Expatriates Emotional Challenges and Coping Strategies: A qualitative Study

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. 1
List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... 6
List of Figures .......................................................................................................................... 6
Abstract ................................................................................................................................. 7
Declaration ............................................................................................................................... 9
Copyright statement ................................................................................................................ 10
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 11

## 1. Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 12

1.1 Introduction to the current study .................................................................................. 12
1.2 What is counselling psychology? ................................................................................. 12
   1.2.1 International Context of Counselling Psychology ........................................... 15
   1.2.2 Multicultural Counselling Psychology .............................................................. 16
   1.2.3 Counselling Psychology & Expatriation ............................................................ 18
1.3 Key Definitions ............................................................................................................... 20
   1.3.1 Challenge ........................................................................................................... 20
   1.3.2 Expatriate .......................................................................................................... 20
   1.3.4 Expatriates vs Immigrants ............................................................................... 20
   1.3.5 Foreign Assignment Success ............................................................................ 21
   1.3.6 Western Culture ................................................................................................. 21
1.4 Aim & Research Questions ........................................................................................... 22
1.5 Structure of the Thesis ................................................................................................... 22

## 2. Literature Review ............................................................................................................ 25

2.1. Introduction .................................................................................................................... 25
2.2. China as a host country ............................................................................................... 26
2.3. Types of Expatriation .................................................................................................. 30
2.4. Gender differences among expatriates ....................................................................... 32
2.5. Culture & Cultural differences .................................................................................... 33
   2.5.1. Chinese Culture ............................................................................................... 34
   2.5.2. Guanxi in China ............................................................................................... 35
   2.5.3. Guanxi at work ............................................................................................... 36
2.6. Forms of expatriate adjustment .................................................................................... 37
   2.6.1. General Adjustment ......................................................................................... 38
   2.6.2. Work Adjustment ............................................................................................ 39
Sections:

2. Methodology
   2.1 Introduction
   2.2 Research Design
      2.2.1 Qualitative Research
      2.2.2 Philosophical Underpinnings
      2.2.3 Narrative Inquiry
      2.2.4 My stand in the research
   2.3 Method
      2.3.1 Participant Recruitment
      2.3.2 Participants
   2.4 Presenting the Participants
      2.4.1 Interview One – Philip
      2.4.2 Interview two – Brigitte
      2.4.3 Interview three – Tania
      2.4.4 Interview four – Aby
      2.4.5 Interview 5 - Claire
      2.4.6 Interview 6 - Zoe
   2.5 Researcher
   2.6 Data Collection
      2.6.1 Conversational Interviews
      2.6.2 Interview Schedule & Protocol
      2.6.3 Procedure
   2.7 Emotional Challenges during expatriation
      2.7.1 Facing culture shock
      2.7.2 Psychological challenges
      2.7.3 Work related Challenges
      2.7.4 Non-work related Challenges
   2.8 Personality traits
   2.9 Coping strategies & Counselling Psychology
   2.10 Counselling Psychology and expatriates
   2.11 Rationale
   2.12 Research questions
   Chapter summary

3. Methodology
   3.1 Introduction
   3.2 Research Design
      3.2.1 Qualitative Research
      3.2.2 Philosophical Underpinnings
      3.2.3 Narrative Inquiry
      3.2.4 My stand in the research
   3.3 Method
      3.3.1 Participant Recruitment
      3.3.2 Participants
   3.4 Presenting the Participants
      3.4.1 Interview One – Philip
      3.4.2 Interview two – Brigitte
      3.4.3 Interview three – Tania
      3.4.4 Interview four – Aby
      3.4.5 Interview 5 - Claire
      3.4.6 Interview 6 - Zoe
   3.5 Researcher
   3.6 Data Collection
      3.6.1 Conversational Interviews
      3.6.2 Interview Schedule & Protocol
      3.6.3 Procedure
Chapter Summary

3.1. Ethical issues
  3.1.1. Impact and importance
  3.1.2. Commitment to rigour
  3.1.3. Sensitivity to Context
  3.1.4. Persuasiveness
  3.1.5. Coherence
  3.1.6. Transparency
  3.1.7. Trustworthiness

4. Analysis
  4.1. Introduction
  4.2. Presentation of the findings
  4.3. Summary of the participants’ stories
  4.4. Emotional Challenges
    4.4.1. Emotional Difficulties
    4.4.2. Positive Challenges
    4.4.3. The challenge of the unknown
    4.4.4. Repatriation
  4.5. Coping Strategies
    4.5.1. Social Network
    4.5.2. Importance of the Family
    4.5.3. Professional Support
  4.6. Adjustment
    4.6.1. Adjustment to daily life
    4.6.2. Living conditions
    4.6.3. Work Satisfaction
  4.7. Personality
## 7. Conclusion

7.1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 199

7.2. Purpose of the study ............................................................................................... 199

7.3. Narrative framework: the methodology ................................................................. 200

7.4. Limitations of the Study ......................................................................................... 201

7.5. Main insights from the literature and findings ...................................................... 202

7.6. Emotional Challenges ............................................................................................ 203

7.7. Coping Strategies ................................................................................................. 204

7.8. Adjustment ............................................................................................................. 205

7.9. Personality ............................................................................................................. 206

7.10. Cultural Differences ............................................................................................ 206

7.12. Summary of the key implications of the thesis .................................................. 208

7.13. Contribution to knowledge .................................................................................... 209

7.14. Further research possibilities ............................................................................... 212

References .................................................................................................................... 214

Appendices ................................................................................................................... 249
List of Tables

TABLE 1 - PARTICIPANT’S DEMOGRAPHICS ......................................................72
TABLE 2 - PROCEDURE DETAILS .................................................................75
TABLE 3 - ANALYTICAL PROCESS ...............................................................89
TABLE 4 - LIST OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES 1 .....................................98
TABLE 5 - TRANSCRIPTION TIME OF EACH INTER 1 ................................140

List of Figures

FIGURE 1: MOST POPULAR NATIONALITIES ..............................................28
FIGURE 2: TOP CITIES FOR EXPATRIATES ..............................................28
FIGURE 3: ADJUSTMENT RELATED FACTORS .........................................40
FIGURE 4: U-CURVE HYPOTHESIS ............................................................45
FIGURE 5 - COPING STRATEGIES ..............................................................55
Expatriates Emotional Challenges and Coping Strategies:
A qualitative Study
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Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Abstract

In the last few decades expatriation to East Asia and China in particular has become an important phenomenon investigated by research studies. Undoubtedly, expatriates face multiple emotional challenges during their stay in China, such as adjustment, cultural adaptation, work related difficulties, language barriers and family separation. The present study aimed to explore in depth the specific psychological needs of expatriates based on their personal subjective opinion from a Counselling Psychology perspective. A narratively informed Thematic Analysis design was used and conversational interviews conducted to generate accounts of the phenomenon of expatriation and the emotional challenges people faced due to a change of country and culture. Five main themes were identified and special emphasis was given to the subthemes which consisted the new and unique findings of the current thesis: I) Emotional Challenges: a) emotional difficulties, b) positive challenges, c) the challenge of the unknown and d) repatriation. As coping strategies, emphasis was given to a) social network, b) the importance of the family, and c) professional support. The issue of adjustment, which included three subthemes a) adjustment to daily life b) living conditions and c) work satisfaction was also discussed. The fourth theme, Personality, included two subthemes: a) Traits and b) Personal Development. The final theme was cultural differences, which included three subthemes: a) communication and interaction with locals, b) cultural differences at work and c) culture shock.

The study found that emotional challenges have both positive and negative impacts on the life and well-being of expatriates. Common emotional difficulties identified were anxiety, distress, depression, loss, cultural isolation and loneliness, while positive aspects included working towards better professional and personal development. The study also identified social interaction as the main expatriate coping strategy and community counselling work was suggested as a form of support.
Personality traits were identified as an important variable which can have a significant influence on emotional challenges as a form of coping strategy. A detailed account of the issues concerning adjustment to daily life was also discussed. Emphasis was also given to work adjustment as a coping strategy and cultural differences was discussed as a form of emotional difficulties. The contribution of the current qualitative research is discussed and further clinical interventions are suggested.

**Key Words:** Expatriation, Emotional Challenges, Counselling Psychology, China
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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the current study

The present thesis explores the emotional challenges and coping strategies of expatriate men and women who lived and worked in Shanghai, China. As will be seen in later chapters, an extensive literature base exists on the general, cross-cultural, work adjustment and cross-cultural differences. Gender and cultural differences among expatriates have also been researched. Yet, there is a paucity of research exploring the emotional difficulties expatriates face in a new environment, the psychological issues these challenges can cause, and the strategies used to cope with these challenges and emotional difficulties. This paucity also extends to counselling, despite the field’s emphasis on immigration and minorities’ well-being. Specifically, no previous research has explored expatriate difficulties from a counselling psychology perspective in order to bring awareness to therapists and Counselling Psychology research of the difficulties expatriates have when they live and work in a foreign environment such as Shanghai.

Previous counselling psychology research does not give an in depth insight into the emotional challenges that might be faced due to relocation nor to effective coping strategies of an expatriate population in China. This study aims to address these areas, by using a qualitative research design. Six open ended conversational interviews were conducted with expatriates living and working in Shanghai, at that time. The rationale behind this research and its methodology is outlined in later sections. In the present chapter, as the focus of the research specifically relates to the emotional challenges and coping strategies of expatriates and how counselling psychologists can help with these challenges, I will firstly introduce the field of counselling in more detail. Finally, the structure of the thesis as a whole is outlined.

1.2 What is counselling psychology?

Counselling psychology is an applied branch of Psychology established within the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 1982, receiving divisional status in 1994 (Pugh & Coyle, 2000). Counselling Psychology in the UK is a distinct profession focusing on the
application of psychological and psychotherapeutic theory and research to clinical practice (BPS, 2014). The existence of counselling psychology as a profession outside the UK in locations including the US, Australia, New Zealand, China, Hong Kong, Germany, Greece and elsewhere has been described in the literature. There are a number of similarities of these different counselling psychology professions both in theory and in practice, however, due to individual and cultural diversity, there are also many differences. As a result, providing a definition of counselling psychology which represents all these different countries might be difficult (Suri – Khan, & Purohit, 2017). As the current research was located in the UK counselling psychology field, it is useful to look at such definitions in the UK context. One theory that fits with my educational and training background is the one used by Feltham & Hanley (2017). They describe counselling and psychotherapy mainly but not exclusively

“as a listening and talking based method which addresses psychological and sometimes psychosomatic problems, including deep and prolonged human suffering, situational dilemmas, crises and developmental needs, and aspirations towards the realisation potential. In contrast to biomedical approaches, counselling therapies operate without medication or other physical interventions and may be concerned not only with mental health but with spiritual, philosophical and other aspects of living” (Feltham & Hanley, 2017 (p.2).

