or across the world. When learners become part of knowledge building communities, both in class and outside of school, they learn that there are multiple ways of viewing the world and multiple solutions to most of life's problems. The "isolated distance learner" is in fact linked to other learners both physically and mentally in the form of technology and interaction can always take place as they choose with the latest technology.

Venter (2003) sees 'isolation' more in the student-teacher relationship when she sees learners from societies characterised as more likely to adhere to teacher-centred learning. She sees this isolation from the teacher, the central component of learning, in three different forms: firstly, isolation from the teacher as the source of information; secondly, isolation from the teacher as an opportunity for receiving the reassurance of being "on the right track"; and thirdly, isolation from the teacher as a mechanism for the imposition of a structure to their studies. Her study compares the attitude of learners from the east and the west regarding the theme of isolation. Venter (2003) finds that learners with a western background, who were described as "learner-centred", see isolation in the above mode as well as "feeling that they missed out on the interaction that was a part of what it really was to 'belong' as a student of an institution" (p277). In eastern society, the role of the teacher and the learner in the Confucian society is missing. However, Venter concludes that in both societies, as learners gradually get used to self regulation and autonomy, they develop their confidence and are able to concentrate on their learning independently. Deep down, both group of learners only want the teacher to provide them with academic guidance, feedback and reassurance that they were on the right track (Venter, 2003).

Student support mechanisms like telephone and emails have been providing quick and inexpensive ways of person-to-person communication even though, in the case of emails, they can be asynchronous in nature. Yet, many learners find these methods time-consuming and inefficient and institutions find these means of communication staff intensive (Trindade et al., 2000). From another point of view, computer mediated communication has also made it possible to assure student-to-student interaction
through discussion and collaborative group learning, thus breaking the traditional and awkward isolation of the distance learning student (Trindade et al., 2000). However, some learners are reluctant to take part in such “contacts” for various reasons – an issue which this research is going to examine.

Role of the teacher

There are two kinds of teachers in distance learning: the studio teacher who teaches on television or on CDs (Sherry, 1996) or the teacher that is “absent”, i.e. the one who teaches by print materials and perhaps provides tutorials or lectures once in a while (Demeester & Elander, 1999). Nowadays in e-learning, the studio teacher is replaced by the e-teacher.

The studio teacher, the e-teacher or the distance learning teacher is responsible for knowing the subject matter, preparing lesson plans and producing an instructional module or course, selecting support materials, delivering the instruction effectively on camera, determining the degree of student interaction, and selecting the form of distance education or assessment (Sherry, 1996).

The teacher who is “absent” physically is not able to provide support to students like a teacher who is present and is able to motivate them, and if necessary give attention to actual needs and difficulties that may crop up. Nonverbal or visual cues from the teacher, that are so taken for granted in a traditional classroom, are also lacking (Demeester & Elander, 1999). Teachers do not have the chance to use non-verbal behaviour or give any visual cues to adapt instructional methods and strategies to best meet the needs of a class during instruction.

Whether a teacher is a studio teacher, an e-teacher or a “distance teacher”, he or she must learn new skills on assuming the role of a distance educator. As identified by Schlosser and Anderson (1993), these skills are:

1. understanding the nature and philosophy of distance education,
2. identifying learner characteristics at distant sites,
3. designing and developing interactive courseware to suit each new technology,
4. adapting teaching strategies to deliver instruction at a distance,
5. organising instructional resources in a format suitable for independent study,
6. training and practice in the use of telecommunications systems,
7. becoming involved in organisation, collaborative planning, and decision-making,
8. dealing with copyright issues.

Currently, few teachers have had sufficient training or field experience to enable them either to be effective distant teachers or to use technology successfully in their classrooms. Proper training would help distance learning teachers to change their method of teaching and help them pay more attention to advanced preparation, student interaction, visual materials, activities for independent study, and follow-up activities. (US Congress, 1989, p.11)

The crucial role for teachers in distance learning, apart from knowing teaching techniques, may be as Venter states:

...to facilitate the development of self understanding so that the learner can develop an approach which suits the social and cultural context, the learning content and, critically, which suits the learner's own characteristics (2002:99).

The teacher, in this sense is there to impart knowledge as well as to provide academic guidance, feedback and reassurance to the learner that he/she is on the right track. This issue was brought up when the issue of learner isolation was discussed.

**Face-to-face Tutorials**

Face-to-face tutorials are usually considered by most institutions as the best interactive support provided by distance learning course organisers, aside from the self instructional materials presented in the various media (Fung & Carr, 1999). Richardson et al. (1999) also see tutorials as a means to “narrow” what Moore (1980) called the “transactional distance” between students and teachers in distance learning. As stated in Biggs (1987, cited in Gibbs, 1992), tutorials should be participatory events, not straight lectures (Fung & Carr, 1999). This is vital in promoting independent learning and reflecting the educational philosophy that deep learning requires the students to be active in the process of learning, not passive recipients of transmission teaching.
Student-centred approaches like group discussion, student presentation and simulation/role play are usually adopted. When these tutorials play a supplementary role and attendance is optional, attendance records have always been discouraging, ranging from 20% from Punjab University, India Chib (1988, cited in Agboola, 1992) to 37% among women and 28% among men in Spain, (James, 1982, cited in Agboola, 1992) to about 50% in Indira Gandhi National Open University, also in India (Menon, 1990, cited in Agboola, 1992).

To many part-time students, attending tutorials is a means towards getting assistance towards self-direction. While students employ strategies to manage their study with a degree of self-direction, they still seek some help from tutors who can give them guidance in their study. During tutorials tutors can convey to the students whether they are on the right track (Li et al., 2000). On the same note, research on Hong Kong Open University students by Fung and Carr (1999; 2000) found that Hong Kong students’ attendance at tutorials was very high compared to that found in other similar studies, possibly reflecting Hong Kong’s geographical compactness, but also possibly reflecting a preference for face-to-face meetings. The researchers also found that the students looked for specific guidance and support from tutors within a largely directive framework; that even where the format of the tutorial departed from the students’ expectations, the students did not necessarily give the tutorial a low evaluation, provided that it was a fruitful experience. Hong Kong students’ first preference was for tutorials using a directive approach, particularly in the form of lectures, which appears to confirm the general belief that Hong Kong learners are compliant and passive. However, even though students did not enjoy taking part in role plays and simulations, small group discussions were frequently used and students ranked these activities as useful. Fung and Carr (1999) also state that cultural context and previous educational experience inevitably have some effect on the expectations and learning styles of adult distance learners. However, they found that similar studies with students overseas, especially in the UK, have shown that views on the functions and formats of tutorials are not significantly different. Generalizations about Hong Kong students being particularly inclined to passive approaches to learning at tutorials are oversimplified and should be avoided.

Recommendations drawn from Fung and Carr’s research (1999) are that if students
placed stronger emphasis on the need to prepare thoroughly for tutorials, as sharing of ignorance is not a fruitful experience, and if more staff development were.

The implementation of Fung and Carr's recommendations is vital to make tutorials successful. However, Hong Kong learners still carry the expectation that tutors or teachers will impart more knowledge or supplement lectures during the tutorials. This in turn often leads to dissatisfaction. It is vital for distance learning providers to state the objectives and format of tutorials at the start to avoid false expectations. Learners are also recommended to be more flexible in trying out a novel approach in learning and to enjoy the opportunities for interaction during tutorials.

Another issue highly related to tutorials and teaching style is the provision of feedback by the teacher, which is to be discussed in the next section.

**Feedback from Teacher**

Garrison (1995) emphasises the importance of peer-to-peer and student-to-instructor interaction via e-mail or study groups to construct knowledge or to provide feedback. Prompt response generally increases student motivation and performance. Using effective interaction and feedback strategies will enable the instructor to identify and meet the needs of the students while providing a forum for suggesting course improvements. The idea of using e-mail within distance learning programmes is for the group discussion and debates which take place in tutorials and face-to-face sessions to be pursued as an on-going process. This increases the students' sense of belonging to the programme as well as to the institution (Edwards & Hammond, 1998).

Learners also see ongoing interactive feedback as a feature of campus teaching that is lacking in distance learning (Venter, 2003). This constitutes a cause for learners' feeling of isolation.

In distance learning, feedback to students might take other forms. It might be provided via e-mail, the Internet or during tutorials. It might also be given to students in their assignments when they are returned. Assignments do not only serve as an assessment tool but they also act as a channel for tutors or teachers to provide feedback extensively,
as a supplement to teaching (Venter, 2003).

**Student Motivation and Persistence**

Adult learners tend to be more motivated compared to children (Ehrman, 1990). Some distance learners are intrinsically motivated by the desire for intellectual growth and the personal satisfaction of earning an academic award, while others are motivated by external, instrumental goals associated with job, career success, and higher pay (Ethrman, 1990; Schwitzer, 1997a).

Distance learners see educational attainment as a path to job advancement, professional certification, or career change. Many already have work experience and significant real-life job responsibilities in their field of academic study (Schwitzer, 1997b). Yet they are motivated to pursue a distance learning programme to qualify for a promotion or to be more qualified for their current positions. When these learners have professional advancement goals, they may be more involved, and more satisfied, with their academic pursuits (Wilkes & Burham, 1991). They prefer learning experiences, class activities, homework, tests – that relate to their goals. In fact, their academic success and associated increase in motivation results in satisfaction with academic choices, resulting in even more motivation and effort (Ehrman, 1990; Strong, 1984). This, in turn leads to further success and achievement.

Aside from career development, some distance learners are motivated to study for self development or to fulfil interest in the subject area and to obtain a qualification in that field (Shen et al., 2002). In fact, interest in the subject matter and the relevance of the programme to the learners’ work lives is also important. This intrinsic motivation may further increase as learners progress through the programme (Venter, 2003). Peer group encouragement is also another motivational factor for adult learners (Shen et al., 2002). Being in contact with other students or in competition with other students may also be a motivation factor for some (Gottschalk, 2001).

In fact, it is not appropriate to make a simplistic distinction between those who have intrinsic motivation and those with extrinsic motivation, who will only do what is necessary to achieve their goals. Kember (2000) found that the Hong Kong students he
interviewed wanted courses to be both interesting and to provide an appropriate preparation for their future career. 40% of the learners interviewed commented on both intrinsic and career motivation.

These motivation theories are related to the learning styles of the learners (Venter, 2003; Richardson et al., 1999; Biggs, 1991,1992; Entwistle & Ramsden,1983). People who are intrinsically motivated use a deep learning approach, while those who are extrinsically motivated adopt a surface approach to learning. The strategic approach or achieving approach describes learning that is driven by the search for a desired outcome, like high grades, examination success and the qualification itself (Venter, 2003). A more detailed account of these learning styles will be discussed in the next chapter.

The aim of distance education programmes is to engage students in effective learning so as to attain certain specified and desired outcomes. The outcomes may be described simply as students’ success in the following forms: persistence in completion of the course and earning the credit or the academic achievement and persistence in satisfying the learning experience. Persistence is a key term in the distance learning literature and yet not many researchers have seriously looked into it.

The positive outcome of a distance learner’s hard work is success due to persistence and the negative outcome or opposite of the term persistence is found in words such as “dropout”, “withdrawal”, “discontinuance”, “attrition” (Cookson, 1990).

Research into the reasons for students’ dropouts or withdrawals has found that it is the combined influence of a number of personal attributes and actions, as well as a number of institutional and programme attributes and interventions (Cookson, 1990).

Students who do not persist usually cite personal or domestic reasons, comprising insufficient time for study, large financial commitments, care of children or other domestic demands. Some give other plans of study, or dissatisfaction with the programme offered, or with the teaching methods (Cookson, 1990). In fact, many of these dropouts may have changed their minds if they had been given more assistance or counselling as soon as problems arose. Some feel strongly about the level of difficulty of the course and some have strong feelings of ‘loneliness’ and ‘lack of support’ or in
other words ‘isolation’ (Venter, 2003).

Some study related problems were also identified in Rekkedal’s study (1985):

...problems concerning the teaching/learning method itself, the subject matter of planning, organising of studies, dissatisfaction with the study material, the tutors’ work and turn-around time of assignments

(Rekkedal, 1985:21).

However, one interesting finding from Rekkedal (1985) is that older learners tend to be more persistent than younger ones.

Holmberg’s concept of “guided didactic conversation” can be cited here when distance learning providers enable more contact and communication with the individual learners to increase motivation and promote study pleasure (Holmberg, 1983). Guided diadactic conversation is Holmberg’s way of describing how the distance educator should communicate with the students in order to ensure that learning takes place. The teachers’ and the institutions’ roles can be reactive and proactive in promoting study pleasure and motivating students to pursue their studies. Counselling can be provided to students to help them understand their motivation and commitment level. Students’ workload can be regulated and more face-to-face contact could be established for understanding students’ needs and problems. Periodic redesigning of programme materials can make learning more interesting. Students’ cognitive learning styles can be explored, when handling assignments or projects and thus more can be learnt about students’ learning difficulties. Assistance can be given to students to plan and organise their studies (Cookson, 1990).

A more recent survey of 542 respondents by HKU SPACE (2001) on factors that deter people from participating in continuing education shows that in 1999 and in 1991, the major deterrent is “no time” and the other deterrent is “need to take care of family”. Even though the data is on deterrents from joining continuing education programmes, which does not directly relate to persistence in distance learning, the data can at least draw one’s attention to the fact that many adult learners find having a time constraint a major issue in not taking up continuing education programmes. The need to take care
of one’s family is another major deterrent which is very much in line with Cookson’s
data in 1990. “Course fee being too high” and “having no money” are very much
related and these are also major problems that adult learners face and again are major
reasons given by Cookson, who referred to this as “financial commitment too great”
(1990:193). The Hong Kong University survey also highlights the “economic
recession” in 1999, which is in fact the impact of the 1997 economic downturn in Asia.
This is a very much localized issue that is irrelevant to western societies. Another
interesting deterrent in the Hong Kong survey is “prefer self-learning” which is also
related to the other deterrent “course not useful”. One might identify this with
Rekkedal’s study (1983) in which learners identified the problem of the
teaching/learning method and programme organisation and planning as well as
dissatisfaction with study materials.

From the different studies cited, the major reasons that affect persistence in distance
learning or continuing education for adult learners in both western and eastern societies
are very similar. Adult learners are full-time workers and part-time students whose
levels of responsibilities in learning are different from full-time students in regular
schools, who do not have the other commitments, like family or financial burdens, that
adult learners always have. Adult learners are also more careful when it comes to
committing to a new endeavour like attending school part-time. There is a lot to
consider before taking up a continuing education programme and thus the motivational
level is usually higher than full-time students. However, their persistence level tends to
be stronger, which is also seen in Rekkedal’s (1983) study. McGivney (2004) also lists
the factors that contribute to persistence among distance learners. She lists motivation
as the major contributor as adult learners have made sacrifices in order to participate
and because they want to prove to themselves and others that they are capable of
learning and gaining a qualification or because they need or are required to study for
career or employment. Having a supportive family or partner is another contributor, as
having family commitments is in fact a deterrent for completion. Enrolling in high
quality programmes with good course content and presentation can inspire an adult
learner to persist. Effective tutorial support provided by the institution and having a
supportive learner group also sustain a learner’s interest in completing the programme.
Students’ motivation and persistence are two major themes being studied in this
research and data will be presented in the Findings section to illustrate the impact of
motivation on students' persistence in completing their distance learning programme.

**Role of Technology in Distance Learning**

"Technology is the key to the renewal of higher education" (Daniel, 1999:333, cited in Kennedy, 2002a:379). Technological improvements have also made the expansion of distance learning possible (Mehrotra et al., 2001). According to Nipper (1989), the "first generation" of distance learning is the passive, correspondence course type – relying on self-study print materials.

The “second generation” augmented print materials with tapes, study guides, videos and readings. The use of radio, television and interactive television provided audio and visual instruction (Mehrotra et al., 2001; Kennedy, 2002a). The availability of full interactivity for distance education persuaded many otherwise sceptical educators and administrators to give serious consideration to establishing distance courses and programmes. By the late 1990s, many institutions of higher education in the US were offering entire degree programmes through interactive television (Mehrotra et al., 2001).

“Third generation” (Nipper, 1989) interactive distance learning courses are delivered entirely on-line. By the mid 1990s, the digital revolution had developed the personal computer, the Internet, the World Wide Web and the CD-ROM to the point where it became feasible to deliver educational content directly to students’ homes and offices. Interaction of students with each other and with the teacher can now be synchronous or asynchronous with the latter providing additional flexibility in students’ and teachers’ schedules. Geographic location has ceased to be a major consideration in that web-based courses can be taken anywhere with an Internet connection and at any time of the day or night (Mehrotra et al., 2001). Visual and auditory information can aid learning by making abstract concepts more comprehensible to learners than text alone would. Having access to video clips and sound as well as text has the distinct advantage of contextualizing learning for students of architecture, language, business etc. (Kennedy, 2002a).

Technology has been a major driving factor in the development of distance learning programmes (Mehrotra et al., 2001) and yet it has also been a bone of contention among
many educationists, who feel that on-line learning may not enhance learning or make teaching more effective (Kennedy, 2002a). Critics of on-line learning feel that the new technology is a (new) receptacle for delivering (the same old) content and they need evidence to support the view that on-line delivery enhances learning (Kennedy, 2002a). An Australian study of 104 IT projects in higher education (Alexander 1999) concluded that there was a big gap between the rhetoric and the reality when it came to evidence of improved learning.

Only 37% of the cases reported improved learning outcomes as a result of the project, compared with 87% of the cases reporting this as the intention. There is also confusion between students’ reactions and student learning. Positive attitudes and increased motivation may encourage better learning outcomes, but they are not, in themselves, evidence of improved learning.

(Alexander, 1999:177)

Various Hong Kong surveys on on-line teaching and learning are reported in Kennedy (2002a). The major concerns from teachers are that there is a new role to play in becoming an e-teacher. The traditional conception of a teacher is the transmitter of knowledge and information to students but becoming an on-line teacher would mean “...facilitating learning by selecting and tailoring information for the individual student rather than to transmit pre-planned lessons to passive recipients” (Kennedy, 2002). Learning to use information technology is another major issue and “....the most experienced teachers can become novices when the classroom environment shifts dramatically, transforming tried and true strategies into ineffective approaches” (Sandholtz & Rinstaff, 1996:282).

The issue of giving regular feedback to all students on-line is a practical problem which concerns time and money and thus teaching may not be effective if feedback cannot be given out to every student when needed (Kennedy, 2002a). From the learners' perspective, they value the face-to-face interaction with teachers which technology cannot replace (Cheung, 1999). Another group of Hong Kong learners are also frank in saying that they do not value the on-line discussion but would like to have on-line support in course information like schedules and assignment submission. They would prefer face-to-face guidance from teachers and tutors and the social contact with their
peers to the on-line teaching or the virtual meeting place (a, 2002). As one postgraduate student from Hong Kong University states: "...universities traditionally provide more than knowledge. They provide the social and motivational structure that allows people to learn and keep on learning. That will always be true. The physical presence is something that is irreplaceable" (Taylor, 2000).

The above quotation tells explicitly the student's feelings towards technology in education. It is a similar concept when it comes to distance learning teaching materials in the next section.

**Distance Learning Materials**

The traditional distance learning materials had their origins in correspondence courses, which Peters (1993) associated historically with the development of postal services in industrial society. These inevitably represented rather narrow possibilities for communication. As Moore argued, "many distance-education programmes are still based upon one type of medium, although the combination of one-way satellite video and two-way audio is increasingly dominant" (Moore, 1993:23).

For some time, the standard classification of learning materials has been into printed, audio, video and computer disk. Printed materials continue to be very common, usually in association with other media. Study guides are often combined with texts or edited readings. Their presentation can incorporate many of Holmberg's (1995) conversational features such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and cartoons. They are also structured to include student activities, stimulation to reflection and self-evaluation and guided progression (Jarvis et al., 1998).

Audio-cassette materials usually supplement the printed ones. They have proved a very flexible source of learning if well produced. Videotapes are much more accessible to learners than previously. In the British Open University, distance learners are provided with access to science and technology subjects through a combination of videos and experimental kits. Computers have also become common in education and training. They open up immense possibilities for interactive learning in fields where demonstration, simulation or learning games are particularly appropriate, such as
management and business studies (Jarvis et al., 1998).

Depending on students' learning needs and the content of the learning, various combinations of these possibilities make feasible the kinds of independent learning, autonomy and 'didactic conversation' which theorists like Holmberg prescribed (Jarvis et al., 1998).

Both Holmberg (1995) and Moore (1993) give guidelines on preparing teaching materials which are appropriate to the teaching strategy as well as to the type of interaction involved in distance education. There should be:

1. *easily accessible presentations of study matter: clear language, in easy writing and moderately dense in information;*
2. *explicit advice and suggestions to the students as to what to do and what to avoid, what to pay particular attention to and consider, with reasons provided;*
3. *an invitation to an exchange of views, to questions, to opinions and comments;*
4. *attempts to involve the student emotionally so that he or she takes a personal interest in the subject and its problems;*
5. *a personal style including the use of personal and possessive pronouns, I, me, my, you, your etc;*
6. *a demarcation of themes through explicit statements, typographical means, or in recorded, spoken communication, through a change of speakers (eg. male followed by female) or through pauses.*

(Holmberg, 1995: 48-49)

These practical guidelines for style in distance-learning materials are increasingly incorporated into study programmes (Jarvis et al., 1998). They are particularly relevant to printed or audio materials. But there is an ever-widening range of both materials and media in distance education. The "transaction" or "conversation" between teachers and learners has been further facilitated by the possibilities opened up by new technologies (Jarvis et al., 1998).

A very good example is to be found in Carr et al. (2002) who state that the distance learning materials provided to learner teachers in the distance learning teachers' training
programme organised by the Hong Kong Open University are meant to guide learner teachers to interact with the developer’s ideas. Learners

...are not involved in a passive process of uncritical assimilation of information. The materials – whatever the medium – attempt to provide two-way communication in which learners interact with text to construct their own meanings and evaluate their learning, thus promoting a deep learning approach (p.168).

To conclude, well-prepared distance learning materials can help in enhancing communication between teacher and learners as well as in enhancing students’ learning. Learners can thus take up a more active and critical role in their learning activities.

The Hong Kong Model of Distance Learning

The definition of distance learning given in The Hong Kong Adult Education Handbook 1995-6 has given a localized definition of distance learning programmes based on the distance learning programmes listed in the directory which are available in Hong Kong. As stated in the handbook, distance learning:

...means that you learn with little face-to-face contact with a teacher. You will usually be equipped with a range of learning materials which you study mainly on your own.

Holford et al. (1995:57)

Then they further list the following features of a distance learning course: 1) teacher and learner are separated, 2) various technical media are used, 3) courses are offered to a large number of students at the same time over a large area, 4) organised self study is expected and 5) students have responsibility for their own learning (Holford et al., 1995).

All these definitions will be studied to determine if there is an appropriate way to define distance learning, especially for the various modes that are being practised in Hong
Kong. Local Chinese learning styles will be taken into serious consideration. Compatibility between their learning styles and a distance learning teaching mode will be analysed.

Though written in non-academic and non-professional terms, Holford et al. (1995) give us some guidelines for assessing a learner’s suitability for a distance learning course in one of the questions they raise: “Will distance learning suit you?” Distance learning works well for some students and less well for others. Students who benefit are those who prefer to study at their own pace, those who find travelling to lessons difficult, those who are self-disciplined and well-organised learners, and those who have reasonable proficiency in the language of instruction.

Another local guide on distance education also gives a similar definition and a similar set of implications. Kember & Murphy (1992) characterise distance education as: 1) the separation of teacher and learner, 2) the influence of an educational organisation, 3) the use of print and other media to unite the teacher and learner and carry the educational content and 4) the provision of two-way communication (p.3).

The implications of this mode of learning, according to Kember & Murphy (1992), are that: the tutor’s influence is indirect; the learning materials must be well-organised and clear; the learning environment may not be designed for or conducive to learning; learners experience a high degree of freedom; evaluation and feedback are often delayed; learners work without direct supervision; and learners require high levels of internal motivation, self-direction, self-evaluation and planning ability.

The Open University of Hong Kong also defines distance learning in the way their programmes are conducted. In the Open University of Hong Kong, much of the teaching and learning is achieved by means of course packages that contain specially structured learning materials, such as printed study units, supplementary readings and assignment questions. These are supplemented by part time face-to-face tutorials held in the evenings or at weekends. In addition, most OUHK distance courses also use media such as broadcast TV, and most incorporate online components that enrich student learning and communication.
In a 2002 publication from Hong Kong University SPACE, *Lifelong Learning in Action, Hong Kong Practitioners’ Perspectives* (2002), edited by Cribbin and Kennedy, the model of distance learning is further clarified as the Hong Kong model:

> The most common model of distance learning throughout Hong Kong is supported distance learning whether locally generated or, as is more widespread, with overseas providers. Local tuition is provided to support distance learning material, be this print-based or on-line. The local support may be locally sourced or may be via visiting academic staff from overseas (and is often a combination of both). The possibility of purely correspondence education exists as does the option of purely on-line courses but in a compact place like Hong Kong, it is relatively simple to organise face-to-face support and this is generally the preference of the learners.


One of the strengths of this model is that it incorporates locally relevant teaching in what could otherwise be somewhat culture-bound learning material, thus offering Hong Kong students an enhanced academic programme (Cribbin, 2002). Since culture is one of the main issues in this research, further elaboration will be made in the next chapter.

**Distance Learning and the Hong Kong Adult Learners**

Even though a lot has been said about distance learning, not much has been said about Hong Kong adult learners or distance learners. It is through the *Recipes for Success* in *The Hong Kong Adult Education Handbook 1995-6* that we see some real life examples of adult learners or distance learners. *The Asian Distance Learner* (1999) provides information about distance learning programmes offered by the Open University of Hong Kong. Quite recently, *Life Long Learning in Action: Hong Kong Practitioners’ Perspectives* (2002), edited by Cribbin and Kennedy and published by Hong Kong University Press, has also provided more insight into the world of distance learning in Hong Kong.

Tan (1995) describes his own experience of continuing education and his motivation to
learn which is reinforced by a sense of group belonging, the attraction of prestigious status and the reward of achievement. The reward is more of a tangible kind like a monetary return, a promotion or even a new career. The intangible reward will be a more critical self and a more systematic way of thinking.

Another learner, Chan, (1995) describes his own ‘efficient learning’ by attending every lecture, having discussions with lecturers, participating in study groups, relating theories to daily experience, comprehensive and critical reading of lecture notes and course materials, and developing a mode of ‘block’ thinking, which means having an in-depth understanding of the reading by separating the arguments into ‘blocks’ of inter-related ideas.

Advice is also given to adult learners on developing problem-solving skills, understanding the concepts and applying them, determining one’s own success by oneself, rejecting ‘spoon-feeding’ and studying in groups. All this advice is given in The Hong Kong Adult Education Handbook 1995-6, which is meant to be for adult learners who are going to commit or have committed themselves to distance learning courses or open learning courses.

Though little has been said about the Hong Kong adult learner here, a more detailed discussion on the Chinese learner will be presented in the next chapter. Venter (2003) summarises Richardson et al. (1999) and states that distance learning students do not differ from campus-based students in their approaches to studying once possible differences in the background variables such as age, gender and discipline have been taken into account.

**Conclusions**

This chapter closes with a note on the Hong Kong distance learner after having explored the various themes of distance learning in operation in western societies. The local situation has been revealed and discussed. This sets the scene for later chapters when empirical findings are discussed in the local learning context. The special mode of distance learning operating in Hong Kong is unique and the learners being examined
in later chapters are also unique. The following chapter will place special emphasis on culture and the cultural background of the Hong Kong learners. The concept of the Hong Kong identity will be explored in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3: Chinese Culture and Chinese Learning Styles

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on culture. In the first section, the various dimensions of culture described by different authors are examined. Having established the meaning of culture and understanding the unique cultural dimension of Chinese people, the concept of “Hong Kong identity” is then examined. The major focus is to find out if the social, historical and political environment of Hong Kong has created a “Hong Kong culture”.

Having explored the cultural values and norms of the Hong Kong Chinese population, the issue of learning styles is then studied. Based on various western authors’ ideas of Chinese learning styles, the second objective of this chapter is to critically examine the Hong Kong learning styles proposed by various local and western theorists. It is the researcher’s aim to clarify the concept of “the Hong Kong learner” and to determine if the Hong Kong learner is a “Chinese learner”.

Culture

It is difficult to define the term “culture” because there is no agreement as to what the concept really entails.

*In different fields, culture is different things, and even within similar discussions, various authors mean different things by it. Just as the content of ‘culture’ varies over time and space, so do its definitions. Definitions have ranged from the erroneously narrow to the meaninglessly broad. A popular statement... is that there are as many different definitions of culture as there are authors on it.*

(Venter, 2002b:3)

Yet, the focus of this research is on Hong Kong culture and the term culture has to be defined using the words of authors whose interpretations might be more adaptable to the purpose of this research. But it is important to note that no one definition is totally
acceptable.

Culture has always been regarded as one of the factors affecting human behaviour, and is an important factor in affecting people’s behaviour in an organisational setting. According to Clifford Geertz, culture is the means by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action (Geertz, 1973). Biggs and Moore define culture as “...the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is transmitted from one generation to another” (1993:117). Combining the two definitions may give a more thorough interpretation as they include the issue of behaviour and experience as well as the issue of something being handed down from generation to generation.

Another earlier definition of culture is drawn from the Ethnoscience School of Anthropology. This is given by Goodenough, a central figure in the school in his 1964 essay:

"...a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. Culture being what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end product of learning: knowledge, in a most general, if relative, sense of the term."

(1964:36; orig. 1957)

This definition of culture has, to a great extent, encompassed the issue of learning and the knowledge one acquires in one’s own society. It is from a desire for belongingness to one’s society that people learn acceptable behaviour. This definition seems to emphasise an active role in learning to be accepted in the group.

Ashton (1991:886) more recently defines culture as “...those national differences which affect, among other things, the way in which people work together”, while Hofstede (1980:24) calls it “the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another. Culture, in this sense, is a system of collectively held values.” Hofstede thus defines culture as a combination of the
common characteristics that determine the response of a single human group to its environment (ibid).

Ashton's and Hofstede's views are similar in that they both stress the collective nature of a group and how the group is different from other groups (nations). They both stress the subconscious nature of the collective values, which is different from what Goodenough (1957) states. However, Hofstede's view has then been criticized as being "subjective" and "implicit" as he states the "mental programming" of the human mind consists of the "basic assumptions and beliefs...that operate unconsciously."

The Dimensions of Culture

Researchers have established different elements of cultures, different clusters of attitudes or different dimensions (Venter, 2002b). Parsons and Shils (1951) provided one of the earliest studies of culture through an examination of attitudinal and normative changes from pre-industrial to industrial society. They concluded that culture values varied along five dimensions: 1) universalism versus particularism, 2) affective versus neutral, 3) achieved versus ascribed, 4) self orientation versus collective orientation, and 5) specificity versus diffuseness.

In 1969, Inkeles and Levinson derived three dimensions from the available literature: 1) relations to authority, 2) self conception and conception of gender, and 3) ways of dealing with primary dilemmas and conflict. Even though these two studies are rather dated, their ideas have provided future researchers with valuable data to build on.

Hofstede (1980), in his well known work on international cultural differences and in the 2001 second edition of Culture's Consequences, determined that cultures differed along four work-related value dimensions. He developed an index of relative scores for each dimension with about 100 points between the lowest and highest scoring country.

Through a study of one American multi-national company (later known as IBM) in 54 countries world wide, Hofstede was able to compile a database of approximately 117,000 questionnaire responses (1980:39). Systematic comparative data was initially
collected in 40 countries. Cross country comparisons were made between data obtained from the service and marketing functions, as these were the functions occurring in most countries of IBM’s operation and hence were considered directly comparable. Using factor analysis, Hofstede analysed the data and concluded that cross cultural differences could be categorized along four dimensions. He called these dimensions the power distance index, the uncertainty avoidance index, the individualism index and the masculinity index. The index cited in this chapter is from the 2nd edition of his *Culture’s Consequences* published in 2001. The ranking is from a list of 53 countries. (Hofstede, 2001).

**Power Distance**

People are unequal in terms of physical and intellectual capacities. These inequalities grow over time into inequalities in power and wealth in society and are accepted as the norm. A greater power distance in organisations indicates an accepted hierarchy in organisational relationships. A smaller power distance relates to greater participation in decision making and greater equality in the organisation. In the dimension of power distance, Hong Kong ranks 15th/16th with an index of 68. Hierarchy in society is accepted and seniors are respected with fear. In the school situation, teachers are respected and treated like gurus who transfer wisdom and knowledge. In the family, parents and elders and respected and children are assumed to be obedient (Hofstede, 2001).

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

Life is full of uncertainty. Different countries and the organisations within them adopt different methods of reducing the anxiety caused by uncertainty. This uncertainty avoidance index measures the extent to which members of a society feel threatened by unstructured, unpredictable situations and the extent to which they try to avoid these situations. Hong Kong ranks 49th/50th with an index of 29, the mean of the 53 countries being 65 in the uncertainty avoidance dimension. This means people in Hong Kong are not too concerned about ambiguity. They do not stick rigidly to rules and are less concerned about risk and uncertainty. In the classroom situation, students expect open-ended learning situations and good discussions. They rate self-efficacy
highly and teachers may answer "I don't know" to a question.

**Individualism versus Collectivism**

This is the relationship between an individual and his/her fellow individuals. It refers to the ties between individuals and society. Individual societies are loosely integrated and participants are concerned about their own needs, goals and achievements. Collectivist societies are usually tightly integrated and social group norms and benefits take precedence. In the dimension of individualism, Hong Kong ranks 37th with an index of 25 compared to the mean of 43, which means it is a low individualist society and can be considered as a collectivist society which has a great orientation to the group with greater conformity. Family ties are strong and harmony should always be maintained in the family and direct confrontation avoided. In the classroom situation, teachers deal with students as a group and pupils' initiatives are discouraged. Face has to be maintained.

**Masculinity Versus Femininity**

This is the division of roles between sexes in society. In most societies, the distribution of roles is always such that men take the more assertive and dominant roles and women the more service-oriented and caring roles. In masculine societies people are assertive and competitive rather than modest, and care for things and money rather than people.

Hong Kong ranks 18/19th in this dimension, which is a relatively high-mid-score in masculinity. Material things and money are important, advancement and earnings are important and ego is strong in this society.

Robbins (2001) defines this dimension in a less sexist approach by coining a new term "quantity of life" vs. "quality of life". Quantity of life is the degree to which values such as assertiveness, the acquisition of money and material goods, and competition prevail. Quality of life is a national cultural attribute that emphasises relationships and shows sensitivity and concern for the welfare of others. The former dimension displays in fact the attributes of a "masculine" society, where Hofstede has identified Hong Kong as "high"; we could therefore say that Hong Kong is "high" in the quantity of life
Hofstede’s empirical data drawn from IBM’s employees have been criticized as he attempted to hold everything constant by studying just one organisation and not taking into account variations of his subjects in terms of other background like age, sex, educational level, country of origin. Even though he had a fair number of subjects to represent the Chinese characteristics, there are too many variables, like their place of origin, their “Chinese link” or their “Chinese heritage”.

IBM has also been described as an organisation that has a strong corporate culture. Although Hofstede’s argument is that as the corporate culture is strong, and it is just one organisation, any differences that emerge in attitudes must be the result of national culture. The question one might pose concerns the relationship between the national culture and the organisational culture. Moreover, the samples in the research were highly male dominated so that judgements of a national culture were based on very non-representative samples. This is particularly significant when there is some evidence to suggest that there might be some attitudinal difference between the sexes (Usunier, 1996).

McSweeney (2002) also comments on the narrowness of the population surveyed. Even though Hofstede speaks of “national samples”, the respondents were exclusively from a single company and, although the surveys covered all employees, the data used by Hofstede to construct national cultural comparisons were largely limited to responses from marketing-plus sales employees. In this respect, Hofstede argues that those people who were surveyed were similar in every respect other than nationality and since they all worked for the same company, they shared a single monopolistic “organisational culture” common between and within every IBM subsidiary. They all then shared the same occupational and organisational culture and thus “the only thing that can account for systematic and consistent differences between national groups within such a homogeneous multinational population is nationality itself…” (Hofstede, 1991:252).

Another criticism of his research lies in the inherent biases of the instrument and the samples used. Cross cultural involvement was the original intention of the research, especially the design of the instrument. However, it turned out that the researchers
involved were all western. Moreover, the questionnaires was translated into 20 different languages, but the version used for Hong Kong, Malaysia and Taiwan was English, and Hofstede’s justification (Hofstede, 1980) was that English was the lingua franca of the large international organisations in these places. However, language is seen as the main stem of culture (Sapir, 1929; Terpstra, 1978; Trompenaars, 1993). There is also the fact that the standard of English ability is not always of the highest in these countries. When the research was conducted in the 70s and 80s, this issue was even more critical.

The four dimensions are definitely a great piece of work and provided the most substantial data on national culture at that time. However, the changes in societies in terms of social, political and economic aspects might have made certain findings obsolete in the present day. Even though a recent follow-up to Hofstede’s study (Fernandez et al., 1997) confirmed much of the original findings, it was found that transformational changes have made their way into various cultural values; for instance, Mexico has moved in 30 years from an emphasis on collectivism to individualism, which is consistent with Mexico’s economic development and the growth of capitalistic values. Similarly, US values have shifted from quantity of life to quality of life, which undoubtedly reflects the influence of women and younger entrants into the workforce (Robbins, 2001).