Traditionally, Counselling Psychology is related to humanistic and existential-phenomenological philosophies in its aim to promote individual well-being (Aldarondo, 2007; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). This means that no singular orientation within the discipline should be considered superior to the alternatives. The plurality of counselling psychology is evidenced by the recognition of the three main traditions: psychoanalytic-
psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural and existential-phenomenological approaches by both the BPS and Heath and Care Professions Council (HCPC) o (Orlans & Scoyoc, 2008).

Counselling psychology employs a wide array of assessment and intervention strategies to support individuals, families, groups, and organisation with their educational, developmental and adjustment concerns (Leong, Savickas & Leach, 2011). Counselling psychology is described as having a remedial role which helps clients to cope with existing or emerging mental health problems. Counselling psychologists are informed by existential and social constructionist ideas; they hold the position that there is no unitary or immutable truth in the experience of living and instead accept that there can be as many possibilities as there are perspectives (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). Therapists generally intervene with people experiencing adjustment difficulties by emphasising the strengths and assets of a client (Gelso, Williams & Fertz, 2002).

Counselling Psychology seeks to mediate psychological distress and promote mental well-being through an exploration of individual subjective experiences (Aldarondo, 2007). Theorists suggest that counselling psychology should shift from an individualist focus and embrace social and cultural explanations of distress and broader psychological interventions (Kagan, Tindall & Robinson, 2010). Counselling psychologists adhering to the scientist-practitioner model are trained to be equally skilled in practice, demonstrating their competence in at least two or three approaches of psychological therapies (Ward, Hogan & Menns, 2001). Additionally, counselling psychologists learn how to use a variety of research methodologies, such as qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. This reflects the belief that Counselling Psychologists should be contributors to research generation and achieve rigour in their therapeutic practice (Ward et al., 2011). Due to the fact that the present thesis aims to analyse the subjective experiences of expatriates from different ethnicities who lived and worked in
Shanghai via a counselling psychology perspective in the hope that the thesis can be helpful to therapists from different ethical and racial backgrounds, it would be useful to provide some details about the international context of counselling psychology as well as multicultural counselling psychology.

1.2.1 International Context of Counselling Psychology

As mentioned above, counselling psychology is a worldwide profession. Different countries might have theoretical similarities or differences which frequently are a result of different cultural backgrounds so therapists might follow the same theoretical principles, but different ways of practice. For many years, theorists suggested that counselling psychology needed to meet the challenges of globalization by examining the culturally encapsulated assumptions within the theories, models and practices (Leong & Ponterotto, 2003). The advancement of an international and global perspective in the counselling field during the past two decades has been facilitated in large part by theorists who recognized the necessity to transcend ethnocentric biases both in theory and practice (Leong & Blustein, 2000). With the advent and maturation of the internet, globalization, immigration and migration of world citizens and the increasing globalization of business, it is apparent that once-separate societies are becoming interconnected (Cheung, 2000). American psychology has been criticized as being myopic and Anglo-Centric (Trimble, 2001). Due to this, international counselling psychology focuses on the fact that therapists need to counter their personal and professional ethnocentrism to become more effective counselling psychologists (Pedersen & Leong, 1997).

Most therapists are neither more nor less ethnocentric than the general public. However, there is evidence that ethnocentric biases contribute to misattribution and cultural encapsulation in decision making (Padersen & Leong, 1997). As therapists we should therefore be more aware of the approaches to counselling practised in other
cultures which could also be applied to our own context. This is a particularly important aspect for therapists who work with the expatriate population since clients might be from different cultural backgrounds living in a third country. Therapists should be aware of the different backgrounds as well as the third country’s (i.e. China) cultural context. International Psychology as a discipline thus aims to help therapists become cross-culturally influenced and competent. This will help therapists to avoid ethnocentricity, in which therapists will avoid making assumptions based only on their own culture and based on the norms of their own country of origin. Also, they will become more open to accepting the worldviews of others, accept differences across cultures as simply differences, and avoid making culturally based assumptions (Heppner, 2006).

1.2.2 Multicultural Counselling Psychology

This thesis also touches on the field of multicultural Counselling Psychology as it is based on the accounts of six expatriates from different ethnic backgrounds, all of whom lived and worked in a third and culturally different foreign country. The multicultural competencies for counselling psychologists were developed by leading researchers in order to provide guidelines for ethical counselling practice from multicultural and culturally specific perspectives (Arrendondo, 1998). Researchers noted that counselling professionals had been using theories and approaches which were mostly focused on American and European societies and it frequently failed to address the problems of minorities within those societies (Vera & Speight, 2003). Counselling psychologists should be able to improve specific characteristics in order to be able to work with ethnic minorities or specific groups. The main areas for development are attitudes and beliefs in which therapists are aware of their own assumptions, values and biases; knowledge in order to understand the different world views of culturally diverse clients and skills to develop appropriate intervention strategies and techniques (Ponterotto, Fuertes & Chen, 2000).
These skills are important for therapists who offer therapy sessions to expatriate clients and also for therapists who are members of the same expatriate community themselves. Therapists who work with expatriates from afar and do not have previous experience should consider expatriates as members of a minority, multicultural group, thus, they have a different approach on how they will adjust to the new environment (Ponterotto et al., 2000). Both therapist groups should be aware that their clients might have developed a different cultural perception due to the influence of the third country’s culture, so any assumptions on the perceptions of the host country or social norms should be avoided. Therapists can give expatriate clients support and generate and construct appropriate behaviour in order to accept and understand the new cultural setting (Sue & Sue, 2012). Behavioural tasks can be provided in order to bring the client closer to the host country culture and also by trying to achieve a cognitive reconstruction of the client (Mak, 2015). Behavioural activation can be achieved by reinforcing the client to engage with activities which can be culturally influenced and they can help clients to learn elements of the host country culture (Mak, 2015). This can help the client to achieve a better therapeutic outcome (Sue & Sue, 2012).

This, however, requires the therapist to be fully aware and knowledgeable of the culture they are required to work with. In many cases it is difficult for the therapist to be aware of all the different cultures and know their characteristics. Thus, the therapist should explore and identify some cultural elements of the client and try to combine them with other characteristics of the host country culture. For instance, identifying how a European client can engage with Chinese culture by finding some tasks where the client will be introduced to it. Furthermore, if a client is facing difficulties with adjustment, the therapist can follow CBT therapeutic technique and other cognitive related therapies in order to form cognitive schemas to explain the culture to an expatriate client and inform them of the differences and difficulties they are about to face. They can also link
knowledge with behaviour and specifically cultural behaviour and explanations. Studies have also found the use of mindfulness or other therapeutic techniques such as Person Centred or Psychodynamic can be useful in the understating of different perspectives which can be used by a therapist to assist the expatriate client in the process of understanding a new culture and new perspectives. It brings to counselling psychologists and multicultural Counselling Psychology research an awareness of the attitudes and beliefs of expatriates, an understanding of the world view of culturally diverse clients and the skills a therapist can develop in order to use appropriate intervention strategies and techniques. Adopting this view, I acknowledge as part of my professional identity a focus on a multicultural minority group such as expatriates and the emotional challenges they might face and how such conditions can influence their mental health and well-being. I believe that the practice of psychology can contribute to improving these situations and as a researcher this paper contributes to the knowledge of counselling psychologists concerning the challenges faced by expatriates.

1.2.3 Counselling Psychology & Expatriation

Counselling psychology can relate to the phenomenon of expatriation in various ways. First and foremost, counselling can be beneficial for expatriates who might be facing emotional difficulties either due to difficulties such as the separation from home, family and friends or to challenges at work like cultural isolation, loneliness and working in a culturally different environment. Counselling can provide expatriates with a safe and confidential environment in order to explore their thoughts and behaviour within the new cultural environment. It can also help them change their perspective on how to approach the new societal norms, customs, traditions and achieve better adjustment. Psychological therapy can increase awareness of ones cultural and ethnic identity and values, what they mean to the client and to the others around them. For example, being white and belonging to an ethnic majority can be a privilege which needs to be acknowledged in order for
someone to be able to function in a multicultural society (Ryde, 2009). Cultural awareness can increase the understanding of the different cultural norms and it can help expatriates reduce miscommunication with host country nationals as well as with other expatriates. Quite often expatriates face difficulties due to acculturation, which happens when people relocate to another cultural environment. Researchers have found that the long-term psychological consequences of acculturation are highly variable, they depend on social and personal variables that reside in the society of origin, the society of settlement and phenomena that exist both prior to and arise during the course of acculturation.

In addition, therapy can provide support to expatriate clients which will uphold their personal strength and coping skills via long or short term therapeutic sessions (Feltham & Hanley, 2017). Another important benefit of counselling sessions is that it can provide expatriate clients with appropriate information, coaching, mentoring, provision of social skills, life skills training, assertiveness and relaxation training which can help them cope with the emotional challenges and other difficulties which may occur during expatriation. This aims to improve their behaviour and teach personal skills in various areas of life which can also be used for personal or family issues. Literature suggests that counselling benefits the adjustment procedure, while therapy simply helps expatriates to deal with their circumstances.

The present section consists of a brief reflection on the identity of counselling psychology; however its aim is to provide an introduction to the discipline as well as its potential relationship with the needs of expatriates and how counselling psychologists can facilitate the emotional challenges and coping strategies of expatriates. Before proceeding to the thesis development, it would be beneficial to discuss some of the key terms which are important for this study.
1.3 Key Definitions

1.3.1 Challenge

According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2017), challenge is “a situation faced which needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and therefore tests a person’s ability”. In the present study, challenge is considered the situation(s) expatriate individuals have to face during their stay in China and how this affects them emotionally. There are many situations which can be considered as challenges, such as adjustment process, environmental, dietary, language difficulties and the like. It is crucial to mention that this study does not aim to categorise the practical challenges or difficulties that expatriates might face, but to identify the emotional impact of people facing challenge during their expatriation. Furthermore, it is important to mention that challenge does not only refer to negative experiences or difficulties; this study also analyses the positive outcome of challenges during expatriation.