Another reservation concerning Hofstede’s study of Chinese culture, especially on the Hong Kong index, must be his knowledge of Hong Kong and his subjects’ affinity with Hong Kong. We need to know whether his Hong Kong informants were local Hong Kong Chinese or immigrants from China who had lived very briefly in Hong Kong. These people might not have any real “contact” with the Hong Kong cultural scene.

Even though Hofstede’s survey has covered respondents from over 50 countries, the researchers, samples and instrument used have an inherent western bias. To overcome this problem, a smaller scale survey was conducted by Michael Bond in 1991 to address the imbalance.

Bond’s Chinese Values survey is in fact a continuation of Hofstede’s IBM survey as he included 100 students from 23 countries, 20 of which overlapped with the IBM survey.
He was attempting to give his survey an eastern bias. He asked a number of Chinese social scientists from Hong Kong and Taiwan to prepare a list of at least 10 basic values for Chinese people and these added 30 questions made up a questionnaire for the respondents.

Bond’s (1986) Chinese Values Survey covers respondents from 23 countries and stresses the importance of Chinese values which focus on:

1. moral discipline (relates to power distance and individualism);
2. integration (relates to individualism and power distance);
3. human heartedness (relates to masculinity) and
4. Confucian dynamism.

Confucian dynamism refers to the teachings of Confucius. It is often referred to as Hofstede’s Fifth Dimension of Culture. This refers to a long-term versus a short-term orientation in life. Long-term orientation refers to values like persistence (perseverance), ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, and having a sense of shame. These values when translated into “positive” behaviours mean adaptation of traditions to a modern context, respect for social and status obligations within limits, thrift (being sparing with resources), large savings available for investments, perseverance towards slow results, willingness to subordinate oneself for a purpose, and concern with respecting the demands of virtue. Short-term orientation means: personal steadiness and stability, protecting your ”face”, respect for tradition, and reciprocation of greetings, favours and gifts. These translate into “negative” behaviours: respect for traditions, respect for social status obligations regardless of cost, social pressure to keep up small savings for investment, quick results expected, concern with ‘face’ and concern with possessing the truth.

In this fifth dimension, Hong Kong ranks second among the 23 countries which, translated into positive behaviours in the learning environment, would mean respect for social and status obligations and respecting the demands of virtue. This is very much in line with Hofstede’s power distance and would be interpreted in a similar nature in a learning environment.
To a western mind, some of the items seem strange, such as "filial piety" and, of course, to the Chinese mind, some of the items on the IBM questionnaire may have seemed equally unusual (Hofstede, 1991).

The sample size of this Chinese Values Survey may seem a bit insignificant as compared to the IBM one. Michael Bond, who initiated the survey, might have found this solution a creative one to the western bias problem in the IBM survey. But Bond's understanding of his Chinese counterparts in the Far Eastern society where he works may have been rather superficial as he was a Canadian by birth and had only arrived in Hong Kong and been with Chinese people since 1971. But still the value of this survey cannot be neglected as it provides us with an extra dimension to point out some characteristics of the local culture, which other writers have not discovered.

McSweeney (2002) also comments on the case of Hong Kong being integrated into the People's Republic of China and questions the implications of these changes for Hofstede's claims. When nations fissure, coalesce, combine, are combined, expand or contract, one has to wonder which set of indices will be accepted for the newly formed nation. To be consistent with Hofstede's assumption — what is true of a part is true of the whole — the national culture of the enlarged nation must be defined as that of the former part(s). According to McSweeney:

An example is the supposed national culture of China. Following the [re]integration of Hong Kong into China are we to believe that what was measured in the IBM subsidiary in Hong Kong is also true for the entire Chinese nation? (McSweeney, 2002:111)

The question of whether the cultural dimension measurements of China will be the same as those of Hong Kong remains unanswered because China has never been covered in the survey.

Trompenaars has more recently identified seven cultural dimensions in his study of 50 countries (1993). Most of these can be broadly associated with Hofstede's work but provide an additional perspective from which this can be examined. He identified three kinds of categories of dimensions; those concerned with relationships with others, those
regarding how different cultures view time and those related to the environment.

There are five dimensions within the first category dealing with relationship with others. These are:

1. universalism versus particularism (the relative focus on rules or on relationships, whether or not there is one answer that can be applied universally or whether circumstances dictate different responses); Hong Kong has a high particularist score and people tend to believe that circumstances dictate different responses. People would break the law to protect a friend.

2. individualism versus collectivism (which is similar to Hofstede’s ideas);

3. neutral or emotional (the range of feelings expressed, the way people interact in either an emotional or detached manner). Hong Kong is in the middle of the scale and the people can sometimes show emotion.

4. specific versus diffuse (the range of involvement, the importance of personal contacts, the perception of society as interrelated or compartmentalised segments of social life). Hong Kong has a diffuse orientation, which means all areas of social life are much more closely related and at times overlapping.

5. achievement versus ascription (how status is accorded, the extent to which people are respected for their job status or for their personal qualities and achievements). Hong Kong has more ascribed roles on the basis of position in the family, organisation etc.

In the second category, Trompenaars (1993) stresses that different cultures have different views to time. Time is either perceived to be linear or cyclic. In addition, there are differences to where in time (past, present or future) orientations lie (Kluckhohn & Strodbeck, 1961). A further perpetual difference in the concept of time is how it is combined with tasks to produce either monochromic or polychromic use of time (Hall, 1983). A monochromic sense of time simply means that one feels that things should be done one at a time. A person with a polychromatic sense of time prefers to maintain multiple threads of different activities. (Hall, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Hong Kong people seem to believe that time is synchronous and that time is to be used wisely and different activities can take place at the same time. As Scollon and Scollon state, “I presume Hong Kong is a busy area, where people walk
fast, talk fast, and overwork to death” (Scollon & Scollon, 2001: 159). What is obvious to all is that there seems to be too little time in which to do too many things.

The final area of cultural variation Trompenaars identified concerns attitudes to the environment. Does the environment control individuals or do individuals control the environment? Does power and virtue come from the individual or from the environment (Venter, 2002b)? Bond (1991) calls this fatalism as opposed to self-determination of events. Religious influence can be seen to permeate this debate as some religions encourage “this world” orientation and the belief of “human mastery over nature” while others see humankind controlled by natural and spiritual forces around them. This is also known as the “locus of control” debate (Rotter, 1966). Individuals with an external locus of control perceive themselves as being controlled by chance, other people ‘fate’ or “luck” (Bond, 1991; Venter, 2002); those with an internal locus of control perceive themselves as having control over their decisions and what happens to them. Most people in Hong Kong believe that nature will take its course and that fate and luck will control them. This is in line with the low uncertainty avoidance index in Hofstede’s survey (2001, 1980).

With Tromprenaars’ dimensions, Hong Kong tends to be more on a particularist scale in the dimension of universalism vs. particularism. This means the people are sometimes inclined to resort to relationships and not to rules or the law to solve problems. They might break the law to protect a friend although this is a rather extreme generalization for a group of law abiding citizens. This may bring us, rather dangerously, to the term guanxi or relationship, which is rather dominant in China. Hong Kong has a medium score in the emotional vs. neutral dimension (Tromprenaars, 1993; Parsons and Shils, 1951) which means Hong Kong people would be expected to show emotions. In the achievement vs. ascription dimension, Hong Kong tends to have more ascribed roles where individuals are judged more on the basis of who they are, whom they know and to whom they are related. Hong Kong has a diffuse orientation in the diffuse vs. specific dimension, which means all areas of social life are much more closely related and at times overlapping.

---

5 guanxi or relationship – a way of maintaining cordial relationships with others, either in business, in society or in the organisations so as to enable smooth business transactions.
Research shows that people with an internal locus of control are intrinsically motivated. They see themselves as the cause of their own behaviour. They participate more in class, are more reflective and attentive, seek and use information in problem solving, remain aware of information that might affect their behaviour in the immediate future and, not surprisingly, achieve more effectively than those with an external locus of control (Wang, 1983; Biggs, 1987). Those with an external locus of control are not self-determining. They do what they believe others have decided for them, have little sense of ownership and are not easily intrinsically motivated.

Though Trompenaar has brought together the cultural dimensions identified by Parsons and Shils (1951), Hall (1983), and Hofstede (1980), his work does not contain any new ideas to further our understanding of culture and specific country’s indices.

The purpose of this research is in fact to study the impact Chinese culture has on the learning styles of Chinese distance learners in Hong Kong. The study of Chinese culture would not be complete if a clearer picture of Confucianism was not presented, as it has been the “basic norm” of behaviour in China for almost 3000 years ago.

**Chinese Culture – Confucianism**

The word “Confucianism” is a sort of shorthand used by western scholars to cut down on the time it takes to say something like ‘all of the philosophical, moral, ethical, bureaucratic, and social ins and outs of a historical tradition of over 3,000 years which have been written about in China, Korea, and Japan (mainly) using Chinese graphic symbols’ (Scollon & Scollon, 1994).

Confucius or K'ung-fu-tzu (Master Kung) was born in 551 BC and was a high office civil servant in China. Confucianism is the teachings of Confucius on practical ethics or pragmatic rules for daily life derived from the lessons of Chinese history (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). A study of Chinese culture cannot be complete without placing a strong emphasis on Confucianism. “Confucianism today is all about the correct observation of human relationship within a hierarchically orientated society” (Oh, 1991). This hierarchy is found in society in general and in the family. Confucianism provided the
philosophical basis for the filial piety which supported the family structures and in turn the state itself over many centuries in China and in its neighbouring countries. It was the basis of a gentleman’s education, a prerequisite for a career in government, and the eventual source of control for society at large. It was the main contributor to the making of a highly integrated society in which the elite and the peasantry shared the same world-view via a common literary culture (Redding, 1990).

Confucian teachings can be summed up by the following main ideas (Hofstede, 1991): the stability of society which is based on unequal relationships between people; the wu lun, or five basic relationships between sovereign and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and between friend and friend; these relationships are based on mutual and complementary obligations; a junior owes a senior respect and obedience (Oh, 1991; Hofstede, 1991). In such a formalized system of roles (Oh, 1991; Yang, 1993), an individual has to perform his or her role in such a way that he or she should say precisely what he or she is supposed to say, and not what he or she is not supposed to say. An individual living in this system is viewed as being interdependent with others.

The Confucian virtue of filial piety locates the family, particularly the relationship between the children and parents, at the heart of the social order (Lau & Kuan, 1988; Venter, 2002b). There are in fact two other relationships mentioned above that belong to the family. One of them is between husband and wife (Bond, 1991) and other one is between brothers and sisters. The one between husband and wife renders women’s lives different from men’s. The wife serves the husband’s family. A female child does not provide the parents with the comfort of knowing that they will be looked after in their old age because on marriage women leave their family of origin. Also, because of their perceived future role, if there are not enough funds for all children to attend school, it will be the girls who remain behind (Bond, 1991; Venter, 2002b).

The family is the prototype of all social organisations. A person is not primarily an individual, rather he or she is a member of a family (Redding, 1990; Chan, 1999). Children should learn to restrain themselves, to play their own role in the family (Redding, 1990), to overcome their individuality so as to maintain the harmony in the family. Harmony is found in the maintenance of everybody’s face, in the sense of
dignity, self-respect, and prestige (Redding, 1990; Oh, 1991; Kirkbride & Tang, 1992; Chan, 1999). The importance of face in the collectivist family and society is in line with Hofstede's own dimension of individualism versus collectivism when he describes national culture. Role compliance is the key feature in a Confucian society and it is role compliance that protects a person and not the law (Redding, 1990). Loyalty to the family drives a person to look after the welfare of the family. Individual achievement becomes an aspect of family achievement (Redding, 1990).

Virtuous behaviour towards others consists of not treating others as one would not like to be treated oneself. These five Confucian virtues include ren (humanity-benevolence), yi (righteousness), li (propriety), zhi (wisdom) and xin (trustworthiness) (Redding, 1990; Oh, 1991; Chan, 1999). These definitive ideals set the norms governing how individuals should act and behave in relation to others in a social hierarchy.

Virtue with regard to one's tasks in life consists of trying to acquire skills and education, working hard, not spending more than necessary, being patient, and persevering. Conspicuous consumption is taboo, as is losing one's temper. Moderation is enjoined in all things (Hofstede, 1991). Self-effacement is also a virtue which comes from the Confucian value of modest behaviour (Chan, 1999). Chinese people prefer not to express their true opinions so as not to embarrass or offend others. This is to "maintain everybody's face." Juniors or students refer themselves as "not worthy" before their seniors or teachers (Redding, 1990; Chan, 1999).

Religion has to a significant degree provided the basis for many of today's prevalent attitudes in Hong Kong. Even though Confucianism is regarded more as a social code than a religion, it is in fact supported in various issues by the nature-related religion, Taoism, and the more spiritual Buddhism (Sheh, 1995; Venter, 2002b; Redding, 1990). The key principles of these three "beliefs" emphasise the importance of education, the principle of humanity (the practice of humanity through courtesy, magnanimity, good faith, diligence and kindness), and the principle of moderation (avoiding the practice of extremes and taking the middle way in thought and action). Taoism teaches the idea of being contented and happy with what you have, to let things behave in their natural way and to move towards a central harmony. This is in fact in line with Trompenaar's and Rotter's external locus of control. As Bond (1991) notes, the Hong Kong Chinese are
likely to attribute events to fate and luck. Buddhism teaches the importance of good moral attitudes, careful reasoning and logical thinking.

After reviewing Confucianism and the cultural heritage of the Chinese society, we must take a closer look at Hong Kong culture, which, to many local writers, is unique.

**Hong Kong Culture – The Hong Kong Identity**

Hong Kong culture is a unique mix based on the interaction between traditional Chinese and Confucian cultural influence and “the Hong Kong experience” (Leung, 1996). Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997, after having been a British Colony since 1842. The political identity of Hong Kong people seems settled. However, their cultural identity continues to undergo complex and contradictory processes of transformation (Abbas, 1997; Ma, 1999).

*In retrospect, the formation of a distinctive local identity has only taken root since the late 1970s, when the new-found Hong Kong identity was largely constructed by foregrounding cultural differences between Hongkongers and mainland Chinese (Ma, 1999:1).*

The majority of Hong Kong people are ethnic Chinese like the people in mainland China, but in the mass media, mainlanders, who are under Communist rule, are stigmatised as “uncivilised” outsiders against which modern, cosmopolitan Hongkongers could not identify themselves. This “de-sinicisation” produced an ambivalent and sometimes contradictory Sino-Hong Kong identity. On the one hand, Hong Kong people identified with traditional Chinese culture in an abstract and detached sense, but, on the other hand, they discriminated against particular cultural practices which were seen as affiliated with the communist regime on the mainland.

Confucianism, as a moral principle and political philosophy, according to Wei and Li (1995) has permeated Chinese thought and personal relationships as well as national regimes for more than two millennia. Hong Kong has always been regarded as a Confucian society by writers of different cultures like Bond, Hofstede, Kirkbride,
Scollon & Scollon, and Redding all through the two recent decades. As a Chinese
person born and raised in Hong Kong, the researcher has been educated in the British
education system and has witnessed the change of Hong Kong from an entrepot to
become one of the most famous cosmopolitan cities in the world. It is interesting,
therefore, to compare what local Chinese writers have to say about Hong Kong being a
typical 'Chinese' society and a 'Confucian' society.

An opinion poll conducted jointly by the University of Hong Kong's Social Sciences
Research Centre and Commercial Radio found that 40.0% of the 517 respondents
interviewed called themselves "Hong Kong people" and another 22.3% "Hong Kong
people in China." Only 20.6% called themselves "Chinese" and 15.5% "Chinese in
Hong Kong." The remaining 1.6% gave other identities or said they "do not know"
(Hong Kong Standard, 2 October, 1998).

Lau and Kuan (1988) are echoed by Abbas (1997) in their feelings about the Hong
Kong identity distinguishing itself from the mainland Chinese and the overseas Chinese
who may have been more strongly influenced by Confucian teachings. Hong Kong,
however, has a unique position in terms of political and economic changes. Wei and Li
(1995) describe Hong Kong as being "modern western but with underlying Chineseness,
it is Chinese with a surface of English-speaking internationalism" (Wei & Li, 1995:17).

Lau (1982) has never associated Hong Kong with a Confucian society even though he
stresses the importance people here see in the relationships in the family. Lau (1982)
regards 'emphasis on material values' as the first major normative orientation of Hong
Kong. This is due to the success of the market competition in the 1970s and 1980s that
has given Hong Kong people a more "comfortable" and "affluent" lifestyle than their
Chinese counterparts (Ng, 1995). This is similar to Bond's description of 'materialism',
which is considered as 'the pursuit of wealth'. People in Hong Kong work hard for
monetary rewards, which are set high on the priorities list according to Bond's (1986)
attitude surveys among Chinese workers.

Abbas (1997), a westerner who has resided in Hong Kong for over 20 years, has a more
apt insight into the local Chinese and he calls this the phenomenon of 'doom and boom'
as he describes the frustration of the Hong Kong people before the 1997 handover to
Chinese rule from the British. The ‘decadence’ is a result of the lack of democratic politics, the striving for materialistic comfort and the helplessness in the face of change. The helplessness lasted a few years and was aggravated when the economic downturn came and the property market plunged two years later. The big increase in the number of people with negative equity from the failure of the property market changed the Hong Kong people into a more helpless group, a situation which was even further aggravated when the unemployment rate soared with the change in the market economy in the early 2000s.

In Hofstede and Bond (1984) and Hofstede (1980), Hong Kong culture is characterised as low on individualism and high on collectivism, with a strong orientation to the family (Venter 2002), high power distance, weak uncertainty avoidance, and medium masculinity. Trompenaars (1993) concluded that in Hong Kong, Chinese managers demonstrate a high level of collectivism, a strong sense of belonging to a social group and prefer working in groups to solve problems.

The five relationships of Confucianism values are hardly able to be maintained in the real sense because of economic constraints. It is hard for the local residents to live under the same roof with their extended families of three generations as the size of flats is more suitable for a nuclear family of four. The prevalence of western influence in terms of the ‘culture of commodity’, ‘commercialism’ (Leung, 1995) and western capitalist ideas (Choi, 1991) have dominated the Hong Kong society, where people are not concerned about being in a ‘collectivist society’ working for the common good but for the ‘individual pursuit of personal achievements’. This can be interpreted by citing Lau (1982, 1984), who finds that Hong Kong cannot possibly be called a ‘collectivist’ society in the sense of ancient Japan and China because of economic and social constraints. The scarcity of space means that flats in Hong Kong are small and are meant for a nuclear family where immediate family members, that is, parents and one or two children, live. The extended family or the clans are no longer considered as ‘family units’. The family unit is thus a small unit and personal achievements are thus shared among the few people in the unit.

The concept of family is also stressed in Hong Kong (Redding, 1990; Lau, 1982; Lau & Kuan, 1988: Venter, 2002b). Lau even states that the concept of the family has become
more important than that of the society (1984). The family is the life support system of the individual in society. The tendency to put family interests above the interests of all other groups in society is a key characteristic of Hong Kong Chinese society (Lau, 1982). It is the family that is the preferred source of support and resources in Hong Kong (Lau & Kuan, 1988). If individualism versus collectivism is concerned with the manner in which the individual relates to the collectivity (being all people in society) then Hong Kong may not be collective in the sense that individuals see themselves as part of the group who constitute Hong Kong society. But basically, they see themselves as belonging to the family and then to society.

The role of women in the family in Hong Kong has also changed because of the total participation of female students in nine years’ education and the equal opportunities for all to higher education (Green Paper on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 1993). Sodusta (2002) states that the gender issue is still a constraint in school as well as in the family. A study conducted by Chan and Ng (1994) stresses the importance of education for women’s integration into the workforce. The issue raised and supported by Sodusta (2002) is the idea of a support system within the family (division of labour, namely doing household chores, hiring a helper in the family, child care activities.) for wives to juggle their family responsibilities, as determined by their cultural “role”, with the demands of their work and studies. In fact, in Hong Kong in 1994, 54.7% of the women aged above 15 contributed their earnings to their household resources compared to 43.5% in 1976 (Chan & Ng, 1994). A higher participation rate of women than men in continuing education was reported in the 1998-99 Hong Kong University SPACE survey (66% female and 34% male).

In the Hong Kong situation, competition is so intense that most people are striving for success in a personal sense and not regarding “society” as their “motherland”. As Lau suggests:

_The Hong Kong Chinese in general neither identify with Hong Kong nor are committed to it but rather tend to treat it as an instrument. Consequently, society is conceived as a setting wherein one exploits to the best of one’s efforts the opportunities available so as to advance the interests of oneself and one’s familial group._

Lau (1982:87)
Lau sounds rather detached and pragmatic saying that the Hong Kong people exploit their society for their personal interests. To a large extent this is true as one could see from the number of emigrants leaving for other countries through fear of Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997. This also reinforces Lau’s own view (1982) of the family unit rather than the society on the whole as a “collectivist” group.

In the fifth dimension of culture on Confucian Dynamism, (added on to Hofstede’s four dimensions) of Bond’s Chinese Survey (1986), Hong Kong ranks second among the 23 countries which when translated into positive behaviours in the learning environment would mean respect for social and status obligation and respect for the demand of virtue. Hofstede (1991) reinforces this aspect by citing the top five positions in this long-term orientation (LTO) index values for the 23 countries. These 5 countries are China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Singapore that ranks ninth. Aside from China, the other five countries are known as the ‘Five Dragons’ because of their surprisingly fast economic growth over the past decades. Hofstede feels that it is not surprising to correlate the LTO with economic growth data published by the World Bank for the period of 1965-1987.

Lau (1982:ix)

Many western writers have given an apt description of Hong Kong Chinese culture. However, there is a group of local Chinese writers who were born in Hong Kong and claim they are ‘proud’ to be ‘Hongkongese’. As Lau (1982:ix) states:

Being a native of Hong Kong, and having sufficient identification with her to call it home, I find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to extricate myself from the people and things which surround me, and the likes and dislikes I have for them.

This very strong bondage with all aspects of Hong Kong started emerging in the early 1980s when China and Britain started negotiating for the hand over of Hong Kong to China. Most Hong Kong people were anti Communist China as China was not an acceptable place for Hong Kong people to call their motherland. They were proud to be
in Hong Kong with its international perspectives and enjoying the economic prosperity that they brought about by hard work and the British colonial laissez faire system.

Lau & Kuan (1988) reiterate this affinity with Hong Kong:

Even though no hard evidence is available, it might not be un-reasonable to characterise the basic identity of the Hong Kong Chinese before 1960s as 'Chinese' with its 'Chineseness' based more on social and cultural factors than on economic or political factors. Gradually, this 'Chinese identity' has undergone slow and subtle changes. In our 1985 survey, an astonishingly large proportion of respondents (59.9%) identified themselves as 'Hongkongese' (Xianggang ren) when they were asked to choose between it and 'Chinese'.

(Lau & Kuan, 1988:2)

Lau and Kuan's comments reinforce the idea of a Hong Kong identity because most Hong Kong people did not feel any affinity with China especially in the cultural and social sense. It is mainly because there was not much interaction between the two people even though Hong Kong people might have close family members across the border. The Communist regime almost divided Hong Kong from the mainland completely because of the different social and political status.

Wei & Li (1995) in their tourist book also remind their international readers that Hong Kong is not China, and Hong Kong culture is distinct from that across the border. Their description of Hong Kong is '...Hong Kong is modern-Western but with underlying Chineseness, or it is Chinese with a surface of English-speaking internationalism. No one sees it as half and half' (Wei & Li, 1995:17). In the same book, they mention the 'Hong Kong identity' when they introduce the terms 'Hongkongers' and 'Hongkongese'. They elaborate the point as follows:

The Chinese population are beginning to assert their identity as Hong Kong Chinese, not the least to stress their distinctiveness from the Chinese from China and the Chinese in Taiwan.

(1995:54)
This Hong Kong identity is in fact associated with a Hong Kong way of life (Leung, 1999; Ng, 1995), which is an intriguing mix of attitudes that came with the economic success of Hong Kong during the colonial rule when people were satisfied with life in the colony. On the other hand, a clear majority of them agreed that people in Hong Kong were often unfairly treated by the British, who had reaped a lot of benefits from the colony. However, the historical development in Hong Kong had in fact lured Hong Kong people to “detach” themselves from Communist China. As Ng notes:

*There was also an outlook on traditionalism, a clinging to traditional views and practices probably for both emotional and instrumental reasons. It lastly contains an embryonic outlook on reform brought on by the frustration and discontent generated by market capitalism.*

(Ng, 1995:33)

This “clinging to traditional views and practices” refers to the attachment to the Chinese cultural heritage, which gives them a sense of belonging. They can identify their ethnicity as “Chinese” and get a sense of belonging, especially to one of the oldest cultures in the world history, when there is discontent generated by capitalist exploitation.

Choi (1991) describes the education system of Hong Kong as using a local setting while retaining the Chineseness in society, especially with a strong affinity with the culture and appearance of Cantonese cities; he says that it has a uniqueness even though highly affected by western capitalist ideas.

Another issue to be considered in the Hong Kong identity question is that the better the education standard of the respondents, the higher the percentage that associated themselves with Hong Kong and with Hong Kong culture. This is because more education opportunities enhance competitiveness in the market and secure a better career prospect (Leung, 1999).

In terms of popular culture, like movies and art, Hong Kong has always been described as ‘alien’ when compared with the culture in China. Hong Kong people are always considered as ‘un-nationalistic’ and its culture is regarded as ‘culture of commodity’,
the art is considered as ‘westernized’ and other terminologies like ‘commercialism’ and ‘westernization’ have become linked with Hong Kong (Leung, 1995).

Abbas (1997) echoes the idea of “commercialism” in the Hong Kong film industry as most critics of the industry seem divided between criticising it for its relentless commercialism or applauding it for its high camp quality. This is actually a result of the local culture leaning too much towards material values.

Lau (1982) regards “emphasis on material values” as the major normative orientation of Hong Kong and this idea is echoed by what Bond calls (1986) “materialism”, which is considered as “the pursuit of wealth”. The pursuit of wealth is a priority of many. Attitude surveys among Chinese workers regularly found that monetary rewards are high on the list of priorities (Bond, 1986). The tendency to work hard may thus be attributed to this.

This dominant characteristic is then re-echoed by Abbas (1997), who justifies this attitude as Hong Kong’s famous “energy and vitality” that could be related to decadence. He further illustrates this concept as follows:

_The energy here is an energy that gets largely channelled into one direction: that is what I understand by decadence. One of the effects of a very efficient colonial administration is that it provides almost no outlet for political idealism (until perhaps quite recently), as a result, most of the energy is directed towards the economic sphere. Historical imagination, the citizens’ belief that they might have a hand in shaping their own history, gets replaced by speculation on the property or stock markets, or by an obsession with fashion or consumerism. If you cannot choose your political leaders, you can at least choose your own clothes._

(Abbas, 1997: 5)

Abbas calls this the phenomenon of “doom and boom”; the more frustrated or blocked the aspirations to “democracy” are, the more the market booms. By the same logic, the only form of political idealism that has a chance is that which can go together with economic self-interest, when “freedom”, for example, could be made synonymous with
the "free market".

To sum up what all these local writers say about Hong Kong culture, Abbas' words might seem to be the most significant: "culture and the politics of disappearance" (Abbas, 1997:5). This gives the idea of the transient nature, the sense of "un-belonging", the sense of change, and the helplessness in belonging here.

All these local writers were describing Hong Kong in the eighties and nineties when its people were under a constant "fear" of the "unknown" in its political and economic scene, which differentiates the local Chinese from other Chinese either in mainland China or overseas. The "Chineseness" is more concealed in the Hong Kong Chinese and the "Hong Kong identity" emerges. This Hong Kong identity is a mixture of the rapid political, social and economic ups and downs that Hong Kong people have faced in the previous decades.

Changes then took place at the turn of the century when the international image of China emerged with China winning in competing for the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Trade Exposition, sending Yang to the moon in early 2004 and its internal economic growth and prosperity. Hong Kong people have changed to another form of mentality, gaining a better sense of belonging to the motherland, especially when they are now formally declared to be "Chinese" when they fill in the nationality and ethnic status on identity papers. Many "Hongkongers" now claim that they are Chinese but they still insist that they are from the Hong Kong SAR.*6

Venter (2002) reviewed the literature on Hong Kong culture and made the following summary:

* Hong Kong SAR – Hong Kong, Special Administrative Region of China. There are only two SARs, namely Hong Kong and Macau. Both were colonies of western countries and were returned to China in the late 1990s. Hong Kong was handed back to China by the British in 1997 and Macau by the Portuguese in 1999.
influence of Confucianism, and this has meant a demand for respect for particular positions and a tradition of obedience. Indicative of this is Hong Kong's high score on Hofstede's power distance index.

(Venter 2002b:51)

In terms of the work ethic of the Hong Kong Chinese, Venter has this to say:

...there is a widespread belief that opportunities are abundant and that anyone who works hard can make something of themselves. Coexisting with this belief, the Hong Kong Chinese are also likely to attribute events to fate and luck (Bond 1991). In terms of attitudes to work, the Hong Kong Chinese have been described as highly instrumental (England 1989), but also having a strong work ethic and strong economic drive.

(Venter, 2002b:52)

Venter's view of Hong Kong being a collectivist society with a strong family influence is partly acceptable. It is a society with a strong family influence as most people in Hong Kong see their immediate family as their collective unit that they depend on, for resources or for other kinds of support (Lau, 1984). However, Hong Kong is not "collective" in the sense that the extended family or the clan cling on to each other, as it is not practical for the big group to congregate in the crowded living conditions in Hong Kong unless there are specific occasions to celebrate or mourn. The views about the Hong Kong Chinese being "Confucian" in nature and with a high power distance orientation can be demonstrated in the daily personal interaction when more junior people at work still have a certain respect for the few senior people in the organisation by addressing them with the functional titles even though first names or English names are commonly used among peers. Venter feels that the materialistic nature of society renders this group as pragmatic people working on their personal pursuits. They are not in control of their own fate but are optimistic that opportunities are abundant. This was rather true in the 1980s and 1990s when opportunities were abundant, but since the unemployment rate in Hong Kong went up to 8% in the early 2000s, social problems like suicides and family break ups have become common. The optimistic nature of society and the sense of social harmony are diminishing, as can be seen from the large number of people who have demonstrated each July 1st for the last few years. Social and economic issues and the strong political bond with China have created a lot of
unrest among the Hong Kong people since the economic recession in 1997 until the present day.

In this light, any attempt to study the effect culture has on an issue will have to take into consideration the uniqueness of the culture. Any stereotyping of Chinese people and Chinese culture may not bear any real significance on the issue to be discussed. Research on or interpretations of studies done by foreign academics on Hong Kong issues may contain a certain degree of bias and it is up to local researchers to produce some insiders’ insights on the issue.

The aim of this research is not just to review Chinese culture, but to explore how culture can affect learning styles. In the context of the Chinese learner, Confucianism does play a very significant role. However, we must bear in mind that the Hong Kong learner also demonstrates some unique features in learning styles and attitudes. In the next section, Confucianism and what it entails for learning will be discussed.

Confucianism and Learning

The significance of education stands out in the Confucian tradition. Education is perceived as important not only for personal improvement but also for societal development (Lee, 1996; Bond, 1996). The Great Learning constitutes one of the Four Books (The Great Learning, The Mean, The Analects and The Mencius). The opening sentence of Confucius’ Analects (I,1) refers to the joy of learning. In fact, close scrutiny of the Analects reveals that the term “learning” pervades the whole work. The way Confucius depicts his life-span development is characterised as a learning process: he began to set his mind on learning at the age of 15; he began to take a stand at 30; he became free from doubts at 40; he received truth at 60 and he was free to follow his heart’s desire without worrying about being wrong at 70 (Analects, II,4). Education is not only important for personal development; according to Confucius, society requires learned people to be officials. This is in line with the concept of “lifelong learning”, which “has been moved from the margins to the mainstream in Hong Kong in 2000” (Young, 2002). The title of a recent Education Commission Report – “Learning for Life, Learning Through Life” (September 2000) – is indicative of this fact (Young, 2002).
Education enjoys special significance in the Confucian tradition because Confucius believed in education for all. He felt that everyone was educable and he accepted all students, varying from children of noble families and rich families to those of obscure origins (Zhu, 1992; Lee, 1996). Confucius also stressed that even though there are differences in intelligence and there are often individual differences, everyone is educable. He stressed that it does not matter whether you are born with knowledge or you attain knowledge by learning, or you attain knowledge by taking pain to learn, once you attain knowledge, it is all the same (The Mean, XX, 10). Difference in intelligence is not a key issue in learning. It is a person’s incentive and attitude to learning that matters.

To the Confucianist, education and learning are always associated with effort (Lee, 1996). Self-determination or will power is the driving force of effort. Confucian tradition states that everyone who exerts effort to learn can attain sagehood or "perfectibility" (Lee, 1996).

Confucianism stresses the intrinsic motivation of learning – learning for self-realization. Education is meaningful only when it leads to perfection of the self. It is, in fact, a very individualistic orientation in education as can be seen in the following citation:

*The purpose of learning is therefore to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous, and what is more, an authentic being, who is becoming more fully human in the process of learning. The process of learning is therefore an inner-directed process*

(Lee, 1996:34)

This idea of self-development for the good of the individual and not for society is, in fact, contradictory to Hofstede’s and Trompenaars’ idea of individualism as the Chinese are regarded as collectivists.

*The Great Learning* also stresses that a person should cultivate himself first, then regulate his family, then govern the state and finally lead the world into peace. This is the external manifestation and utility of education. This also correlates with a person's
internal establishment and external performance. This is also a chance for social mobility, which is an extrinsic motivation (Lee, 1996). All in all, the aspiration for upward social mobility through educational success seems to coexist with the ideal for intrinsic personal growth in the process of education (Lee, 1996; Huang, 1987; Cheung, 1991).

Confucianism encourages the Chinese to respect hierarchical relationships between individuals so that teachers are expected to teach as well as guide students. Teachers must be seen with the authority and power to decide which knowledge is taught, with students accepting the information readily and rarely questioning or challenging teachers in the classroom (Chan, 1999; Salili, 2001; Bond, 1986).

As the classroom culture discourages active and critical enquiry, people typically behave according to the social expectations for their roles e.g. between teachers and students, designated group leaders and members. People wait for their turns to speak in discussion groups and contradictions are unlikely to take place (Chan, 1999). With emphasis on reflective thinking and enquiry in the process of learning, an ideal teacher in this context should be the one who guides students but does not pull them along, urges students to go forward and does not suppress them, opens the way for students, but does not take them to the place (Lin, 1983).

The pressure to preserve harmony, to conform, to avoid loss of face and shame mean that certain styles of learning are preferred by the Chinese. The principle of self-effacement, stems from the Confucian principle of propriety, which values modest behaviour and thus prevents the Chinese from expressing their true opinions so as not to offend or embarrass others. “Chinese students would refer themselves as ‘not worthy’ before their teachers” (Chan, 1999: 299).

There is also a strong tendency for maintaining face (Kirkbride & Tang, 1992). Bond (1986) also agrees when he says that in a static society, where the importance of structural harmony within a group is emphasised, every person has to concern himself or herself with the right conduct in maintaining one’s place in a hierarchical order. Classroom behaviour must therefore serve to maintain face and prevent shame for the individuals concerned.
However, a study entitled 'Face-saving group work' conducted by the researcher among 96 university students in their English for Occupational Purposes programme reveals that Chinese students in the year 2000 are not too concerned about the 'loss' of face. Even though they treat their teachers with reverence and respect, they do not think that their teachers are the ones who will decide how and what they should learn. Teachers are there to guide them. Most respondents agree that they would speak up even if the teacher is watching them and they would give and take feedback comfortably without the fear of damaging a relationship (Lam, 1997).

Within the Confucian tradition, students learn through co-operation, by working for the common good, by supporting each other, and by not elevating themselves above others (Nelson, 1995). In the Hong Kong situation, this might be to a certain extent rather impossible. The competitive nature of the public examination system and the pressure imposed on the students tends to discourage genuine learning in the co-operative sense. The whole essence of the public examination is to discriminate amongst students for the limited resources, i.e. number of university places or places in more prestigious secondary schools and even English medium secondary schools.

As education in the Confucian tradition is considered important for its intrinsic value, it is by nature inclined towards the deep approach rather than the surface approach to learning. Confucius’ conception of learning was indeed a process of “studying extensively, enquiring carefully, pondering thoroughly, sifting clearly, and practicing earnestly (The Mean, XX. 19, in Lee, 1996). In another context, Chu states:

*Generally speaking, in reading, we must first become intimately familiar with the text so that its words seem to come from our own mouths. We should then continue to reflect on it so that its ideas seem to come from our own mouths. Only then can there be real understanding. Still, once our intimate reading of it and careful reflection on it have led to a clear understanding of it, we must continue to question. Then there might be additional progress. If we cease questioning, in the end, there'll be no additional progress.*

(Chu, 1990:135).
As the above quotation indicates, memorising (becoming familiar with the text), understanding, reflecting and questioning are the basic components of learning. They are inter-related, integrated and should be repeated for further and deeper learning (Lee, 1996; Chu, 1990). It is worth mentioning that memorisation is seen as a significant part of learning in the Confucian tradition, but it should by no means be equated with rote learning. Memorisation precedes understanding, and leads to deeper understanding. It has never been regarded as an end in itself (Chu, 1990). Wang Yang Ming believes in three significant aspects of learning. The first is memory; the second is understanding what is in books; and the last is incorporating what one gets from books into one’s own experience. To regard memorising as an end is to be discouraged (Wang, 1924, cited by Chu, 1990).