1.3.2 Expatriate

It would be useful to provide some information about the term expatriate. The word comes from the Latin term ex (out of) and patria (country, homeland), so an expatriate is a person who is temporarily or permanently residing in a country other than that of their citizenship (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). Expatriation is an amorphous concept that mainly refers to international assignments or, in other words, corporate expatriation, which is generally a form of temporary international relocation of individuals by organisations (Suutari, 2003). More on the existing literature on expatriates will be detailed in the next chapter.

1.3.4 Expatriates vs Immigrants

The existing literature describes an expatriate as a highly skilled individual from a middle or high social class living in a foreign country on a temporary basis (Gatti 2009), whose main aim is further professional development (Gatti 2009), while an immigrant is
described as a working class individual who moves to another country quite often seeking permanent residence (Cass et al., 2005; Urry, 2002). Although this description makes a distinction between an expatriate and an immigrant, it remains unclear and insufficient since it perpetuates the socio economic inequality between people who move to another country to work or settle down (immigrants) from those from the same country who are professionals and thus considered as expatriates. It also fails to address why some countries do not use the term expatriate, and instead consider all non-natives as an immigrant. In this study, the culture of the new country differs significantly from the native culture of the expatriate.

1.3.5 Foreign Assignment Success

The degree of completion of the work related goal of the expatriate defines foreign assignment success. Success is typically defined in the literature by the individual’s expressed desire to complete the assignment and to not repatriate earlier than planned (Harrison, Gowan & Neill, 2004; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007).

1.3.6 Western Culture

At this point it is worth explaining the term ‘Western’ and ‘Western world’. According to the literature, the Western world is the part of the earth which has its roots in Greco-Roman civilization in Europe and the advent of Christianity (Hayas, 1953; Hutter, 2004). In the modern era, Western culture has been heavily influenced by the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Age of Enlightenment and it has been shaped by the expansive colonialism of the 15th–20th centuries (Hutter, 2004; Thomson & Hickey, 2005). The term originally had a literal, geographic meaning, when Europe was perceived as the centre, which contrasted Europe with the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia (Thomson & Hickey, 2005; Dallmayr, 2004). Today, however, there is little geographic relevance since the concept of the West has been
expanded to include former European colonies such as Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Thomson & Hickey, 2005; Dallmayr, 2004). This term along with other (also as problematic) terms such as global, first world and many other are also used very broadly to refer to a heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, political systems and specific artefacts that have some origin or association with Europe, North America and Australasia (Thomson & Hickey, 2005).

1.4 Aim & Research Questions

I aimed to document the accounts of expatriate men and women in Shanghai. The need to listen to their accounts is paramount to inform and incorporate expatriates’ perspectives in developing suitable interventions and services addressing their needs. In order to form the questions I took into account the basic. Therefore, I was guided by the following research questions:

1) **What emotional challenges do expatriates face during their stay and work in China?**

2) **What strategies do they use to cope with those challenges?**

The two questions were formed on the basis of the research topic which is about the emotional challenges of the expatriates. My aim to understand those challenges lead me in the first research question which was to identify and understand which those challenges are. The next question was formed by the simple question on how people can cope with these challenges and what do they do to cope with it. My goal was to be able to link the emotional challenges and the coping strategies with counselling psychology and understand how practitioners can support expatriates.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The focus of this research is to explore the emotional challenges of expatriate professionals who lived and worked in China and the coping strategies they followed
through the spectrum of counselling psychology. It highlights the importance of attempting to understand the emotional challenges that individuals experienced and how this has impacted on them psychologically, and what interventions need to be done to support individuals who are in similar situation.

Before proceeding with the thesis structure, it is important to mention the sequence in which I conducted the present thesis in order to explain to the reader why some parts of the literature review are mirrored in the findings and discussion chapters. I first started writing the Analysis chapter, then I proceeded to the Reflective Analysis section, followed by the Findings and the Discussion. The last chapters I conducted were the Introduction and Literature Review. This means that by the time I was writing the Introduction and Literature Review, I was already aware of my findings. Therefore, I decided to include only the literature relevant to my findings in order to inform the reader of the existing theories and previous research findings related to some of my findings. With this in mind, I wanted to present issues concerning adjustment, cultural differences and personality, coping strategies and emotional challenges. In the discussion chapter there is a more detailed description on what this particular research found in relation to the aforementioned themes. Within the discussion section emphasis is on the unique findings of the present study and the unique issues described within the subthemes.

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the research question and the objectives of the study. Chapter two summarises the literature on the needs of expatriates, the adjustment process and potential issues that individuals might face. The chapter also focuses on personality traits, coping strategies and the role of counselling psychology.

Chapter three presents the research methods used in this study. It analyses the theoretical position underlying the research, the research method, research design, a section in which I situate myself in the research context, another where the participants are presented and finally a section entitled rigour credibility and trustworthiness of the
research. In chapter four, I move on to the presentation of the findings, the data analysis process is presented, attempting to clarify and understand how the analysis was undertaken. The last part of this chapter is the presentation of the analysed data- the findings which answers in the two research questions. Chapter five is a reflexive analysis of the study in which I present my personal reflections about the topic, the research process and the challenges of conducting the current research. Additionally, I present my personal experience of expatriation to the reader.

Chapter six discusses the findings where the main themes and subthemes are discussed and reflected with the existing literature in mind in order to answer in the two research questions. In this chapter I combine the findings from each theme with the wider literature in order to gain a better understanding of the research findings. Furthermore, the chapter aims to give counselling psychologists a better understanding of the phenomenon of expatriation and the emotional challenges, coping strategies and other issues discussed by the participants of the current study.

Chapter seven demonstrates what this qualitative research can contribute to the existing literature and what we, as counselling psychologists, can learn from the participants’ stories. It explores further the actions needed to be taken to meet the psychological needs of these participants and those in a similar situation. The purpose of this study is summarised, the findings and key issues that arose are discussed, focusing on the implications of these findings on how to meet the psychological needs of those who have similar experiences. Moreover, the study’s limitations, contributions to and implications for practice and recommendations for future research are presented. Finally, I conclude with recommendations for future research studies into similar subjects.

Chapter Summary

The present chapter constitutes an introduction to the reader about counselling psychology and the topic I explored throughout the whole thesis. Furthermore, it
introduces some key terms to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the specific terminology used within the following chapter. Finally, a brief description of each chapter and its contents is included.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Within the present chapter, I include the theoretical and research literature relevant to the phenomenon of expatriation. In this chapter my aim was to synthesize the previous literature and attempt to summarise their main points. A literature review aims to inform the reader about what has been learnt so far, to synthesize and critically analyse the existing literature and to identify the main theoretical points as well as the limitations and gaps of the research (Webster & Watson, 2002). The research journals were collected throughout the three academic years in the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology.

At this point I will briefly describe the selection criteria used for the research articles included in the Literature Review chapter. In order to decide which research articles were the most appropriate to include in this chapter, I spent a lot of time reading a plethora of articles about expatriation. The research papers I included were all peer-reviewed published articles in the English language. The selected articles included both quantitative and qualitative studies which examined different aspects of the phenomenon of expatriation predominantly in China and other countries of East Asia. My main focus was to select articles which could provide more information to describe the emotional challenges that expatriates might face and the differing coping strategies detailed in the existing literature. Due to the fact that Analysis was the first chapter I conducted, I decided to include in the Literature Review some further information about personality.
traits in order for the reader to have some prior knowledge and understanding before reading the Discussion chapter.

On the other hand, I did not have any limitations on the size used by previous researchers. Also, due to the limited literature on expatriation and especially on expatriation in China, there were no restrictions on the year the research was published.

The Literature Review starts with some basic information about China as a host country and includes figures of the latest number of expatriates there. The next section gives detailed information about the different types of expatriation as described in the existing literature. Section 2.4. analyses the gender differences within the expatriate population.

The fifth section briefly describes the basic elements of traditional Chinese culture and the cultural differences expatriates might face in their new environment, as documented in previous research literature. The sixth section describes the stages of expatriate adjustment and the seventh section offers a detailed account of the emotional challenges. Section 2.8. describes the personality traits which can facilitate the adjustment process and aid better well-being during the time of expatriation. Finally, sections 9 & 10 introducing the links between expatriation and counselling psychology and the coping strategies that expatriates use and how counselling psychology can help them to have a better well-being. All the chapters and each one individually provide important information to help the reader understand the various themes identified in the Analysis chapter, which are later discussed in the final two chapters of the study.

2.2. China as a host country

In this thesis, since China is referred to in the context of international migration and acculturation, it is important to understand the position of the host country towards
foreign populations such as expatriates. The last two decades have witnessed the People’s Republic of China (PRC) emerge as a major economic power to become the second largest economy in the world (Chan, 2010). With a population comprising of approximately 20 per cent of the world’s consumers, there has recently been a tremendous surge in foreign investment in the PRC (Selmer, 1999; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley & Luk, 2001). This has resulted in a substantially increased number of Western professionals working and living in the PRC (Selmer, 2005). According to a Global Relocation Trends survey (2001) and the National Foreign Trade Council, the number of expatriates moving to China for employment has increased greatly (Shaffer et al., 2006). For instance, in 2012 the number of Western men and women who relocated to mainland China numbered more than 240,000, a 17% increase from 2007 (China’s Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, 2012). Only 25% of those who relocate overseas have had previous experience of living abroad (Shaffer et al., 2006).

China has become an expatriate “place to be” for many international companies, who employ expatriates from all over the world. Lately, China has become a desirable location for other professionals, such as psychologists, teachers and religious workers. At the end of 2012, 600,000 expatriates and approximately 328,000 foreign students were reported to be living on mainland China, according to a census by the Chinese government. Individuals from the USA, Japan and South Korea are the most common expatriate nationalities, with a smaller number of other countries also represented.
The previous numbers, however, are not totally accurate since they do not include individuals who have been living in the country for less than three to six months (Zhi & Tong, 2012). Of those, approximately 209,000 lived and worked in Shanghai, which according to the Shanghai Municipal Government’s report (2016), has 573 multinational corporations. The nations most represented in Shanghai were Japan, the USA, South Korea, France, Germany, Singapore, Canada, Australia and the UK. Apart from Shanghai, the national statistics provided a list of the top 10 preferred cities.
Research results also reported that 73% of the expatriate population living in China can barely speak Mandarin Chinese and only 8% have a basic knowledge. Moreover, they reported that 30% of expatriates have been living in China for 5 years and 20% have been living and working for more than 10 (Beijing relocation, 2015). Thus, individuals wishing to work or assigned to work in China should prioritise their learning of the history and culture of China in order to achieve a better understanding of cultural differences and develop a social sensitivity to Chinese culture before embarking on any type of work (Boyle, 2000).

As the world becomes more of a global community and different cultures interact with each other on a regular basis, there is a greater need to understand cross-cultural experience. Expatriates face unique daily challenges while working and living in Asia under a different cultural and political setting. These expatriates, their families, employers and host nationals need to value the importance of understanding how to bridge the culture gap and support healthy adjustment and transitions. Nevertheless, cross-cultural training and information before expatriate professionals relocate to the PRC is lacking (Arthur & Bennett, 1997; Semler, 2005). This can cause issues in the quality of life, such as increased stress, distress and anxiety (Semler, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

There is a growing body of research concerning expatriate cultural adjustment (Shim & Paprock, 2002). Some has focused on the spouses of expatriates, their cross-cultural adjustment and its impact on the assignment (e.g. Bikos et al., 2007; Suh & Lee, 2006) as well as on the adjustment of expatriate children (Van der Zee et al., 2007). Research has also focused on expatriate work adjustment and the process of managing expatriates (Selmer, 2001). Furthermore, research has also attempted to link individual personality traits to adjustment (e.g. Peltokorpi, 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). In the
field of counselling psychology, mental health and expatriation, however, research is sparse. Only a few researchers have tried to link counselling and expatriation (e.g. Skuja & Norton, 1982; Suh & Lee, 2006; Van der Zee et al., 2007), and there is still no insightful information from personal expatriate experiences of the challenges faced and/or the coping mechanisms used in to deal with the challenges.

A detailed literature review concerning the pertinent variables to this study will follow. The following categories will be discussed as they relate to expatriation: 1) culture & cultural differences. This section will help the reader to understand some of the core differences between Chinese culture and Western cultures. This will facilitate a further understanding of the potential emotional challenges due to different cultural backgrounds. 2) Forms of expatriate adjustment. The second section aims to demonstrate some of the previous literature findings on expatriate adjustment, the differences between the adjustment types, and what positive or difficult challenges it might bring to expatriates. 3) Emotional challenges during expatriation. This section will discuss the previous literature findings related to the challenges expatriates might face during expatriation. 4) Personality traits. The fourth section takes a closer look at personality traits and their impact on approaching emotional challenges. 5) Coping Strategies & Counselling Psychology. The final section aims to show the coping strategies reported by expatriates in previous research and the role of counselling psychology during this process.

2.3. Types of Expatriation

Before I start the main 5 points of the current literature review, a discussion of the definition of expatriate and its different types would be beneficial.

Previous researchers introduced new terms such as “international itinerants” (Banai & Harry, 2004) and “independent, internationally mobile professionals” (McKenna & Richardson, 2007) in order to describe this new group of mobile population. Furthermore, definitions of expatriation were discussed in the context of migration, which
is defined as the physical movement from one geographic location to another (Agzino, 2000). Expatriates are generally treated in the literature as a homogeneous group of organisational expatriates (OE), until more recent researchers began to pay attention to the different kinds of expatriates and described alternative forms of foreign work experience such as the self-initiated expatriates (SE). OEs are usually sent by their home companies to international posts, whereas SEs are those hired on a contractual basis without being transferred from a parent organisation (Lee, 2005). Some other SEs chose to travel on their own initiative and thus do not benefit from organisational support (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010). SEs are temporary workers and most come from countries such as New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the USA (Doherty et al., 2008; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). It is important to separate SEs and OEs since they differ significantly from each other in several work-related dimensions (Peltokorpi & Fabian, 2009).

Firstly, there is no fixed period of stay for SEs, while OEs have to achieve specific job or organisation related goals within a pre-decided period, ranging from six months to five years (Zhang, 2015). SEs often perceive their overseas working experience to be part of their self-development or part of another personal agenda and do not usually receive a relocation package and no HRM support from employers, while OEs are often equipped with generous relocation packages (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). According to the research, OEs are usually motivated to work abroad because of the financial benefits and opportunities for career progression (Zhang, 2015). An OE can become a SE after time if, for example, they choose to remain in the country after the end of their work contract. Moreover, the boundaries between these different forms of expatriation can be vague since some can combine work with education, internships in the host country, and travel back and forth to their home country for work related purposes, which creates a further complication in the distinction between an OE and a SE (McKenna et al., 2012).
2.4. Gender differences among expatriates

Even though the present research aims to identify the challenges and coping strategies applied by both men and women, it will be beneficial to briefly mention some of the gender differences identified by the previous literature. There is great interest regarding gender differences of expatriates and this is important area for counselling psychologists in order to be aware of the differences between men and women during adjustment, work and life in China.

According to inter-nations organisation reports (2015), the majority of expatriates used to be predominantly male. Nevertheless, more and more women are pursuing a career overseas. In 2005, international women were hailed as an up and coming phenomenon in the annual Global Relocation Trends Survey Report, which showed that 23% of all international assignees were women (Internations, 2015). Another study found that expatriate women have higher levels of adjustment than men due to their superior social skills, which help them to learn faster and be more confident about having relationships in the host environment (Koveshnikov, Wechtker & Dejoux, 2014).

Academic research on expatriates originates from the 1980’s and has focused on different domains. In the 1980’s, the focus was predominantly on adjustment, both cultural and psychological, particularly on the discomfort and distress experienced during the adjustment period (Black, 1988; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Beginning in the 1990s, researchers shifted their interest and focused on withdrawal cognitions (Black & Gregersen, 1990; Naumann, 1992; Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluck, 2002). Later research focused on expatriate individual differences and how job performance was affected, and whether their employment standards were being met (Selmer & Leung, 2003). Research also found that female expatriates had higher levels of socio-cultural adjustment and self-transcendence (Cole & McNulty, 2011).
In the next section, I will attempt to discuss the previous literature and its links to expatriation. In addition, the next section attempts to give a brief description of the core principles of Chinese culture only and not provide any evaluation or comparison with another specific cultural background.

### 2.5. Culture & Cultural differences

The first point to be discussed are the cultural differences Western expatriates might experience during their stay in China. There is an obvious cultural distance between expatriates and Chinese culture and especially for those who come from so called Western countries. This cultural distance influences adjustment to life and work in China and it can be the reason for many potential challenges. Learning how to integrate cultural, religious and societal norms and customs into daily life consists of one of the first challenges expatriates might face. Some of the cultural differences can be immediate, such as encountering the language and appearing physically different, while other differences might be the time to understand professional relationships and the importance of job titles in the work environment (Hofstede, 2001). Counselling Psychology has shown a great interest about culture and how culture influences peoples’ thoughts and emotions. Cultural values can also influence therapy and in this section the reader can understand the basic differences between expatriates and the host country. Also, therapists should keep in mind that many expatriates have adopted a lot of cultural values from the host country which might also have an effect during the course of therapy.

Researchers have given a plethora of definitions about culture and the values or characteristics which form a culture. Two models are widely used for identifying a culture: Kluchohn and Strodtbeck’s (1961) five dimensions and Hofstede’s (1980) Value Survey Model (VSM). Hofstede (1980) found that the four cultural dimensions which enable a comparison of countries and demonstrates a culture’s consequence on work
related behaviour are: power distance which mostly refers to societal hierarchy, uncertainty avoidance which focuses on how people manage the stress caused by an uncertain future, individualism vs collectivism and masculinity vs femininity which refers to the gender role within societies. The problem, however, with these models is that the scope is too narrow and simplistic, with only five variables which cannot describe such an exuberant culture like the Chinese one. Both models could not be used as a true representation of the complexity of a national culture, particularly in the case of Hofstede’s VSM, which is mainly concerned with business culture rather than national culture. This study will follow the notion that culture is a collection of values, beliefs, behaviours, customs and attitudes that distinguish a society (Fan, 2000).

2.5.1. Chinese Culture

In order to understand the differences between Chinese and any other culture, it would be useful to attempt a brief description. Firstly, we have to consider that China is an enormous country and it would be impossible to state that people across the country have the same cultural identity or they follow the same values. However, it is still possible to identify certain core values which give people their basic identity. These core values are held in common by the Chinese no matter where they live (Fan, 2000), they are consistent and have been shaped by a tradition of four thousand years of history maintained by the same language.

The Chinese value system is distinguished not only from Western cultures, but also from other Asian cultures, such as Japanese or Korean. Chinese culture in the PRC consists of three major elements: traditional culture, communist ideology and, more recently, Western values. Marilainen (2008) summarised the previous theories about Chinese culture into three main core principles: Hierarchy: which is the sense of distributed power and respect to seniority and age; Collectivism: harmony, family-orientation, guanxi and reciprocity in which relationships define a person and finally
Future Orientation which refers to thriftiness and long-term orientation. Long term orientation relates to people’s beliefs about the long-term influence of their actions and value high personal attributes such as thrift and perseverance. Many researchers found that Chinese-majority society is embedded with characteristics of collectivism (Wong, 2001). Collective society is mostly concerned with the harmony between its members and group orientation is considered a key feature of Chinese culture (Oyserman et al., 2002). On the other hand, Western societies are more focused on the individual needs, personal freedom and self-actualisation (Sampson, 2003).