Rote learning is indeed not a Confucian tradition as memorising is never regarded as a means to learning (Chu, 1990; Lee, 1996; Bol, 1989). As Su Shi was advocating his true learning, he criticised customary learning i.e. rote learning, as it “debilitates a man’s talents and blocks a man’s eyes and ears” (Chu, 1990: 135). In contrast, true learning should be illuminating, and should be associated with thinking and comprehension (Bol, 1989: 174).

The Hong Kong Learner

In the formal education scene, the 2000 Education Reform report states that public expenditure on education takes up 4% of Hong Kong Gross Domestic Product, which needs to be increased. Nine years of basic education has been provided to all since the 1980s. However, a pyramidal education system exists today in Hong Kong with fewer and fewer students achieving the next higher level. In 1981, only 5% of the relevant age cohort in Hong Kong could hope to enter a tertiary institution. By 1995, the number of first year, first degree places offered by the eight universities had increased to 15,000, which was 18% of the relevant age group. Competition still remains intense as students compete for more preferred institutions or courses of study. In early 2004, the proposed change to a four-year university degree from a three-year one came as a surprise to many and students in Hong Kong are constantly facing changes which may not be too easy to adjust to.
The examination system in Hong Kong has always created a great pressure on the students, from both parents and teachers. Besides the two examinations per year in primary and secondary school, students go through various public examinations, the most prominent ones being the Hong Kong Certificate in Education Examination (HKCEE) in Form 5 and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKAL) on leaving Form 7. A recent Education Commission document states that in the Hong Kong education system, “learning is still exam-driven and scant attention is paid to ‘learning to learn’. School life is usually monotonous, students are not given comprehensive learning experiences with little room to think, explore and create” (Education Commission 2000:4). This is the reason for the accusation made by various writers that Hong Kong students adopt a learning style that increases their chances of success by memorising facts prior to the examination, which means maintaining a surface approach to learning (Biggs, 1991; Pierson, 1996).

English language proficiency has always been an impediment to learning among Hong Kong students (Lau, 1997). On the return to China in 1997, the Chinese medium of instruction was re-emphasised in secondary schools to help students to learn better. However, it became more difficult for students to move up the academic ladder as many tertiary institutions use English as the teaching medium. In 1998, a Government decree allowed 100 secondary schools to teach in English, raising the reputations of long stigmatised Chinese medium schools. However, students get less exposure to English. This raises the issue of the standard of English among Hong Kong students (Lau, 1997). In the 2000 Education Reform, the Standing Committee on Language Education & Research was formed to raise the language standards in HK. The emphasis is placed on upgrading the professional standards of teachers, creating a motivating language environment and, most important of all, raising the language competency of students to reflect the current and future needs of society.

Hong Kong learners are depicted in the following ways, if Hofstede’s dimensions are applied. The power distance dimension describes the degree to which learners are self-directed or teacher-directed. Cultures with high power distance like Hong Kong (ranks 15th/16th with an indices of 68) value teacher-centred learning, placing a premium on order. Student conformity is also expected (Hofstede, 1980). There might be an
emphasis on the teacher’s personal “wisdom” and teacher-centred education in which
the students expect the teacher to initiate communication and to outline the paths they
should follow (Hofstede, 1986).

The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension describes the degree to which participants in a
learning situation seek to structure information and avoid ambiguity through
generalised principles and a search for absolute truth. In cultures with weak uncertainty
avoidance, like Hong Kong (ranks 49th / 50th), Singapore, Britain and the US, teachers
are allowed to say “I don’t know,” and participants are comfortable with unanswered
questions. Learners are encouraged to seek innovative approaches to problem solving,
and intellectual disagreements are viewed as stimulating. Achieving motivation and
hope of success is stronger in these cultures (Hofstede, 1986). These people do not
always see the fear of failure as imminent.

Learners in a collectivist society like Hong Kong (ranks 37th in the Individualism
dimension) will speak up only when called upon personally by the teacher. They will
speak up only in small groups. Formal harmony in learning situations should be
maintained at all times where students are expected to learn “how to do”. Neither the
teacher nor the learner should ever be made to lose ‘face’. Education is a way of
gaining prestige in one’s social environment and of joining a higher status group.
Teachers are therefore never contradicted or publicly criticised (Hofstede, 1986).

In the classroom of a “masculine” society (Hong Kong ranks 18th /19th and is
considered as medium), bright students are openly praised and rewarded. Achievement
motivation is strong in these cultures. There is keen competition with each other in class
and academic brilliance is rewarded in class. Teachers are admired for their brilliance
rather than their friendliness as in a feminine society. The best students are usually used
as the norm for others to follow (Hofstede, 1986).

Hong Kong learners are then vividly described in this quotation by Murphy (1987):

*Hong Kong student(s) display unquestioning acceptance of the knowledge of the
teacher or lecturer. This may be explained in terms of an extension of transfer
of the Confucian ethic of filial piety. Coupled with this is an emphasis on
strictness of discipline and proper behaviour, rather than an expression of*
As Biggs (1991) says, Hong Kong learners are sometimes stereotyped as passive, reticent, and reluctant to openly challenge authority, especially teachers. They are inclined to favour rote learning over creative learning, dependent on the syllabus, and lacking in intellectual initiative. Even so, both Murphy (1987) and Biggs (1991) see the Hong Kong learner as someone who follows the Confucian tradition with: a high power distance orientation; respect for authority, especially the teacher; strict adherence to discipline; and the ability to stifle his/her own personality and creativity. This view of Hong Kong learners is, in fact, a myth as Kennedy (2002c) tries to clarify.

In Kennedy (2002c), some received opinions about the Chinese culture and Chinese learners are counterpoised with more recent interpretations. Discussions of Chinese learners are sometimes insufficiently sensitive to the age, gender or geographical location of the learners and beliefs about the influence of Confucian culture on learning styles are overstated (Kennedy, 2002c). The usual comments regarding Chinese learners or Chinese traits will conveniently refer to Confucian values, disregarding the subject under discussion (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Kennedy also re-interprets the Confucian values of collectivism and conformity when he cites Confucius’ views on individuality in learning. “Education is only meaningful if it leads to the perfection of the self and the purpose of learning is to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous being” (Lee, 1996:34).

**Learning Approach Theory**

To gain another perspective, it is relevant to examine Hong Kong students in light of recent theoretical approaches to learning (Biggs, 1991,1992; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983). These current theories identify three distinct processes that could go on when an individual approaches learning tasks. The approaches are surface, deep and achieving (Table 3.1). These approaches are determined by learner motivation and orientation, and the tactics and strategies the learner uses when dealing with learning tasks (Pierson,
The surface approach to learning is linked to extrinsic motivation. The learner sees his/her learning efforts as moving towards some specific goal – for example, getting a good job. Fear of failure of attaining this goal and working over-diligently on the task are balanced by the learner in this approach. The learner concentrates on those elements of the task which will get him/her through the course of study. This usually means focussing on the literal and concrete components of learning tasks, emphasising words rather than meanings. Such an approach encourages reproducible, rote learning. The student has very little personal involvement in and commitment to learning and is fearful of academic failure and what that will do for future wage-earning prospects (Pierson, 1996; Biggs, 1991).

Table 3.1 Effects of Approaches to Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surface approach</th>
<th>Performance: Poor examination performance, including external examination, but good for recalling unrelated detail.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational: Intentions to terminate formal education as early as possible: poor academic self-concept; dissatisfied with academic progress; preference for technical rather than science or humanities subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal: An external locus of control (believes that other people and luck determine what happen to you), low verbal IQ, low parental education. Characteristic of younger rather than mature-age students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep approach</td>
<td>Performance: Good performance in external examination, but only in subjects of interest, learns concepts and principles of high structural complexity with which to interpret detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational: Intention to continue formal education to tertiary level; good academic self-concept, sees oneself as a good performer and satisfied with progress. Often a preference for humanities, rather than science subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal: Internal locus of control (believes one controls ones destiny), but unrelated to IQ (allowing for higher performance in particular subjects), students with a bilingual background tend to have a deep orientation, as do mature-age students and adults.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Achieving approach | Performance: Tends to do well in examinations and generally 'cue seeks' to maximize on what is required for high grades.

Educational: Intends to stay in formal education to seek the highest qualifications. Sees him/herself as a good performer relative to others, but tends to be dissatisfied unless performing at the very top. Preference for science subjects.

Personal: Internal locus of control, over-achieving (perform beyond what intelligence level would predict – bright, but not the brightest): like deep, related to experience and bilingual background.


The deep approach suggests that the learner has significantly more involvement in and commitment to the content of the learning task rather than attainment of short-term occupational and failure-avoidance goals. This approach implies intellectual curiosity towards study. Maximum effort is expended to satisfy that interest and curiosity. The learner is personally engaged in the subject matter and, by means of his/her own initiative, seeks to integrate more information by reading and discussion through every available intellectual avenue. The student is intellectually challenged and passionately engaged.

The achieving approach is one that follows from the ego-enhancement and pride that come from visibly achieving good grades or results. This approach, according to Biggs (1991), is not concerned with the content of the learning task as much as the context of the task. This includes such elements as time management, personal discipline, working space and the most efficient ways to cover the syllabus. The learner is motivated by the sense of achievement that comes from success and the part it will play in his/her future achievement and advancement.

Biggs (1987) believes that Hong Kong learners are more likely to assume a surface approach to learning because they are facing an excessive amount of syllabus material to be learned, have very little choice and control over content and method of study and an assessment system that requires reproduction of what has been learned, plus a
learning environment where independence and individuality are neither nurtured, valued or required. A deep approach to learning would be achievable if the learners were given time to digest, contemplate and to discuss what they are learning. Such an approach to learning might be viable if the public examinations concentrated on understanding principles rather than the reiteration of facts and procedures. In summary, Pierson (1996) feels that it likely that the colonial education system with excessive workloads, centralised curricula, concentration on knowledge acquisition, examinations emphasising reproductive knowledge over genuine thinking, the didactic, expository type of school teaching that is common in Hong Kong schools, overcrowded classrooms and inadequately trained teachers foster a more surface approach to learning.

Kember and Gow (1991) discovered in another comparison between Hong Kong post graduate students with a similar Australian cohort that Hong Kong students tend to have a relatively strong achieving approach to learning rather than a surface approach. Other studies (Gow & Kember, 1990; Gow et al 1994; Balla et al., 1991) discovered that tertiary education in Hong Kong was not so successful in sustaining deep and achieving approaches to learning. Deep motivation and an achieving strategy declined from the first year to the final year. This is because learners tend to limit their study to what is specifically taught in the course and show little motivation to do outside work. Perhaps this is a response to the heavy workload demands of tertiary level courses. Garner (1990) suggests that learners follow primitive study strategies, ignoring more enriching time-consuming study skills, if these primitive strategies provide them with a practical way to get through a course (Pierson, 1996). However, it is more encouraging to hear again from Gow et al (1994) that in their comparative study of Hong Kong and Australian students, the stereotype of excessive reliance on rote learning was not confirmed among Hong Kong learners (Pierson, 1996).

The Chinese teacher’s duty is to “teach the books” (Jiao Shu), which puts a lot of emphasis on “imparting knowledge from the books” and puts high values on textbooks (Mok et al., 2001). A common western stereotype is that the Asian teacher is an authoritarian purveyor of information, one who expects students to listen and memorise correct answers and procedures rather than to construct knowledge themselves (Stigler & Stevenson, 1991). Teacher-centred pedagogy and student compliance are still prevalent in many modern Chinese societies despite the fact that some of them have a
long history of western influence (Biggs, 1996; Ho, 1993; Scollon & Scollon, 1994). In collectivist societies, the teacher’s role is to ensure the conformity of the students in the classroom and violation of the group norms is not accepted (Ho, 2001). Ho’s (1999) study into the teacher-student relationship finds that both Hong Kong and Australian teachers state that teachers should maintain some authority over students and yet be approachable, emphasising the fact that they are more effective with students with whom they have a good relationship, characterised by mutual respect, understanding and the students perceiving care and concern on the teacher’s part (Ho, 2001). However, a major difference between the Australian teachers and the Hong Kong teachers is that in Australia respect is earned through good teaching and demonstration of teacher competence whereas in Hong Kong, respect is given to the teacher who can exercise control over the classroom and have an affectionate relationship with students.

Teachers in Chinese society have also been described by Cortazzi and Jin (2001) and Gao and Watkins (2001) as having a holistic view of teaching, where the teacher acts as a friend and parent, cultivating not only the cognitive development of the students but also promoting positive attitudes to society and a sense of responsibility for moral behaviour. Teachers are expected to set themselves up as models both in academic and non-academic spheres. Education is referred to as “books and society” and teachers are to teach their students their roles in society, with collectivist obligations to behave within that role in socially acceptable ways. This is in line with the idea of the hierarchy and the maintenance of harmonious relationships in Bond (1991:83) who says “honour the hierarchy first, your vision of the truth second”.

The concept of “face” (mien-tzu) – having status in front of others – is important. It is considered selfish and shameful to cause someone to “lose face” (Bond, 1986). Being modest and self-effacing, not “blowing your own trumpet” is praiseworthy, while wasting other students’ class time by expressing independent judgements is egotistical and selfish. Besides, such challenges are disrespectful to teachers and may cause them to lose face (Kennedy, 2002c). On the other hand, students are not encouraged to speak out, to question, to criticise and are unwilling to commit themselves for fear of being wrong (thus losing face).

Teaching is largely didactic and text-bound, with little time allowed for discussion; for
many Chinese students and teachers books are thought of as an embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. Knowledge is in the book and can be taken out and put inside students' heads. However, to westerners, books are open to interpretation (Kennedy, 2002c; Maley, 1983).

In the western mind, the ideas of memorisation and rote learning are generally equated and it is generally believed that they do not lead to understanding. However, although the traditional Asian or Hong Kong practice of repetition can be associated with mechanical rote learning, memorisation can be used to deepen and develop understanding, as in the studies of the Chinese classics, when the content has to be memorised to develop understanding. Biggs (1996) points out that it is in fact a misconception to believe that learners from Chinese society are rote learners. He suggests that these learners “may be repetitive learners but there is no evidence that they rote learn more than their Western counterparts” (Biggs, 1996:63). As far as the role of repetition is concerned, Biggs' view concurs with that of Garner (1990); repetition skill development comes first, followed by meaning and interpretation, with repetition being used as the tool for creating meaning (Biggs, 1996:57). If memorisation is understood in this latter way, the Chinese learner cannot be accused of rote learning without understanding (Marton et al., 1996; Kennedy, 2002c).

The Hong Kong Distance Learner

Hong Kong adult learners or distance learners were described briefly in The Recipes for Success in The Hong Kong Adult Education Handbook 1995-6.

Tan (1995) describes his own experience of continuing education and his motivation to learn, which was reinforced by a sense of group belonging, the attraction of prestigious status and the reward of achievement. The reward is more of a tangible kind, like monetary return, a promotion or even a new career. The intangible reward will be a more critical self and a more systematic way of thinking. Another learner, Chan (1995), describes his own 'efficient learning' by attending every lecture, having discussions with lecturers, participating in study groups, relating theories to daily experience, comprehensive and critical reading of lecture notes and course materials, and

88
developing a mode of ‘block’ thinking, which means having an in-depth understanding of the reading by separating the arguments into ‘blocks’ of inter-related ideas.

Advice is also given to adult learners, including developing problem-solving skills, understanding the concepts and applying them, determining one’s own success by oneself, rejecting ‘spoon-feeding’ and studying in groups.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to review Hong Kong Chinese culture, particularly distinguishing Hong Kong culture from mainland Chinese culture and Confucianism. Being a Chinese society, Hong Kong has been prescribed a set of values, very much in the Confucian way, like conformity, acceptance of hierarchy in society, acceptance of family and collective well-being. However, Hong Kong’s uniqueness in terms of the social, political and economic changes that have taken place in the last few decades has also given her another set of cultural traits. Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) and Tomprenaars’ (1993) surveys have assigned some indices in describing its culture as being high in power distance, low in uncertainty avoidance, high in collectivism and high in masculine society. These indices prescribe some common behavioural traits that describe the Hong Kong person. Hong Kong learners are being studied in this research to determine if they do indeed demonstrate those qualities and learning styles that they are perceived to possess.

The literature depicts Hong Kong adult learners as passive, reserved, and reluctant to challenge a teacher’s authority. They are concerned about “face” and are not willing to share their views openly in class. They are surface learners and are keen on rote learn. All these descriptions are to be clarified in the research when respondents share their views on their learning styles.
Chapter 4: Research Design and Analysis

Introduction

The central research question of this study is “Is distance learning compatible with Hong Kong adult learning styles?” This central research question can be broken down into various sub-questions. Firstly, what does the literature say about the culture-specificity of Chinese learning styles? Secondly, what are the various themes in distance learning? Thirdly, is distance learning an acceptable mode of learning for adult learners in Hong Kong?

The central research question was addressed by conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on culture, particularly with regard to writings on the learning styles of Hong Kong Chinese adults. The primary research was in the form of a case study conducted on a group of students in a particular distance learning MSc in Training and Human Resource Management programme offered by the Centre for Labour Market Studies (CLMS), the University of Leicester, in collaboration with The School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE), the University of Hong Kong. Yin defines the case study research method as “an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Yin, 1984:23). “The contemporary phenomenon” in this research, is in fact this particular distance learning MSc programme. There are numerous distance learning programmes at different levels being organised in Hong Kong by educational providers like the Open University of Hong Kong, the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong (SCOPE: School of Continuing and Professional Education), Hong Kong Polytechnic University (SPEED: School of Professional and Executive Development), and Hong Kong University (SPACE: School of Professional and Continuing Education). This particular MSc programme from HKU SPACE was chosen following Stake’s “case selection” technique. Stake (2000) states that his choice is to examine that case from which he feels he can learn the most. He explains that this may mean taking the one most accessible and the one he can spend the most time with. The choice of this particular MSc programme was based on the fact that the researcher, being a graduate of the programme, has insider knowledge. Easy access to the course participants was
possible as the researcher could go to the teaching site and appeal for help without much difficulty. The potential for learning is in fact more important than the representativeness of the case (Stake, 2000). It is also difficult to identify and to select the most representative case in the situation when there are no prior criteria set for a particular area to be studied, as in the case of this specific kind of distance learning programme.

Three distinct data collection methods were employed in this case study. 1) Focus group discussion sessions were conducted as exploratory research for the survey. A series of focus group discussions were held to identify topics and subject areas that informed the questionnaire survey. These were conducted among MSc course participants who had formed study groups and these discussion sessions took place in their study group meetings. 2) The positivist theory-testing approach of collecting quantitative data was used by sending out a questionnaire to elicit respondents' attitudes towards Chinese cultural traits, their learning styles, their motivation to learn, the social constraints in Hong Kong society, their family commitments and the use of technology in learning. The questionnaire was distributed by post to all course members in Hong Kong on the two-year distance learning master’s programme being studied. 3) There was also a theory building phenomenologist approach using qualitative interviews held with a small sub sample of the MSc course participants drawn from the questionnaire in order to further examine the extent to which they adhere to the principles of Chinese culture as set out in the existing literature, their learning styles, their motivation to learn and the social pressure about pursuing further degrees. These respondents volunteered to take part in the survey.

In this case study, a combination of a theory-testing quantitative approach and a theory-building qualitative approach was adopted. The theory-testing approach of collecting “the most valid kind of knowledge” which “is objective knowledge, and that we come to know things by testing our ideas through the process of research” (CLMS, 2002:19) takes the form of a questionnaire survey for collecting quantifiable, objective knowledge (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1993). This approach is not prominent in this research. It is not a theory testing approach as such in the positivistic sense of this term, i.e. the aim is not so much to test a pre-existing hypothesis but more to explore theoretical premises in relation to a specific case study. It is more a theory-building
phenomenologist approach in collecting "the most valid kind of knowledge" which "is subjective knowledge and that we come to know things by viewing the world through the eyes of the people we study; through understanding their subjective interpretations of it" (CLMS, 2002:21).

The Research Process

Focus group interviews are small, task oriented groups that give respondents a chance to express their opinions and talk freely about their beliefs, attitudes, and experience (Schmidt & Conaway 1999; CLMS, 2002). A series of focus group discussion sessions were conducted as exploratory research for the survey before the actual data collection stage started. These discussions were held to identify topics and subject areas that informed the questionnaire survey (CLMS, 2002). The function of the focus groups was for the members of the group to purposefully interact with one another in an effort to gain and share information about a specific topic (Schmidt & Conaway, 1999). Morgan (1988) sees focus groups as the explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. Robson (1993:240) also claims that focus groups allow "people's views and feelings to emerge but give the interviewer some control." It is particularly useful to use focus group interviews here because the group members are all study group members on the same MSc programme and it is expected that they share similar feelings about the learning experience. Focus groups are best used here for eliciting the course members' range of views, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and experiences. This helps build assumptions and generate ideas to build up the research question.

A focus group interview guide was designed in February 2001. It was designed based on themes and issues discussed in the literature on distance learning, Chinese culture and Hong Kong adult learning styles. This guide served as a logical outline of topics that set the agenda for the focus group interview. It provided structure to the discussion and ensured that the interview covered all important topics (Schmidt & Conaway, 1999). The focus group interview guide includes questions on the Hong Kong learner, who is described as a passive receiver of knowledge; issues of face; the Chinese learner and group work; the Chinese learner and respect for the teacher; the Chinese learning
style, especially rote learning and group work; the Chinese motivation to learn; and the social pressure towards pursuing further degrees. The Chinese learner's commitment towards the family and their attitude towards technology and learning were also discussed. A copy of the guide is attached in Appendix A.

Two focus group interviews were conducted, one in February and another one in March. The first one included 12 participants, who were all members of a self-organised study group for their MSc. The second group was held in March and six people took part in the discussion. This second group also consisted of members of another study group from the same MSc programme. Both sessions took about an hour.

Both groups had similar backgrounds because all participants were doing the MSc programme part-time and all of them had full-time jobs while taking the distance learning programme. In addition, they were all working at the same level, i.e. the later part of Module 1 when they were preparing to submit their first assignment two weeks later. There were three males and nine females in the first group and their general age was between 30 to 40. Aside from two members who were working with the Police Force as rank and file officers, the other ten were all working in the Human Resource Management or Training field. The second group of six females was from the same tutorial group when they were doing the Diploma in Human Resource Management with Hong Kong University SPACE. The Diploma in Human Resource Management is a face-to-face one-year part-time programme where students with experience in Human Resource Management can move on to the MSc programme if they achieve a grade "B" or above in their overall assessment. These six members were from the same tutorial group having the same classroom experience a few months prior to their MSc distance learning experience. This group had more to say about their new distance learning experience when they compared their classroom days with their relatively new distance learning experience. The choosing of a 'homogenous' group has the benefit of everyone having similar characteristics, ...having some unifying elements out of which true discussion can grow (Schmidt & Conaway, 1998).

The discussion took place in Cantonese as all the participants are Cantonese speakers and it was felt that they would feel more comfortable expressing their ideas in their native language. There would also be no problem in expressing ideas in one's native
language, especially concepts about Chinese culture e.g. terminology in Confucianism in a more concise manner. The researcher took the role of a facilitator whose main responsibility was to create an open environment where group members feel free to discuss their beliefs and opinions (Schmidt & Conaway, 1998). A discreet observer was also present, with a seating plan in front of him, marking down the person who was talking and making notes of the main points of each member. The observer's role was to take notes of the discussion discreetly and making sure that the discussion was audio-recorded for later transcription of the results. The observer was someone who had no knowledge of the topic under research. His role was totally neutral and he did not know the focus group members at all before the interview. It is important that the observer is an “outsider” and is completely ignorant of the topic. He would not be able to pass any personal judgement on the interviewees or the comments being made. Since the researcher did the interviewing and the transcribing by herself, the quality of translation can be consistently maintained. “The researcher’s knowledge of the language and the culture of the people under study” will affect the quality of the research (Vulliamy, 1990:166). The researcher’s fluency in the language of the write-up also has an effect on the validity of the research.

Audio-taping was also done to record data relatively unobtrusively to capture detailed comments of the participants, as well as their intonation and paralanguage (Schmidt & Conaway, 1999). Since the purpose of the focus group discussion was to generate ideas for the other research activities, i.e. the questionnaire and the interviews, common themes and consensus opinion were identified and reported according to topics. By organising participants’ comments according to content, their opinions become more clearly revealed in relation to the topical categories of interest to the researcher. The findings of these focus groups were used to set up topics and generate the questions in the questionnaire.

The focus groups brought up issues regarding distance learning, the most prominent ones being the theme of isolation, the issue of lack of tutorial support, lack of motivation, their experience of this new learning mode, their hopes and fears. All these comments provided the researcher with the concepts that could be further explored in the design of the questionnaire and also the qualitative interviews.
Questionnaire Design and Distribution

Survey research is the process of collecting a large amount of objective data at a single juncture in time in a systematic manner. A body of quantifiable data is obtained which can be collated and analysed to reflect discernible patterns of association (Bryman, 1989).

Since there is little interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, bias will be eliminated from the survey. This adds to the objectivity of the survey (CLMS, 2002).

The purpose of the questionnaire is to find out the respondents' feelings and attitudes about Chinese culture and Chinese cultural traits among Hong Kong people, the Chinese preferred learning styles, the main reason(s) for the respondents joining the distance learning programme, their expectations of the course, the hardships and ordeals they have gone through or are going through, and their feelings about the distance learning mode of learning. A copy of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix B.

Most western writers say that Chinese culture highlights certain key themes in Confucianism like “hierarchy” in society, power distance, issues of face. (Hofstede, 1991; Bond, 1986; Trompenaars, 1993). It is important for this research to find out if Hong Kong people behave in the way described or whether they have a special ‘identity’, being born and brought up in Hong Kong (Lau, 1982; Lau & Kuan, 1998; Abbas, 1997; Leung, 1996). It is a crucial part of the questionnaire to get respondents’ views of their own culture. The culture issue is then related to the Chinese learning style. The ‘myth’ of the Chinese learner (Kennedy, 2002c) is the theme to pursue in this research in establishing if distance learning is an appropriate mode of learning for this group of Hong Kong learners.

The questionnaire is divided into seven sections. The first section seeks demographic information about the respondents including age, sex, educational background, profession, family background and number of years after formal education. The information provides interesting data on the respondents’ backgrounds, which in turn might affect their motivation to learning and their specific social pressure in acquiring further degrees. This is to provide data to determine if what Schwitzer says is relevant to this group of Hong Kong learners:
...today's distance learners are non-traditionally aged students who have multiplistic life-views and many already-formed attitudes and beliefs; are culturally, ethnically, and geographically diverse; have substantial personal and occupational life experiences; and on one hand, are motivated by professional goals and opportunities for advancement or positive changes in life situation, but on the other hand, may be challenged by previous learning experiences or limited academic familiarity.

(Schwitzer, 2001:85).

The second section is on cultural traits of the Chinese learner. Respondents' attitude towards Chinese concepts is sought. It includes information on Confucius' hierarchy in society and the five relationships, Hofstede's power distance, issue of face etc. Respondents are required to indicate the extent to which they agree with given statements, using a Likert scale response questionnaire. This questionnaire is found in Appendix B. This section aims to provide data on how respondents feel about Chinese culture, as informed by western writers (Kluckhohn & Strodbeck, 1961; Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Trompenaars, 1993; Bond 1986) and about what local Chinese contemporary writers (Lau, 1982; Lau & Kuan, 1998; Abbas, 1997; Leung, 1996; Ma, 1999) have to say about "the Hong Kong identity" and the "Hong Kong experience". The results generated can help us understand the local Hong Kong Chinese better, especially their beliefs and opinions, compared to what western writers have claimed these are.

The third section is on learning styles and respondents are required to express their agreement or disagreement on questions related to learning styles where issues like rote learning and group learning are taken into consideration. The examination system of Hong Kong and the issue of giving and receiving feedback among peers are also areas of concern in this section. Biggs (1991) and Pierson (1996) both feel that the pressure of the public examinations in Hong Kong forces students to adopt a surface approach to learning, which relies on rote learning to increase their chance of success. As Biggs (1991) says, Chinese learners are stereotyped as passive and lacking in intellectual initiative (Biggs, 1991). This questionnaire intends to collect empirical data that could help bridge the gap between the contention and the reality, and clarify the ideas on the behaviour of this group of Hong Kong learners.
The fourth section deals with motivation to learn. Respondents have to express their views on their own motivation towards learning and the relationship between freedom and discipline in learning. Various researchers (Biggs, 1987; Garner, 1990; Gow & Kember, 1990; Bella et al., 1991) suggest that Hong Kong learners are motivated by extrinsic motivation, like a good salary or a better job.

The fifth section dwells on social issues in Hong Kong and the idea of the paper chase. This section provides insight into the respondents' relationship with society. Hong Kong society is always considered as a pragmatic society where the people are keen on obtaining materialistic rewards, like paper qualifications, instead of studying for the sake of personal development or interest in the subject (Lau, 1982; Bond, 1986; Leung, 1995; Ng, 1995; Abbas, 1997).

The sixth section investigates the respondents' relationship and commitments towards their families and the relationship between academic attainment and family responsibility (Lau, 1982, Bond, 1986).

The last section on technology explores respondents' preference for 'printed' materials and on-line learning. This section mainly deals with technology and distance learning. Various studies indicate that technology has been a major driving force in developing distance learning programmes (Nipper, 1989; Daniel, 1999; Metrotra et al., 2001; Kennedy, 2002a). The purpose of this section is to investigate if this group of Hong Kong distance learners finds technology an aid to their learning.

The questionnaire is very comprehensive but it only needs around 20 to 25 minutes to fill in. The questionnaire is very user-friendly as it only requires respondents to choose from a five-point scale ranging from total agreement to total disagreement. A pilot questionnaire had been sent out earlier to a few course members, who gave feedback on the validity of the questionnaire and the clarity of individual questions. The pilot group of respondents also helped ensure that the questions were phrased clearly and that no misunderstandings would occur. Multiple choice questions were also checked for mutual exclusiveness and exhaustiveness (Robson, 1993). This means only one choice is appropriate (mutually exclusive) and that all the possible choices have been included (mutually exhaustive). A lot of modifications were made to the questionnaire before it
was administered to the group. The questionnaire was administered to all the participants enrolled in the MSc in Training/HRM/Performance Management distance learning programme conducted by the Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, in Hong Kong together with the Hong Kong University, School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE) at the time the survey was conducted. The total population of this target group is about 600.

Access to the student database was negotiated with the School Registrar and Secretary, Hong Kong University SPACE. The questionnaire was sent out by post together with a cover letter to all course members in Hong Kong introducing the purpose and the objective of the research. MSc course members were asked for help in filling in the questionnaire. The letter explained that it was a personal research project, and the research had no relation with Hong Kong University SPACE programme administration. It also emphasised that participation in the research was purely voluntary and that the researcher had had no access to the students’ database of grades or results.

A total of 600 copies of the questionnaire were sent out. Most of the completed questionnaires were faxed back and a handful were sent back by post. A total of 97 copies were received. This represents a response rate of 16%. Five returns had to be discarded because the respondents were non-Chinese and their data would not be relevant to the research question. The non-response rate was expected to be high since the researcher had had no personal contact with the respondents; in addition, all respondents are part-time students who spend a great percentage of their time on full-time work. It is up to the goodwill of individual respondents to fill in and return the questionnaire. A high non-response rate in social research may also be related to the kinds of issues being researched (Robson, 1993). The question on the appropriateness of distance learning to Hong Kong learners may well have been a sensitive topic and many MSc course members may have felt uncomfortable filling in the questionnaire. Another reason may be the fact that the learners doing the 4th module of the MSc programme and those who are beyond the 4th module were all already working on their own research. Many sets of questionnaires on different topics were being sent around to study group members or fellow course mates at the same time. Learners were already inundated with different survey forms to be filled in. It was assumed that only
those course members who really felt interested in the subject of distance learning would fill in the questionnaire, hence providing more “honest” and thoughtful responses for this study.

**In-depth Qualitative Interviews**

The third stage of the research, which is the major stage of the case study, was to conduct in-depth interviews as a mechanism through which the implications of the questionnaire results could be explored more qualitatively and subjectively. As Robson (1993) states, qualitative data is useful in supplementing and illustrating the quantitative data obtained from an experiment or survey. Qualitative researchers also argue it is this subjective qualitative data that informs the individual’s perceptions of the social world (CLMS, 2002). A shortcoming of Hofstede’s (1980) work is that his surveys were not substantiated by qualitative data and that the information he provides on what individuals do and feel in different parts of the world through quantitative data may not truly help us understand more about the behaviour of those nationalities. One of the aims of this research is to go beyond the broad picture that studies such as Hofstede's can provide in order to look at what membership of a particular culture actually means for those who live in it in terms of looking into their learning style, particularly their experience of distance learning. It is taking the knowledge one step further by really focusing on individuals in the group and exploring their feelings, attitudes and behaviour.

A sub-sample of the questionnaire respondents was invited for a semi-structured interview. It was deliberately decided to use no special criteria in the selection in order to avoid bias in the respondents’ backgrounds as in this particular study, the research did not intend to make connections with respondents’ background, such as gender or age and their relationship to distance learning. 22 interviews were conducted with people who had expressed a willingness to be interviewed earlier, when the researcher went to the bi-annual teaching visit to classrooms and elicited help from those who had responded to the questionnaire. These teaching visits are occasions that happen twice a year when teachers fly in from Leicester and conduct seminars and tutorials. All these are optional meetings that learners decide if they would like to attend. With the help of the teachers, the researcher managed to introduce and explain the purpose of the
research to the course members. Interested parties left their contact information with the researcher and these are the 22 people who took part in the semi-structured interviews. The focus of the interviews is to help elaborate on individual feelings, viewpoints and experience on the following aspects:

- Demographic background of respondent – identify information like age, education level, motivation to study, time spent on study
- Hong Kong culture – the Hong Kong identity
- Motivation to learn
- Personal learning styles
- Constraints in learning – academic, social, and personal
- Personal acceptability of the distance learning mode of learning
- Use of technology e.g. e-mail and on-line conferencing.

A copy of the interview guide is attached in Appendix C. The interviews are meant to be an elaboration of the questionnaire responses in the sense that they also serve as a means to collect data in support of two issues: 1) that Hong Kong culture may not necessarily be closely associated with Confucianism and 2) what constitutes “Hong Kong Identity”, a term which many local writers are exploring. These local Chinese learners in Hong Kong may demonstrate a different learning approach from what was described by many as “Chinese learning styles”. The last issue was to determine if distance learning is a compatible mode of learning for this group of Hong Kong learners.

Twenty-two interviews took place in the summer of 2003. Sixteen of them were conducted face to face and the other six were over the telephone. Even though telephone interviews have often been said to be inadequate compared to face-to-face interviews because of the lack of rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee (Robson, 1993), “it is compensated for by evidence of smaller interview effects and a lower tendency towards socially desirable responses” (Bradburn & Sudman, 1979:241). Also the interviewer had no choice but to accept the proposal of a telephone interview from an interviewee as it saved a lot of the travelling time and socialising time required when interviews are conducted face-to-face. Each interview lasted about an hour. A few extended to almost two hours because the respondents had a lot to share. A list of
questions asked is found in Appendix C.

With the consent of the interviewees all interviews were recorded. Tape recording provided the opportunity to listen closely to what was being said and to follow up with appropriate probing questions (Robson, 1993). Note-taking on the spot would have diverted the interviewer's attention from the interaction while having to spontaneously decide whether the point being made was relevant or not. Moreover, it is more appropriate if verbatim presentation of the ideas of the respondents is given in the report when issues like personal feelings and opinions are being expressed. All the interview recordings were translated and transcribed, remaining as close to the nuance and tone of the interview as possible.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis of the questionnaire

Data collected from the questionnaire was collated and analysed using SPSS. The attitude statements were analysed using simple descriptive statistics in relation to the themes that emerged from the questionnaires. The questionnaire results are detailed in the following Findings chapter.

Analysis of the qualitative research

The method of analysis of qualitative data has to be explained thoroughly to justify the validity of the research. Many methods of analysis were investigated and the method most applicable to this particular research was the 'Framework' technique employed by Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR) described in Ritchie (1994). This method was in fact employed by Hills in her PhD thesis entitled "Women Managers in Britain and in Hong Kong" (Hills, 1995). Hills' analysis technique was used as a model because of the similar nature of the two studies. The main focus of Hills' research was also on how the cultural characteristics of the respondents affect their behaviour.

The first stage of the analysis was to read through each transcript and develop an index to apply to each transcript. The index is developed by systematically identifying issues
and relationships between issues and any issues that the respondents identify as important. While doing this, subsections of main issues emerge (Hills, 1995). An example can be found in the issue of Confucianism, where the subsection on the authority of the teacher emerged. In the subsection on the teacher, there are a few subsections that look into subjects such as face issues of the teacher, the teacher as the 'know-all', the guidance provided by the teacher.