Traditional Chinese culture consists of diverse schools of thought including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and a host of regional cultures (Fang et al., 2008). Confucianism is the most influential thought, creating the foundation of the cultural tradition and it provides the basic norms of Chinese interpersonal behaviour. This basic behavioural and moral doctrine is based on the teachings of Confucius with regards to human relationships, social structures, virtuous behaviour and work ethics (Pye, 1972). The Confucius social hierarchical theory i.e. the five relationships of emperor-subject, father-son, husband-wife, brother-brother, and friend-friend, perpetuates its influence in modern China (King, 1993). These Confucian moral principles are the main way that relationships are structured within Chinese society and they are followed by people in order to ensure a harmonious society (Fang et al., 2008).

2.5.2. Guanxi in China

In order to understand deeper the harmonious society and how relationships are formed within society it would be beneficial to explain guanxi and how it differs from
Western culture. There is a plethora of research about *guanxi*, its nature, origins and how it can be achieved by an expatriate population. However, this study’s focus is not Chinese culture per se, but it aims to give basic information about some of its core principals to help the reader understand some of the basic cultural differences between Western expatriates and Chinese nationals.

The term *guanxi* is generally translated as “special relationships” or “connections” (Leung & Wong, 2001). It is developed with ingenuity, creativity and supplemented by flexibility (Leung & Yeung, 1995). *Guanxi* is embedded within Confucius philosophy, which defines the Chinese moral code (Leung & Wong, 2001). An expatriate individual will fall into a *guanxi* web in his/her socialisation during their adjustment in China. According to the literature, *guanxi* is perceived to have four constructs: favour, trust, dependence and adaptation. Expatriates will have to face these aspects both in general everyday life and at work. Moreover, they will have to understand the different *guanxi* dimensions between the different social units such as family, friendship and the work environment, which are the core principle of a harmonious relationship. These social and philosophical constructs might be different from other cultures which do not apply the harmonious relationship as a top principal. In the next section, a description of the differences between Western expatriates and Chinese nationals in the work environment and the role of *guanxi* will be presented.

### 2.5.3. Guanxi at work

First of all, we have to keep in mind that the way a British or an American manager works with his or her British or American employees in the UK or the USA does not equally transfer to the manner in which the British or American manager works with his or her Chinese employees in the Shanghai office (Law et al., 2000). Studies which compared British and Chinese enterprises concluded that maintaining a harmonious relationship was greater in Chinese enterprises, while harmonious relationships were not
perceived as important for British enterprises (Easterby-Smith et al., 1995). Law et al. (2000) pointed out that many American business people complained about the \textit{guanxi} rules within Chinese firms.

The cultural and social norms which constitute the way of life for the Chinese people are based on the history of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucius and also greatly influenced by the Cultural Revolution. The Confucius philosophy remains novel for a large number of Western expatriates, who are mostly influenced by a Judaeo-Christian religion and philosophy (Pacific Bridge, 2008). The cultural differences between expatriates and host nationals can create stress and misunderstandings (Van der Zee et al., 2004). In fact, Westerners often refer to China as one of the most culturally distant places (Selmer, 2001). Research also indicated that Westerners often find Chinese culture, people and institutions very enigmatic (Chen, 2001). General, work, intercultural and other forms of adjustment are therefore essential for expatriates and their families’ well-being and performance during their stay overseas.

The present section has attempted to give a brief description of the cultural context in which an expatriate would have to live and work. Consequently, in the next section, adjustment-related factors of Western expatriates in China found in previous literature will be discussed in detail.

\textbf{2.6. Forms of expatriate adjustment}

Stress, anxiety, uncertainty associated with crossing borders and cultural differences, separation from the family or spouse may be the result of working and living in East Asia (Wong, Wong & Heng, 2005). Having to live, work, and function in a vastly different cultural environment might pose a challenge to adaptation and adjustment (Peltokorpi, 2008). This has led to a growing body of work on the adjustment of expatriate workers (Black & Stephens, 1989; Peltokorpi, 2008; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2012; Selmer,
2005, Shim & Paprock, 2002, Takeuchi et al., 2007). According to Merilainen (2008), however, the majority of these studies used a rather stereotypical sample group of Western expatriates which consisted of, on average, 90% of men aged between 40 to 50, 80% of them were married and the majority were working as CEOs with university degrees on current assignments from three to seven years.

Views on adjustment and definitions vary in the literature. Adjustment has been defined in terms of subjective well-being (Campbell, 1981) or the unhappiness that expatriates feel about their circumstances (Munton & West, 1995). Selmer (1999) has defined adjustment as the socio-cultural characteristics required to achieve effectiveness in interpersonal exchange with host country nationals. Scholars have identified three interrelated facets of adjustment to living and working in foreign countries. In acculturation literature (i.e. Searle & Ward, 1990), the facets of psychological, socio-cultural and work adjustment have been identified. In expatriate literature (i.e. Black, 1988), similar facets of adjustment to the general, environment, work and interacting with host country nationals have been proposed. Specifically, adjustment itself has been posited as a three-dimensional construct (Black et al., 1991), which is confirmed by research (Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999). These dimensions include general adjustment, work adjustment, and interactional adjustment (Black et al., 1991; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Selmer, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006). The three dimensions and other types of adjustment will be discussed in the paragraph below.

2.6.1. General Adjustment

Researchers state that general adjustment involves a process through which expatriates become more comfortable with the local surrounding in the country they live (Takeuchi et al., 2007). General adjustment also refers to the level of comfort and the ways of coping with differences in areas such as the food, weather, living conditions and transportation (Takeuchi et al., 2007). When an expatriate shows an ability to understand
the different culture, feels comfortable with their everyday lifestyle and is able to communicate effectively both inside and outside work with the host country nationals, they report greater general adjustment (Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003). Difficulties with general adjustment can cause stress, cultural isolation and, in some cases, depressive episodes (Hechanova et al., 2003).

2.6.2. Work Adjustment

This type of adjustment refers to the comfort of someone’s ability to adjust to the foreign work environment (Selmer, 2005). Managing authority relationships, work-related roles and navigating between the home base of company and the host site of the company are areas which show expatriate adjustment (Takeuchi et al., 2002). Moreover, the level of confidence an expatriate has in order to complete goals and tasks is another indication of the overall work adjustment procedure (Hachanova et al., 2003). An inability to adjust at work during expatriation can frequently be the reason for early assignment termination.

2.6.3. Interactional adjustment

Interaction adjustment is determined by the degree to which an expatriate is comfortable interacting or socializing with locals both inside and outside the work environment (Takeuchi et al., 2002). Again, the degree of confidence for each expatriate to set and complete goals also reflects the degree of interactional adjustment, since it demonstrates the level of comfort to interact with locals when a task needs accomplishing (Hechanova et al., 2003). One main reason influencing the interactional adjustment of expatriates is the cultural distance because a great deal of difficulty in socialising and interacting with host country nationals whose culture is immensely different might be experienced (Hechanova et al., 2003). According to the research findings, one variable that has a positive influence on interactional adjustment is the length of stay. The longer
an expatriate has been in the country, he/she usually reports a greater degree of interactional adjustment suggesting with time they become more comfortable with the local population (Selmer, 2005).

Figure 3: Adjustment related factors (source: Merilainen, 2008)

2.6.4. Cross Cultural Adjustment

A great deal of research has been conducted concerning cross-cultural adjustment (Black, 1990; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Cross-cultural adjustment refers to the changes that occur within expatriate individuals or families as a result of environmental demands, i.e. the psychological comfort and familiarity that the individual has in the new foreign environment (Black, 1990). Cross-cultural adjustment refers to the degree to which expatriates are psychologically comfortable and familiar with different aspects of a foreign environment (Black, 1988). Culturally adjusted expatriates are open to the host culture and able to add new behaviour, norms and rules
to the foundations provided by their home cultures (Church, 1982). Maladjusted professionals tend to experience anxiety and distress to such an extent that they may even believe that host country nationals are plotting against them and making their lives difficult (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Finally, some might even face failure at work (Ramalu, Rose, Uli, Kumar, 2010).

Some research reveals that expatriates sometimes find it easy to adjust with work and life abroad, while others might conclude a negative result (Mao & Shen, 2015). Expatriates face a double-edged challenge to their mental and physical health: the stressors affecting them are not only new and unfamiliar, but the coping responses that worked at home may not do so abroad (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Tung, 1987). For example, studies about adjustment of American expatriates in East Asia have found that between 16 and 40 per cent of all assignments terminated early (Ramalu et al., 2010). Limited adjustment to the host culture has various negative work and life related consequences such as lower job satisfaction, whereas culturally adjusted expatriates were more likely to perform their work tasks effectively (Naumann, 1993; Peltokorpi, 2008).

Cross-cultural adjustment has been found to be highly related to general life satisfaction and work related satisfaction (Takeuchi et al., 2002) and is influenced by the expatriate spouse and family (Caligiuri, 2000). It is suggested that an expatriate is more likely to experience difficulty in cross-cultural adjustment if the partner or children are experiencing a difficulty as well (Napier & Taylor, 2002). Similar studies found that an expatriate is more likely to be successful in his/her assignment when their spouse is supportive and encouraging (Usui, Rose & Kageyama, 2003).

**2.6.5. Socio-Cultural Adjustment**

Socio-cultural adjustment relates to the ability of an expatriate individual to ‘fit in’ or interact effectively with members of the host culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1996).
Socio-cultural adjustment has been associated with variables that promote and facilitate cultural understanding and the acquisition of social skills in the host culture (Cross, 1995). This type of adjustment is based on cultural learning theory and emphasises social behaviour and practical social skills underlying attitudinal factors (Selmer, 2006).

The level of cross-cultural adjustment, it has been argued, should be treated as a multidimensional concept rather than a unitary phenomenon (Black et al., 1991). Black et al., (1991) distinguished between three dimensions of in-country adjustment which were analysed in the previous section in order to cover both cross-cultural and socio-cultural aspects (Selmer, 2006).

2.6.6. Psychological Adjustment

Psychological adjustment refers to subjective well-being: mood, behaviour and attitudes during the adjustment process (Ward et al., 1998). This type of adjustment concentrates on social skills and behaviour (Selmer, 2005). Previous research attempted to measure psychological adjustment by using the three dimension model (Balck et al., 1991) a) general, b) work and c) interaction adjustment. Selmer (2005), in previous studies, examined the psychological well-being of expatriates by using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), which has mainly been used to investigate minor psychiatric symptoms (Goldberg, 1972).

The theoretical concept of subjective well-being corresponds to the psychological aspects of international adjustment related to work and the working environment (Selmer & Lam, 2004). Attempts have been made to examine the subjective well-being of expatriates through an examination of both the medical/psychological outcomes of living and working abroad (Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). Additionally, a study by Aryee et al. (1996) investigated the psychological well-being of expatriate employees in Hong Kong and found that expatriates expressed an average positive degree of quality of life well above the mid-point of the bipolar scales used. However, it is useful to note that, despite
a common cultural heritage, there are considerable differences between Hong Kong and the rest of China, which makes this finding less able to be generalized to the Chinese mainland (Selmer & Shiu, 1999). Furthermore, psychological adjustment requires more time and effort to be achieved because it is mainly based on deep-rooted values (Jun, Lee & Gentry, 1997). Undoubtedly, both sociocultural and psychological adjustment are important and relevant factors enhancing expatriate adjustment and the adjustment challenges they face in the PRC.

Western expatriates were found to be “somewhat” adjusted in the PRC, as their mean scores were above a medium point on all the three dimensions of socio-cultural and psychological adjustment (Selmer, 2006). Selmer (2005) found that the magnitude of the relation between sociocultural and psychological acculturation was greater if a person was better socio-culturally adjusted because psychological adjustment was significantly positively related to general and work adjustment. The study concluded that social skills can promote psychological adjustment especially in the case of work adjustment’s correlating positive effect on psychological adjustment (Merilainen, 2008). For instance, an expatriate who is more socially flexible and interacts with people both inside and outside work has more chances of being more psychologically adjusted. One issue, which will be discussed in a later section, concerning interaction adjustment is the lack of language and communication barriers. Expatriates frequently cannot rely on English outside the work environment. Lack of language skills may be considered as a form of ignorance for the local mentality and it may sometimes lead to constant misinterpretations while trying to interact with the locals. According to the literature, this is one reason why many expatriates have a separate daily life and they live in the so called expatriate “ghettos” (Bjorkman & Schaap, 1994).
2.7. Emotional Challenges during expatriation

2.7.1. Facing culture shock

Considering the cultural distance between expatriates and China, as discussed in a previous section, it could be assumed that expatriates face considerable culture shock as a part of their adjustment process in China, from both sociocultural and psychological aspects (Sims & Schraeder, 2004). Longitudinal studies found that a typical U-curve process indicates that culture shock is present in all three dimensions of sociocultural adjustment. Before continuing this review of those empirical studies that investigated culture shock, it would perhaps be useful to provide a basic description of the U-curve adjustment hypothesis. Most of the U-curve descriptions include discussions of four stages (figure 4). In the initial stage (“honeymoon stage”), individuals are usually fascinated by the new culture and are excited about all the new and interesting “sights and sounds”. Shortly after the initial excitement, expatriates tend to feel culturally disorientated (culture shock) and start to struggle with their adjustment and this is the period when many expatriates start facing various emotional issues, such as anxiety, distress and depression (Bhaskar - Shrinivas et al., 2005). After this period of time, they usually start learning how to cope with the stress of living and working in a foreign environment, adjustment increases and then levels. If expatriates are not able to develop
their coping mechanisms, some might terminate their assignment early, while others might develop more severe psychological issues (Selmer, 2006).

Figure 4: U-curve hypothesis (Source: Global Human Resource Management)

Longitudinal studies have found that culture shock appears after having spent around 17 months on an assignment and for some expatriates it seems to take around 10 to 12 months to overcome this stage (Selmer, 2005). According to the literature, this is the time when most expatriates appear to be more psychologically and socio-culturally adjusted. However, the U-curve hypothesis has been a subject of criticism from various researchers who claim that this hypothesis has been tested on business expatriates only and focuses on general adjustment, which does not apply to the whole of the expatriate population (Shrinivas et al., 2005).

2.7.2. Psychological challenges

Expatriates sometimes perceive living and working in China as a demanding process which frequently leads to emotional frustration (Sergeant & Frenkel, 1998). Nevertheless, some of the challenges can be due to personal issues in their lives and not specifically linked to expatriation in China. For example, some individuals might be unwilling to cope with Chinese reality, which will automatically cause psychological
barriers to intercultural adjustment (Selmer, 2004). This situation can also cause problems in understanding the local culture and way of life. An inability or unwillingness to adjust to the new foreign environment can derive from an individual’s cultural limitations or an inability to understand and cope with a novel culture (El Mansour & Wood, 2010). This inability usually causes anxiety, confusion and distress to expatriates who are not able to understand foreign cultural phenomena. The greater the differences between the home and the host culture, the greater the emotional challenges are likely to become for expatriate intercultural adjustment (Chen, Lin & Sawangpattanakul, 2010).

Studies have shown that psychological barriers could also have a negative impact on general and interaction adjustment especially for those who had spent only a short period of time in China. An inability to adjust can cause anxiety, distress, depression and cultural isolation (Chen et al., 2010). On the other hand, inability to general adjustment does not necessarily influence work adjustment (Selmer, 2004). Inability to adjust has been shown to be often a result of an unwillingness to learn how to live in a different cultural environment and an intolerance towards different cultural characteristics (Chen et al., 2010). Furthermore, coping strategies play an important role during this process because they can facilitate adjustment and can often create an emotionally safe environment for the expatriate. In a later section, personality traits will be discussed in order to demonstrate its influence on adjustment, coping strategies and emotional challenges.

2.7.3. Work related Challenges

Since many expatriates relocate to China predominantly for work-related purposes, it would be beneficial to discuss some of the potential work-related challenges. Researchers have found that due to cultural and policy differences many expatriates present a difficulty in understanding the position requirements, the role and the requirements of their role as well as the expectations that employers have from them
(Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Some countries like China may have different guidelines, regulations and perceptions of professions such as psychology, social work, science-related or business related professions. These differences confuse expatriates in their job role as they might have been educated, trained and worked under different regulations and work expectations. These work-related differences might cause feelings of uncertainty, uncontrollability, unfamiliarity or unpredictability of the new job role which also influences the adjustment of newly arrived expatriates (Li, 2016).

Meta-analyses studies which used data from 8474 expatriates in 66 studies found that job role clarity and work adjustment are highly correlated (Bhaskar - Shrinivas et al., 2005). This evidence shows how the work environment can bring emotional challenges to expatriates who might feel that they are doing work unrelated to their abilities and this might cause feelings of frustration, uncertainty and anxiety. In order to cope with these difficulties, expatriates seek psychological support in order to learn behavioural mechanisms to cope with work-related challenges (Li, 2016). On the other hand, there are positive challenges such as career development, new opportunities to work in a multicultural environment, and personal growth and knowledge (Noe et al., 2006). Studies found that expatriates have the opportunity to combine knowledge and experience learned in their home countries and be more competitive in the new work environment in China. Furthermore, they find the chance to combine their skills and become more knowledgeable leading to professional success. Finally, working in a multicultural environment increases personal development and builds the confidence of expatriates to work in a foreign environment (Noe et al., 2006).

2.7.4. Non-work related Challenges

One important influence on general adjustment to the foreign host culture is the family and spouse adjustment. The inability for the whole family to adjust or spouse
difficulties due to the distance of the relationship, unemployment, or childcare responsibilities is one of the major non-work related challenges. An expatriate’s family inability to make the transition to the new culture/country has a significant impact on overall psychological stability and research shows that such conditions of family maladjustment can cause anxiety, depression and anger (Pires & Stanton, 2006). Previous studies showed that marital difficulties were one of the largest group of clients for counselling in Shanghai (Myler, 2014). Frequent presenting problems of couples were infidelity, family crisis and breakdown in communication (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Many of the expatriates felt caught between the pressure to succeed at work and family demands. On the other hand, research also reported cases of couples who did not experience such issues and both of the individuals were able to adjust and cope with their assignment.

Families, on the other hand, usually faced issues with their children who found it hard to adjust to the international schools, with longer hours, stringent rules and a more demanding curriculum. Many of the children described their experience of transition in the new culture as traumatic (Skuja & Norton, 1982).

Several studies identified that language and communication problems are one of the most significant challenges for expatriates. Western expatriates have been shown to be more likely to face significant communication and language issues. It seems that the problem is not only the Chinese people’s inability to speak English, but also the different communication styles between Western expatriates and Chinese nationals might be challenging as well (Vihakara, 2006). According to the literature, Chinese communication style tends to be indirect and high-context, whereas some Western cultures such as the Scandinavian cultures can be considered as direct and low-context (Peltokorpi, 2008).
A high-contextual style means that people of such style do not necessarily fully express themselves in an explicit manner. In another words, high-contextual communication tends to give space for reading between the lines and it is the listener’s responsibility to understand the message. A typical example is the Chinese people’s inability to say “no”, no matter the situation in order to keep the harmonious relationship. On the other hand, low-context communication style tends to be very direct and people are expected to share all relevant information. More specifically, hiding any facts can be interpreted as hiding the truth and it can even be considered as lying (Froese, Peltokorpi & Ko, 2012). These differences in communication style can lead to the mis-perception of Chinese people as shy, indirect, reserved, evasive or deceptive. Such perceptions may lead to significant communication problems, even though both sides might be using English (Vihakara, 2006). Furthermore, expatriates might sometimes feel isolated causing difficulties at work and in general interaction with the public. In these circumstances, people can still face communication issues even though they both might be using the so called “international English” since people tend to think in their own language which is affected by their culture and values.

Apart from differences in communication styles, another challenge might be related to language proficiency. Shaffer et al. (1999) found that expatriates who had fluency in the host-country language had faster adjustment than those who were not able to speak the local language. Being able to speak, read, write and understand Mandarin Chinese has been demonstrated to have an impact on the life and career of expatriates living in China. Hachanova et al. (2003) found that communication and cultural challenges can have a significant influence on expatriate daily life. Fluency in the host country language has been positively correlated to a better general adjustment and less negative challenges at work and daily life (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).
2.8. Personality traits

This section demonstrates how personality traits can influence expatriate coping strategies when facing multiple challenges during their adjustment, work and everyday life in China. Central to the idea of personality traits is the belief that some individuals would be more able to handle stress during their time in China. Many studies found that specific individual personality traits predisposition a healthier life during expatriation (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012; Ramalu et al., 2010; Swagler & Jome, 2005). The majority of such studies, however, come from Human Resources and management studies which mostly focused on the adaptability of expatriates to the work environment and their studies were mostly conducted in order to facilitate the selection procedure for expatriates. There is less research from psychological studies which explores the personality traits in order to help therapists to facilitate expatriates’ adjustment and emotional challenges when they live abroad.