The index was then applied to each line, paragraph or section of every transcript by inserting the relevant index number in the margin. All the information about a particular issue was then grouped under the same index number. It is also possible to see two or more subject indexes consistently emerge together, which suggests a relationship between these issues (Hills, 1995). The creation of an index is to break down the data into component elements. Information is then rebuilt into a series of concepts through which we can understand the role culture plays in affecting the learning styles of the respondents.

Two types of charts were created. One contained demographic information on the respondents e.g. name (English first names were used in the interviews but a pseudo name was created using the same first letter of the alphabet, e.g. Mary was given a pseudo name Margaret), age, occupation marital status etc. The second type of chart was termed 'subject' chart (SCPR, 1992). Using the same sequence of interviewees, to facilitate cross-referencing, charts could be built up on which all the information about a particular subject or theme could be brought together. The details of the theme and the links between them become visible (Hills, 1995). A copy of the thematic index is attached in Appendix D.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Method**

This section begins with an illustration of the weaknesses in the method before moving on to look at the strengths. All research is bound to have practical constraints imposed by circumstances and resources available. We will first examine the implications of those limitations for the outcomes of the research and the contribution that the method can make.
Limitations of the Research

The questionnaire is designed based on the initial themes and concepts generated during the focus group discussions. There is a wide array of ideas and themes brought up in isolation. During the design of the questionnaire, these concepts and themes have to be related and categorized under similar topics. In many instances, concepts overlap in various areas under study. For example, in the second section, which deals with Chinese culture and Confucianism, the role of the teacher is a main concept to study. The same idea of the role of the teacher comes up again in the section examining learning styles and it recurs in the section under distance learning when the role of the teacher comes under further discussion. To a respondent, questions related to the teacher come up in various instances and it gives the impression that the researcher is not capable of differentiating information. However, it is not possible for questions relating to the teacher in other sections to be omitted because each question has its own value in that particular section. Respondents might feel that the question is repeated but, when the question is posed for the second time, it is explained to them that the answer to the question might give a new implication for another focus in the research. This might seem a weakness to the respondent but, in fact, it is a necessity as the researcher needs to explore an issue from a different perspective.

An issue worth noting is that the questionnaire response rate is rather low. A 16% response rate is not encouraging. One reason may be that the length of the questionnaire intimidated potential respondents’ willingness to participate. It also required a high level of commitment in being interviewed as a follow up measure, which some potential respondents may have anticipated. Another reason for the low response rate is the nature of the group. The population under study is only around 600 in Hong Kong and these people are adult distance learners who juggle priorities between work and studies. Taking up 20 to 30 minutes of their time is a big commitment given their heavy work and study schedules. Some respondents might also feel that the topic is not of interest to them. This is a problem in all questionnaire surveys, which all researchers should be aware of and accept. However, my strategy was to try my best to maximise the response rate by sending a covering letter with the questionnaire, explaining the purpose and giving people my contact details to
personalise the questionnaire. It was encouraging to get some returns with e-mail addresses or some contact notes indicating their willingness to offer further help, i.e. in being interviewed (Robson, 1993).

The fact that the researcher was unable to gain access to the respondents’ database is another constraint on the successful implementation of the survey. Due to privacy legislation, a researcher cannot have access to names and addresses of the respondents. This prevented the researcher from appealing for help on a more personal basis should there be a need to contact individuals or to send an effective follow-up reminder as a means of boosting the response rate of only 16% (Robson, 1993). However, with the help of the School Secretary and Registrar of HKU SPACE, the purpose of the research was made clear to the respondents and the identity of the researcher was introduced. With the generous help of the CLMS lecturers when they were conducting teaching visits in town, the researcher even had a chance to visit the group and present the research outline as well as appeal to students to participate in the study. The lecturers offered their help by providing a few minutes before the lecture for the researcher to explain the purpose and present the objective of the research and at the same time make a request for help.

The in-depth interviews were supposed to collect data to illustrate and explain trends and behaviour identified in the questionnaire survey. However, getting a bigger number of respondents to take part in the interview was not possible. Most people were fully committed to their work and studies, which meant getting an hour of their time for interviewing was near impossible. It was also difficult to arrange for a place near their work place for the face-to-face interview to take place. In a few instances, the interviews were conducted via the telephone, which prevented the interviewer from observing the body language and capturing the genuine tone and paralanguage of the respondents, which a face-to-face interview could have achieved. Even though there were such constraints, telephone interviews had to be included to maximise the number of interviewees. Telephone interviews are also acceptable as they compensate for “evidence of smaller interview effects and a lower tendency towards socially desirable responses” (Bradburn & Sudman, 1979:241).

All the interviews were conducted in Cantonese because all respondents are Chinese. It
is appropriate to allow respondents to use Chinese to express themselves more freely and more succinctly on aspects of Chinese culture and on their own learning experience. However, the problem raised is that the interview transcripts have to be translated and sometimes there is no direct lexical equivalence of the two languages and, as Phillips (1960:291) says, this is 'in absolute terms an unsolvable problem' which results from the fact that 'almost any utterance in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings, and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of ...'. During the translation, an apparently familiar term or expression for which there is direct lexical equivalence might carry 'emotional connotations' in one language that will not necessarily occur in another. On those occasions where two languages do not offer direct lexical equivalence several researchers and linguists suggest that one's efforts should be directed 'towards obtaining conceptual equivalence without concern for lexical comparability' (Deutscher, 1968:337; Temple, 1997:610). For many researchers (Sechrest et al., 1972; Brislin et al., 1973; Warwick & Osherson, 1973) the process of gaining comparability of meanings is greatly facilitated by the researcher having not only a proficient understanding of a language but also, as Frey (1970) calls it, an intimate knowledge of the culture. Only then can the researcher pick up the full implications that a term carries for the people under study and make sure that the cultural connotations of a word are made explicit to the readers of the research report. Even though the researcher is well-versed in both English and Chinese and all the interviews were conducted in Cantonese with a lot of bilingual terms used, for data validity and member checking, the interview transcripts were sent back at a later stage to the interviewees for clarification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is important because during the transcription stage some words may be inappropriately used which may reflect a different connotation or a different meaning. This member check allows for clarification, explanation, or extension of questions or ideas, which is essential as it is the goal of research to represent accurately the views and perspectives of those who participate in a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study aims to examine Chinese culture and Chinese learning styles and their compatibility with distance learning. In this case people from all Chinese backgrounds should be studied. However, since distance learning is the subject of research, the population is restricted. It is a limitation of this research that the target population only comes from one MSc programme. Some might argue that it is too small a population to
be representative of Hong Kong Chinese learners or for the results to be generalised to all Hong Kong learners. However, the choice of this one particular programme, and one programme only, is in fact a strength of the research. By holding factors such as subject matter and content constant, one can focus on learners’ responses and feedback towards the programme easily. This particular programme was deliberately chosen because of its use of printed materials and the provision of some face-to-face support that gives learners a little taste of classroom interaction for comparison. The limited use of technology or, to be more concise, the optional use of technology, like e-mail and blackboard chat, is another issue worth looking into to investigate if technology does enhance distance learning’s effectiveness.

The research is restricted to the group attending a distance learning programme organised by a British university. It would be interesting to be able to compare respondents’ feedback if data could be collected from a programme organised by an Australian or an American university. This gives other researchers some ideas to consider if a cross-cultural study could be organised among universities from different regions.

**Strengths of the Method**

The strength of the method lies in the combination of data collection methods. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to include both objective and subjective knowledge. The focus groups that took place in the initial stage were to provide an opportunity to help brainstorming ideas and provide the themes of the study. The focus groups are an idea generator which “allows people’s views and feelings to emerge, but gives the interviewer some control” (Robson 1993:240). Then the researcher gathered the subjective ideas and views and developed the questionnaire, which is a tool to collect a large amount of quantitative empirical data. It is a more objective way of collecting views and feelings from a large group of respondents. The next stage was to re-introduce the “subjectivities of the researcher and of those being studied” (Flick, 1998:6) when in-depth interviews were being conducted. The purpose of these interviews is to study the participants’ “knowledge and practices” as well as to help illustrate and elaborate the objective empirical data collected in the questionnaire. This adds reality to what is otherwise a set of unexplained statistics. The researcher’s own
communicative competencies and knowledge in the subject area are also a key factor in ensuring the success of the interview process (Flick, 1998:55). This is a major strength of the method as the researcher is the person who is most involved in the study, expected to know more it than others in the area under study and has total control of the whole procedure (Stark, 2000).

Being able to conduct the in-depth personal interviews in Chinese is another advantage that the researcher has. It is important that the interviewees can express themselves in their mother tongue freely and succinctly because the topic of the research is Chinese culture and learning styles. It is important that terminology related to Chinese culture like “wu Lun” and “li” are presented in Chinese and no interpretation is required. These are common Chinese words that almost all Chinese will understand and if these are translated into English, the respondents might feel distant from the ideas. It was also easier for the interviewees to express themselves when they talked about their own learning experience. It would be open to interpretation and argument if respondents had to answer questions in English. The main issue now is that the person who does the transcription and the translation has to gain comparability of meanings, which (Sechrest et al., 1972; Brislin et al., 1973) is greatly facilitated by the researcher (or the translator) having not only ‘a proficient understanding of a language’, but also having, what Frey (1970) calls, an intimate knowledge of the culture. Only then can the researcher pick up the full implications that a term carries for the people under study and make sure that the cultural connotations of a word are made explicit to the readers of the research report.

The Organisation of Findings

The following sections of this thesis present the findings of the research by themes identified by the researcher and the respondents. These themes will be discussed based on the empirical findings and feelings and views the respondents expressed in confidence with the researcher. These ideas and concepts will help explain and justify the research questions and achieve the objectives of the research.

The empirical data will be presented in hard statistics and the views and feelings will be
presented in the respondents' own words as far as possible so as to maintain the authenticity of the ideas and to make known the subjective feelings of the culture group being studied.

The last section will conclude the discussion to determine if culture will impact on the acceptability of distance learning in the culture. Recommendations made by the respondents for improving the effectiveness of distance learning programmes will also be included.
Chapter 5:  
Findings: Confucianism and the Hong Kong Learner

Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings on the cultural traits of the Hong Kong learner. Empirical findings and qualitative data collected through the interviews are then presented. The study then looks at what respondents feel and say about Chinese culture, with special reference to Confucianism and the culture of Hong Kong. We then look at how respondents view their own cultural identity. It is argued that the average Hong Kong person is not "Chinese" as described by most western writers. Most people in the target group tend to prefer to call themselves Hong Kong Chinese and we can see how most respondents describe the characteristics of the Hong Kong Chinese. These characteristics are an amalgamation of Confucianism, colonialism and materialism as well as the result of the economic boom and doom in the last century. Since the Hong Kong Chinese cannot be identified with Chinese people in different parts of the world, the local Chinese are proud of their own unique identity. Following this, the study goes on to examine the way "the Hong Kong learner" is depicted by the learners themselves.

Bearing in mind this unique "Chineseness", most respondents in this case study tend to disagree with foreign writers' descriptions of their learning styles. It seems to be unjustified to generalise about what a Hong Kong learner is from foreign writers' observations of Chinese learners in mainland China or of overseas Chinese learners. The respondents in this case study described their experience in learning, which helped the researcher to explore some key theoretical premises in this research.

The Findings

Profile of the Respondents

The distance learners studied in this research are working adults in Hong Kong who are enrolled in a two-year master's programme with the Centre for Labour Market Studies
(CLMS), University of Leicester. These programmes are distance learning programmes in the field of training, human resource management and performance management. These programmes are being run in the UK, Europe, US, South America, Africa and Asia Pacific. These students are all working adults in the training and human resource management professions who come back to school part-time to pursue a higher degree. They are different from traditional college students with their vast experience and their motivation to pursue higher education even when they have established themselves in their professions.

The target population in this research was all the course members in the MSc in Training and MSc in Training and Human Resource Management and the MSc in Performance Management programmes. We can look at the student profile from the empirical data collected in the research on culture and distance learning. About 600 copies of the questionnaire were sent out to all the existing students. There were 92 returns and the response rate is 16%. The following tables show the profile of these 92 respondents. Table 5.1 shows that 12% of the respondents are male and 81(88%) are female.

Table 5.1 Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If this data is compared with the data from the Open University website, where the male and female ratio in April 2003 was said to be 0.96:1, the difference is substantial. In another survey (1998-1999), 66% of students enrolled in Hong Kong University SPACE courses were female and 34% male. This indicates that women perceive education as a means of increasing their productive empowerment (Sodusta, 2002).

---

7 Hong Kong Open University website: http://www.ouhk.edu.hk  
8 Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education (for adult life-long learning)
Table 5.2  Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30 years old</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years old</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 years old</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 51 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 shows that the biggest group is between 31 and 40 years of age. This constitutes 50% of the whole population. The 41 to 40 group is also relatively large (28.3%) compared to the 20 to 30 year old group, which makes up 20.7%. This data shows a similar pattern to the statistics collected in an unpublished survey on the profile of participation in continuing education programmes conducted by the Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education in 2003, which shows the three biggest groups participating in continuing education programmes are the 18 to 24, 25 to 29 and 30-34 age groups. The 35 to 39 and the 40 to 44 age group are the second highest.

Table 5.3 shows that more than half of the respondents are married (55.4%) and 37 (40.2%) are single. Four of the respondents are divorced. In a later analysis, we can compare the other factors in terms of the respondents' marital status.

Table 5.3  Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 An unpublished survey conducted by the School of Professional and Continuing Education, The University of Hong Kong (HKU SPACE) that commissioned the fieldwork to the Social Sciences and Research Centre (SSRC) of the University. The random telephone survey was conducted from 1 March to 8 March 2003 for a consecutive of seven evenings. A total of 1,626 Hong Kong adults aged 18 or above were successfully interviewed. The response rate of the Survey was 56.7%.
Table 5.4 No. of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Children</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One child</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4 shows an interesting figure of almost 70% of the respondents having no children. This is a factor that may affect the respondents' choice of doing a master's degree programme by distance learning or indeed whether they pursue their studies or not. There are 18.5% of the respondents who have one child and 8.7% who have two children. There are only 3.3% (3 respondents) who have 3 children. We may be able to confirm later that people who have no children have a better learning environment and they find it easier to commit themselves to pursuing a further degree. Since the Hong Kong Family Planning Association has been advocating “2 is enough”, most people in Hong Kong have only one or two children.

Table 5.5 Family Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Composition</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Live alone</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With only my spouse</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With spouse and Children</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With spouse, Children and parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With spouse, children and parents-in-law</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With other relatives</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing system</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The significant figures shown in Table 5.5 are the number of respondents who live alone and the rest who live with either their spouse or spouse with children or spouse
and parents in law and children.

Table 5.6 Educational Level Completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6 shows that 40.2% (37 respondents) are University graduates and 17.4% have finished postgraduate level studies. Thirteen respondents reported that they are secondary school leavers and 20 of them are of tertiary education level. This group makes up about 36% of the population. Even though this is a master’s level programme, students who have slightly lower educational level but are experienced in the field of HRM or training can be considered on an individual basis.

Table 5.7 Employment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Working</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7 shows that among the respondents, 93.1% are full time workers and 4.3% work part-time. Another 4.3% are not working. These people who are not working may be home-makers or temporarily out of work because of the bad economic times.
Table 5.8 Job Position/Title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position/Title</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance &amp; Banking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servicing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching &amp; Training</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
<td><strong>96.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.8 shows job position/title. 75.3% of the respondents are in the supervisory, general and managerial position. This is because the MSc programme is an HRM programme. 14.6% are in training and teaching because one stream of the MSc programme is in training. The rest are in other areas of finance, technical and servicing industries.

Table 5.9 The Empirical Findings
(In the following tables, 1= strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=not sure, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)

A. Cultural Traits of the Hong Kong Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A Hong Kong Chinese is a ‘Chinese’.</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I accept Confucius teachings on the ‘structured hierarchy (□□)’ in society.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I accept Confucius’ teachings on the ‘5 relationships (□□□□□)’ with others.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am affected by traditions and culture from the West.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I believe in the idea of gaining, giving and maintaining “face” as central parts of interpersonal interaction.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

114
<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I am very concerned about money and status.</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I respect a teacher as an authority in his/her field of knowledge.</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I feel comfortable addressing my teacher by his/her first name.</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I always pay attention to the teacher in class.</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I will always accept what the teacher says.</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The teacher is a “know-all” to me.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I will follow the instructions of the teacher without question.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I will ‘lose face’ in front of the teacher if I do not know an answer to his/her question.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I am most concerned with saving “face” when interacting with my classmates in a group discussion.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I will not lose face if I make a wrong judgement on an e-mail to my teacher alone.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I believe that everyone is equal in a group.</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I believe that collaborative effort is required in group work.</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I believe that we have to cooperate in a group and help each other to complete the task assigned.</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I tend to keep quiet in a group discussion even when I am absolutely sure that I am correct.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I don’t want to exert myself too much in a group discussion.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I don’t want to be seen as trying to impress others unduly in a group discussion.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B Learning Styles of the Hong Kong Learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I am used to rote learning, i.e. memorising all the important points in a book and reproducing them in the examination.</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>When I memorise ideas, I understand the concepts.</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Critical thinking’ does not take place when I memorise ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I prefer listening to lectures which deliver all the ‘right’ concepts.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The language of instruction used in the classroom can affect my understanding of the concepts.</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I prefer being able to study in my own time and at my own pace.</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I am used to having all the lecture materials provided by the teacher.</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I do not enjoy taking part in group tutorials.</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I am not confident about sharing my views with others in tutorials</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I do not like studying with others in group tutorials.</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I do not feel comfortable giving feedback to others in group tutorials.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I do not feel comfortable receiving feedback from my peers in group discussions.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I always take the initiative and seek to integrate more information by reading and discussing through every available intellectual avenue.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I have very little choice and control over the content and method of study.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I am always facing an excessive amount of materials to be learned in my course.</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I feel that individual freedom (learner autonomy) is extremely necessary in my own studies.</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I feel that it is the examination system in Hong Kong that requires the reproduction of what has been learned.</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Instant evaluation and feedback from the teacher is extremely important to my learning.</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

116
### C. Motivation for Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I am highly motivated to work hard to pursue a further degree.</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I feel that my ego is enhanced if I achieve good grades through hard work.</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I am motivated to learn by the attraction of prestige and status.</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am motivated to learn by the attraction of tangible rewards such as a pay rise or promotion.</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I am motivated to learn by intangible rewards such as developing a critical self and a more systematic way of thinking.</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### D. Social Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Hong Kong is a place that puts a lot of emphasis on academic attainments.</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Paper chasing/ ‘credentialism’ has become a trend in Hong Kong.</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Good academic qualifications are equivalent to ‘success’ in Hong Kong.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I prefer to pursue further studies full time.</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I cannot afford the time to go back to full-time study.</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I cannot afford financially to quit my job for full-time study.</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I need to pursue further off-the-job training after work for my career development.</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### E. Family Commitments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I feel that I must look after my family before pursuing my own academic attainment.</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I find it impossible to attend classes after work because I need to spend time with my family.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>It is easier for me to pursue a distance learning programme of study than a regular taught programme because I can fit study time around my family time.</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I believe in having and spending quality time with my family regularly.</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My responsibility for the family is to give them all my time after work.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I feel that it is unfair to my family if I use family time for study.</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>My family will be proud of me if I acquire an MSc degree.</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The five tables above show the empirical findings from the survey of the MSc course members. The findings show some very discernible patterns in terms of their feelings towards the idea of Chinese culture, learning styles, sense of responsibilities and some social characteristics in Hong Kong. The first set of questions shows the respondents’ views on the cultural traits of the Chinese learners. The second set shows the learning style of the Hong Kong learners; the third set shows the motivational level and factors of the learners; and the fourth set shows various social issues in Hong Kong. The last set shows the Hong Kong learners’ commitment to their families.

The survey questions are designed for self-explanatory purposes and thus all questions take the form of a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree. Each question consists of one statement phrased in simple English for easy understanding.

Since the questionnaires were sent via the e-mail and the mail, some respondents may have had questions regarding the meaning or implication of some of the questions. Some questions may have been open to interpretation and some questions may have
needed to be elaborated. The answers provided may not be what the respondents truly feel. Some of the answers should be further elaborated and illustrated in order to form an accurate representation of the respondents' views. There was no opportunity for the respondents to clarify, illustrate and explain.

Some of the questions were rather unclear to the respondents. The question on whether one accepts Confucius' teachings on the structured hierarchy and the other question on whether one accepts Confucius' teaching of the five relationships are too presumptuous. They both assume that the respondents all understand what 'structured hierarchy' is and what the 'five relationships' are. In the case of the interviews, the interviewer could define these terms and ensure that the respondents had thoroughly understood these terms so that they then could express their views. Other terms that might have needed to be clarified are "know-all", "rote learning", "face", "learning autonomy", "credentialism", "ego".

The response rate of the questionnaire was 16% and, therefore, could not truly reflect what the group under study feel. It is not appropriate to generalise based on such a low response rate and further analysis of the topic would be needed to explore the general feelings of the course members regarding distance learning and Chinese learning style.

The Chinese Culture - Confucianism

As discussed in Chapter 3, Chinese culture is characterised by a few key issues in Confucius' teachings. The most obvious of all is the hierarchy in society and the fact that the stability of society is based on unequal relationships between people. These relationships are based on mutual and complementary obligations that run the society. According to Oh (1991), Confucianism today is all about the correct observation of human relationships within a hierarchically orientated society. The questionnaire set out to find out if the MSc course members whom we surveyed accept this idea of a "hierarchically structured society". This also refers to a great power distance society, where the elders in the family and the emperor in the country are at the top of the hierarchy. According to Hofstede, "high PDI countries have hierarchies" and "in a high PDI society like Hong Kong, inequality is seen as the basis of societal order" (2001:97).
In the questionnaire survey, 46% of the respondents accept Confucius teachings of the structured hierarchy, whereas about 21% do not. The interesting phenomenon is that there are about 33% who say they are not sure. These people who say they are not sure might in fact mean that they do not understand what structured hierarchy means. In the interviews, the term structured hierarchy was briefly explained when respondents had doubts. One of the interviewees, Venus, felt very strongly about “hierarchy” as a feature of a Confucian society.

All respondents have English first names, as this is the trend in Hong Kong for people who have had an English education up to secondary school or above, both in schooling and at work. However, the majority of educated Hong Kong people use their Chinese names at home. In this survey most respondents would like to remain anonymous and so a pseudo name was created for each one using the same letter that starts his/her first name.

Venus said:

Hierarchy, listening to parents, respecting seniors, no matter whether from a family status perspective and within the company, the respect is still the same.

A similar pattern can be seen in the next issue about Confucian teachings of the “five relationships”. The wu lun, or five basic relationships are the relationship between sovereign and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wife, and between friend and friend. These relationships are based on mutual and complementary obligations and help maintain the stability of society. The junior owes the senior respect and obedience. In such a formalised system of roles, Yang (1993) says that an individual has to perform his or her role in such a way that he or she should precisely say what he or she was supposed to say, and not what he or she was not supposed to say. An individual living in this system is viewed as being interdependent with others. This is very much in line with Hofstede’s (1991, 2001) and Trompenaars’ (1993) dimension of a collective society. Hofstede states that in a collectivist society like China, people are integrated both horizontally as well as vertically. The vertical integration is known as “filial piety” (Hofstede, 2001:228), which means people stay with the family, their parents, grandparents and other elders, respect them and look after
their well-being. Horizontal integration refers to the relationship between people of the same level e.g. siblings, spouse and friends. 53.3% of the respondents who took part in the survey accept the “5 relationships”. 40% are not sure and there are only 6.7% who do not accept the “5 relationships”. Those 40% who are not sure might be those who do not really understand what the 5 relationships stand for even though Chinese characters (五倫) “wu lun” were given next to the term “5 relationships”. Some might intend to say that they are not sure if they accept the concept of the 5 relationships.

When respondents were asked in the interviews if they accept this five relationships “wu lun” concept, one interviewee, Cathy, simply said,

Yes, I accept that. I live with my parents and support them financially. We visit our other older relatives at all the festivals and we respect them.

Vivian is more certain as she is slightly older among all the interviewees and she says,

Yes, we respect our parents, teachers, elderly people, and we have family education....

She went on to say,

I learnt all these ideas when I practised Chinese calligraphy and I came across the teachings of Confucius and Mencius.

Another respondent, Natema, who is in the 35 to 40 age group also presented a similar idea:

I learnt that in primary school when we were taught relationship within the family and the “clan” in Chinese letter writing classes. We learnt that we had to respect our parents, older people, respect our brothers and sisters....

Among the 22 interviewees, there were three persons who said they do not accept the “5 relationships” advocated by Confucius. Sam, who is a 40-year-old Certified Public Accountant, responded like this:
No, I don't accept things like the 'wu lun', it does not contain any content at all, times have changed and the environment has changed so rapidly as well.

About Confucianism in general, he said,

*Following Confucianism is easier said than done. In fact, nobody likes to follow it because it deviates from human nature. It is difficult to use these doctrines to teach the young people. For example, a king in the Tang Dynasty used Confucian doctrines in his government public examinations but he gained his sovereignty by* (Sam)

Then he went on to say that Hong Kong people do not know much about Confucianism. They only inherit the habits from their ancestors. Ellen, who is a manager in an investment bank in her mid 30s and lives with her boyfriend, also feels that the Chinese in Hong Kong learn about Confucianism at home from the elderly people; they learn mainly to be “more reserved and not to push too forcefully”.

Ellen admits that she does not know too much about Confucianism. She said the following in her interview:

*Knowledge about Confucianism...not much... since I was at school I always felt that all Chinese should be reserved, which means one should not criticize others all the time and should not point out other people’s faults. I think the belief in Confucianism is to be more conservative and the principle is not to affect the others.*

She then went on:

*Confucianism is more conservative compared to western thinking, which means the Chinese minds are not as open as the western ideas socially, economically and in terms of education.* (Ellen)

122
Johnson, a 38-year old radiotherapy technologist also had a lot of doubts about ‘wu lun’ when he said, “it depends on the situation and the type of moral value”. When he was asked if he accepts what westerners say about Hong Kong being a Confucian society, he had this point to make:

I don't feel like that. The traditional Chinese thinking affects people of different age groups. The older people have greater Chinese influence and the younger people have less because they are more affected by western thinking.

According to Johnson,

Confucianism leads a person towards benevolence, politeness, to have a pleasant character and a high moral standard.

Juliana, who is in her early 30s and lives with her boy friend, also feels that Confucianism is:

something very reserved and traditional, like feelings...respect the teachers, 100% obedience to seniors and elders.

When she was asked if Hong Kong is a Confucian society, she said,

It’s becoming not so. Like my parents’ generation, they’ve a lot of Confucianism thoughts, but in my generation or the next generation, their feelings are more independent, not like Confucianism.

(Juliana)

Bob is single and is in his 30s. He expressed his views on Confucianism, “...respect teachers, have high moral principles, care for parents.....a rather traditional thinking.....” To Bob, Hong Kong is still a Confucian society:

Right now, it still is. But when the next generation, which means those who are currently studying, are in charge, things may become quite different. You can
see that from the recent marching*, elections, Democratic Party that they are moving gradually away from the idea.\textsuperscript{10}

Teresina tried to define Confucianism as:

*Confucianism is very theoretical, like how to respect others, the relationship of kings and officials, father and son, etc. Willingness to help others, even without reward, hard working, even in a situation where you are underpaid...*

But when she was asked if she accept the “\textit{wu lun}”, she said, “\textit{I accept, and I even agree with, the hierarchy it suggests.}” To the question of whether Hong Kong is a Confucian society, she expressed herself like this:

\textit{Up to now, still Confucian. Compared to 10 years ago, we are becoming less Confucian now. But the impact is still there.}

Anne, who is an HR officer with the Equal Opportunity Commission, is in her late 20s. She expressed similar views to Teresina’s regarding whether Hong Kong is a Confucian society:

\textit{Not sure, but basically yes. In the future, it’s going to change, I mean, towards being less Confucian.}

Personally she accepted Confucian ideas like the “\textit{wu lun}” but “\textit{not the priority it suggests, because some are outdated.}”, and she defined Confucianism as virtues like:

*Benevolence, filial piety, politeness, compliance, less egoism, more collectivist, decency...and many other Chinese virtues...*

Millie is in her thirties, married and has an eight -year old child. She was the only person who had read the \textit{Analects} of Confucius but she was rather humble in saying:

\textsuperscript{10} There was a big march of half a million people in the streets of Hong Kong supporting democracy and the removal of the Chief Executive as well as his Cabinet on 1\textsuperscript{st} July, 2003.
I had read briefly the Analects of Confucius. I do not really know much. All I know is that Confucianism is about teaching us to be loyal to the king and love our family, care for our parents, and behave with courtesy ... I think as Chinese, we would have certain Confucian thinking. If we look at our previous generation who were not born and raised in Hong Kong, either they were in China or had migrated to western countries, they still brought up their children with some traditional Chinese thinking. And I believe all of us would also bring up our children with certain traditional Chinese thinking. Therefore I think all of us here [all Chinese in HK] have certain Confucian thinking.

(Millie)

Murphy is a 35-year old bachelor and he has similar views on Confucianism and Hong Kong being a Confucian society:

Strong family concept, stress on friendship like those within the triad society and the dominance of the face culture. Yes, I accept the ‘wu lun’ because I feel that we have to respect the elders and the people in authority. I think Hong Kong is a Confucian society to a certain extent. I believe about 50% Confucian. For instance, our family concept is still strong. We still believe in marriage in order to have better coherence.

(Murphy)

Cathy, a single senior accountant in her early thirties, had a more negative view about Hong Kong being a Confucian society based on her knowledge of Confucianism.

Wu lun; compliance; appearance are important. I once went to a place where people worship Confucius; people there are nice, polite, properly attired and talk about how husband and wife respect each other and what they should do to get a peaceful life. No, I don’t think Hong Kong is a Confucian society. Hong Kong is characterised by the strong ‘chewing’ the weak. No politeness can be found like you can always see people jumping the queue. Well, some may show

---

11 A Cantonese expression meaning the strong bullying or eliminating the weak.
politeness but there are only a few. People are just too rushed to get things done, with the necessary patience.

Milane said this about Hong Kong being a Confucian society:

*It [Confucianism] does not appear so superficially, but if you look more in depth you may still see some signs of it. Say if you listen to the DJ's radio talk show you could still hear them refer to Confucianism, but you wouldn't feel much of it in the daily life.*

Milane feels that Confucianism is not explicitly seen in our daily life but traces can be found often. She even refers to the media in citing real life examples of the effect of Confucianism.

Another important concept is the family being the prototype of all social organisations. It is the basic unit that people belong to and are responsible for. In the Chinese family children are taught to obey parents and people who are older (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Redding, 1990). “Respect for parents and other elders is seen as a basic virtue” (Hofstede, 2001:99). Role compliance in the family is another virtue in a Confucian society. Loyalty in the family drives a person to look after the welfare of the family and individual achievement becomes an aspect of the family achievement (Redding, 1990). This is also along the same line with Hofstede's (1991, 2001) and Tromprenaar's (1993) collectivist dimension. In fact, if we look at our questionnaire findings, we find that the family will be pleased about the respondents’ achievements, like acquiring an MSc degree.

The questionnaire survey shows that the family feels a sense of pride when one of the members achieves success. 87.9% state that the family will be proud if someone in the family acquires a higher degree. Only 2.2% of the respondents disagree and 9.9% are not sure. This agrees with what the western writers (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Bond, 1986, 1991) say about the Chinese families, i.e. that they expect the children or the family members to excel and to bring glory to them.

Chinese people are also committed to the family in that they have to provide for the
family first before looking after their own interests (Bond, 1986, 1991). 63.7% of the respondents agree that they have a commitment towards their families and must provide for them before pursing their own academic attainment or interest. This is a characteristic of a Confucian society and is also a common phenomenon in Hong Kong society. The issue of academic attainment will be further discussed in Chapter 6 on how people juggle their time between family and work.

**Concept of Face**

The concept of “face” is another Confucian concept that most western writers believe that Chinese people are concerned with. There is a strong tendency towards maintaining face (Kirkbride & Tang, 1992). According to Bond (1986),

> ...in a static society where the importance of structural harmony with a group is emphasised, every person has to concern himself or herself with the “right conduct in maintaining one’s place in a hierarchical order.

(Bond, 1986:56)

The questionnaire results show that 76% of the respondents agree that “face” is an issue, whereas only 10.9% disagree. 13% are not sure. The concept of face is indeed part of Confucian teachings. In a later analysis of the respondents’ relationship with “the teacher”, they have similar attitudes about “face”. To examine closely this delicate and sensitive issue, we tried to find out what course members have to say in the personal interviews.

Bob really feels that “face” is a key issue among Chinese when he was asked to define “the Chinese”.

*A relatively conservative group, also a little more introspective, compared to other nationalities. ‘Face’ is very important. Interpersonal relationships are also very important to them. Umm...which means, usually, rather than to maintain the harmony of the two, which is more important than making a good profit.*
On another occasion, he elaborated on what he feels about “face”

Let’s say when you have to point out someone’s mistake, you have to be careful. It would be best if you could do it ‘one to one’, instead of making him lose his/her face in front of other [colleagues].

(Bob)

Ellen expressed similar views on “face” when she said:

Since I was at school, I always felt that we Chinese should be more reserved, which means we should not criticize others all the time and not point out others’ mistakes. This is not to make others lose face. I think Confucianism is more conservative and the principle is not to affect others. I think the issue of face is quite an obstacle for the Chinese. Some people would rather not ask [questions] if they don’t know; or they would wonder if they should voice an opinion because it would be a shame if the opinion is wrong. So far, I think, in a group situation, say in a learning situation with Chinese members, many [Chinese] would not dare to raise a question or challenge others opinions, especially if these people are teachers or academics. One of the main reasons is that they would feel ‘Oh, my, what if what I said is wrong, then it’ll be such a loss of face’. In fact, for myself, I also would not dare to voice my opinion in such a situation. Although I feel I have the courage to speak and I know where I stand, I would wonder, in case my opinion is wrong, would people find me very naïve or ignorant? I think we still have to learn to be positive, and should not consider it a loss of face or a great shame if what we said is wrong.

(Ellen)

Lois is single and is below 30 years of age. She feels that “face” is absolutely not an issue in a learning situation. But she feels that teachers, not students care about “face” as most teachers may not accept criticism from students. She then said she would not criticise her teachers because she cares about their “face”. In the next section about the teacher and the learner, the issue of face will be brought up again.
The Teacher

A common western stereotype is that the Asian teacher is an authoritarian purveyor of information, one who expects students to listen and memorise correct answers and procedures rather than to construct knowledge themselves. (Stiger & Stevenson, 1991:43).

“In Chinese societies under the influence of the Confucian culture, teacher authority and the suppression of individuality have deep-rooted cultural roots” (Ho, 2001:99). The empirical findings show that 78.3% of the respondents feel that they respect the teacher as the authority. 12% disagree with the view and only about 10% say they are not sure.

Do Chinese people always pay attention to the teacher? 85% of the respondents say that they always pay attention to the teacher with only about 9% disagreeing. This is in line with Chan (1993) and Salili (2001) who say that the teachers are respected and obeyed because they are people with authority.

However, the findings from the questionnaire survey are not in agreement with writers like Salili (2001), Chan (1999), Watkins and Biggs (2001), and Stigler and Stevenson (1991), who feel that students will always accept all that the teacher says. Only slightly more than one-third of the respondents (38%) agree that they will accept what the teacher says without question. Another 35% say otherwise. There are 26.1% who are not sure.

The term “know-all” was brought up at the focus group and all participants understood what it meant so no explanation was required. It was presumed that all questionnaire respondents had had no problem with interpreting the term. The findings show a similar attitude as towards the teacher’s authority; less than 20% of the respondents agree with the statement and 58.7% disagreed. 16.5% said they are not sure. This will give us some idea about how these people, who are doing a distance learning programme, see the importance of having a teacher present who could present himself/herself as a “know-all” to transmit knowledge to them.
During the personal interviews, course members were asked if they would consider the teacher an authority and would they consider the teacher the “know-all”. The last question is whether they would challenge the teacher and what the reasons would be for doing or not doing so. There are a lot of similarities in their responses. Almost all of the 22 interviewees feel that they respect teachers as figures of authority because their expertise is in the subject matter that they teach, but they do not consider them to be the ‘know-all’.

Johnson said the teacher is “the one who teaches and transfers knowledge, and he/she is neither an authority nor a ‘know-all’.

Juliana feels this way about the teacher:

He is not an authority and he can’t be a ‘know-all’. Basically I feel that no one can know all. He may have to do research and preparation before he can teach me. In my experience doing the Master’s degree, I respect the teacher more as a mentor. I think I won’t just pay attention to him because he’s the teacher. If the teacher is very serious in teaching me and I can learn from him, I’ll pay attention. But I’ve come across teachers who are not serious, and I’ll not listen to him completely.

She added,

In Confucius time, people must obey the teacher 100%. If you ask me, I’ll still respect the teacher, but I won’t obey him blindly. If I feel that I can challenge the principles he taught, I’ll challenge him, but I’ll make sure that I’ll be respectful and polite. I’ll discuss with him the different views, but may not be a challenge. Even if it is a challenge, it will not be vicious. If the teacher insists, I’ll shut up.