Several authors discussed the personality traits that may indicate which individuals might be better suited for overseas assignments. Emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness are highly accepted by the field of mental health and psychology as distinguished dimensions of personality and they are the traits which have been investigated by previous researchers (McCrae & Costa, 1997).

*Emotional stability or lack of neuroticism* is observed in the individual who experiences an absence or minimal amount of anxiety, depressed mood, nervousness or uncontrollable emotions (Guthrie, Ash & Stevens, 2003). An individual who presents emotional stability copes better and faster when negative emotions are experienced and the degree of emotional stability can be a predictor of expatriate adjustment or maladjustment (Guthrie et al., 2003). This plays an important role on how expatriates approach emotional challenges and the coping mechanisms they will develop.
Extraversion refers to an individual who is more sociable and assertive (Caligiuri, 1995). Extraversion may also be related to confidence and zeal for life and interpersonal encounters at one end, and traits of cautiousness, lack of self-confidence and timidity that may result in withdrawal from life situations and relationships at the other (Digman, 1989). For the present research, these traits of extraversion play an important role in how expatriates see their role, how they cope with challenges and how counselling psychologists can empower such traits in order to influence the individuals to interact with the local and expatriate community.

An expatriate demonstrating traits of openness to experience is imaginative, curious and broad-minded (Guthrie et al., 2003), which can refer to more culturally tolerant individuals. Therapists can work on expatriate clients’ traits (i.e. openness and/or acceptance) in order to help clients to be more culturally tolerant and eliminate anxiety or distress resulting from culture shock or cultural differences. Therapists can work with expatriates’ personality traits especially in the beginning of expatriation, which, according to the U-Curve hypothesis, is when expatriates face their first emotional challenges. Some example of “openness” might be respect and understanding of different values, an appreciation of different perceptions and feelings. Furthermore, expatriate individuals who have strong feelings of agreeableness are usually more cooperative, show more empathy and usually show more interest in interacting with the local population (Thornberry, 2015). Agreeableness has been shown to be a favoured personality trait when expatriates are being considered for assignments (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997).

Another personality trait discussed by researchers is conscientiousness which usually defines personalities as more dependable, careful, thorough and reliable (Guthrie et al., 2003). Individuals with stronger traits of conscientiousness have a strong desire to succeed and have strong sense of responsibility (Thornberry, 2015). Conscientiousness
has been the trait perceived by employers assigning overseas assignments, to be most influential on an expatriate’s intention to complete an assignment or terminate it prematurely. Personality traits of conscientiousness are believed to be predictive of healthy adjustment (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997).

Researchers have sought to make predictions between personality traits and successful expatriate adjustment suggesting that these expatriates are more able to cope better in both negative and positive challenging situations. Previous studies explored traits specific to success in cross-cultural settings (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven 2000, 2001). These specific traits are seen as: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, flexibility and emotional stability which are perceived as more useful and valid than the “Big Five” personality traits which were the basis of previous research. Van der Zee et al. (2004) named these traits as “intercultural traits” and individuals possessing and demonstrating high levels of these personality characteristics were shown to cope better with the anxiety due to expatriation challenges and, as a result, have easier adjustment. Cultural empathy focuses on the ability to empathise with the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of members of different cultural groups (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2003). Cultural empathy is also linked to general adjustment.

Being open-minded refers to openness to new experiences and an unprejudiced attitude towards members of another cultural group with different cultural norms and values (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2003). Individuals who are more open to experiences and accept differences are more likely to have a genuine curiosity about other cultures and report less fear or stress in cross-cultural situations. On the other hand, people who are not very open or accepting do not usually feel at ease in foreign cultures (Van der Zee et al., 2000). Social initiative is a dimension that is frequently demonstrated by a tendency to approach social situations in an active way and take initiatives. Studies showed that expatriates with strong social initiative traits reported greater general adjustment (Clegg
& Gray, 2002). Furthermore, emotional stability refers to the tendency of an individual to maintain calmness during stressful events versus a tendency to show strong emotional reactions under stressful circumstances (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). Emotional stability is connected to both general and work adjustment.

The stressors experienced by expatriates may shift over the length of expatriation, and depending on the length of their stay abroad, this may be reflected in the score of personality traits. During the initial stages of expatriation, the primary stressors might be related to needs such as finding housing, enjoyable food, exploring the city. The personality facet of emotional stability would be relied upon heavily to cope. As the expatriate adjusts, more nuanced stressors appear, such as those related to personal relationships and the subtleties of communication. These interactions are mostly related to the trait of cultural empathy.

The exploration of personality traits, potential challenges and stressors lead to the question of how expatriates cope during their time abroad and what the role of counselling psychology is. In the next and final section, coping strategies and the role of counselling psychology will be discussed.

2.9. Coping strategies & Counselling Psychology

It is important to understand the coping mechanisms of expatriate individuals when they have to deal with anxiety and stressful situations or how they respond to the challenges related to expatriation. According to the literature, the ways of dealing with stress are usually categorized into two groups; problem-focused and symptom-focused coping strategies (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). The first method aims to change the situation and factors causing stress and anxiety in a constructive way (Folkman et al., 1986), while
the second focuses on efforts to cope with anxiety and minimize the stress instead of dealing with its source (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Researchers have also pointed out other coping strategies, such as defensive or unconscious strategies (Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005). Based on previous research findings, problem-focused coping seems to enhance adjustment to a novel working environment, including people going to work abroad, more effectively than its symptom-focused counterpart (Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005). Prior research found that active efforts to change the stress-causing job environment is positively associated with expatriate intercultural adjustment, while parent country escapism or fantasising about other employment are negatively correlated to adjustment (Ariss, 2010).

Individual characteristics such as tolerance and patience in combination with the responsibility of problem solving and social interaction with the local population can facilitate different dimensions of expatriate adjustment in China. Social interaction with the Chinese or other expatriates seems to be an efficient coping strategy when dealing with challenging situations. On the contrary, parent country escapism seems to have a negative effect on expatriates’ life. From these findings, we can conclude that personal characteristics and abilities may have significant importance on facilitation and hinder psychological, sociocultural and general adjustment as well as empowering expatriates to cope when facing challenges.
2.10. Counselling Psychology and expatriates

Social stigma, treatment fears, fear of emotion, anticipated utility and risks, self-disclosure, social norms and self-esteem may lead someone to consider seeking counselling psychology services (Vogel, Wester & Larson, 2007). There are multiple findings about men and women in therapy indicating that the female population is keener on seeking counselling services. On the other hand, men compared to women tend to report greater severity of symptoms (Vogel et al., 2007). To my knowledge, there is a lack of research specific to the help-seeking, coping-strategy behaviours of the expatriate population in China and there is little previous research about counselling the expatriate population in general.

Expatriates seek psychological therapy for a variety of reasons. Their presentation may be due to the stress or distress of living and working abroad, or it may be due to different reasons unrelated to expatriation. Expatriates report similar mental health concerns to the general population (Truman et al., 2012). Considering the stress involved
in taking an expatriate assignment and the demands to accomplish the task, it is not uncommon for expatriates to experience “internalising/externalising problems and substance abuse disorders” (Truman et al., 2012).

Other researchers emphasised that efforts should be made to facilitate the continual enhancement of organisational commitments during the first year (Harrison et al., 2004). The authors, however, did not offer concrete examples of what these efforts should be, while current exploration points to counselling psychology services as a possible resource employers may connect expatriates to or a service that an expatriate may ask for help. Studies which explored the needs of expatriates suggest that many employers tend to underestimate the complexities involved taking on such assignments (Mo & Jian-Ming, 2010). They also explored how expatriates established themselves in the new environment and how this underestimation can affect the expatriate’s life. Expatriates may need therapy due to multiple reasons and sometimes these issues might stem from previous issues before the expatriation, but the issues might be exacerbated by the stress that comes along with moving abroad. Furthermore, the need for therapy may also be related to unique stress due to cultural distance and cultural isolation.

Even though counselling psychology services are typically easy to find in one’s home country, it might be a unique challenge to find a therapist when abroad. Living in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar norms and values, language barriers can be an obstacle to locate the needed services. Moreover, finding a fully trained therapist with credentials and experience may also be challenging. Psychologists should learn about the cultural education and norms, form support networks and learn coping strategies for expatriates who might be dealing with emotional issues (Lippincott & Lippincott, 2002). Additionally, therapy may be useful to address stresses involved in moving to a new culture, change of home, separation from loved ones and support networks, language issues, concerns about children’s education, and racism (Nelson-Jones, 2002). Moreover,
therapy can provide cross-cultural training prior to departure, which has been proven to be very helpful (Shim & Paprock, 2002).

Another challenge that expatriates face and counselling psychology might be helpful is the repatriation. Many expatriates face loss and separation because members of their group of friends or colleagues might have to repatriate. Moreover, repatriation can bring the same challenges and stress as the initial expatriation (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Many expatriates have made many life and career sacrifices during their time abroad and having to repatriate can also cause great levels of anxiety and distress (Sussman, 2002). In other circumstances, many expatriates have adopted specific cultural characteristics from the host country regarding their personal and professional lives which might not be accepted in their home-country (i.e. Harmonious behaviour at work). Previous research has also shown that many expatriates use home-country escapism in order to avoid adjustment difficulties. However, this premature departure might also cause feelings of failure, which might also influence an individual’s self-esteem (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

Counselling therapy for expatriates can be carried out individually, in groups, or as family therapy. Suh and Lee (2006) explored a group of Korean expatriates living in the USA who participated in group therapy which aimed to help them with emotional issues related to their expatriation. The study showed that expatriates found the group to be effective and it helped them to understand cultural differences, attitudes and behaviours. They also reported that therapy changed their relationship with their partners and children. Moreover, they experienced increased self-awareness and empowerment, positive thinking and open-mindedness. The expatriates disclosed that their challenges were also related with language difficulties, financial concerns, family stress, homesickness, feelings of insecurity and role confusion (Suh & Lee, 2006). Greater
therapeutic benefit from couples counselling is also found to help expatriates who live in a third culture or live with a non-working partner.