(Juliana)

The interviewer asked, “Is it due to the issue of ‘face’?”

She answered,
Yes, his face, but on the other hand, if he does not accept my opinion, I won’t feel that I’ll lose face. But I understand that he is of the older generation and if he’s a lot older than I am obviously, Confucianism exists. I must respect his ‘face’.

Juliana, being a trainer at the Retraining Board, has this to say about herself being a teacher who is a lot younger than many of her trainees:

I’ve not thought of this issue.... Basically they [my students] feel that I’m their teacher and they’ll give me the basic ‘face’. I guess they find me easy going, most students accept me. I have not had any situation that involved face before. But on the other hand, I am aware that many students are older than me and when I talk to them, I am always careful and I respect their experience in life.

(Juliana)

The way Juliana feels about her teacher is in fact typical of most of the 22 interviewees. Cathy, however, has a slightly different view about the teacher:

I’ll respect my teacher no matter how bad he or she performs. I still attend the lectures. The teacher is the authority, but not the ‘know-all’. When I ask a question, I can tell whether the teacher knows the answer or not, or just pretends that he knows. I can tell. But I can understand his/her constraints because it is impossible for a teacher to know everything when there is a huge database of knowledge. I won’t challenge my teacher because we should be polite to others. Even though I know the teacher is obviously wrong, I’ll try not to challenge him. I always seek to be mild to express my views.

(Cathy)

Cathy is trying to demonstrate the virtue of politeness ‘li’ and ‘benevolence’ as well as ‘obedience’ to the teacher and this is typical of Confucianism’s hierarchy and Hofstede’s and Tromprenaar’s power distance.
Millie said she had changed her views about the teacher and her attitude towards the teacher as she grew older. She said:

Looking back when I was studying full time, I was a traditional student who would answer the teacher's question when I was called upon by the teacher, which means I would not take the initiative to raise a question. I think I grew up in a 12 'stuff duck' educational system, which was over 10 years ago. But more recently, which means during my distance learning process, may be because of the change of environment, educational situation etc., new circumstances as such have allowed me to take more initiative. I volunteer to raise and to answer questions, which I would not have done before.

(Millie)

She was then asked if she respects her teachers as a 'source of knowledge'. She said:

I do respect them but I do not believe that they are the source of knowledge. I believe knowledge can be gathered from many sources, say books and other media. Therefore I rather believe teachers are the facilitators of our learning, or the middlemen who help us learn.

(Millie)

Teresina feels that the teacher

is someone I can find easily anytime (at school time). A teacher is willing to help us and share with us good study materials and I'm academically reliant on him/her. In the MSc programme, teachers do not exist, no support was given, at least not the type of support given like the ones from the secondary school. The teacher is not really an authority and not a 'know-all' because sometimes the answer may be wrong. They 'know-all' may be true in a primary school, but not so evident from the secondary school onwards. It is hard to measure whether the teacher is a 'know-all'. May be the teacher has more than enough preparation and looks like a 'know-all'. The teacher may not be necessarily

12 “stuff duck” is a Cantonese expression for spoon feeding.
good at the subject. In the past, it may be true because the society is not as complicated as now. But now I really doubt it because teachers are dealing with a lot of emotional aspects of the students as well, like counseling the students. The time spent on their own subject may be less as a result.

(Teresina)

Among the 22 interviewees, no one really said that he/she would ‘challenge’ the teacher openly. They tended not to like the word ‘challenge’ because it is too negative and disrespectful. They may ask the teacher politely and respectfully even though they cannot accept what the teacher says. Ellen said she would not challenge the teacher openly, especially since she has become older:

*I think I was not the type who would voice my ideas nor raise my question right away. However, now that I am older or may be I have been introduced and accepted different concepts, I feel that it is alright to discuss some issues. Yet, I still believe I would not persist in my own idea although I think it is right, I mean I would not argue strongly with a teacher or strongly maintain that I was right. I would rather discuss with the teacher and I would accept what was said by the teacher... I mean, just like before, I would think “never mind” and just keep it to myself instead of arguing with the teacher like foreigners, who would be adamant about their opinions. *

(Ellen)

We can use Venus’ words to sum up how Hong Kong Chinese learners feel about the teacher:

...after all, he is the teacher, and the teacher should generally know more than me, in a particular subject. I believe s/he has certain knowledge that I don’t know. I will certainly ask my teacher questions sometimes, but probably not in a challenging or criticizing way.

(Venus)

What she said is that she respects the teacher as her teacher and therefore she would not openly criticise or challenge the teacher. This shows a very strong influence from
Confucianism in respecting the teacher as the authority. Since teachers are authority, figures they should not be challenged or criticised.

Losing Face in Front of the Teacher

Respondents were asked about students “losing face” in the presence of the teacher or during on-line communication with the teacher. The questionnaire findings show that 60% of the respondents (58.7% and 68.5% respectively) say that they will not “lose face” either in front of the teacher, if they do not know the answer to the question the teacher asked, or when communicating with the teacher by e-mail. As students, they do not feel strongly about “losing face” either face-to-face or when communicating on-line with the teacher.

Lois agrees with this set of data when she says,

_I think teachers care more for ‘face,’ but not students. We are there to learn and to make mistakes. It doesn’t make us ‘lose face’ even if we make mistakes. Teachers may not accept criticism from students._

(Lois)

Millie feels that the issue of ‘face’ is important but not important in the learning situation. She feels that ‘face’ is an issue but not really an important issue. It does affect communication with the teacher but not very seriously. She added:

_Say when I have raised a question in front of the whole class and such a question is criticized by the teacher as stupid or naive, or if I receive any negative feedback, then I will think twice before I ask my next question._

(Millie)

After all she feels that she might ‘lose face’ and she will not pursue the matter.

Empirical findings and the interview findings are consistent in showing that the majority of respondents are basically affected by Confucian thoughts and behaviour either from their family education or from younger school days. They have almost
inherited the "virtues" or the "behaviours" of Confucianism without being consciously aware of it. Perhaps one reason is that the Hong Kong schools do not obviously teach Confucianism as a school subject. However, people are exposed to the behaviour and are always reminded of what the "right" behaviour is. There are only a few respondents who said more radically or overtly that they do not accept concepts like "wu lun" or the hierarchy. Yet, even this small group of people feel that they accept behaviour like playing their proper roles in the family or respecting the teachers. The concept of face is also a major issue among the majority of respondents in this case study, but they are, in reality, more concerned about maintaining another's face rather than their own.

Hong Kong Chinese

Since about 6% of the respondents who took part in the questionnaire survey did not accept the idea of the 5 relationships and about 20% did not accept the idea of a structured hierarchy, a more direct question was asked at the individual interviews, such as "How would you define being Chinese?" and "Are you Chinese?" The following is an excerpt from the interview with Cathy:

P: How would you define being Chinese, HK Chinese? What kind of Chinese are you?
C: Those with yellow skin, black hair are Chinese
P: How do you see being "Chinese"?
C: There are 3 types of Chinese, complete, half complete and not complete, only with a Chinese appearance. For example, the foreign born Chinese belong to the later group.
P: How do you see HK Chinese?
C: HK Chinese belongs to the half complete group as they have a lot of western influence but the strong family oriented concept still remains. According to one of my friends living in Germany for many years, a friend is the most important companion in life because friends are usually of the same age. While in HK, parents and spouse seem to be more important.
P: Are you HK Chinese?
C: Yes
Another respondent, Vivian, feels that Hong Kong Chinese are "exposed to western cultures and Chinese virtues". What are Chinese virtues? To quote Dennis' words, Chinese virtues are "family values, filial piety (respect your parents), value systems, like thrift."

Below is another interviewee, Juliana, whose views are slightly different:

P: Have you ever lived overseas?
J: No
P: So all the more you feel that you are a Hongkonger?
J: Yes.

Here is how Juliana feels about being HK Chinese:

J: I think the culture is very unique. It is a mixture of western and oriental. We've a lot of foreign things, not only western, as we have contact even with, say Japan. We'll have influence from the west, but we are not as open as the westerners... are still "reserved". Say, like the way we dress, we'll not be as "exposed" (parts of our bodies), but we'll not be as reserved as Chinese people.

(Juliana)

It is really interesting to see how a Hong Kong person "refused" to be called "Chinese" and likes to identify herself as a "Hongkonger". Bob has similar feelings about being a
Hongkonger:

P: How would you define being “Chinese”?
B: I think, basically, that would be people from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan.
P: Then, would you think the “HK Chinese” are a rather unique group?
B: They are different from mainland Chinese.
P: How would you define being “HK Chinese”?
B: Characteristically, perhaps because “HK Chinese” have more exposure to western culture, they do not have as much concern about relationships [as mainland Chinese] but have more consideration for efficiency. Also, [HK Chinese are] more efficient in work, more swift in thinking, and have more concern for efficiency than the work itself.
P: Which group of Chinese do you think you are?
B: Definitely HK Chinese!

(Bob)

This was the general feeling among all the people whom we spoke to who were born in Hong Kong and a common denominator is that they are all within the 30 to 40 age group. All these four respondents are very definite about being “Hong Kong Chinese”.

Another issue worth noting among these four respondents is that they all mention western influence on the Hong Kong Chinese. Lau and Kuan (1988), Abbas (1997) and Wei and Li (1995) state that Hong Kong people distinguish themselves from the mainland Chinese who may be more strongly influenced by Confucian teachings as Hong Kong has a unique position in terms of political and economic changes. Wei and Li (1995:17) describe Hong Kong as ‘modern western but with underlying ‘Chineseness’; it is Chinese with a surface of English-speaking internationalism. From the survey findings we can see that almost 84% of the respondents agree that Hong Kong people are affected by western traditions and culture and only 8.7% think otherwise. 7.6% say they are not sure.

One of the interviewees, Dennis says, “...culture is not something static. We’re becoming less Confucian. We are more westernized now.”

137
Ellen has an apt description of Hong Kong Chinese:

*I think we are in quite an awkward position... we are not fully Chinese... we are not really related to... I don’t mean we’re not related to but we’re not brought up in the environment of China and nurtured by its culture. HK was a British colony for a long time and we grew up in such an environment. We’re influenced by western society, their economies and backgrounds, so we’re slightly different than those who are born and raised locally in China therefore shaped with different concepts.*

(Ellen)

Ellen feels that the western influence is from the media and that sometimes these cultural differences bring along some positive influence.

*I think many “Hongkongers”, especially the children nowadays, are different from our generation. They are... or they have learnt to be more outspoken. Also, in HK nowadays, we watch many western movies and read books or articles written by foreigners, so we are aware that some people are very daring in voicing their ideas and thoughts, so one learns that there is nothing wrong in expressing your thoughts. Actually, there is no “right” or “wrong”. I think western thinking has influenced Chinese in such a way. One learns to tolerate other’s different opinions, which is a positive influence.*

Being materialistic is another characteristic of the Hong Kong person. According to his research, Lau (1982) regards ‘emphasis on material values’, which is similar to Bond’s description of ‘materialism’ (also considered as ‘the pursuit of wealth’), as important for Hong Kong people. People in Hong Kong work hard for monetary rewards, which is high on the list of priorities according to Bond’s (1986) attitude surveys among Chinese workers.

Survey findings show that more than one-third (41.8%) of the respondents disagree that Hong Kong people are concerned about money and status, whereas about 43% agree that Hong Kong people regard money and status as important. This again shows that the western writers’ idea about Hong Kong Chinese being “materialistic” receives equal
support and disagreement.

Johnson, another interviewee, is rather sceptical about Hong Kong Chinese being "materialistic, money oriented, rushing for quick and immediate results...".

Teresina agrees with Johnson when she says more positively that Hong Kong Chinese are "hard-working, money oriented, materialistic, like to make friends..."

Murphy is rather negative about Hong Kong Chinese even though he acknowledges that he is a Hong Kong Chinese:

...selfish, individualistic, like to use the amount of wealth to define other's success. They pay no respect to others, particularly Asian foreigners. Hong Kong people think they are one of a kind and tend to look down upon others. (Murphy)

Anne is one of the youngest members in the group (25 to 30 years group) and she feels that Hong Kong Chinese are:

...more educated than the average Chinese, but their horizons are becoming narrower. The standard of living is better, but because of a long period of prosperity, people cannot tolerate hardship and sometimes are rather shortsighted. (Anne)

Anne feels that Hong Kong Chinese are becoming narrow-minded because they are proud of their economic affluence. However, it is a rather negative view that they are short-sighted in terms of looking towards the future.

Venus is herself Hong Kong Chinese and these are her remarks regarding the Hong Kong Chinese:

They respond fast and work fast, are efficient... language [English] capability is better, on average, Hong Kong people are quite fluent in English. They are
concerned about ‘face’, like to give ‘face’ to others. Comparatively more realistic, like when something is done, it can’t be undone. When they are under pressure or having a crisis situation, Hong Kong people are patient and persistent.

Sam also is “Hong Kong Chinese” and he describes the Hong Kong Chinese as: “hard working, clever people, who can still be strong in adverse conditions.”

Milane feels proud to be “Hong Kong Chinese”:

   I am Chinese, but happy to be from Hong Kong...It seems more prestigious to have the words ‘Hong Kong’...Yet the economy of Hong Kong is declining in such a way that in these few years, it’s not so high-status as before. I used to be very proud to be Hong Kong Chinese but no longer so. It is affected by the economical situation. It’s also because of ... ¹³ Tung Chee-hwa.

   (Milane)

Milane is in fact proud of the economic success of Hong Kong before 1997 but after that, when the economy started to deteriorate, she feels that the status and image of Hong Kong has changed. This is the general feeling about Hong Kong up to the present day when the economy has not regained its strength from the late 1990s.

In general, most of our respondents feel that they are proud of being Hong Kong Chinese who are, in Ho and Leung’s words “materialistic in their attitudes. Economic stability and prosperity are the major concerns of most Hong Kong people...” (1997:351). Another local writer, Ng, can be quoted to summarize Hong Kong people:

   ...exhibiting an intriguing mix of attitudes. The mix...consists, firstly, of an outlook of market competition which sees business as business. It also is made up of an outlook on traditionalism, a clinging to traditional views and practices probably for both emotional and instrumental reasons. It lastly contains an

¹³ Tung Chee-hwa was the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Special Administrative Region of China (SAR) and was in office from the handover of Hong Kong by the British to the Chinese on 1st July, 1997. He has always been blamed by the local population for his poor administration and the declining economy.
embryonic outlook on reform brought on by the frustration and discontent generated by market capitalism.

Leung (1999) has also cited a few media events and a few names popular among Hong Kong people which stir up "Hong Kong emotions". These are the obtaining of the Olympic Gold medal by Lee Lai Shan in 1996 and the ceremony of the transfer of sovereignty at midnight on 1st July, 1997. Other names that can be heard regularly in the popular culture and which have helped to bring Hong Kong to the international scene, such as Hollywood, are people like Bruce Lee in the 1970s and Jackie Chan in the present day movie world. According to a survey conducted in 1999, these famous artists have in fact generated a feeling of Hong Kong identity among the people here.

From the findings collected, we can summarize how our respondents see their own identity. Almost half of them accept consciously or subconsciously concepts of Confucianism, even though they did not have proper training in what Confucianism entails. They were brought up with the idea that they have to respect the elderly, the teacher and people who are of higher rank. They are concerned about "face", especially maintaining another's face because they have to show respect to others. They are westernized, modernized and materialistic compared to other Chinese in Taiwan or in mainland China. They do not want to be associated with these other Chinese because of their economic success in the last few decades. They are proud of the success that was brought about by the colonial rule and yet they are proud of their roots being Chinese.

In conclusion, they do not want to call Hong Kong a Confucian society and they do not want to be called "pure Chinese". They are proud to be called Hong Kong Chinese or "Hongkongers". This Hong Kong identity makes these people a unique group of Chinese who might behave differently to the "Chinese" described by most western writers, especially in terms of their learning styles.

The most interesting phenomenon is that there are about 30% of the respondents who are not sure if they accept Confucianism or not, or who are not sure what Confucianism is. These people are the ones who might not want to consider themselves as pure "Chinese". It might be more appropriate to call these people "Hongkongers" and look at them as a unique group who were born and raised in Hong Kong.
The Chinese Learner

After defining what being Hong Kong Chinese is, we are now concerned about what the Hong Kong Chinese learner is like. According to Biggs (1991) the Hong Kong learner is portrayed as passive, reserved, quiet and reluctant to openly challenge authority, especially teachers. They are inclined to favour rote learning over creative learning, dependent on the syllabus, and lacking in intellectual initiative. They are also described by Murphy (1987) as demonstrating an unquestioning acceptance of the knowledge of the teacher or the lecturer, which may be explained in terms of the Confucian ethic of filial piety or Hofstede's (1980, 1986, 2001) dimension of power distance. The idea of the teacher's personal wisdom and teacher-centred education has always been considered to be pertinent to Hong Kong Chinese learners (Hofstede, 1986). 'Face' is an issue among teachers and learners in a high collectivist society like Hong Kong. Hofstede also ranks Hong Kong as 'medium' in the masculinity index, which implies that Hong Kong learners are high in achievement motivation and value academic brilliance and excellence. Teachers are also admired for their brilliance in the knowledge being taught.

Learning Approach

Three current learning theories are studied regarding the distinct processes that could go on when an individual approaches learning tasks. The approaches are surface, deep and achieving approaches to learning (Biggs, 1979, 1991,1992; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983). These approaches are determined by learner motivation and orientation, and the tactics and strategies the learner uses when dealing with learning tasks (Pierson, 1996).

The surface approach to learning is linked to extrinsic motivation. The learner sees his/her learning efforts as moving towards some specific goal - for example, getting a good job or getting through the course of study. This usually means focusing on the literal and concrete components of learning tasks, emphasising words rather than meanings. Such an approach encourages reproducible, rote learning. The student has very little personal involvement in and commitment to learning and is fearful of academic failure and what that will do for future wage-earning prospects (Pierson, 1996; Biggs, 1991).
The deep approach suggests that the learner has significantly more involvement in and commitment to the content of the learning task rather than attainment of short-term occupational and failure-avoidance goals. This approach implies intellectual curiosity towards study. Maximum effort is expended to satisfy that interest and curiosity. The learner is personally engaged in the subject matter and, by means of his/her own initiative, seeks to integrate more information by reading and discussion through every available intellectual avenue. The student is intellectually challenged and passionately engaged.

The achieving approach is one that follows from the ego-enhancement and pride that come from visibly achieving good grades or results. This approach, according to Biggs (1991), is not concerned with the content of the learning task as much as the context of the task. This would include such elements as time management, personal discipline, working space and the most efficient ways to cover the syllabus. The learner is motivated by the sense of achievement that comes from success and the part it will play in his/her future achievement and advancement.

Biggs (1987) believes that Hong Kong learners are more likely to assume a surface approach to learning because they are facing an excessive amount of syllabus material to be learned, have very little choice and control over content and method of study, have an assessment system that requires reproduction of what has been learned, and are in a learning environment where independence and individuality are neither nurtured, valued or required. Pierson (1996) also feels that it likely that the colonial education system with excessive workloads, centralised curricula, concentration on knowledge acquisition, examinations emphasising reproductive knowledge over genuine thinking, the didactic, expository type of school teaching that is common in Hong Kong schools, overcrowded classrooms and inadequately trained teachers foster a more surface approach to learning.

A deep approach to learning would be achievable if the learners were given time to digest, contemplate and to discuss what they are learning. Such an approach to learning might be viable if the public examinations concentrated on understanding principles rather than the reiteration of facts and procedures (Biggs, 1987).
The survey contained several questions on the issue of rote learning, which was described by Biggs (1993, 1994) as learning in a mechanical way without thought or meaning. It is one of the key aspects of the surface approach to learning. Respondents were asked if they have the habit of memorising, if they understand the concepts when they memorise passages from the texts and whether critical thinking takes place when they memorise. The survey findings show that 64.8% of the respondents admit that they are used to rote learning, while only 26.4% say they are not.

A very stereotypical response of the Hong Kong learners is shown in the survey findings. 63.7% say that they understand the concepts when they memorise ideas. Only 14% say they do not. Rote learning is described by Biggs (1994) as learning in a mechanical way without thought or meaning. However, according to the respondents they can learn by memorising and yet they understand the concepts. Later in 1996, Biggs accepted the notion of memorisation leading to understanding.

In the qualitative interviews, only three among the 22 interviewees say that they are not used to rote learning. Vivian hates mere memorisation and Susan says she needs to understand the concepts first and she cannot just memorise. Lois says that overall she does not agree with rote learning. This is what she says:

> I would suggest adopting a 'rote learning' approach in the foundation stage when learning the basic theories. I think it is an appropriate approach at this stage. Critical thinking should be applied after you have learnt the basic theories and principles. It is better to apply such an approach in the latter stage during self-development. But over all, I do not agree with rote learning.

(Lois)

A large majority of the interviewees, like Lois, feel that at a certain stage of education, mostly in younger days when they had public examinations, they needed to rote learn in order to cram in the ideas. Some have in fact, got out of the habit as they have moved on to do this higher degree programme. This is what Cathy says:
My learning is 70% rote learning and 30% other learning methods. Some technical terms need to be memorised. When the English standard of a person is not too good, rote learning is helpful.

(Cathy)

Shirley rote learns a lot but she needs to know the meaning when she memorises and she says memorisation and critical thinking do not correlate. Sam has opposite views about memorisation. He wants to understand first and then memorise. He feels that critical thinking does take place and he says, "studying would not be successful without either one [rote learning and critical thinking] of them". Dennis feels that it all depends on the occasion. He has to memorise vocabulary and their meanings but he cannot rote learn in the master's programme. Here is what Johnson says referring to the different subjects that he is learning:

Rote learning is necessary, especially in literature; science is to experiment, to prove; we should be very clear before we can memorise. I need to understand first before I memorise. Yes, I understand the meaning before I memorise. In learning a poem, I will memorise it first and then analyse.

(Dennis)

Below is Milane's experience:

I would do so [practise rote learning] in Form 5 (secondary school), but for tertiary education, it's impossible to practise just rote learning. To make it easier to memorise what you've been taught, you have to understand and comprehend first. Rote learning works like a computer..., it depends on how big your memory is. People just compete to see whose memory is the largest. Critical thinking...I'm not sure...may I say it means you have to be able to memorise and apply, and you could contemplate from one issue to another?

(Milane)

Bob does not like the idea of rote learning but he has no choice:

I try not to if I do not have to, but it is the most direct means of learning. If
opportunity permits, I would wish to avoid such learning practice, of course. No, no, in the master’s programme, I would never study by rote learning only. I will try my best and rely on myself by reading and ‘digging through books’.

(Bob)

The empirical findings show that more than one-third (38.5%) of the respondents say that critical thinking takes place when they memorise. Another one-third (36.3%) say that critical thinking cannot take place when they memorise. In the individual interviews, Natema said that she felt strongly against rote learning, which was a result of the education system that has become very demanding on the students to cram in all the ideas. However, she is glad that she does not need to do so in the master’s programme. She said:

*What I could get from my master’s studies now is critical thinking. Everything is viewed from a different angle. I’ve learned a lot.*

Bob also added, regarding the correlation between rote learning and critical thinking:

*Sometimes when you’re not familiar with the topic, then you cannot help it but to learn by rote. In general, when you have a certain grasp of knowledge then you would use – especially when someone is guiding you – critical thinking.”*  

(Bob)

Juliana says that she always used the surface approach in her secondary school days, but in higher education, she has been adopting a deep approach because she has the motivation to learn and acquire more. She wants to understand the subject that she likes more thoroughly. But she would not use an achieving approach because she does not want to give herself too much pressure. She refers to the days of Confucius when she expresses her views on rote learning and critical thinking:

*I think there is a conflict, because rote learning, you don’t need to think. Just cram everything into you mind, no need to digest. With critical thinking, you need to think and to have your own feelings and then criticize other people’s theories.*
I think in Confucius’ times, they can really afford to understand and to memorise. But in HK, the exam system... fighting for a place in a well-known school, students are fighting for a place... and the examination... teachers expect and pressurize students to memorise everything for the exam. The exam has changed the meaning of education.

(Juliana)

Anne was a language major in university and she feels that she changed her learning approach during different periods of her education. She adopted a surface and achieving approaching for most of her academic life and changed to a deep approach when she worked for her degree:

During my degree study, since I was a language major, it was definitely necessary to understand the course material. But for distance learning, I am using 50% rote learning and 50% understanding. I do not necessarily know the meaning when I memorise because I have a strong short-term memory; I can cram a lot of materials into my brain and after the exam forgot everything. Sometimes I can memorise but not understand. Yes, critical thinking helps to increase the amount of materials I can memorise. When learning a poem, I would rather understand first and then recite. Rote learning did not take place in my Master’s day.

(Anne)

Venus is different from the others in that she depends heavily on rote learning. She said that she was always a surface learner in primary school, secondary school, diploma level and is so even in her MSc. An excerpt of her interview is given here to see her reasons for choosing the surface approach and her views on rote learning and critical thinking:

P: Why do you choose the surface approach to learning?
V: Because personally I am not a curious person. May be if the subject is interesting, I’ll spend more time looking into it. I have a target in finishing the MSc programme, complete it and hopefully it would be helpful in my job. That is the reason for choosing the surface approach.
P: How do you go about your learning? (rote learning- memorisation).
V: Yes, rote learning is quite important in my study life. It depends on the type of subject, I'll use the surrounding objects to help me memorise.

P: Do you know the meaning when you memorise?
V: Yes, I need to know the meaning.

P: Will you understand and memorise?
V: Yes

P: Is rote learning related to critical thinking?
V: Yes, rote learning will increase the level of critical thinking.

P: How?
V: It is not quite possible to criticize a piece of work without remembering anything of that article, especially when the piece of work is not present.

P: Will you memorise and then analyse, say when you memorise a poem; do you understand the theme, the setting?
V: I'll first memorise and then analyse.

P: What is the advantage?
V: When I go through the process of memorising and then analysing, I'll find them (the poems) even easier to recite and easy to remember.

P: In your Master's day, did rote learning take place?
V: No

(Venus)

Sandy also expresses similar views regarding rote learning and critical thinking. She said that she has always been a deep learner because she has always been using mind mapping, understanding and memorising at the same time. She cites an example of learning Chinese Literature, which is rather related to the Confucian teachings of the Great Books:

Let's take learning a poem as an example. I need to understand the meaning first, then I'll study the background of the author and possibly the background of writing the poem. Then I'll read through it and try to feel the content and the scene, rather than just reciting. That approach helps me memorise the poem. I always did well in my Chinese Literature exam. During the exam, students always have to learn how to criticize and analyse to get good grades.
This practice of rote learning is often described as a by-product of the education system, especially the examination system and the pressure it brings to Hong Kong learners. Survey findings show the views of the respondents regarding rote learning and reproductive learning. 75.6% of the respondents agree that the examination system requires reproduction of what has been learnt because there is an excessive amount of materials to learn for the examination. In the responses to another question, 64% agree that there is an excessive amount of course materials to study in the Hong Kong public examinations and this is imposing a great pressure on the students.

In another question, 31.1% of the respondents feel that they did not have a choice over the content and the method of study because of the pressure from the examination system, with an excessive amount of materials to learn when they were in school. However, 40% say they disagree as they had a choice over the content and method of study even in their school days with the examination system.

To sum up the learning approach of the respondents in the interviews and the questionnaire survey, Shirley’s idea can be considered representative of Hong Kong learners:

_I think I would try not to do so [rote learn] now. It depends if time allows, which is one major consideration. If time permits, I would like to try to digest things first for it would be easier to absorb then. Otherwise, if time is really running short and if an examination is compulsory, I would try to memorise them all even though I do not understand. Just stuff them all in the brain, rote learn them to handle the examination first._

(Shirley)

This could be summarized as the surface approach to learning when the learner takes in all the information just to pass the examination. Then Shirley goes on:

_I think when I was young I would just stuff them all in the brain and rote learn them. I wouldn't ask myself to really understand things and to apply them in life. I feel that taking the master’s degree course is in fact a means to train myself to_
think. I would learn to analyse and try to apply what I had learnt in my study or work. I think it's very difficult to learn "critical thinking". I think different people have different standards in such a learning process. Before, I would think it depends on which educational level I was at, I would then think rote - as long as I got pass grades - was enough. Now, I think... in fact it is not easy to achieve marks by rote learning, it really depends on yourself to digest the information to show others you have really learnt.

(Shirley)

From this excerpt we can see that Shirley has developed from a surface learner to becoming a deep learner. Then the next question for her was “So if you were allowed to choose and you could manage, which mode of learning would you choose?” She answered in the following way:

I would choose the latter one (deep learner) because you could really absorb and maintain an impression of what you have learnt. If by rote learning or just repeating what others have written, you would forget all right after you have submitted your assignment or sat for the examination.

(Shirley)

Almost all the interviewees express the view that they are not just surface learners but have tried to achieve more, especially at higher degree level in adopting a deep learning approach. This is in fact a basic requirement in higher learning when learners have to be responsible for understanding and analysing what they have learned. We can, therefore, conclude that almost all of our respondents in the master’s degree programme practise deep learning because they have to understand the concepts and be able to apply the knowledge they have learned.

Lectures and Tutorials

A common western stereotype is that the Asian teacher is an authoritarian purveyor of information, one who expects students to listen and memorise correct answers and procedures rather than to construct knowledge themselves (Stigler & Stevenson, 1991). Teacher-centred pedagogy and student compliance are still prevalent in many modern
Chinese societies despite the fact that some of them have a long history of western influence (Biggs, 1996; Ho, 1993; Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1994). In a high power distance society, the teacher is expected to impart knowledge and wisdom without any question. The lecture approach is supposed to be ideal for Hong Kong learners, who are stereotyped by many writers as passive and reserved (Biggs, 1996). This research, however, also examines the tutorial, or small group approach, to determine if the learners favour this small group learning environment. We will first look at Chinese learners group behaviour and then examine the empirical and qualitative data on people's preferences for group tutorials.

**Group Work**

Bond (1986), “…in a static society where the importance of structural harmony with a group is emphasised, every person has to concern himself or herself with the “right conduct in maintaining one’s place in a hierarchical order.” Nelson (1995:9) states that “within the Confucian tradition, students learn through co-operation, by working for the common good, by supporting each other and by not elevating themselves above others.” In this aspect, working in groups in class might be for the general good as we are concerned with the group’s responsibility and not merely with the individual contribution.

From the survey findings we can see that over 80% of the respondents believe that everyone is equal in a group, collaborative effort is required and everyone has to cooperate. This is also in line with Hofstede’s dimension of national culture, where Hong Kong is considered as a collectivist society. The survey also shows some surprising responses regarding participation in group discussions. 74% feel that they will not keep quiet in a group discussion. This might be supported by the argument that Chinese learners are collectivists and they prefer staying in a group (Hofstede, 1981). 48.9% of the respondents agree that they do not want to be seen as trying to impress others in a group. 24% disagree and 27.2% are not sure. However, nearly half of them do support the view that the concept of self-effacement, i.e. modesty and balance, stems from the Confucian principle of propriety, “li”, which requires that individuals maintain a certain level of humility in accordance with their rank, and do not elevate themselves above others (Bond, 1986). This concern for humility suggests that Chinese students like to downplay their performance and tend to prefer working in a non-threatening
environment in small groups rather than in a big vocal group (Flowerdew, 1998).

Carol is in fact quite typical of a lot of Hong Kong learners in that she wants to maintain a certain level of 'humility'. She believes that she is a traditional Chinese person:

In this case [group work] I am more traditionally Chinese for I am more passive. I surely don't take the lead but let others be the leaders. However, I actively participate in sharing ideas if I am very familiar with the topic or I am well experienced with the issue from work, then I am more proactive, otherwise, I keep to myself.

(Carol)

Ellen, another interviewee, feels that it is important to accept others in the group and share with others in the group. Her views almost summarize all the aspects about group work being discussed in this research.

I appreciate such kinds of learning direction [doing group work] since we are no longer primary or secondary students who need to be guided by a teacher all the time. I think learning at this stage is quite "initiative" and you also need a group of people having the same vision to encourage each other. You can also learn from each other in a group. I try to voice my opinions in a group and to accept theirs. Before, I didn't think I could accept other's ideas, but now, everyone has his/her own way of thinking. I have learnt to consider other's advice, and to learn from them. I am more active in my own group, I mean, if there is anything I don't know I'm willing to ask someone I know, and I'm willing to share my knowledge with them.

(Ellen)

What Ellen is saying is that group work is a good learning method and that we should learn to appreciate that there are group differences and accept the differences. Another interviewee, Cathy, had something completely negative to say about group work when the interviewer asked her if group work is important in the learning situation:
No, because members in a group usually end up playing rather than studying. The academic standard within the group is usually different. The absence rate for group meeting is high. When there is an assignment for individual group member, some people do their work at the last minute, which ends up being poor quality. Generally, it’s hard to get a group of good people.

(Cathy)

However, most respondents are positive towards working in groups; there is only a small group of people who feel that group work does not work. Some even feel that if the teacher is not there, the group is not useful because some say that it is “the blind leading the blind” (Dennis, Sam, Janice).

Group Tutorials

70% of the respondents in the survey enjoy taking part in group tutorials compared to 21% who do not. The findings also show that 69% of the respondents disagree with the statement that “I am not confident about sharing my views in group tutorials” compared to 22.2% who agree that they are not confident about sharing their views. It is a novel finding that learners from a Chinese cultural background feel that the sharing of views is acceptable.

Even though it is against Confucian teachings to criticise others, 74.5% of the respondents feel comfortable giving feedback in group tutorials and 82.2% feel comfortable in receiving feedback in group tutorials. These findings concur with previous findings that Hong Kong students like taking part in group tutorials and they behave actively in the group. Most of our respondents participate actively in group tutorials and they enjoy tutorials perhaps because of the interactivity of the sessions.

After looking at the quantitative data, we turn to look at what interviewees say about their preference between lectures and tutorials. In Susan’s interview, she describes this difference:

*I think the first one [lecture] is more for receiving, you are there to listen to what the other tells you and you should know and understand. I think it's more for absorbing knowledge. For the latter one [tutorial], I think there is more*
interactions, which means you can ask questions, voice your opinions or criticize what the others have said. I think you are more passive in the former one. Actually I like both of them because I feel lectures can give you a basic concept about something new to you since you may not always fully understand what you read on your own. If there's an instructor who introduces something in a proper way especially some new concepts then I am able to grasp it more easily and clearly. After I've got the concept, it is then be easier for me to absorb the knowledge when participating in tutorials or group discussions.

(Susan)

Milane gives similar view about lectures and tutorials and she is very honest in her response:

M: My understanding is that, lectures are attended by more people, conducted in a hall or a big room with a lecturer to teach; tutorials provide more opportunities for students to ask questions and to discuss unclear issues. Lectures are more one-way teaching by a lecturer with more students to attend. Tutorials are a kind of teaching with a smaller group with more opportunities for the students to discuss with the tutor or each other and to raise questions.

P: So, do you prefer attending lectures or taking part in tutorials?
M: Umm... I like both, but if I have to pick one, I would pick lectures. However, if I have to prepare for an assignment, I would prefer tutorials.

P: Why so?
M: I have a lot of questions when working on an assignment, so in tutorials I could raise and discuss the questions.

P: Otherwise, why do you prefer lectures more?
M: It's more one-way, which means I can doze off if I am tired...

P: You're very honest!

Among all other respondents in the interviews, the majority prefer attending tutorials because they feel that there is more interaction, more participation in the tutorials and the discussions help enhance understanding. Venus says tutorials are smaller groups and she can have greater concentration. Teresina has a similar idea and she feels that she
can get more detailed answers in a tutorial. Millie's ideas are slightly different:

*I think tutorials are better, perhaps because there are fewer students which allows more opportunities to ask questions. There are too many students in the lectures and the lecturers focus mainly on presentations. Of course it depends very much on how well the lecturers manage the presentations, but it also depends on how well the students can absorb the knowledge. If you lack the basic concept of the topic, as usually happens to me, you find it quite difficult to learn from lectures.*

(Millie)

Sandy gives another reason but she prefers tutorials also:

*Lectures are more for receiving information. Of course there is time [at the end of lecture] for you to ask questions but surely you won't be active to do so since you will be tired after the lectures. In case you are very interested in the topic, you may raise your question during the break, but you cannot do so during the lecture for there will be a disruption. I think a tutorial, like a group discussion, is quite a good teaching method. This is because the tutor will allow you to ask questions all through the tutorials. Also, the class size is smaller so there will be more interaction between the tutor and the students.*

(Sandy)

Most respondents we talked to prefer attending tutorials for the interaction, the personal contact and the opportunities to ask questions even though lectures are usually well presented, informative and sometimes analytical.

**Motivation to Learn**

In western educational psychology, "achievement motivation is highly individualistic, and ego-enhancing, characterised by individual competition, where winning is its own reward" (Atkinson, 1964). But in East Asian societies the notion of success needs to be reinterpreted in a collectivist framework, which may involve significant others, the family, the peers, or even society as a whole (Holloway, 1988).
89.8% of the respondents in the survey said that they are highly motivated to work hard to pursue a further degree. Only 5.7% say that they are not. On a similar note, the same percentage of the respondents feel that their ego is enhanced if they achieve good grades through hard work.

The concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is also different in western and eastern culture. For western students, intrinsic motivation is to understand what is being learned (Biggs, 1987), but for Chinese students the adoption of deep strategies may be activated by "a head of mixed motivational steam: personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward, and yes, possibly even interest" (Biggs & Watkins, 1996: 273). That is the reason for the Chinese saying that "there are golden houses and beautiful girls in books" (Lee, 1996:37).

57% of the respondents in the survey say they are motivated by tangible rewards and 87.6% say they are motivated by intangible rewards. Tangible rewards here refer to "materialistic" things like qualifications, money and 'the pursuit of wealth" (Bond, 1986).

The interview results show that there are 13 respondents who feel that they are motivated by extrinsic rewards, in particular a qualification which will lead to a better job or better career opportunities. This is what Teresina says:

> Qualifications, if in my current work position I don't get a master's degree, I will be eventually replaced by somebody else.

Murphy says something similar:

> Enhance academic background, want to get a better position, increase my bargaining power when negotiating for a new job.

Susan is also concerned about the present needs:
Job nature, benefit. I can get more and more knowledge. I can enhance my ability to handle my job. Work, pay rise, academic, career, all help.

The Chinese learners who took part in our survey seemed more interested in intrinsic, i.e. non-material rewards, like a sense of achievement and ambition. 87.6% of the respondents agree that they are motivated by intrinsic rewards. Only 6.7% say that they are not motivated by these intangible rewards. 57.3% of the respondents agree that they are motivated to learn by the attraction of prestige and status. Out of these 51 people, 17 are in fact in total agreement that they are motivated by prestige and status. This is somewhat supported by Hofstede’s ranking of 17th given to Hong Kong in the dimension of masculinity, where reward, prestige and praises are valued in the society (Hofstede, 1986).

Interviewees also express their views that they are motivated to learn by intangible rewards. Juliana says that she is intrinsically motivated to learn and she feels that it helps her ego:

> When I did my master's degree, it was intrinsic motivation. I want to prove to myself that I can achieve higher education, obtain a higher degree, not tangible rewards, may not help in achieving anything of that sort. I feel that I have finished a master's degree, get a bit of respect from others. It did raise my prestige too!

(Juliana)

Anne has a different view regarding her motivation in learning:

> My primary aim for the MSc programme is not for knowledge. In contrast, the study of the diploma in HRM is for knowledge. The motive for the MSc is the networking of my group members... I can gain from experience sharing. For the theory part, I can gain by reading appropriate textbooks.

(Anne)
Ellen is motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically. She talks about interest, career and challenging herself for self-fulfillment.

*Most important of all you have to be interested in the subject, you will then put in the effort to study and to learn about it. Also, other people’s support, such as from the lecturers or friends, is also very important. However, the key point is still your own interest in the subject, your wish to learn more. You are not trying to learn to get a job or a promotion but for your own interest, then you will try harder to learn. I also believe it was because of my interest to learn more about HRM, and I would like to find out if I could manage such a degree. I also believed I could handle the assignments and manage the time for the tutorials so I took the course.*

(Ellen)

Lois has a similar reason for doing the master’s degree, i.e. for the qualification. However, she also feels that she does not have adequate knowledge. Most important of all, she wants the vision, to do something really interesting in the future.

*The main reason is there are too many bachelor’s degree holders in the market. I am young and with not much working experience. If you are an employer, you will consider both the worker’s qualification and working experience. For the younger ones like me, who lack both, it is ideal to work and study together so as to meet with the market demand. Plus, I am interested in the subject. I also feel my knowledge is not quite sufficient, after all, not all I have studied during the Bachelor’s degree course could meet with the market demands. Hopefully, by studying further, I can expand my vision, then I can find something I am really interested in to do and to study in the future.*

(Lois)

To recapitulate what has been discussed about motivation for learning, our respondents seem to be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated. Some look for tangible results like a degree qualification, which will give them a good job and this is justifiable in a materialistic society like Hong Kong. Job opportunities and career advancement are two important factors that encourage a lot of the respondents to pursue higher degrees. However, there are people who are keen on developing themselves for personal interest
or for other intangible reasons, like networking and having a vision for a brighter future. Perhaps we can also call these long-term tangible rewards!

Social issues in Learning

What do respondents feel about the social environment in Hong Kong regarding learning? 88.9% of the respondents feel that Hong Kong puts emphasis on academic attainment and therefore most of them (77.5%) also believe that paper chasing and credentialism have become a trend in Hong Kong. Only 3.3% disagree with the fact that academic attainment and the paper chase is getting more common in Hong Kong. Since academic attainment is becoming important, most people are interested in pursuing some training or education.

In the face-to-face interviews, many interviewees said that they were pursuing a further degree for a better career path. They mostly feel that credentialism is a key issue in Hong Kong society. Thirteen interviewees feel that academic attainment is important. Some even say the basic qualification is a degree. All these 13 people are keen on pursuing further studies but money is a big constraint. They all say they would go back and study full time if it had not been for the issue of money.

In the survey, only 34.4% of the respondents would prefer to pursue full time study while 44.4% disagree with the view. It is, in fact, a luxury in Hong Kong in this situation to quit one’s job and pursue full time study. 84.3% say they cannot afford the time for full-time study. In another survey question, 85.4% say they cannot afford financially to quit their job for full time study. This is the reason why distance learning programmes are becoming popular in Hong Kong. Three interviewees, Sam, Janice and Shirley mentioned that going back to school full time is a very luxurious thing as they feel that they would like to but they do not have the money. If they had had the money, they would definitely have enjoyed taking up full time programmes.

Among the 22 interviewees, Bob has something interesting to say about academic attainment being important:

*It is highly important. For instance, if you apply for a job, this is their*
[HR/potential employer] first consideration during their first screening. Other than experience, they definitely consider qualifications. That's why many people "desperately" study and study... In HK, people may not be, or are no longer being, driven to study by interest. It would be preferable if they did not have to study but just to pay for the credentials.

(Bob)

Then he goes on to talk about the time and financial constraints:

Financial concerns are of course most important. And of course, time is another concern. It is very difficult to just quit working and go back to school for the moment.

(Bob)

Janice talks about her view of Hong Kong society and the issue of academic attainment:

I think the social system in HK leads people to have such a concept that it is important. For me, however, academic attainment can be understood differently. It is an important issue for it could be seen as a measurement of your abilities, your potential to obtain a job. But I think it is more important to consider whether it could facilitate your self-development. Say if you have a high academic attainment and have a high-paid job, some people may consider you are doing great, yet, I do not think it means you are the learned one. In HK, I would say about 60% of the people would judge from whether you had a degree, studied well or graduated from a prestigious school to determine if you are a competent person or not, but I would not judge others in such a way.

(Janice)

What Janice says is perhaps the trend in Hong Kong. People in Hong Kong are rather superficial, judging people's success by looking at these minor factors. It is in fact what Hofstede (1991, 2001) says about a masculine society where people look for glamour and prestige. In a materialistic society like Hong Kong, people are indeed very pragmatic and look for tangible things like a handsome salary and high status to determine one's success.
Murphy is also very pragmatic in saying that he will not go back to school full time even though he is aware that credentialism is an issue in Hong Kong and academic attainment is important. He also says that family commitment is an issue for him. Below is an excerpt from his interview:

P: Do you think academic attainment is important in HK?
M: Yes, I think one has to have at least an undergraduate degree.
P: Are you ready to go to school full time?
M: No, for economic reasons, I need to support my family. I used to think about it and I guess it is not possible eventually.
P: Would you sacrifice anything if you engaged in full time study?
M: The most important reason is, I'd lose contact with society. For family reasons, I need to support my mother and my brother.
P: What about family commitment? Are you committed to your parents?
M: I have to support my mother and my brother financially.
P: Credentialism- is it important?
M: Yes, it's important. Credentialism is an insurance against fluctuation. It makes me feel more confident. This course clearly exceeds my academic ability (my English is not that good and I am only a form 5 graduate), the fact that I can still manage it makes me feel more confident

(Murphy)

Murphy's example is typical of many others in Hong Kong who manage to work up their own academic ladder gradually, one step at a time. What Murphy did was that he did a part-time Diploma in HRM, which leads to a master's degree if you can achieve a certain grade on completion of the programme. Murphy is a typical example of a Hong Kong learner having all the constraints to career development in a paper chase society.

The next issue, which is the last issue to be discussed in this chapter, is also related to a point that Murphy raised. It is family commitment and the Chinese learner. The Chinese learner is considered as a collectivist whose role in the family has a very important effect on his/her pursuing his/her own interests.
Family Commitment

The Chinese collectivist culture means the family is always the centre of attention in the Chinese world (Hofstede, 1991; Oh, 1991). In the face-to-face interviews, most respondents said that they cannot afford to go back to school full-time or cannot afford to further study because of family commitments. This is in line with the Confucian thoughts of the family being the heart of the social order and each member having the responsibility to look after the welfare of the family (Redding, 1990). In the questionnaire survey, 63.7% agree that they have commitments towards their families and must provide for them before pursuing their own academic attainment or interest. This is a characteristic of a Confucian society and is not strange in the Hong Kong context. Millie is married and has an eight-year-old son and she made this comment when she was asked if her family has any effect on her pursuing further education:

*Yes, mainly because my son is still young. He is only in primary school and I feel I need a lot of time to take care of him. As a mother, I think it is more important to take care of my son while he is at the foundation stage of education than my own study.*

(Millie)

In Millie’s case, she gives priority to her son’s education as he is in his foundation stage of his education.

26.4% of the respondents do not agree that they have to look after their family interests before committing themselves to their own academic pursuit. These people are perhaps the ones that are not married or they are from more affluent families who are not dependent on them financially.

Attending distance learning programmes, to many respondents, does not take up too much of their time. 67% of the survey respondents say they prefer distance learning programmes because they fit into their schedule of spending quality time with the family and not using their family time to study.

The issue of having quality time with the family is also brought up and is a major
concern. 83.5% of the respondents believe in spending quality time with the family. This may be attributed to the fact that they are concerned with their conflicting roles as students and as family members. Most of these people are the ones who are married and have children. We can look at Susan who has two children, 6 and 9 years old. She said:

My study hours are one hour before I start work at the office in the morning and one hour during lunch. Then I go home at 6:00 p.m. and then spend time with my two children before dinner. Sometimes I come home late and they will wait for me for dinner. They both go to a private tutor who helps them with their homework in the afternoon and when I come home, I go through some of their work with them, help them revise for dictation or tests and then we eat. After dinner, we have a little quality time together as we watch one T.V. programme. It is not a very good programme for children as it is a soap opera. But this is the only time we spend together. Then I put them to sleep and then start my own study. It is already 10:30 p.m. and I have an hour and 15 minutes before the late news to study. I always watch the late news with my husband and that is the only time the two of us have for ourselves. After that it's 12:15 a.m. and it's time for bed. On Saturdays, we go to the grandparents place and on Sunday, we have our own family day when we sometimes go out for lunch or we go to the New Territories for half a day. But nowadays, they have so much homework that we have to spend the afternoon doing homework together. My husband will read the papers when the kids are doing their homework. That 'teaching' job is mine again. For dinner, I usually cook because the maid is not there and I would prefer something simple for the family to eat together. I have almost no time for myself.

(Susan)

Shirley has one little girl who is seven and she is also giving up all her prime time for the family of three.

I enjoy quality time with Karen but I can't afford too much time because I'm doing my master's degree. I cannot afford to take her to ballet class or piano class because she goes to these lessons on weekdays. The maid takes her
instead. Once she had a graduation ceremony at the ballet school and she was the only one whose parents did not attend. Anyway, I am trying to spend more quality time with her and we try to help her with her homework almost every night, from 8:30 to 10:30 p.m. ... Both my husband and I get home around 8 p.m. and we eat around 8. Dinner is the time for us to chat... I enjoy it most... At night she has a lot of homework to do and we have to teach her. I can’t have time to study. Sometimes I do not study at all for many weeks because I prefer to look after my daughter. I feel guilty in not giving her enough time. I only work hard when the assignment is due. I did very poorly in assignment 2 and I must try harder in the next one. I don’t go to my study group any more because I cannot afford the time.

(Shirley)

One of the questions in the survey reveals that 87.9% of the respondents feel that the family will be proud if someone in the family has acquired a higher degree. Only 2.2% of the respondents disagree and 9.9% are not sure. According to Hofstede (1991, 2001) and Bond (1986, 1991), Chinese families expect the children or the family members to excel and to bring glory to them. This is how a Chinese family will behave. This is also true in a collectivist society where personal achievements are shared by the family. Most of the interviewees also agree that their family members will be proud of them if they acquire their master’s degree. Most of them say their family members are very supportive spiritually, even though not financially, to their pursuit of a higher degree.

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the survey and the interviews on Chinese culture, and Hong Kong culture as well as the Chinese learner. It started off with findings summarising what respondents feel about their own identity. Various themes such as ‘wu-lun’, the hierarchy in the family and in society, and the concept of ‘face’ as well as the teacher in the Chinese mind were discussed. Most respondents do not identify themselves as “pure Chinese” as most western writers describe them. They would rather call themselves “Hongkongers” with special characteristics brought about by the social, economic and historical background of Hong Kong. From the data collected, the
Hong Kong identity was introduced and the way these people perceive their cultural heritage was presented. The group tends to be reluctant to be stereotyped as “Chinese learners” and most members were rather clear in describing their learning styles, learning motivation and commitment towards their families, always bearing in mind their “Hong Kong identity”.

When analysing this unique group of Hongkongers, one must be careful not to stereotype because these respondents are a very small group of students in one MSc programme for human resource professionals, which means they constitute a very small sector of Hong Kong society. One must also bear in mind that these people joined the course based on similar motives and most have a very similar educational and social background. The fact that they have very similar professions also explains that they had had similar kinds of training before. Due to the profession, there are also more female respondents than males, which might have a certain bias effect on the findings, e.g. the responsibility to the family. These people, coming from a similar profession, also tend to have similar views on the various topics of the discussions. The findings do not represent all Hong Kong learners, be they adult learners or children. A more credible research on the Hong Kong learners would need a vast sample covering learners of different age groups, different genders and from different levels of educational and training programmes.

Having said this, looking at a small sample and their reactions towards their own cultural identity is considered useful as our major focus is on a particular mode of learning, namely distance learning, and the choice of this particular distance learning programme is valid because it is one of the most popular distance learning programmes that has run for over 10 years in Hong Kong. It is considered as typical of a distance learning programme that can be found with a substantial number of participants.

In the next chapter, we are going to further discuss the Hong Kong learner in the light of the distance learning mode of studies using data collected from the participants of the above mentioned programme. The major concern is to determine if distance learning is an acceptable mode of learning for this group of learners.

165
Chapter 6: The Hong Kong Learner and Distance Learning

Introduction

The findings from the previous chapter show that the respondents in this study in general feel that the Chinese culture in Hong Kong is not purely Confucian and that they would prefer to be identified as Hong Kong learners, who are relatively different from the Chinese learners as stereotyped by many western writers. The learning styles adopted by the Chinese learners who have participated in this research have also been examined. Most respondents exhibit the characteristics of surface learners in their early school days with heavy examination systems and develop from surface learners to deep learners as they grow older and as they get to the stage of higher education. We have also acknowledged the fact that these Hong Kong learners do not blindly accept whatever the teacher says but also would not challenge the teacher openly like their western counterparts would. These Hong Kong learners can be intrinsically, as well as extrinsically motivated, depending on their individual needs.

In this chapter, we will examine the issues of distance learning that we have discussed in Chapter 2. Quantitative data will be summarized and findings from the face-to-face interviews analysed to determine if distance learning is a learning mode compatible with the learning styles of this particular group of learners.

Distance Learning

Distance learning is a form of education characterised by: the semi-permanent separation of instructor and learner throughout the duration of the learning process; the active involvement of the institution in the planning and preparation of learning materials, and in the provision of student support services; the use of media and technologies to unite instructor and learner and deliver course content, including print, audio, video, or computer; the semi-permanent absence of a learning group or cohort through the duration of the learning process, so that people primarily learn individually and not in groups, except for the possibility of meetings for both didactic and socialization purposes (Keegan, 1986).
This definition consists of all the major themes that this research sets out to examine. The review of literature in Chapter 2 has already covered these themes. In this chapter, empirical findings from quantitative and qualitative findings are collected and collated to illustrate these major aspects. They include the profile of the distance learner, learning styles, personal experience of distance learning, learning autonomy, learner isolation, the role of the teacher, face-to-face tutorials, students' motivation and persistence in learning, and the role of technology in distance education and distance learning materials.

The main purpose of the chapter is to explain how the respondents undertake their distance learning programme and consider if their learning styles are appropriate for attending distance learning programmes. Chinese learners are often stereotyped as passive learners, who depend on the teacher to supervise them and to guide them. They are also described as surface learners, who do not understand the main concepts and prefer attending lectures, which enable them to receive knowledge passively. The data is presented here to investigate how indeed this group of Hong Kong respondents learn and if their learning style is suitable for the distance learning mode of education.

Profile of the Learners

Today's distance learners are “non-traditionally aged students who have multiplistic life-views and many already-formed attitudes and beliefs; they are culturally, ethnically, and geographically diverse; they have substantial personal and occupational life experiences; and although, on the one hand, they are motivated by professional goals and opportunities for advancement or positive changes in their life situation, on the other hand, they may be challenged by previous learning experiences or limited academic familiarity” (Schwitzer, 2001:85). The target group under study in this research demonstrates most of these characteristics.

The distance learners studied in this research are working adults in Hong Kong who are enrolled in two-year master's programmes with the Centre for Labour Market Studies (CLMS), University of Leicester. These programmes are distance learning programmes in the field of training, human resource management and performance management. These programmes are being run in the UK, Europe, US, South America, Africa and
Asia Pacific. These students are all working adults in the training and human resource management professions, who have come back to school part-time to pursue a higher degree. They are different from traditional college students with their vast experience and their motivation to pursue higher education even when they have established themselves in their professions.

The target population in this research is all the course members on the MSc in Training and MSc in Training and Human Resource Management and the MSc in Performance Management programmes. We can look at the student profile from the empirical data collected in the research on culture and distance learning. As discussed in Chapter 5, about 600 copies of the questionnaire were sent out to all the existing students. There were 92 returns and the response rate is 16%. The profile of these 92 respondents is summarized in Tables 5.1 to 5.7. Among these 92 respondents, 12% are men and 81(88%) are women. About 50% of the respondents are in the 31 to 45 age group and 28.3% are from 41 to 50 years of age. Only about 20% are below 30 years of age. More than half of the respondents are married (55.4%) and 37 (40.2%) are single. Four of the respondents are divorced. It is interesting to note that almost 70% of the respondents have no children. This is a factor that may affect the respondents' choice of doing a master's degree programme by distance learning or even whether they would like to pursue their studies or not. There are 18.5% of the respondents who have one child and 8.7% who have two children. There are only 3.3% (3 respondents) who have 3 children. 24% of the respondents live with their spouse and 27% live with their spouse and children.

40.2% (37 respondents) are university graduates and 17.4% have finished postgraduate level studies. Thirteen respondents reported that they are secondary school leavers and 20 of them are of tertiary education level. This group makes up about 36% of the population. Even though this is a master’s level programme, students who have a slightly lower educational level but who are experienced in the field of HRM or training can be considered on an individual basis.

93.1% are full time workers and 4.3% work part-time. Another 4.3% are not working. These people who are not working may be home-makers or temporarily out of work because of the bad economic times.
75.3% of the respondents are in supervisory, general and managerial positions. This is because the MSc programme is an HRM programme. 14.6% are in training and teaching because one stream of the MSc programme is in training. The rest are in other areas of finance, technical and servicing industries.

The following table summarizes the questionnaire findings on the last two sections of the questionnaire, namely section F, on issues on distance learning, and section G, on technology and distance learning.

In the following tables, 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=not sure, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree.

Table 6.1
F. Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I have the discipline to organise my own learning.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I can set learning goals on my own.</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I am responsible for my own learning.</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am very aware of the physical distance from my teacher.</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I am very aware of the physical distance from other course members.</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I feel that the teacher is not giving me adequate attention.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I feel a strong sense of being &quot;isolated&quot; from other course members.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I feel that instant feedback is always available from my teachers.</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I enjoy being able to have control over the pace of my own learning.</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I have the necessary self-direction to learn on my own.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I have the necessary self-motivation to learn on my own.</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I can always understand the</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the first three questions, 74% of the respondents say that they have the discipline to monitor their own learning, 80% say they have the responsibility to monitor their own learning and 92% say they can set their own learning goals. About 78% of the respondents feel that they can have control over their own learning and 78% have the self-direction to study on their own. Approximately 85% have their own motivation for learning. The fact that over 70% say that they are highly independent learners helps to summarize the findings for the last few issues. However, About 65% of the respondents are aware of the distance from the teacher and 62% are aware of the distance from other course members. In terms of understanding, only about one-third of the respondents say they can always understand the concepts from the readings. And only about 40% say they can relate theories to everyday life. The last question in this section shows that about 39% say they need constant supervision in their own learning, while another 37% say they do not.

These findings show interesting views presented by the respondents, but there is no elaboration to explain these figures. When some say they need supervision and some others say they do not, they do not explain why they need the supervision. Even though some kind of pattern can be shown in the first three questions regarding self-direction and self-control and an almost equivalent percentage of people say they are highly independent learners, there was no chance for the researcher to find out from these 70% of the respondents what they conceive a highly independent learner to mean. This would need to be clarified face-to-face when respondents could explain their perceptions of an independent learner.

It can also be noticed that there was a non-response rate for some of the questions, which cannot be presented clearly in the summary table. These non-responses may mean that the respondent(s) do not understand the question or that the question is non-exhaustive, i.e. not all the possible choices are provided. It may also be due to the fact
that the respondents do not like the question being asked and if this had happened in a face-to-face interview, the question could have been elaborated on, explained or clarified in a different way so that the respondent could have provided his/her view clearly.

Table 6.2
G. Use of Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I prefer reading ‘printed’ materials and hard copies of books to reading on the computer screen.</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I always access the web site of my University for information.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I always access the internet for supplementary information.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I often get in touch with my teacher or supervisor by e-mail</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contacting a teacher by e-mail is a satisfactory substitute for a teacher talking to me in the classroom.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I use the on-line conferencing facilities provided by the University a lot.</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I often fax my assignments to my teachers.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last section of the questionnaire is on the Use of Technology. Almost 90% of the respondents say they prefer to print out reading materials and only about 10% say they do not. It is a strange phenomenon that no one chose “not sure” and no one chose “strongly disagree”. There was also a 2.2% non-response rate to this question. This indicates that respondents may have only used the printed study pack provided and they were not expected to do any on-line reading. Another question shows that there are only about 20% of the respondents who got in touch with their teacher or supervisor by e-mail and that about 40% say that contact by e-mail is not a satisfactory substitute for the classroom teacher. Another 80% say they do not use the on-line conferencing facilities provided by the University.

All these responses regarding the use of technology may not truly reflect the situation with regard to the students’ attitude to it because many respondents may not know much
about the on-line conferencing facilities and they may not have identified a teacher or a supervisor, other than meeting a "teacher" when their annual face-to-face teaching is conducted. There may not have been a "teacher" whom they can get in contact with and ask questions pertaining to their personal studying needs.

Even though some obvious patterns have been shown in the questionnaire survey, the majority of the answers need further analysis and interpretation, which face-to-face interviews can provide. The discussion below draws on the qualitative findings obtained in the face-to-face interviews and the responses are recorded verbatim to represent the views and feelings of the respondents.

The "Distant Learner"

Distance learning is learning that occurs away from the standard classroom involving a separation of teacher and learner (Sherry, 1996). This is the simplest description of distance learning. The separation or 'distance' is felt by a large percentage of the respondents. Survey findings show that 65.6% of the respondents are aware of the physical separation from the teacher. Only 14.4% do not feel that they are separated. A similar number of people (63.3%) also feel that they are physically separated from other course members. Even though there is geographical proximity in Hong Kong and most Hong Kong learners have the support of study groups that enable regular contacts with other course members, they still feel the separation from the teacher and other course members in regular classroom contacts.

Another issue worth exploring here is the idea of "isolation" when pursuing a distance learning programme. The learner usually feels "isolated". The sense of community, which develops through the socialisation of the students in a traditional classroom is lost. Separation by real physical distance affects the rapport of the distance learning class and coming from different background deprives all participants of a common community link (Willis, 1993b).

On this point, the data seems to be contradictory, as only 23.1% of the respondents feel isolated whereas 65.6% and 63.3% feel that they are physically being separated from the teacher and from the other course members respectively. Their idea of being
physically distant and their interpretation of being “isolated” do not appear to have a strong a relationship. To the respondents, the word “isolation” might be a bit too strong and give too negative an idea of separation.

In the qualitative interviews, six respondents say very definitely that the word ‘isolation’ is too strong. These six people are Natema, Juliana, Venus, Sam, Elsie and Johnson. They feel that they can always approach their study group members because they have effective study groups. They study together, encourage each other and they feel that their teachers from Leicester are serious in teaching them.

Lois said that ‘distance’ is not a real concern and she did not even feel the distance with her teachers.

*It's really not that “distant”. Even if you are not taking this type of course, you are also very “distant” with your friends. I do not meet with my friends much, we mostly communicate by emails nowadays. Even if you have to take several classes each week, you will not meet all the classmates every time, for some will skip the lesson or be too busy to attend, so “distance” is not a real concern, it depends how you look at it.*

(Lois)

Ellen also expresses a similar view to Lois’:

**P:** What do you feel about the “distance” from teacher and classmates?

**E:** Perhaps because the distance learning course I have just completed is for a master’s degree, which offers a different level of knowledge than secondary school or bachelor’s’ degree, therefore, much of the information provided required self digestion. The instructors are there to train us to analyse and to guide us into the right track. They are not supervisors with a responsibility to monitor when and how we work on our assignments, therefore, the distance between the teachers and students is wider than I felt in the schools before. But then, the support provided by our school [SPACE/Leicester] is pretty sufficient. If we have any need of support, say to clarify an issue we do not understand,
we could get it from them. Since they are quite helpful, during the time when we need support, we don’t think the distance is really that wide.

P: What about among classmates?

E: There were many students in our course – close to 200, I think. It’s hard to feel a close relationship with the other classmates since we are not always taking lectures/tutorials in the same classroom. The school therefore encourages us to form some study groups of 5-6 students. In my group, we discussed the course materials and assignments among ourselves, and meet to do so if possible. The relationship among us is therefore much closer. Since we had been studying together for a few years, we understand each other and strongly support each other. Even after completing the course, we can move on from being classmates and become good friends. We would continue to support each other in our daily lives.

(Ellen)

Vivian says something similar to these six interviewees. She does not feel the isolation but she feels the ‘distance’. It sounds rather ironical because Hong Kong is such a small place but she feels that she is lonely and ‘distant’ from her team. It is the inability to meet and to keep up the work that makes her feel ‘distant’ and ‘lonely’.

Yes, I feel the ‘distance’. I don’t feel isolated... but I feel lonely. Perhaps I have a study group and we sometimes meet, but not too often. Sometimes we do not manage to catch up and we don’t turn up to those meetings...the pressure is there! I feel lonely because we don’t talk to each other much...I know they all feel the same...

(Vivian)

Dennis said that he did feel the isolation as well as the distance:

Yes, I feel isolated. The word ‘isolation’ is not too strong. I feel the ‘distance’. I haven’t even seen the campus. After two and a half years, I didn’t know anything about (or feel familiar with) the University. I only felt the sense of belonging when I went there for the graduation ceremony. That was the feeling I had always wanted to get. I met the teachers whom I’ve met before in Hong
Kong... It would have been different if I had had been studying there... Yes, I feel “isolated’ from my teachers, my classmates. 

(Dennis)

Murphy said he felt isolated from his teacher but he felt rather closely tied to his classmates because they met regularly.

Milane was very certain when she said:

*There is “distance” of course. Since we only meet once in a while, our relationship cannot be close. For full time study, teachers and students meet almost every day of the week, they are much closer. For distance learning, we only know each other by our last names. After a couple of questions, the lecture/tutorial is over and it’s time to go.*

(Milane)

Millie also felt the ‘distance’ with her teachers because there was not enough face-to-face teaching:

*Although the e-mail system is well-established, I still find quite a wide distance from the teachers. I met with the tutors a few times when they were in Hong Kong, I felt better meeting with them. These one-to-one tutorials were much better since I could discuss my questions personally with them. I found these meetings better than e-mail communications, at least I did not have to wait for the responses and guess when I would receive them.*

(Millie)

Teresina has a different reason for feeling ‘isolated’:

*Surprisingly, I rather feel isolated from the course material, probably because there is too much, it’s double sided, the font size is too small, just feeling too much. I don’t feel isolated from the teacher because I knew there wouldn’t be a teacher in a distance learning course. I was prepared for it in advance.*

(Teresina)
From the qualitative findings we can see that the words ‘isolation’ and ‘distance’ are taken to be somewhat interchangeable even though the word ‘isolation’ is used in the interview guide. Most respondents chose to take the two words as referring to a similar concept, meaning ‘separation’.

The conclusion drawn from these findings is that when learners say they feel ‘isolated’, they are in fact referring to the isolation from the teachers, the institution and the course content (reading materials – too much heavy reading) and this becomes intimidating to them. When they say there is no isolation, they are in fact referring to their relationship with their fellow course mates or study group members. They feel that they have a study group which can meet often and perhaps it is also due to the geographical proximity of places in Hong Kong that they do not feel the isolation.

To reiterate Moore’s typology (1993) of interaction between learners, teachers and the content of the educational transaction, all three types of isolation are identified among Hong Kong learners. People are least aware of the learner-content isolation but they are most concerned about not having enough learner-instructor interaction.

**Learner Autonomy and Discipline**

The current definition of distance learning is beginning to use principles of andragogy, placing the adult learner at the centre of learning and the teacher as a facilitator of that learning, the learner has full responsibility for his own learning.

63.3% of the respondents in the questionnaire survey are highly independent learners and only 16.7% do not agree that they can learn independently. The ones who are not sure may not have found out what distance learning involves or they may feel that they do not understand themselves.

“Learner autonomy” or learner control in distance learning is what we are looking at in this research. Learners are independent in setting objectives, methods of study and evaluation (Moore, 1986). The survey findings show that Hong Kong learners know
very clearly what distance learning involves. 81.3% say that they can set goals for their own learning and 97.8% say that they are responsible for their own learning. Only 1.1%, i.e. one respondent, disagrees that he/she is responsible for his/her own learning, and one respondent is not sure.

In the questionnaire survey 74.7% agree that they have the discipline to organise their own learning. 12% regret that they lack the discipline and 13% say they are not sure if they have the discipline. 79.1% say that they are able to control their own pace of learning and 80% say they have the necessary self-direction to learn on their own. 85.4% say they have the necessary self-motivation to learn on their own.

From the above empirical findings we can say that Hong Kong course members are very confident that they have the necessary discipline, self-motivation, and self direction to set their own goals in learning, to have control over the pace of their learning and to organise their own learning.

The qualitative findings also demonstrate a similar trend to the empirical data. Almost all the respondents say that they are independent learners. Dennis says this:

Yes, I set my own calendar, I'm very disciplined, set my own pace. I can achieve it. I have the self-direction and self-motivation. Now the programme is over and I feel great!

(Dennis)

Natema said that she was highly independent, had self discipline, self-direction and set her own goals. She said she handed in all her assignments on time except that she applied for an extension for her dissertation for a month. She is affirmative that she is an independent learner. Sam also said that he was an independent learner and his strongest motivation was the eagerness to learn.

Lois said she appreciated having learner autonomy:
I highly appreciate it [learner autonomy]. It is because it calls for your self-development. If you fail, you learn to be smarter next time. It allows you flexibility so that you can study, say according to your own condition.

(Lois)

Shirley felt that she needed to monitor herself so that she could keep up with her work:

Since this course [MSc] was quite tough and tight with a lot to learn, I felt we needed to have a lot of initiative and autonomy. I found it quite hard at the beginning since I was not yet used to the mode of distance learning with no one to push and monitor my work. Then I realized that if I did not monitor myself, set a schedule for my work, I would end up falling behind. Therefore, I have been teaching myself, in addition to the academic knowledge, the skill of time management. I therefore believe it requires high autonomy from the learner in order to complete the course.

(Shirley)

Millie made the following comment about learner autonomy but she did not say whether she was an independent learner or not.

I think learner autonomy is very important to someone taking a distance learning course. If you are not independent, it is very likely you will be left behind and fail to follow the progress of the course. That is why some of my friends claim they cannot enroll in a distance learning course and must choose a course that requires class attendance otherwise they cannot monitor themselves. That is why I think learner autonomy is a pre-requisite for someone taking a distance learning course.

(Millie)

It is in fact very promising to see that almost all the respondents are confident that they are independent learners and that they are able to have the discipline, direction and motivation to set their own learning goals, pace their own learning and manage their own learning. Venus is the only person interviewed who says that she is not really an independent learner. She said:
Not really. I’m not really an independent learner. I know that I’m joining the group and I’ve to meet the group’s expectations. If I was a complete independent learner, I would not have to care about the group. I need the group to push me.

(Venus)

Even though a great majority of learners taking distance learning programmes claim that they are autonomous learners, the educators should always be playing the facilitators’ role in guiding them in identifying learning objectives, discovering resources, defining goals and specifying evaluative criteria. At each stage the educator should be as active as possible in the educational transaction (Moore, 1980).

Face-to-face Tutorials

As Biggs (1989) says, tutorials are participatory events and not straight lectures and Fung and Carr (1999) also state that face-to-face tutorials are the best interactive approach that most institutions can provide for their learners. Fung and Carr’s (2000) research on Hong Kong Open University students found that the Hong Kong’s students’ attendance at tutorials was very high compared to that found in other similar studies, possibly reflecting Hong Kong’s geographical compactness, but also possibly reflecting a preference for face-to-face meetings; that the students looked for specific guidance and support from tutors within a largely directive framework; that even where the format of the tutorial departed from the students’ expectations, the students did not necessarily give the tutorial a low evaluation, provided that it was a fruitful experience.

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, the issue of attending tutorials was discussed. In Chapter 5, empirical findings and qualitative findings were presented and analysed to show that distance learners enjoy attending face-to-face tutorials. 70% of the respondents enjoy taking part in group tutorials and 68.9% say that they are confident sharing their views in tutorials. 74.5% feel comfortable giving feedback in group tutorials and 82.2% feel comfortable receiving feedback in tutorials.

The reasons given by the interviewees are that in tutorials the groups are smaller and
they can have better interaction and more participation and this helps to enhance understanding. They can also raise questions on assignments in tutorials (Milane). Another reason given is that tutorials are like group discussions and it is a good teaching method where the tutor will allow the tutees to ask questions all through the tutorial (Lois).

When another course member was asked whether the tutorial group had helped him or not, he said the tutorial group had made him open himself up, be more active and speak more (Murphy). Another student, Janice, was also adamant that she prefers tutorials:

*I prefer tutorials, more interaction, more participation, they enhance understanding. I'll participate. If you don't participate, it's hard to learn. The world is complicated. If you don't participate and just receive [in lectures], you'll forget very easily.*

(Janice)

Natema seems to be the only person who used to take part in the on-line conferencing; she took part at least 3 times a week and she felt that she was really talking to her teachers. She has this very positive remark to give on the teacher facilitating her learning and the face-to-face contact:

*Yes, the teacher does facilitate my learning. I enjoyed the hot-line discussions. Almost every night I was there [on-line]. It's a pity that they don't have it now. Professor G, Professor P, Professor M were there, [all CLMS lecturers] were there ..... I prepared the topics, people from other countries took part. I think this can replace classroom teaching.*

(Natema)

She feels that these on-line conferencing sessions can in fact replace the face-to-face tutorial because she feels extremely useful during the on-line conferences. She feels that it is a pity that her course mates did not want to join the discussion because they
said they did not have the time.

One negative view about group tutorials was expressed in the following words by Cathay when she was asked if the group tutorials help:

No, it always ends up with the same person answering all questions. Some people will transfer the responsibility to others to answer. Some group members are very inactive. (Cathy)

Again this reminds us of the general misconception of passive Chinese learners, which does not take into account that over 70% of Hong Kong learners enjoy group work, enjoy sharing, and feel comfortable in giving and receiving feedback. The Chinese learners we surveyed in this research are no longer the quiet and passive type.

**Role of the Distance Learning Teacher**

The Chinese learners in Chapter 4 view the teacher as the authority but not necessarily the ‘know-all’. They respect the teacher as someone who gives them knowledge and someone who deserves their attention. This is in line with the Confucian tradition of having respect for teachers and trying to maintain the ‘face’ of the teacher.

In a traditional classroom, teacher and student interaction is assumed. The previous section in this chapter discussed the issue of ‘isolation’ or ‘distance’ between teacher and learner in distance learning. Most course members doing the Leicester University CLMS master’s programmes by distance learning feel that the separation is there, not so much between course mates but between teacher and learner. In the distance learning mode of teaching, face-to-face interaction is minimal. However, the teacher and the learners can use various means like e-mail, telephone call, faxes to communicate.

Can a distance learner who has very little opportunity to meet the teacher face-to-face understand the concepts from the readings? From the survey findings about 41.1% say they cannot understand the concepts just by reading alone. 31.1% say they can always understand the concepts. It seems that about half of the learners need help from the teachers to explain or to guide them in understanding the concepts.
Along the same lines, respondents were asked if they were always able to relate theories to everyday life. 38.9% say they can but about 29% say they cannot. 32.2% say they are not sure. It seems that there are about one-third of the respondents who may need help in relating theories to everyday life.

One of the course members, Millie, feels that the teacher is important in helping students understanding of the concepts:

Most important of all is for the teacher to know the standard of the students. Then the teacher can, based on the students' understanding, facilitate their learning by providing materials of suitable level for the students. In a situation of group work when all the group members are confused about a topic and cannot clarify among ourselves, it is better to have the assistance of the teacher [tutor].

(Millie)

The discussion below is on the availability of instant feedback from the teacher. When doing distance learning, the physical separation is obvious. The students also lack the immediate support of a teacher who is present and is able to motivate, and, if necessary, give attention to actual needs and difficulties that may crop up. Another difficult aspect of distance learning is the lack of nonverbal or visual cues that are so taken for granted in a traditional classroom (Demeester & Elander, 1999).

The survey findings show that 28.6% of the respondents feel that instant feedback is not available from the teacher. 31.9% feel that they have instant feedback. However, it is the biggest group (39.6%) who say that they are not sure if they get instant feedback from the teacher or not. Anne feels that she really needs the physical presence of the teacher who could give her instant feedback:

Yes, I like to have the physical presence of the teacher. The supervisor I contact is not really responsive; sometimes it takes a while for him to answer my questions. I believe a local teacher is much easier to work with.

(Anne)
Millie also prefers meeting the teacher face-to-face so that she can get instant feedback:

*The one to one tutorials were much better since I could discuss questions personally with the tutor. I found these meetings better than e-mail communication. At least I did not have to wait for the responses and guess when I would receive them.*

(Millie)

Teresina feels lucky because her supervisor gave her immediate responses:

*My supervisor is very supportive because he gives me immediate responses. I am very lucky. He is responsible and I usually get a reminder from him if I fall behind schedule. But I would try not to depend on him too much.*

(Teresina)

Some people will wonder if the teacher gives adequate attention to individual students. 42.9% feel that the teacher is not giving them enough attention. 23.1% say the teacher is giving adequate attention. This is made possible even in distance learning, when many means of communication can be made available easily.

Can independent learners supervise themselves for their learning? The survey shows that 38.9% need constant direct supervision in their learning, whereas 37.8% of the respondents say they do not need to be supervised. Are Chinese learners so dependent on the teacher? This will have to be further explored.

Interviewees’ feedback helps to illustrate some of these answers. Since face-to-face meeting with the teacher is not possible all the time in distance learning programmes, the learners expect to communicate with their teachers via e-mail or faxes. However, they have to depend on themselves and no one is there to supervise them. Bob was talking about independence:

*You have to be responsible for yourself. Since no one is pushing you, you may not be aware if you have got behind.*

(Bob)
Shirley feels strongly about having the teacher who can check on her progress and give her encouragement or motivation:

"I miss my secondary school days or even the days when I was doing the Diploma in HRM with HKU. I met my tutor at least twice a month. She was always very encouraging and gave us a lot of personal advice. Even though she was not 'supervising' us, I felt good because she was like a private tutor who kept checking on my progress. When I was doing my master's dissertation, my supervisor was very responsive. He answered my questions right away and helped me set schedules. I felt that I was lucky to have him as my supervisor because at least I felt the closeness and the sense of someone keeping track of my progress. I was lucky that I did not feel as though I was being left out. But before I had my supervisor, when I was working on the four modules, I felt a bit lost. I called my friends in my study group and made sure we reminded each other of deadlines. We set study schedules together."

(Shirley)

Shirley seems to be rather dependent on her teacher but this was in fact similar to what other people said about not having someone to act as a 'mentor' or 'coach' to give them advice or some kind of 'supervision' even though the word 'supervision' may sound rather strong. Two course members even mentioned that in the first few months of the distance learning experience there was a strange feeling of 'helplessness' and even though they had a study group (some had been together when they were doing the taught Diploma in HRM programme conducted by HKU SPACE and they were very close friends), they had the feeling of 'the blind leading the blind'. This in fact demonstrates that a lot of the distance learning students were rather dependent and helpless at the beginning.

Use of Technology in Distance Learning

The CLMS distance learning master's programmes makes use of printed materials for

---

14 Diploma in HRM is a face-to-face part-time programme organised by HKU SPACE and the University of Leicester. It is the feeder programme to the distance learning MSc in Training and HRM programme. Students who score a "B" or above in their final grade are guaranteed a place in the MSc programme.
self study and students are also given access to a physical library as well as to on-line library support, both from Hong Kong University and from Leicester University. Students have both face-to-face tutorials and lectures in addition to an on-line learning platform for on-line conferencing.

A survey of 542 respondents randomly selected was conducted by HKU SPACE in 1999 about the demand for continuing education in Hong Kong and to establish a general profile of Hong Kong adult learners. It was modelled on the survey conducted by Chan and Holford in 1991 so as to enable comparisons to be made (Shen et al., 2002). One of the new perspectives included in the 1999 survey was to explore the interest of adult learners in web-based learning.

*Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that they had a personal computer (PC) at home. Around half of these were connected to the Internet. When asked the question: ‘Do you know there are on-line courses conducted mainly via the Internet?’ 54.7% of the respondents answered in the affirmative. However, inquiry revealed that only 3% of them had actually participated in such courses. This indicates that up to the early part of 1999, Internet-based instruction was still not a popular mode of continuing education in Hong Kong* (Shen et al., 2002:68-69).

Cheung et al. (1999) investigated the readiness of adult learners for on-line courses. Of the 800 respondents 95% had computers, while 70% had access to the Internet. However, fewer than 50 of these students felt the need for a ‘virtual meeting place’ and only 9% expressed a preference for courses offered entirely on-line; 36% (strongly) disliked the idea, stating that they value face-to-face interaction with teachers, which technology could not replace.

In this study, respondents were asked if they prefer reading “printed” materials and/or hard copies of books to reading from the computer screen. The survey findings show that 50% of the respondents strongly agree with that and 40% say they agree. In other words, 90% of the respondents prefer to read printed materials to reading from the computer screens. There remain only 10% who disagree. This might be due to the fact that 28% of the respondents are in the 40 to 50 age group and 50% are in the 31 to 40
age group. These people had not been exposed to a computer when they were younger and are not used to reading on a computer screen.

In the individual interviews, only two interviewees say they do not mind reading from the computer screen. Anne is the only person who says:

If it is properly arranged, I'm O.K., it is even more convenient to me because I can read it anywhere in the world. (Anne)

All the other interviewees say that they prefer reading printed materials either because it is very tiring to read on the screen or because they like to carry the chapters around and read wherever they go.

Dennis who works as an IT trainer says that he does not feel comfortable reading on-line materials:

I'm not comfortable. I need to print it out. If everything is on P.C., it's not very convenient. I can't take e-copy of materials. It's totally unacceptable. Unless the e-copy is editable. If I can use word processing to look for key words, this is good. (Dennis)

Bob has a similar comment regarding reading printed materials:

Although I end up using e-mails, internet, computer, etc. to learn, I still have most of the materials printed out. By the time you really need to refer to the information, you prefer black and white. Especially when the article is long, say four or five pages long, then I definitely print it out to read. I am not too comfortable reading on the computer screen. (Bob)

Lois does not express her view about reading on-line or reading printed materials but she has this comment to make:

I think it is best if there is a platform where you log-in to it, where there are
different links allowing you to access to different sections of information. You can just click into the link to see if that section is useful to you. You only print out or download the chapters that are useful to you. It will save both time and paper. I think it is better than giving a big bundle of course materials to us. I find it hard to carry folders around and it takes up a lot of space to store them. It is also hard to search for a particular piece of printed material, but much easier to search from the Internet. So I think it is more convenient to use Internet.

(Lois)

In general, most course members still find reading printed materials more comfortable even though they are very used to computer technology. Perhaps it is because reading from the computer screen is very tiring. Juliana elaborated on this and said that if you need the font size typeface to be big enough and comfortable to read, you cannot get the whole page because of the screen size. You have to scroll left and right and you will find it very inconvenient to read from the screen.

Respondents were asked if they make use of the technology comfortably when doing a distance learning programme, e.g. accessing the University web site for information and accessing the Internet for supplementary information. The survey shows that only 22.2% of the respondents use the university website always and about 60% say they do not access the university website. Interestingly, more people access the Internet for supplementary information. A total of 52% will access the Internet for information, which is slightly more than half of the group. Most people interviewed seem to be using the computer at work. They do not have too much time to access the university web site for information. However, they access the Internet a lot for other sources of information. A few interviewees said that the university website and the Internet are very useful resources.

Ellen is very familiar with the use of technology:

Yes, I am comfortable with the use of technology, since I have to use a computer a lot during work and I would also use Internet, searching websites and sending emails, so I am used to it. (Ellen)
Bob comments on his use of technology. He said he is comfortable with using technology in learning:

*In general yes [comfortable with using technology in learning]. I have no problem with normal Internet searching, but with some special systems, like the one for this programme I am studying, it requires so many passwords and sign on IDs, I have already lost them all so I ended up not using it much. I could no longer tell which ID, which sign-on, and which password could help to use which system.*

Even though he is comfortable with technology, he finds it troublesome. He goes on to talk about the Internet.

*In fact it [the Internet] is in general the most time efficient and useful means, but may be for the sake of internal administration, it [the Leicester website] is too well categorized and confuses the user. In fact I would like to use it for many things, say to search for articles; it is the most convenient way so I do not have to search from the library one by one. I just have to make use of the search engines by inputting the key words, then it would offer you many articles which are very useful but still, I would not use the Leicester one.*

(Bob)

If the population had been a younger group of people, the responses might have been different. There might be more people using these electronic sources of information available to them.

Another electronic communication medium is e-mail contact with the teacher or supervisor. The survey shows that 66% of the respondents say that they do not often get in touch with their teacher by e-mail. Only 18.9% say they do that often.

Respondents in the survey also express their views on whether contact by e-mail with the teacher is a satisfactory substitute for talking in class. 42.3% say no. 37.7% of them say that could be a substitute.
Most interviewees say that the e-mail could not replace the teacher. Most interviewees said that the e-mail response is slow and not all the teachers will respond right away. Anne said that the e-mail is not interactive enough. She added that misunderstanding and misinterpretation may sometimes result.

Teresina is comfortable with e-mail communication with the teacher. She feels that the e-mail can replace the teacher:

*I think yes. Whenever there is a teacher, I feel comfortable with e-mail communications. There is no need to be face to face.*

(Teresina)

Ellen has this to say:

*I don't think communication by email can fully replace face-to-face discussions. But if I only need to clarify some simple viewpoints, then I think it is alright to get the answers by emails only. But for more complicated issues – which I had tried to discuss by email but failed – I prefer to do so face-to-face or at least over the phone. I think it is hard to discuss in-depth issues by emails.*

(Ellen)

Dennis, the IT trainer, is again not speaking like an IT person:

*No, e-mail feedback cannot be instant. Secondly the issues raised are never all answered, just like in a letter!*  

(Dennis)

Cathy said that e-mail is a dead object (like a tool). Emails cannot express themselves but the teacher can give an immediate response. Susan gave a definite “no” and said that the feel of a real person is different. Murphy also felt that the e-mail could not replace the teacher but he had this to add:

*No, there is no feeling about e-mail, you know, friends usually told me to use*
emoticons, for example 😊 and 😃, to express my mood at the time of writing. But for sure it cannot replace the touch of face-to-face interaction.

(Murphy)

All the data on whether the e-mail can replace the teacher is in fact supported by the discussion in Chapter 5 regarding the Chinese teacher as well as the role of the distance learning teacher earlier in this chapter. Students feel that the presence of the teacher is more helpful to their learning.

Another means of communication provided by the university is the on-line conferencing facilities and from the survey results we can see further illustration of the lack of enthusiasm among the group in using technology to help in either sourcing for information or for communication. 90% of the respondents say that they do not use the facilities a lot. Only 5.5% are positive and say they use these facilities a lot.

Juliana said that she was not used to talking with strangers on-line, like ICQ kind of things. She said she might not know the subject matter and she prefers discussing things with people she knows. Vivian also said similar things:

No, I don't know how to ask questions. I didn't find the timing right because I have not read. I won't know what to ask. I prefer a face-to-face visit.

(Vivian)

A few other interviewees, like Susan, Janice, Lois, also said that they knew about the on-line conference but they never had the time.

Ellen said that she had used the on-line conferencing once and never got on again:

Once... since that conference was held with students from different study groups at different stages of the course, it was increasingly harder to go on with the discussion, so I didn't spend much time on it. As I did not find it helpful, I never participated in it again. I would rather discuss with my own group-mates or discuss with my supervisor.

(Ellen)
Natema is the only person who said she had used the on-line conferencing three times a week. She said she enjoyed it very much:

*I enjoyed the hot-line discussion. Almost every night I was there. It's a pity that they don't have it now. Professor G, Professor P, Professor M, ...all professors are there... I prepared the topics, people from other countries took part...In fact, I got to know those people on the on-line conferencing. I guess I should contact them and make friends, to share and to discuss...*

(Natema)

Natema seems to be the only person who could spare two hours three times a week to take part in the on-line conferencing, especially when she has two children (seven and nine years old). She has excellent time management skills and she can juggle her time really well between her family, work and study. She has to sacrifice her own rest time so that she can be actively involved in her studies.

The last question asked was if respondents fax their assignments to their teachers and there were 78.9% who say they do not. They would rather hand in hard copies to the agent and let them be dispatched or couriered to the UK. The fax machine also does not help these respondents as well. One reason for not using the fax machine is perhaps that the papers are too lengthy and they would take a long time to fax. It is also because overseas faxes are charged like long distance telephone charges. It would be easier and cheaper if the e-mail attachment could be used to replace the fax machines.

It is not a common phenomenon that course members fax their assignments to their teachers because usually they submit hard copies of the assignment to HKU SPACE who collect all assignments and courier them to CLMS. Students do not have to submit any work directly to CLMS because HKU SPACE acts as a liaison between the university and the learners.

**Student Motivation and Persistence**

The issue of students' motivation in distance learning was discussed in Chapter 5 in great detail. Even though Hong Kong learners are often described by researchers as
having 'extrinsic' motivation, many respondents claim that they are also intrinsically motivated.

Kember (2000) found that the Hong Kong students he interviewed wanted courses “to be both interesting and to provide an appropriate preparation for their future career...40% of the interviewed students commented on both intrinsic and career motivation” (2000:113).

An unpublished random telephone survey of 1626 adults aged 18 or above conducted by Hong Kong University SPACE in early 2003 (Hong Kong University SPACE, Social Sciences and Research Centre (SSRC) of the University)\(^\text{15}\) shows the following reasons for undertaking continuing education programmes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for undertaking Continuing Education Programmes</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For improvement in work capabilities</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For personal interests</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For learning new skills</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a more meaningful life</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For promotion</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For change of job</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For higher salaries</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For enriching social life</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures show that Hong Kong adult learners participate in continuing education programmes from both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

The data from this HKU SPACE survey concurs with the qualitative data collected in this research. Respondents have different reasons for taking up their distance learning MSc programme and we cannot classify these reasons as either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

Elsie says that she is motivated to getting a degree and a good job, which is an extrinsic

---

\(^\text{15}\) An unpublished survey conducted by the School of Professional and Continuing Education, The University of Hong Kong (HKU SPACE) that commissioned the fieldwork to the Social Sciences and Research Centre (SSRC) of the University. The random telephone survey was conducted from 1 March to 8 March 2003 for seven consecutive evenings. A total of 1,626 Hong Kong adults aged 18 or above were successfully interviewed. The response rate of the Survey was 56.7%.
motivation:

*To meet with my own target. Say, I have set the target to obtain a degree, then I would keep on working to complete the modules as required for the degree. If anything else, to find a good job may be another motivator.*

(Elsie)

Anne feels that Hong Kong Chinese are becoming narrow-minded because they are proud of their economic affluence. However, there is also a rather negative view that they are short-sighted, which means they do not look to the future. She said Hong Kong learners are:

...*more educated than the average Chinese, but the horizon is becoming narrower. The standard of living is better, but because of a long period of prosperity, people cannot tolerate hardship and sometimes are rather shortsighted.*

(Anne)

Lois’ view is that some Hong Kong learners lack persistence in learning or they may not be motivated to concentrate because they lack discipline. They give up half way because they do not see the long-term benefit of further studies. She also feels that this is the reason why learners in Hong Kong are surface learners, who only study the course materials provided and do not refer to the journals or references.

...*whether or not the students can successfully complete the course is all dependent on the students. For those who have to work long hours and are exhausted when they are home, it will be very tough if they have to catch up with the assignments. Since there is no fixed schedule of lectures, say once a week, it is easy for those who lack discipline or are too busy to monitor their schedule end up delaying their study for too long. Visions of the students may be limited for they may only rely on studying the course materials provided and do not refer to other journals or references...*  

(Lois)

Bob also feels that the future gain is important in motivating him to study. He is also
concerned with the current use of the knowledge acquired. This seems to be a more long-term approach to learning yet he is referring to the learning of concepts and ways to deal with his work.

*If it could be applied in daily life or could be used in the workplace, or a theory that I learnt which could be further elaborated on to resolve an issue... mostly knowledge that I could make use of. Of course I would “anticipate the future gain”. Before I enroll in a course, I would consider the current and future market to anticipate the future gain that such a qualification would bring me. Such gain is of course a motivation too.*

(Bob)

Cathy feels that she is justified in going ‘high up the career ladder”. She is always thinking of her career and this can be considered as an extrinsic motivation because she is afraid of unemployment and she does not want to be in a junior position. It is also a sign of achievement motivation, according to Biggs (1993).

*People always seek to go higher up in the career ladder. I don't want to be ordered around, I want to be the person in charge. The fear of unemployment is another factor. In Hong Kong, I believe girls need to be studying too.*

(Cathy)

She also refers to the gender issue here, which will be dealt with later in this chapter. However, her point is that it is important that girls are not discriminated against in society and they should also be motivated to continue their studies.

Many eastern cultures also place a premium on effort, rather than on ability, which is the first attribute westerners consider for good or poor performance (Holloway, 1988). As one Chinese proverb says: “If one keeps on grinding one can turn an iron rod into a needle”; investing huge effort into an impossible task is regarded as admirable (Hau & Salili, 1990:20). It is also a sign of persistence, which motivates a person to achieve what he needs to achieve. The top five attributes for success for Hong Kong secondary

---

16“To be ordered around” is a Cantonese expression meaning “being subordinate to someone” and always have to be commanded.
students are effort, interest in study, study skill, mood and, only in fifth place, ability (Hau & Salili, 1991). Effort seems to be expected among Hong Kong students.

As Janice says:

*I had to put in an extreme amount of effort to complete the MSc because of my "stupidity". I know that if other people can read only once and remember, I need to read at least three times. I also need more time to concentrate and then to understand what is being taught at school. So doing distance learning is very good for me because I can work at my own pace and learn more. But I usually take a lot more time.*

(Janice)

Two other interviewees, Elsie and Kathy, say almost identical things. Elsie says:

*At the beginning of my MSc studies, I felt very unhappy and I almost wanted to quit. There was work and the family to juggle. Almost three years of involvement and I don't really know whether I will pass all the assignments. I always feel that I am not as intelligent as other people. But I told myself that I must persist because I have paid so much school fee. I am lucky when I was doing my dissertation because my supervisor is a very responsible one and I always get words of encouragement from him. I was also lucky that I had a new boss and he made life less difficult for me at the dissertation stage. I really had a bit more time to concentrate on my studies.*

(Elsie)

Kathy is also concerned about her ability and she puts in extra effort to complete the programme:

*I almost wanted to give up when I was doing assignment two and the result of my assignment one wasn't too good. I felt that I had tried my best and I was still not up to the standard. I knew I must work harder but I could not 'find' any more time unless I don't have any sleep. I am really lucky that my boy friend told me that I must persist because he had a lot of confidence in me. I'm really grateful to him that I did it.*
From these two stories, we can get a sense of how Hong Kong learners differ from many western learners, who treasure interest more than effort as a motivation factor. These two ladies also attributed their success to luck: one having a good supervisor and a good boss and the other one having a boy friend who motivates her to work hard. When learners perceive themselves as being controlled by chance, other people or 'fate' or "luck" (Bond, 1991; Venter, 2002), this is related to the concept of having an external locus of control; whereas those with an internal locus of control perceive themselves as having control over their decisions and what happens to them. Hong Kong learners are sometimes rather "humble" in saying that their success is more attributed to luck and other people's help rather than their own effort or ability. This is the Confucian sense of humility.

Summary

This chapter has examined the various themes in distance learning, namely the profile of the distance learner, learning styles, personal experience of distance learning, learner autonomy, learner isolation and distance, the role of the teacher, face-to-face tutorials, students' motivation and persistence in learning, and the role of technology in distance learning.

Empirical findings show that the distance learners who are enrolled in the master's programme with the Centre for Labour Market Studies (CLMS), University of Leicester are mostly female and half of them are in the 31 to 40 year old group. 55% of these people are married and about 70% have no children. 40% are University graduates and 17% are of postgraduate level. 91% of the respondents work full-time while pursuing their master's degree programme on a distance learning mode. About 75% of the respondents work at managerial, general and supervisory level jobs and about 15% are teaching and training professionals.

The idea of 'isolation' and 'distance' in distance education has been discussed and it seems that people have different interpretations of the word 'isolation'. Physical
distance and 'isolation' are not strongly correlated. Some respondents feel that 'isolation' is too strong a word to describe the distance learner. However, about 65.6% and 63.3% of the respondents feel that they are physically separated from the teacher and from other course members respectively, even though there is geographical proximity in Hong Kong and course members can always communicate on the phone or meet in study groups. Most interviewees who took part in the qualitative survey feel isolated from the teacher, the institution and the course content.

From the empirical findings it can seen that Hong Kong learners are independent and autonomous learners because more than 80% or the respondents can set their own goals in learning and about 98% say that they are responsible for their own learning. About 75% have the discipline to organise their own learning and about 80% enjoy having control over their own learning as well as having the self-direction to learn. 85% believe that they have the self-motivation to learn. These findings are supported by the qualitative data. Almost all the interviewees are confident that they are autonomous learners and have the discipline, the direction and motivation to set their own goals, pace their own learning and manage their own learning.

Over 70% of the respondents enjoy face-to-face tutorials and 75% feel comfortable giving feedback while 82% feel comfortable receiving feedback in group tutorials. As Fung and Carr’s (1999) research shows, Hong Kong Open University students’ attendance at tutorials was very high and most students graded it as a fruitful experience. In the personal interviews, similar feelings can be found among the course members we spoke to.

The teacher is still a very important person in the learning situation, where 41% of the learners need the teacher to explain concepts, 29% need the teacher to relate theories to everyday life and 28.6% feel that they need instant feedback from the teacher. 43% of the respondents feel that their teacher is not giving them enough attention. It is also rather disappointing to see that 38.8% say they need constant direct supervision in their learning when 98% of the respondents mentioned in another study that they are responsible for their own learning. This seems like a paradox, but when looked at from a different perspective, we can tell that most respondents are responsible mature adults and can be responsible for their own learning. However, when the role of the teacher is
being discussed, most respondents miss the traditional face-to-face interaction with the teacher whom they see as the ‘authority figure’ (Chapter 3). They tend to say that they need the supervision and the attention of this ‘teacher’ or ‘mentor’ figure.

The use of technology in distance learning is another aspect that seems like a paradox. Most learners are exposed to the electronic learning environment but are not comfortable using it for learning. A very good example is the need to print out reading materials instead of reading on the computer screen. Few people took part in the online discussions with the lecturers and other overseas course members even though they are familiar with the technology. Only 37.7% of the respondents say the e-mail contact with the teacher can be a substitute for talking to the teacher in the classroom. Most interviewees share the same view that an e-mail teacher could not replace the ‘physical’ teacher.

Kember’s (2000) words can be reiterated to show students’ motivation in distance learning studies. Hong Kong students want “courses to be both interesting and to provide an appropriate preparation for their future career. Forty percent commented on both intrinsic and career motivation” (2000:113).

Persistence is also an issue worth noting among Hong Kong distance learners. It is effort and hard work that many course members put into their studies in order to succeed. Yet some people seem to attribute their success to luck, which is in line with the Confucian sense of humility and Tromprenaar’s (1993) idea of external locus of control.

In the next chapter, conclusions will be drawn from the empirical findings and qualitative findings to determine if the distance learning mode of education is compatible with the Hong Kong Chinese learners. Recommendations on delivery of distance learning programmes will also be included. These recommendations can hopefully be adopted by the course developers of distance learning programmes to improve and modify their programmes to cater for the needs of their Hong Kong learners, who have their unique cultural, social and political history.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

Introduction

This concluding chapter aims at drawing out the main issues regarding culture and then summarises what has been discussed about Hong Kong culture, with reference to Confucianism and Chinese culture. A brief summary of Hong Kong’s unique cultural traits and how these have affected the learning styles will be presented. Since the central research question in this study is whether distance learning is a compatible mode of learning for Hong Kong Chinese adult learners, various themes in distance learning are taken into consideration in order to answer the above question. Some feedback given by local learners with regard to their concepts of distance learning is also included. The chapter ends with the contributions of the research and its limitations, and then makes suggestions for future studies.

The Chinese Culture and the Hong Kong Culture

98% of the population of Hong Kong are Chinese and Confucianism has in fact permeated the minds of the people. Findings from this research show that 46% of the respondents accept the Confucian teachings on hierarchy and 53.3% accept the five relationships. The general feeling is that Confucianism is about proper behaviour, compliance, family and virtues, like filial piety and benevolence, which are valued in the traditional society. Commitment towards the family is accepted by about two-thirds of the respondents and they say that the interests of the family must be looked after first before pursuing their own academic goals. 88% say that the family are supportive and are proud of their achievement. Even though a minority of the respondents feel that Confucianism is outdated, the majority still accept Confucianism in their thinking, even if subconsciously.

The issue of face is also a great concern among Hong Kong Chinese. 76% agree that it is important to maintain, give and gain face. In the social situation, most respondents will make an effort to maintain and give face to others. In the learning situation, not knowing the answer to the teacher’s question is not an issue of losing face. But students
are careful to maintain the face of the teacher and do not openly challenge the teacher even when they disagree with him/her. Most respondents say they will not pursue the matter if it involves making the teacher lose face.

From the above findings it can be concluded that Hong Kong society is still a very "Chinese" society and the people here have inherited the "virtues" or the "behaviour" of Confucianism without consciously being aware of it.

Hong Kong was a British colony for over a hundred years till 1997. Western influence and colonialism have had a great impact on the attitude and behaviour of the Hong Kong people. The social and economic development of the last century has affected Hong Kong in a unique way. As Leung (1996) states, Hong Kong culture is a unique mix based on the interaction between traditional Chinese and Confucian cultural influence and 'the Hong Kong experience'. Most respondents feel strongly about being "Hongkongers" rather than being "Chinese". Hofstede's and Tromprenaar's dimensions of culture give us part of the picture of the culture of Hong Kong. Yet the influence of Confucianism and colonialism as well as economic development have also given Hong Kong unique characteristics, which Chinese people in other countries do not demonstrate.

Venter's (2002) summary of what different writers say about Hong Kong culture is cited here as a general guideline. Hong Kong has a high power distance score (Hofstede, 1984; Redding, 1990), a low individualism score (Hofstede, 1984; Bond, 1991; Redding, 1990), a mid masculinity score (Hofstede, 1984; Inkeles & Levinson, 1969) and a very low uncertainty avoidance score (Hofstede, 1984). In the fifth dimension, Confucian dynamism (Hofstede & Bond, 1988), Hong Kong has a very high score on long-term orientation, which stresses persistence, order, thrift and having a sense of shame.

Using Tromprenaar's dimensions, Hong Kong tends to be more on a particularist scale in the dimension of universalism vs. particularism. This means the people are sometimes inclined to resort to relationships and not to rules or the law to solve problems. They might tend to break the law to protect a friend. But it is rather extreme to say that among a group of law abiding citizens. This may bring us, rather
dangerously to the term *guanxi*[^17], or relationship, which is rather dominant in China. Hong Kong has a medium score on the emotional vs. neutral dimension (Tromprenaars, 1993; Parsons & Shils, 1951), which means Hong Kong people expect to show emotions. On the achievement vs. ascription dimension, Hong Kong tends to have more ascribed roles where individuals are judged more on the basis of who they are, whom they know and to whom they are related. Hong Kong has a diffuse orientation on the diffuse vs. specific dimension, which means all areas of social life are much more closely related and at times overlapping.

In terms of how time is viewed (Tromprenaars, 1993; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Kluckholn & Strodbeck, 1961), Hong Kong people seem to believe that time is synchronous and that time is to be used wisely and different activities can take place at the same time. People in Hong Kong tend to be always in a hurry and they seem to be doing too many things in too little time. Distance learning is very suitable in this sense when there are no regular classes to attend and learners can ‘squeeze’ time out of their heavy schedule to study the course materials.

Hong Kong people are said to believe in an external locus of control, meaning being dependent on fate and chance. They believe that the environment controls the individual (Tromprenaars, 1993; Bond, 1991). This aspect affects how learners persist in their studies and how they exert their effort in their studies when doing distance learning. They are supposed to be self-motivated and have self-control in their studies.

After examining what western writers say about the Hong Kong culture, it is important to consider what local writers say about the Hong Kong identity. As Leung (1996) states, Confucianism does have a lot of influence on Chinese minds and the Hong Kong experience is what makes Hong Kong culture unique. The political history of Hong Kong as a British colony and all the western influence gives Hong Kong a touch of internationalism and openness. The economic development in the last century has also prompted a lot of Hong Kong people to ‘move away’ from their mainland counterparts and some writers called this “desinicisation” (Ma, 1999:1). With economic development, Hong Kong citizens turned to materialism and have become proud of

[^17]: *guanxi* or relationship – a way of maintaining cordial relationship with others, either in business, in society or in organisations so as to enable smooth business transactions.
their affluent life styles. Abbas (1997) called this the phenomenon of “doom and boom”. The Hong Kong people have become a group of short-sighted materialistic people with a strong sense of transience and change. Yet they like to call themselves “Hongkongers” and they are proud of their “Hong Kong Identity”, which distinguishes them from the Chinese in China, who, they feel, are less fortunate to be under Communist rule and from other overseas Chinese.

To sum up, when we talk of someone having the “Hong Kong identity” we are referring to someone with a Chinese face, a Chinese mind and western orientation. They are westernized, modernised and materialistic due to the economic boom in the 1980s and early 1990s. They are proud of their success under the British rule and proud of their internationalism. They are also proud of their basic Chinese roots, yet, they do not want to be called “Chinese” because they want to be distinguished from the Chinese in other parts of the world, particularly from the Chinese in mainland China. They would rather be called “Hong Kong Chinese” or “Hongkongers”.

**The Hong Kong Chinese Learner**

Hong Kong Chinese learners are depicted in the literature as examination oriented, surface learners whose English proficiency has always been an impediment to learning because the medium of instruction was always English under British rule (Lau, 1997). The Hong Kong students are always accused of being passive and reserved, and of accepting whatever the teacher says. They are inclined to rote learning over creative learning, dependent on the syllabus and lacking in intellectual initiative (Biggs, 1991). The power distance dimension emphasises students’ conformity and teacher-centred education. The high collectivist ranking describes the Hong Kong learners as people who like to maintain harmony in the classroom, where the students only speak up when called upon by the teacher. Teachers will not be challenged openly and education is viewed as a way of gaining prestige in one’s social environment. In a masculine society, teachers are admired for their brilliance and keen competition is to be found. The best student is the norm to follow. The low uncertainty avoidance index signifies that Hong Kong learners seek innovative approaches to problem solving and intellectual disagreements and discussions are seen as challenging. Even Hofstede’s four
dimensions give a somewhat contradictory description of the Hong Kong learners.

In Chinese societies under the influence of Confucian culture, teacher authority and the suppression of individuality are deep-rooted (Ho, 2001). Hong Kong learners, like other Chinese learners, respect the teacher as the authority figure. 78% of our respondents are affirmative of this. To further demonstrate this, 85% of the respondents say they will always pay attention to the teacher. However, there are only about 38% who say that they will accept what the teacher says without question. These three sets of data show that the Hong Kong learners respect the teacher but will not blindly accept what the teacher says because only 20% say that the teacher is the “know-all”. Our interview findings also confirm the fact that the Hong Kong learners respect the teacher as an authority figure, someone who deserves their respect because he/she knows the subject matter better. They also treat the teacher as a facilitator of their learning and someone who can offer guidance and help when needed. Almost all our respondents say they will not challenge the teacher openly or disagree with the teacher openly even when they are certain that they themselves are right. This is to maintain the face of the teacher.

The materialistic attitude of Hong Kong people has also affected their learning styles and their choice of institution, nature of award and the overall need to take up a learning activity.

The empirical data show that 75% of the respondents say that they have to rely on reproductive learning because of the pressure of the examination system. 63.7% of the respondents say that they are used to rote learning but they do understand the concepts when they memorise the ideas. This is against what Biggs (1991) says about rote learning being a mechanical way of learning without thought or meaning. Others say that they were surface learners, who just memorised everything, when they were in their secondary school days but as they grew older and went on to higher learning, they developed the deep learning approach. This is a basic requirement in higher education when learners have to be responsible for understanding and analysing what they have learned. They are intrinsically motivated when they learn for self-betterment and for personal interest in the subject matter.
Learners in Hong Kong enjoy doing group work and they participate willingly in group discussions (Lam, 1998). Almost half of the respondents say they will not try to impress others in a group and they all seem to agree with Flowerdew (1998) that the group environment is a non-threatening environment in which to learn. 82% feel comfortable receiving feedback in group tutorials and 74.5% feel comfortable giving feedback to others in group tutorials. These findings are really enlightening as the majority of our interviewees can actively participate in group activities and enjoy the interactivity whereas western writers have always had the misconception that it is against Confucian teachings to criticise others in a group setting. The overall view is that most of our respondents prefer tutorials to lectures for the interaction, the personal contact, and the opportunities to ask questions even when lectures are well presented, informative, interesting and analytical.

Hong Kong learners can also be commended for having both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learning. The Chinese saying “there are golden houses and beautiful girls in books” gives people the misconception that Chinese learners are motivated by material things like money and outward appearance. However, according to our statistics, 87.6% of the respondents say that they are motivated by intangible rewards. In general, most people are motivated by having better job opportunities and career advancement but there are others who say they want the fulfillment of personal interest, networking opportunities or a vision for a brighter future.

Most respondents were motivated to take up the distance learning Master’s programme for better job opportunities or to satisfy their needs for credentials, which is a clear trend in Hong Kong as 78% of the respondents say so. About 85% of the respondents say that they cannot afford the time and the money for full-time study but they feel the need for academic attainment. That is why 67% of the respondents say that they prefer distance learning programmes because they fit into their schedule of spending quality time with their family.

Distance Learning

Even though distance learning started in Europe as long ago as the 19th century in the
form of correspondence courses, it was a relatively novel mode of learning in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s when overseas universities began to find this market lucrative as there were a large number of qualified potential university entrants rejected by the limited number of local universities. People who cannot afford to go overseas find distance learning degrees or even postgraduate degree programmes offered by prestigious foreign universities attractive. Since the establishment of the Open University of Hong Kong in 1989, distance learning programmes have become a more recognized mode of learning in Hong Kong.

The western model of distance learning has developed over the years from using printed texts and self study to on-line learning with separation between the teacher and the learner and between learners and learners. Distance learning can be considered acceptable in Hong Kong because the need for continuing education is increasing and societal constraints have helped promote the popularity of distance learning. The Hong Kong model of distance learning under study in this research is in fact 'supported' distance learning. These programmes are usually generated by overseas institutions. Local tuition is provided to support distance learning material, be this print-based or on-line. The local support may be locally sourced or may be via visiting academic staff from overseas (and is often a combination of both). The possibility of purely correspondence education exists as does the option of purely on-line courses but in a compact place like Hong Kong, it is relatively simple to organise face-to-face support and this is generally the preference of the learners (Cribbin, 2002: 27-28).

This research has studied the major themes in distance learning and reviewed the literature. Empirical data were collected to analyse the Hong Kong Chinese learners' approach to the distance learning mode of education. The following table is a summary of the literature on distance learning discussed in the earlier chapters in this thesis and the data obtained from the survey and the personal interviews.
Table 7.1 Summary of the Major Themes in Distance Learning and a Comparison of the Hong Kong Distance Learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance Learning - Major Themes</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
<th>Hong Kong Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profile of Distance Learners</td>
<td>Mid 20s to early 50s, may be married with one or two children,</td>
<td>Majority aged 22 to 35, average aged 33, male and female ratio of 0.96:1, 55.4% married, 30% of whom has one to three children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for pursuing distance learning programmes</td>
<td>Constraints of time, distances, finances, opportunity to hear speakers who are not easily available, social contact with other students, professional advancement, personal interests</td>
<td>Constraints of time, qualifications, finances, prestige, status, job opportunities, career advancement, flexibility, personal interests,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andragogy</td>
<td>Self directed, independent learners, draw on accumulated experience as resource in learning, aware of learning needs, want to apply skills and knowledge to real life problems &amp; tasks</td>
<td>Self-directed, independent learners, some require teacher’s supervision, some not able to apply theories to everyday life, not too clear about learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Autonomy</td>
<td>Set own objectives, methods of study and evaluation</td>
<td>Set own objectives, methods of study and evaluation, some need advice of teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Isolation</td>
<td>Learner-content interaction, Learner-learner interaction, Learner-instructor interaction</td>
<td>Learner-content isolation, learner-learner separation, Learner-instructor separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td>Surface Approach, Deep Approach, Achieving Approach, Hong Kong learner - surface learner, Rote learning without understanding</td>
<td>Surface approach – younger age, deep approach when grow older, Rote-learning with understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Teacher</td>
<td>Studio teacher, The teacher who is ‘absent’ or ‘distant’</td>
<td>The ‘absent’ teacher cannot be replaced by the electronic teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face Tutorials</td>
<td>Student-centered approaches like group discussions, students’ presentation,</td>
<td>Enjoyed face-to-face tutorials, Expect tutor ‘teaching’ at tutorials, High attendance rate even if</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 From Open University Hong Kong website: http://www.ouhk.edu.hk
19 From this quantitative survey
simulation/role plays
If attendance is optional, attendance records are discouraging
attendance is optional,

Teacher’s Feedback
Effective interaction and feedback strategies
Instant feedback
E-mail feedback
Need instant feedback from teacher,
E-mail feedback not adequate
Feel comfortable in receiving and giving feedback in group

Student Motivation
Intrinsic & Extrinsic motivation,
Hong Kong learners described as extrinsically motivated
Both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated

Persistence
Positive outcome: effective learning, desired outcome
Negative outcome: dropout, withdrawal, discontinuation, attrition
Persistent, put in great effort, external locus of control, some attribute success to luck

Role of Technology
3 generations of distance learning:
1st generation: passive correspondence type, self-study printed materials
2nd generation: printed materials, tapes, study guides, videos and readings
3rd generation: interactive, on-line courses, using the internet
Hong Kong learners exposed to technology, make use of internet for resources but do not enjoy reading electronic text, not interested in on-line conferencing, e-mail teacher cannot replace ‘real’ teacher,

From the empirical data it can be observed that the Hong Kong distance learner can be described as an adult learner whose average age is 33, male or female, and working in a managerial position. The motivation to take up a distance learning programme is both extrinsic and intrinsic. There is the need for a higher academic qualification so that future job advancement opportunities will be made available. The ego is enhanced because of society’s recognition. Some really pursue further studies for self-development and personal interests. Financial constraints and time constraints are two common problems among Hong Kong distance learners. The majority cannot afford to do full time study because of time constraints. Flexibility of time provided by distance learning programmes is a major attraction to many to pursue continuing education.

Empirical findings from this study show that the distance learners who are enrolled in the master’s programme with the Centre for Labour Market Studies (CLMS), University of Leicester are mostly female and half of them are in the 31 to 40 year old group. 55% of these people are married and about 70% have no children. 40% are university graduates and 17% are of postgraduate level. 91% of the respondents work
full-time while pursuing their master's degree programme in a distance learning mode. About 75% of the respondents work at managerial, general and supervisory level jobs and about 15% are teaching and training professionals. 85% of our respondents say that they cannot afford the time and the money to pursue full time study but the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to study is there. 89% feel the need for academic attainment and so the only alternative is to continue their studies in a distance learning mode, which can fit into their schedule for the family.

Andragogy, "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980), places the adult learner at the centre of learning with the teacher as the facilitator. Effective adult learners are more self-directed and independent. The quantitative findings show that Hong Kong learners are independent and autonomous learners because more than 80% of the respondents can set their own goals in learning and about 98% say that they are responsible for their own learning. About 75% have the discipline to organise their own learning and about 80% enjoy having control over their own learning as well as having the self-direction to learn. 85% believe that they have the self-motivation to learn. These findings are supported by the qualitative data.

Almost all the interviewees are confident that they are autonomous learners and have the discipline, the direction and motivation to set their own goals, pace their own learning and manage their own learning. These mature adult learners are not to be compared with secondary school students, who have to face the pressure of examinations and have to adopt a surface approach to learning. Adult learners are able to draw on their reservoir of accumulated experience as a rich resource in learning, are aware of their learning needs and want to apply skills and knowledge to real life problems and tasks. Distance learning provides the content, the learning platform and the consultations and there is advice provided in the tutorials so the learners can apply what they have learned to their job needs.

The idea of 'isolation' and 'distance' in distance education has been discussed and it seems that people have different interpretations of the word 'isolation'. Physical distance and 'isolation' are not strongly correlated. Some respondents feel that 'isolation' is too strong a word to describe the feelings of the distance learner. However, about 65.6% and 63.3% of the respondents feel that they are physically separated from
the teacher and from other course members respectively even though there is
geographical proximity in Hong Kong and course members can always communicate
on the phone or meet in study groups. Most respondents who took part in the
qualitative survey feel isolated from the teacher, the institution and the course content.
The isolation with the course materials means learners find the learning materials not
user-friendly enough. In distance learning programmes, the core course materials
should be prepared in such a way that learners can interpret and analyse the concepts on
their own. It might be an idea for distance learning course providers to consider
modifying the course content, making it more easily understood so that learners will not
feel a distance from the course materials.

Respondents in this survey express some very valuable comments regarding learning
styles. Most interviewees feel that they were surface learners when they were younger
because there were a lot of materials to be learnt and they had to go through
examinations which gave them a lot of pressure. To cope with the examinations, they
could only memorise as many facts as they could and they felt that they were surface
learners. As they grew older, especially when they participated in degree or master’s
programmes, they could no longer rely on mere memorization; they had to develop a
deep learning approach. This is a basic requirement in higher learning where learners
have to be responsible for understanding and analysing what they have learned. They
are intrinsically motivated when they learn for self-betterment and for personal interest
in the subject matter.

The teacher is still a very important person in the learning situation as 41% of the
learners need the teacher to explain concepts, 29% need the teacher to relate theories to
everyday life and 28.6% feel that they need instant feedback from the teacher. 43% of
the respondents feel that their teacher is not giving them enough attention. It is also
rather disappointing to see that 38.8% say they need constant direct supervision in their
learning, whereas 98% of respondents mentioned that they are responsible for their own
learning. This seems like a paradox but from a different perspective we can tell that
most respondents are responsible mature adults and can be responsible for their own
learning. However, when the role of the teacher is being discussed, most respondents
miss the traditional face-to-face teacher or the teacher whom they see as an authority
figure. They tend to say that they need the supervision and the attention of this
‘teacher’ or ‘mentor’ figure. They also feel strongly that the “absent” teacher cannot be replaced by a teacher at the other end of an electronic message.

Face-to-face tutorials are usually considered by most institutions as the best interactive support provided by distance learning course organisers, aside from the self-instructional materials presented in the various media (Fung & Carr, 1999). Biggs (1989) also states that tutorials should be participatory events for learners to express their views or to discuss issues. This view is supported in this research where over 70% of the respondents enjoy face-to-face tutorials and 75% feel comfortable giving feedback, while 82% feel comfortable receiving feedback in group tutorials. As Fung and Carr’s (1999) research shows, Hong Kong Open University students’ attendance at tutorials was very high and most students graded it as a fruitful experience. The personal interviews show similar feelings can be found among the course members. In distance learning programmes, the learners always appreciate the rare opportunities of meeting with their tutors or teachers for specific guidance or support and meeting other learners for sharing as well as support. Most evaluation given to all kinds of face-to-face tutorials is positive as long as learners feel that these are fruitful experiences.

The qualitative feedback also supports this idea as most interviewees say that these sessions are usually made up of smaller groups and they can have better interaction, feel free to participate and raise more questions. In a distance learning course, students appreciate this kind of interaction more than full-time learners because their teachers are usually at a distance and it is not too convenient for them to contact their tutors too often and they do not raise questions too readily by e-mail or fax. Therefore, most distance learners will make full use of these opportunities to get more familiar with their teachers and to have more interaction.

Hong Kong learners know the purpose of these sessions very well and they do appreciate the importance and the benefits of attending these tutorials. Without these sessions, the learners would feel left out and they might not have joined the distance learning programme at all because the learner-instructor interaction, as well as the learner-learner interaction, would be missing. Most respondents feel that these face-to-face tutorials are the highlights of the programme.
The distance learning teacher is always ‘absent’ physically, but the feedback is always given in great detail via on-line conferencing, e-mail or assignment feedback. Learners find this feedback useful and helpful. Very often learners find it a source of motivation. The distance learners know very well that they cannot always expect the physical presence of the teacher but they will have to get used to these “absent teachers” and make full use of the availability of the teacher for general guidance.

Kember’s (2000) words on students’ motivation in distance learning studies can be reiterated. Hong Kong students want “courses to be both interesting and to provide an appropriate preparation for their future career” (Kember, 2000:113). 40% commented on both intrinsic and career motivation. The social conditions are such that most learners cannot afford full-time studies and most people find that pursuing further studies on a part-time basis is a good alternative. Taking up distance learning programmes means that they can juggle their time for learning and for the family or for their jobs. The paper chase and credentialism are two major trends in this unique Hong Kong society. People are keen to attend courses either for self-betterment or for better career paths. The availability of distance learning programmes is in fact an ideal choice for adult learners who cannot afford to quit their jobs and who have heavy commitments both at work and at home.

Persistence is a Confucian virtue and a virtue of the Hong Kong Chinese. It is effort and hard work that many course members put into their studies in order to succeed. These are qualities that are required in taking up a distance learning programme because adult learners are autonomous learners and success depends on their self-direction and self-discipline when pursuing further studies on top of a heavy workload and heavy family commitments. A few respondents mentioned that they considered the idea of withdrawing from the distance learning programme in the early stages. However, they were happy that they had persisted and had completed the programme. Looking back, it was persistence on their own part, as well as luck, because some attributed their success to luck, and others say they had encouragement from people they are close to. However, it is through persistence on their own part that they succeeded. Another reason for their persistence was the high tuition fees that they had paid, because of which they felt they had to persist and complete the programme.
The attitude to the use of technology in distance learning is another aspect that seems like a paradox. Most learners are regularly exposed to the electronic learning environment, but are not comfortable using it for learning. A very good example is the need to print out reading materials instead of reading on the computer screen. However, this is only a matter of the personal reading style of the learners; providing the materials electronically still achieved the purpose of the learners reading the course materials no matter whether they were on-line materials or hard copies. The computer literacy of the course participants and the availability of the computer technology is an aid to learning via distance. It provides a lot of opportunities for learners to use the various sources of learning materials and 52% of the respondents are in the habit of accessing the Internet for learning resources. However, 90% of our respondents say they do not often use the on-line conferencing facilities provided by the university. This shows that Hong Kong learners, though computer literate, are not keen on taking part in on-line conferencing. They prefer the traditional face-to-face contact with their teachers. Only 37.7% of the respondents say the e-mail contact with the teacher can be a substitute for talking to the teacher in the classroom. Most interviewees share the same view that the e-mail teacher could not replace the ‘physical’ teacher. In general, the e-learning mode of distance learning still needs to be accepted by Hong Kong learners. However, their average age is 33. Perhaps when more e-learning programmes become available, the younger generation, who have been more exposed to computer technology when they were children, may accept this kind of learning mode more readily.

Learners’ Feedback on Distance Learning

The aim of this research was to examine if distance learning is an appropriate mode of learning for Hong Kong Chinese learners. The target was a unique group of respondents who had enrolled in the same distance learning programme. These respondents have been course members and their concerns provide important feedback for other distance learning programme providers as a guide to improvement of the delivery of the programmes. When the interviews were conducted, interviewees had the chance to express their views and to discuss their learning behaviour. Many have strong feelings on what they feel distance learning programmes should be like. These views can provide valuable information for distance learning programme providers.
who cater for Hong Kong learners so as to modify some of the practices to suit their needs.

The positive feedback mainly focused on the flexibility provided by distance learning. Some learners feel that they could manage juggling between work and studies because there are no fixed and regular classroom hours and learners can schedule their own time easily. The autonomy given to learners makes distance learning programmes ideal for mature adults who can manage their own learning.

The setting up of study groups for learners is also another positive aspect of distance learning programmes. Some learners appreciate working with a study group for peer learning. Some feel that their study groups work really well in providing support to each other, developing friendship and more importantly, comradeship. This kind of group support has been discussed in the research findings. The availability of classroom facilities, conference rooms or study rooms provided for study group meetings is indeed a help to the learners when they need to meet their group members and to work on projects together. Study groups can also help break the isolation that many distance learners experience when they feel that they are isolated from other course members, as well as being isolated from the teacher and the institution. The study groups also help break the isolation from the course materials when members work in groups to explain and analyse course content among themselves. This is especially true when the distance learning programme is an overseas programme and the study group activities function as a local support to bridge the gap between the overseas providers and the local recipients.

The number of face-to-face teaching events is another concern of the Hong Kong learners. Some learners feel that face-to-face teaching sessions are very useful and they would welcome more. More formal teaching would help them grasp more of the course content. However, this is against the principle of distance learning as the essence of distance learning is that the number of face-to-face teaching sessions is kept to a minimum to allow more flexibility. The freedom of having fewer face-to-face meetings is a characteristic of distance learning and one of the benefits provided by distance learning is that face-to-face lectures, which are time-consuming, are kept to this minimum.
During the face-to-face lectures or seminars, attendance is good. However, many respondents are typical of what western writers say about Hong Kong Chinese learners. They do not feel comfortable raising questions and they do not participate actively in these lectures. The general impression is that Hong Kong learners are too passive and they take in whatever is spoon-fed to them. To some learners, these contacts provide a rare opportunity for them to listen to their "teachers", who feed them with the concepts. They really enjoy the sessions and are satisfied with the outcome – they learn something new! The general impression given to the teachers may be that Hong Kong learners are too passive and they might not be up to par with learners from other parts of the world. There might be a lack of understanding between teachers and learners and more communication needs be introduced to bridge the gap between the two parties. In fact, the general consensus among this group of respondents is that the more face-to-face teaching there is, the better understanding they can have about the course content.

Many respondents see the need for more local support, not only in the form of study groups, but in the form of local tutorials, where local tutors can provide discussion and sharing sessions at more regular intervals. This would supplement what is "inadequate" from the small number of face-to-face teaching sessions. The local tutor should be easily available for learners to be called upon for consultation or even just to answer simple questions. This idea of the local tutors also brings in the cultural aspect of distance learning. The local tutors would be people of the same cultural group, who would be expected to understand the learners' mentality more than the overseas teachers. These tutors are supplementary to the teachers, who, being foreign to the culture, may not be able to cater to the learners' needs. Local tutors can be trained by the programme providers in terms of academic content and subject matter. They can then also play the role of the local support and the "teacher" who is always there to help. The idea of the "remote teacher" will then be eliminated.

Another suggestion is for more comprehensive introductory materials for orientation to be provided to learners at the start of the distance learning programmes. Most respondents feel the need to have a comprehensive and informative introductory package. Others feel the need for incorporating introductory notes and/or perhaps a summary of each module or unit so that distance learners can have an overview of the
subject matter and understand the materials easily. A very genuine recommendation is that course providers should consider incorporating these introductory packages so that learners will not feel so "distant" from the course materials. The introductory package is a very important part of the course materials as learners are slowly getting used to the directions and the pace of their study. A clear and comprehensive guide and some summary of the subject matter would indeed be a great help to the learners' understanding of the rest of the programme.

**Contribution to Existing Knowledge**

The major contribution of this research is that it begins to provide a critique of the existing understanding of Hong Kong culture. The main aims were to critically examine the various interpretations of Chinese and Hong Kong culture in the literature (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Tromprenaars, 1997; Bond, 1986, 1991; Scollon & Scollon, 1994, 2001). The importance of Confucianism in moulding Chinese culture and Hong Kong culture was also an issue investigated in this research. Besides providing a critical analysis of the dimensions of culture, the research also identifies some special characteristics of Hong Kong learners as a unique group. This is a contribution to existing knowledge as many studies of culture are done by foreign writers, whose views may be biased and ethnocentric (Hofstede, 1991). Although many local writers (Lau, 1982, 1984; Lau & Kuan, 1988, Abbas, 1997) talk about Hong Kong culture, they have not gone into the effect culture has on learning. This research was conducted by a Hong Kong Chinese researcher who has studied culture and the impact culture has on learning. This cultural relativity (Hofstede, 2001) is an important aspect as research into culture is a very sensitive issue and when looking at a culture, it is through the relative norms of the culture itself.

The aim of this research has not been to test theoretical propositions against a representative sample as in a positivistic approach, but rather to explore key theoretical premises in a phenomenological approach in relation to a specific case study. Using a case study of an overseas distance learning master's programme conducted specifically for Hong Kong adult learners, the researcher does not aim to generalise about the Hong Kong learner. In reality, the aim of this case study is to act as an empirical testing
ground for existing theories of culture, particularly with regard to what these have to say about Chinese learners.

Being a case study, this research has aimed for depth of analysis rather than the breadth achieved by other studies, such as those of Hofstede or Tromprenaars. Most research into Chinese learning styles focusses on Chinese learners in general and researchers did not identify a specific group of Chinese learners, like learners in Hong Kong, who may have different characteristics because of the historical, social, political and economic background of the place. Even though the study focusses on the Chinese culture, it takes into account that the Chinese who live in a different geographical region have a different orientation. The Hong Kong example is a unique one as there has been a history of over a century of foreign rule and the people who were born here have never been exposed to the "real" Chinese culture. There is also a very strong influence of the economy, which has given these people other orientations in life. It is also important that ethnography was studied inside the group and not by someone who acts like an observer. As the study was conducted by a local person, it should have more logical relevance and authenticity than one conducted by someone who comes into the society temporarily to conduct the research.

The Chinese learners being studied in the literature are usually secondary school students in the English or Mathematics classrooms (Biggs, 1991, 1987, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). This research has studied professional and adult learners. A few studies have been done by various writers on Chinese adult learners, but they have mostly studied overseas Chinese (Chan, 1999). This research focussed on adult professional learners and explored the limited amount of literature regarding Hong Kong adult professional learners. This study has taken a great leap forward in understanding this unique group of learners more thoroughly. Empirical data was also generated to provide a clearer insight into the adult learners in this unique society.

Distance learning practice has also been studied widely in the US, Australia and the UK, where the Open University has been involved rather heavily. However, this research has focussed in depth on one particular distance learning programme which has some unique features of its own. Broad research has been conducted by different people countless times. However, this case study focusses on one distance learning programme
where homogeneity can be found. This in-depth study of the participants has also examined almost all the major themes in distance learning. Since the second and third generations of distance learning are relatively new modes of learning in developing economies in the east, the impact on the learners in these cultural groups is in fact important information for other distance learning programme providers to consider in catering for their overseas learners.

This research aimed to develop a working definition of distance learning as a reference for the study of a “suitable mode of educational delivery” to provide insight for distance learning providers in improving their programmes.

**Limitations of this Research**

The two fundamental areas that this thesis has addressed are how Hong Kong adult learners differ from other Chinese adult learners and whether distance learning is a suitable mode of learning for them. Though on a small scale from which only limited conclusions can be drawn, this research has attempted to cover many of the key issues in studying the learning style of a cultural group and the impact that a specific mode of learning has on them. There are, in fact, limitations of this research, which set the scene for future studies.

The study covers only one group of respondents, namely the participants of one particular distance learning programme organised by Leicester University. The programme is a master’s programme and, therefore, the participants are postgraduate students who have had work experience. This is a unique group because they are human resource and training professionals, who joined the programme as a means of career development and professional betterment. These people demonstrate different qualities from the “Hong Kong learners” that have been discussed at great length in the literature. This specific group cannot represent “Hong Kong learners” in general. The programme that they enrolled in is not a compulsory education programme and the motivation level is different. People only enroll in the course when they are highly motivated by it, either extrinsically or intrinsically.
To study a culture, one must observe the culture as an insider. Many writers talk about Chinese culture when they are not members of that society. Hofstede's and Trompenaars's studies, though global in nature, are not specific to each individual culture. There are a lot of generalisations about individual cultures, either grouping cultures within nationalities or within geographical boundaries. Grouping Chinese culture by nationalities is, in fact a major disadvantage. Chinese people are present everywhere and they come from various subgroups e.g. Taiwanese Chinese, Singaporean Chinese, mainland Chinese, American Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese. Each of these groups has gone through different changes politically, socially, economically and historically. They manifest different characteristics related to their place of origin. The study of Chinese culture in this research emphasises "the Chinese culture" and "Confucianism". Even though local writers have been cited a lot in this research, their views have mainly focussed on the "Chineseness" of the people they studied, putting little emphasis on the "Hongkongness" of this unique group.

The size of this study is relatively small compared to studies like Hofstede's and Tromprenaars. The small number of respondents can only give a general idea about how this small group of participants feel. It cannot be a representative survey of all Chinese distance learners in Hong Kong. It provides a small sample of distance learners of a particular age group who might be able to give valuable feedback on their learning experience.

No comparison has been drawn between adult learners and children or younger learners. Most writers focus on learners at school but this research emphasises adult professional learners out of school. The literature describes young learners under pressure from the education system, the examination system and from peers. However, adult learners learn for their own interest, pay their own fees and are more motivated to enroll in the programme of their choice. The findings of this research should then be treated from a different angle.

Gender issues might be interesting to study but this study has not covered the difference between male and female learning behaviour and learning motivation. The issue of family commitment might be important when comparing the two genders.
Studies of distance learning were conducted in the US some two decades ago. They almost equated the term "distance learning" with "on-line learning" or "e-learning. However, in Britain, the studies on this issue are quite recent. They are still looking at distance learning programmes with hard copies of teaching materials and face-to-face teaching, which are being completely replaced in the US by electronic means. This study could have put more emphasis on the modern technology that aids distance learning. However, this was not one of the research questions and thus the findings are biased towards the traditional means of distance learning.

Future Studies

This case study only managed to cover one group of approximately 100 respondents from one distance learning MSc programme. The scale of the research is too small to consider the results as being representative of Hong Kong learners. It is recommended that future studies should cover a bigger population or target a more heterogeneous group of learners. These respondents could be drawn from different distance learning programmes to give a more representative picture of Hong Kong adult learners.

Future studies could also include adult and child/teenage learners from Hong Kong to compare their learning attitudes. School and university learners are under the constraints of the education system and they are under a different form of pressure and learn in a different environment.

Gender issues might be another topic worth studying in future research. A lot of literature has covered male and female motivation as well as the different attitudes of the two sexes towards family commitments and career development. These aspects could be interesting areas to explore. Many researchers have been looking at sexual discrimination and equality issues in Hong Kong. The different levels of participation in lifelong learning is an area that future research should focus on because more and more females are joining the workforce and taking up continuing education for academic and professional betterment.

Future research should also concentrate on e-learning. More emphasis should be placed on how electronic means are used to learn and to communicate. E-learning and
distance learning have become almost synonymous in the global scene and future studies should aim to find out more about e-learning and e-teaching.
Bibliography


Biggs, J.B. (1992). Why and how do Hong Kong students learn? Using the learning and study process questionnaire. Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong.


Bond, M., & Hwang, K.K. (1986). The social psychology of the Chinese people. In M. Bond (Ed.), *The psychology of the Chinese people*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.


development: social stratification in Chinese societies, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.


pedagogical perspectives, Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong.

Cribbin, J. (2002). Growth and development of lifelong learning in Hong Kong. In J. Cribbin, & P. Kennedy (Eds.), Lifelong learning in action: Hong Kong practitioners' perspectives, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Cribbin, J., & Kennedy, P. (2002). (Eds.), Lifelong learning in action: Hong Kong practitioners' perspectives. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.


HKU SPACE (Research and Development Unit) (2001). The 2001 survey on the Demand for continuing education in Hong Kong. HKU SPACE

Hong Kong Productivity Council (1986). *In-service training as a means of developing human resources in Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong Productivity Council for the Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development


Jegede, O., & Shive, G., (Eds.), (2001). *Open and distance education in the Asia Pacific region.* The Open University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.


Planning Unit, (2004). The Open University of Hong Kong.
Planning Unit, (2005). The Open University of Hong Kong.

Research and Development Unit, (2005). Hong Kong University SPACE,


Tan, I. (1955). Recipes for success. In J. Holford, D. Gardner, & J. Ng (Eds.), *The Hong Kong adult education handbook, 1995-6.* Longman Hong Kong,


The Open University of Hong Kong, (2005). University website: http://www.ouhk.edu.hk


Venter, K. (2002a). Learners in Hong Kong, Malaysia and the UK. In J. Cribbin, & P. Kennedy, P. (Eds.), *Lifelong learning in action: Hong Kong practitioners' perspectives,* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Venter, K. (2002b). *Common careers, different experiences: women managers in Hong Kong and Britain.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.


Appendix A

Hong Kong Learner Survey – Focus Group

Pansy Lam – CLMS PhD research

This survey is to collect data for a PhD research project on cultural influences in using the distance learning mode of education. I would be very grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this, as it would make a great difference to the research. Please complete all questions, however your name is optional.

Name: ______________________  Intake: ______

Cultural traits of the Hong Kong Chinese learner

1. Hong Kong Chinese learners are described as passive receivers of knowledge who do not like to ask questions.

2. Is ‘face saving’ an important issue for the Hong Kong Chinese learner?
   Yes - why?  No - why?

3. Do you think the Hong Kong Chinese learner likes group work?
   Yes - why?  No - why?

4. The Chinese learner in Hong Kong has a lot of respect for the teacher.
   Yes - why?  No - why?
Learning style of the Hong Kong Learner

1. Do you use ‘rote learning’ (by memorisation) when you are preparing for exams?
   
   Yes - why? No - why?

2. Group tutorials are useful for distance learning students. Can you rank this on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the most useful?

3. How important is learning at your own pace? Can you rank this on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the most important?

4. How important is learning at your own time? Can you rank this on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the most important?

Motivation to learning

1. My motivation for pursuing an MSc degree is ..... 

2. I need to be supervised in learning.
   
   Yes - why No - why?
Social concerns of the Hong Kong learner

1. I must get an MSc degree because my friends are getting one.
   Yes - why? No - why?

2. My family will be proud of me if I get my MSc.
   Yes - why? No - why?

Family Commitments

1. My family life is the most important. Can you rank this on a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being the most important? Why?

2. Doing a distance learning degree will not affect my family life too much.
   Yes - why? No - why?
Use of Technology

1. I am more comfortable reading ‘printed’ materials than reading electronic documents.
   Yes - why?  
   No - why?

2. I enjoy communicating with my teacher on e-mail or electronically.
   Yes - why?  
   No - why?

3. I am comfortable with the ‘remote’ teacher on the computer.
   Yes - why?  
   No - why?

4. I prefer ‘face-to-face’ interaction in the classroom to learning on my own.
   Yes - why?  
   No - why?

5. The issue of ‘losing face’ will not occur if I interact with my teacher electronically.
   Yes - why?  
   No - why?

Thank you for your co-operation. 
If you are interested in the topic, please contact Pansy Lam at 7778-7860 or at lcpansy@ust.hk
Appendix B
Survey Questionnaire

Culture and Distance Learning in Hong Kong

This survey is part of a doctorate degree study with the CLMS, Leicester University, on Culture and Distance Learning in Hong Kong. It aims at collecting opinions from distance education Chinese learners in Hong Kong on the distance learning mode of education.

In this survey, distance learning means
“the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance, and tuition of a tutorial organization” Holmberg (1977:9).

Another aspect is on the “communication between the teacher and the learner” which “must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices” Moore (1973, 664).

The findings of this research will be relevant for education and training providers who cater for the needs of Hong Kong Chinese learners.

Please complete both sections of this questionnaire.

I. Personal Information (please choose the appropriate answer and fill in the blanks with the appropriate letter)

1. I am _____ . (A) male (B) female.
2. I am _____ years old. (A) 20-30 (B) 31-40 (C) 41-50 (D) 51 and above
3. I am _____.
   (A) Hong Kong Chinese  (B) Chinese from Mainland China
   (C) Overseas Chinese  (D) Chinese from Taiwan  (E) non-Chinese
4. I am _____.
   (A) single (B) married (C) separated (D) divorced (E) widowed
5. I have _____ children (* put ‘no’ if you have none and skip question 6 & 7)
6. My youngest child is _____ years old.
7. My oldest child is _____ years old.
8. I live _____.
   (A) alone (B) with my spouse alone (C) with my spouse and children
   (D) with my spouse, children and parents (E) with my spouse, children and parents-in-laws
   (F) with other relatives
9. I finished full time schooling _____ years ago.
10. I completed _____.
    (A) secondary school  (B) tertiary education  (C) university education
    (D) post-graduate level education  (E) vocational education
11. I spend _____ hours on average studying at home every week.
12. I am _____.
    (A) working full time (B) working part-time (C) not working
11.1 I am in a _____ position.
    (A) supervisory  (B) general  (C) managerial  (D) finance and banking
    (E) technical  (F) servicing  (G) manufacturing  (H) teaching and training
    (I) others ______ (please specify)
Part II Please complete the following section by putting an 'X' in the appropriate box.

In the following boxes, 1 stands for “Strongly Agree” 
2 stands for “Agree” 
3 stands for “Not Sure” 
4 stands for “Disagree” 
5 stands for “Strongly Disagree”

A. Cultural Traits of the Hong Kong Learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A Hong Kong Chinese is a ‘Chinese’.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I accept Confucius teachings on the 'structured hierarchy (□□)' in society.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I accept Confucius’ teachings on the ‘5 relationships (□□)’ with others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am affected by traditions and culture from the West.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I believe in the idea of gaining, giving and maintaining “face” as central parts of interpersonal interaction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I am very concerned about money and status.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I respect a teacher as an authority in his/her field of knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I feel comfortable addressing my teacher by his/her first name.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I always pay attention to the teacher in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I will always accept what the teacher says.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The teacher is a “know-all” to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I will follow the instructions of the teacher without question.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I will ‘lose face’ in front of the teacher if I do not know an answer to his/her question.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I am most concerned with saving “face” when interacting with my classmates in a group discussion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I will not lose face if I make a wrong judgement in an e-mail to my teacher alone.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I believe that everyone is equal in a group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I believe that collaborative effort is required in group work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I believe that we have to cooperate in a group and help each other to complete the task assigned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>I tend to keep quiet in a group discussion even when I am absolutely sure that I am correct.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I don’t want to exert myself too much in a group discussion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I don’t want to be seen as trying to impress others unduly in a group discussion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Learning Styles of the Hong Kong Learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am used to rote learning, i.e. memorising all the important points in a book and reproducing them in the examination.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>When I memorise ideas, I understand the concepts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>'Critical thinking' does not take place when I memorise ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I prefer listening to lectures which deliver all the 'right' concepts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The language of instruction used in the classroom can affect my understanding of the concepts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I prefer being able to study in my own time and at my own pace.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I am used to having all the lecture materials provided by the teacher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I do not enjoy taking part in group tutorials.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I am not confident about sharing my views with others in tutorials.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I do not like studying with others in group tutorials.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I do not feel comfortable giving feedback to others in group tutorials.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I do not feel comfortable receiving feedback from my peers in group discussions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I always take the initiative and seek to integrate more information by reading and discussing using every available intellectual avenue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I have very little choice and control over the content and method of study.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I am always feel there is an excessive amount of materials to be learned in my course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I feel that individual freedom (learner autonomy) is extremely necessary in my own studies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I feel that it is the examination system in Hong Kong that requires the reproduction of what has been learned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Instant evaluation and feedback from the teacher is extremely important to my learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Motivation to Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am highly motivated to work hard to pursue a further degree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I feel that my ego is enhanced if I achieve good grades through hard work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am motivated to learn by the attraction of prestige and status.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am motivated to learn by the attraction of tangible rewards such as a pay rise or promotion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I am motivated to learn by intangible rewards such as developing a critical self and a more systematic way of thinking.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### D. Social Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Hong Kong is a place that puts a lot of emphasis on academic attainments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Paper chasing/ 'credentialism' has become a trend in Hong Kong.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Good academic qualifications are equivalent to 'success' in Hong Kong.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I prefer to pursue further studies full time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I cannot afford the time to go back to full-time study.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I cannot afford financially to quit my job for full-time study.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I need to pursue further off-the-job training after work for my career development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### E. Family Commitments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I feel that I must look after my family before pursuing my own academic attainment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I find it impossible to attend classes after work because I need to spend time with my family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>It is easier for me to pursue a distance learning programme of study than a regular taught programme because I can fit study time around my family time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I believe in having and spending quality time with my family regularly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My responsibility for the family is to give them all my time after work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I feel that it is unfair to my family if I use family time for study.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>My family will be proud of me if I acquire an MSc degree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### F. Distance Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I have the discipline to organize my own learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I can set learning goals on my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I am responsible for my own learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am very aware of the physical distance from my teacher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I am very aware of the physical distance from other course members.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I feel that the teacher is not giving me adequate attention.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I feel a strong sense of being &quot;isolated&quot; from other course members.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I feel that instant feedback is always available from my teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I enjoy being able to have control over the pace of my own learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I have the necessary self-direction to learn on my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I have the necessary self-motivation to learn on my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I can always understand the concepts from my readings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I am always able to relate theories to everyday life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I need constant direct supervision in my learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
G. Use of Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I prefer reading 'printed' materials and hard copies of books to reading on the computer screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I always access the web site of my University for information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I always access the Internet for supplementary information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I often get in touch with my teacher or supervisor by e-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Contacting a teacher by e-mail is a satisfactory substitute for a teacher talking to me in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I use the on-line conferencing facilities provided by the University a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I often fax my assignments to my teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for your co-operation! Good luck to your MSc Study!
Appendix C

Culture and Distance Learning in Hong Kong

Interview Guide

1. Personal details

age, gender, marital status, educational attainment, last attended school, family status, age of children, work pattern, job nature, position at work

2. Cultural Traits of the Hong Kong Learner

How would you define “Chinese”?
How would you define “HK Chinese”?
What kind of “Chinese” are you?
What do you know about “Confucianism”?
Do you think Hong Kong is a Confucian society?
How do you see your relationship with your teachers?
Do you respect your teachers as a source of knowledge?
How do you see yourself in a “group” in a learning situation?
What do you feel about the issue of “face”?

3. Learning Style of the HK Learner

What are your views on “rote learning”?
What do you feel about “critical thinking”?
How would you compare attending lectures with attending tutorials?
How do you see the role of the teacher in facilitating your learning?
How do you help yourself in your own learning?
What do you feel about the examination system in HK?
Do you study using a surface approach, deep approach or achieving approach

4. Motivation

What motivates you in your learning?

5. Social Issues

How do you feel about the social values in HK regarding learning and pursuing further studies?
Are you ready and able to go back to school full time?
Are you ready and able to study part-time?
6. Family Commitment

Does your family have any effect on your pursuing further studies?

7. Distance Learning

What do you feel about distance learning?
Can you describe some characteristics of distance learning?
What are the pros and cons of distance learning?
How would you describe your experience in studying this MSc programme by distance learning?
Have you had any other experience of doing other distance learning programmes?
Can you describe the experience?

8. Role of Technology

What do you think about the role of technology in learning?
How comfortable are you in using technology in learning?
Appendix D

Interview Analysis Index

1. **Chinese**
   1.1 Chinese
   1.2 Hong Kong Chinese
   1.3 Hongkonger
   1.4 Overseas Chinese

2. **Confucianism**
   2.1 structured hierarchy
   2.2 5 relationship
   2.3 respect for seniors
   2.4 family - responsibility
   2.5 face (others, self)
      2.5.1 maintaining face (self, others)
      2.5.2 giving face (others)
   2.6 teacher
      2.6.1 authority
      2.6.2 know-all
      2.6.3 guidance
      2.6.4 face
      2.6.5 feedback from teacher
   2.7 group
      2.7.1 face
      2.7.2 exert oneself
      2.7.3 group effort
      2.7.4 impress others
      2.7.5 giving, receiving feedback

3. **Hong Kong Culture**
   3.1 western influence
   3.2 money
   3.3 status

4. **Hong Kong Chinese Learner**
   4.1 rote learning
      4.1.1 memorisation
      4.1.2 understand concepts
      4.1.3 critical thinking
   4.2 surface approach
   4.3 deep approach
   4.4 achieving approach
   4.5 lectures - passive
   4.6 tutorials - interactive
   4.7 group discussion - peer feedback
   4.8 teacher’s instant feedback
5. **Motivation**
   5.1 intrinsic motivation
      5.1.1 intangible rewards e.g. ego, prestige, status
      5.1.2 good grades
   5.2 extrinsic motivation
      5.2.1 tangible rewards e.g. pay rise, promotion

6. **Social Issues**
   6.1 credentialism
   6.2 academic attainment
   6.3 full time study – career development
      6.3.1 financial burden
      6.3.2 time constraints

7. **Family Commitment**
   7.1 responsibility
   7.2 quality time with family
   7.3 study time fit around family time
   7.4 family feel proud of academic attainment

8. **Distance Learning**
   8.1 self discipline
   8.2 self direction
   8.3 self motivation
   8.4 set own learning goals
   8.5 responsible for own learning
   8.6 physical distance
      8.6.1 with teacher
      8.6.2 with fellow students
      8.6.3 with materials
   8.5 isolation
   8.6 understand and relate theories
   8.7 teachers’ supervision

9. **Technology**
   9.1 printed materials
   9.2 websites
   9.3 Internet
   9.4 e-mail teacher
   9.5 fax to teacher
   9.6 on-line conference (blackboard)