To summarize, this literature review has indicated that whilst there is a wealth of theoretical and conceptual literature in the area of expatriation, only a handful of empirical studies have addressed the topic of expatriation specifically with regard to counselling psychology. In the next section, I will describe the rationale concerning this research which also indicates my personal interest in the topic. Additionally, a more detailed account of my personal interest can be found in the reflexive analysis chapter.

2.11. Rationale

The rationale for the present study is that expatriate professionals in China face multiple emotional challenges and I would like to explore the specific psychological needs from their perspective. According to the findings of the previous literature, expatriation has become an important phenomenon in the last few decades. Nevertheless, the main focus of the literature to date has been from a Human Resource and Business studies outlook, which concentrated on expatriate adjustment at work, their productivity and their adjustment or suitability to work (Black et al., 1991; Selmer, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006). Less research has been conducted from a Counselling Psychology perspective and there is especially a shortage of qualitative research which explores the issues of expatriates in depth and according to their personal subjective opinion through their stories. Furthermore, there is little insightful evidence about the actual challenges nor of the coping strategies expatriates use in their everyday personal life. Instead the majority of research is based on predictions related to personality traits and the suitability of the expatriates in their assignments. This research aims to get insightful information about emotional challenges and coping strategies as experienced from the participants and not to evaluate any general personality traits.
The current research study contributes to the knowledge of counselling psychologists as regards expatriation and any issues that might arise. Additionally, it increases the awareness and education of counselling psychologists who work with expatriates or those who repatriate and are likely to face related difficulties.

2.12. Research questions

As mentioned in the aim section in the introduction chapter, the research questions for the present study are the following:

1. What emotional challenges do expatriates face during their stay and work in China?

2. What strategies do they use to cope with those challenges?

Chapter summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the relevant theoretical and research literature in five key areas: 1) Culture & cultural differences, 2) Forms of expatriate adjustment, 3) Emotional challenges during expatriation, 4) Personality traits, 5) Coping Strategies & Counselling Psychology. The introductory section aimed to give further information to the reader about the phenomenon of expatriation in China through use of officially published statistics. A brief explanation of the different types of expatriates and some gender differences was considered beneficial for the reader. Furthermore, the previous research and literature findings of the aforementioned key points related to the research questions and the aim of the study were discussed.

In the following chapter, a detailed account of the methodology, design, the participant selection process and the data collection method is discussed. Furthermore, a brief introduction of the participants will be provided.
3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The present chapter provides a circumstantial account of the method I used in this study. The aim of the research was to examine the emotional challenges facing expatriate professionals in their relocation to China and the coping strategies they followed. The goal was to generate accounts of the phenomenon of expatriation and the emotional challenges that people face due to a change of country and culture. Through documenting their stories, the potential psychological issues to those relocating overseas for employment was explored, as was how counselling psychology can improve their lives. Furthermore, this research also aims to educate counselling psychologists and future expatriate professionals to prevent or minimalize the cause of any emotional difficulties and facilitate adjustment by providing helpful coping mechanisms.

This research was undertaken within a qualitative framework and, to be more specific, within a narratively informed theoretical perspective. In this chapter, the reason for the choice of qualitative research will be mentioned briefly. In addition, the theoretical position and philosophical underpinnings of my study will be presented. The research design of the current study and the rationale for using narratively informed Thematic Analysis (TA) in order to answer the research questions will also be presented. In another section, the research context is situated and a detailed description of the method and procedure is provided. Data analysis and its step by step procedure is also detailed. A section on the trustworthiness and the ethical considerations of the study is included. Finally, a description of the participants’ background is given.
3.2. Research Design

3.2.1. Qualitative Research

Quantitative research methods focus on objective measurements, statistical or numerical data collected from different instruments such as questionnaires, and they are useful for putting data into order, ranking and categories (McLeod, 2001). Quantitative research emphasises the generalisation of data across groups of people or an explanation of a particular phenomenon (Kasim & Hudson, 2010) Quantitative research is essential for providing a broad base of insight on which typically a final course of action might be recommended (McLeod, 2008). Qualitative research, on the other hand, gathers non-numerical information such as diary accounts, unstructured interviews, unstructured observations etc. and mostly focuses on in depth exploration of peoples’ experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

For the purposes of the current study, I propose that a qualitative method is more appropriate to explore the personal challenges experienced by expatriate individuals living and working in China, and also the coping mechanisms each expatriate used in order to deal with their adjustment. I felt that questionnaires could not cater for the depth of response required to address the research questions. Within counselling psychology, it has been recognized that qualitative methods are more congruent to the philosophy of practice (Morrow, 2005). Qualitative methodology not only fits with the concerns of my research, but also with my professional philosophy as a humanistic counselling psychologist (Creswell, 2007). Working as a therapist, I have valued the importance of peoples’ stories and how clients make sense of their realities through their lived experiences. I will approach this research and the power of participants’ stories by having this philosophical stance in mind.
3.2.2. Philosophical Underpinnings

In this section, an overview of the epistemological positioning of the current research will be given. My epistemological commitments as a researcher which contributed to the methodological decisions made in the process of this project will be presented. First of all, I will describe my ontological and epistemological engagement and then outline briefly how ontology and epistemology influenced the methodology of my study.

Transparency about the epistemological position that someone holds is pivotal for the process of research. It is a notable part of ensuring that the reader is aware of the kind of knowledge the researcher is aiming to produce, as well as the principles guiding this production. Researchers choose an approach and methodology that reflect their personal views and beliefs about reality (Etherington, 2004; Morrow, 2007). Ontology refers to what exists, what there is (Petrov, 2011).

Ontology can also be considered as one’s view of what we believe about reality, about our assumptions of the nature of reality (Willig, 2008). Individual ontological views vary among different perspectives and this is reflected in the literature on the subject (Eli, 2011; Lather, 2006). Furthermore, in qualitative research there is a wide range of perspectives ranging from realism to constructivism. Interestingly, since qualitative methodologies do not have a standard ontological and epistemological theory for qualitative research, each researcher has to formulate their own subject and philosophical ideas. (Boje, Oswick & Ford, 2004).

For the purposes of the current study, a constructivist standpoint has been chosen (Ponterotto, 2005; Rosen, 1996). Constructivism has been developed on the assumption that reality is individually created; there is not one single reality, it is constructed in the mind of the individual (Hansen, 2004; Sterling-Folker, 2002). It could be considered that different sets of meaning are represented by different things and situations. More
precisely, reality is shaped by the individual and can be formed in different ways through their unique beliefs, experiences, environment and culture (Cupchik, 2001; Etherington, 2004). Thus, constructivism highlights the subjectivity of experience by recognizing the personal templates of making sense and supports the view that there are as many realities as there are perceivers (Rosen, 2006).

There is great debate concerning the position of the researcher on how reality is known or can be known, and also about the relationship between ontological and epistemological position (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). I personally come from a particular stance where I believe that there is no single reality, but a multitude of realities which can be understood, so I hold a constructivist ontological position. Thus, I believe that the present study leads to an understanding influenced by the particular reality and the dynamics of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. This ontological stance does not fit only with the purpose of my research, but it can also be argued that it matches the values of counselling psychology. Counselling Psychology places an important value on the subjective experiences of individuals and it often leans toward a phenomenological understanding of the world.

Having this in mind, I used a narratively informed methodological framework. Data were collected from unstructured conversational interviews which enabled my participants to tell their stories the way they preferred and I analysed the transcripts using thematic analysis. Unstructured conversational interviews and narrative inquiry also fit with my epistemological stances. In addition, since narrative inquiry was only used for the data collection and not as a method of analysis, it would be preferable to state that this research can be characterised as narratively informed.
3.2.3. Narrative Inquiry

As noted above, narrative inquiry was used as a theoretical approach in order to design this qualitative research and conduct the interviews. Narrative inquiry is a valuable research method used to explore aspects of memory, experience, health, family and personality, including identities constructed by a complex mixture of physical, moral and cultural influences, such as being an expatriate (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013; Bamberg, 2010; Stephens & Breheny, 2012). The rise of narrative as a research method in psychological studies developed as a response to researchers' needs to obtain a deeper understanding of human experiences and concentrate on situations from the point of view of those experiencing it (Parker, 2005).

There are multiple ways people understand their reality; most of the time it is through culture, history, the environment, and interaction with others (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Individuals describe their life experiences through stories; they use stories to express how these experiences have affected them as individuals or as a group (Josselson, 2006; Riessman, 2008). Storytelling is one of the most powerful elements of human communication due to the fact that human beings are keener to resonate stories of experiences rather than information (Smith & Sparkes, 2006; Webster & Mertova, 2007). We relate stories with people; we look for differences and similarities to adjust into our own stories (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Through stories we connect with other individuals or larger groups of people, we relate our personal journeys with other's stories to feel less isolated as expatriates do around the world (Burr, 2003). Storytelling also permits both the teller and the audience to construct a reality into meaningful and understandable experiences, which in other cases would be evanescent to them and others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research from a sociological perspective suggests that individuals’ stories mirror social structures, as individuals contribute to something more than biographical
particulars, namely stories of social worlds in their own terms (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). On the other hand, psychological approaches claim that narratives consider the notion that storytelling is an important tool for the reproduction and negotiation of an individuals' self (Crossley, 2000). According to the latter perspective, narratives recite more about the individuals ‘inner self’ than his/her external social world. These two apparently contradictory theories should not be conceptualized as isolated approaches, but it needs to be recognized that narratives can provide important information about both the ‘self’ and its social environment (Riessman & Speedy, 2007; Riley & Hawe, 2005).

Narrative focuses on subjective experiences by providing an understanding of how individuals make sense of their world through storytelling (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Narrative inquiry approaches stories as a fundamental identity formation for human beings and uses their stories as the basic object of exploration in order to comprehend their experiences (Gillman, Heyman & Swain 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Researchers maintain that narrative is a fundamental property of the human mind in order for people to make sense of themselves through stories and a way to present their experiences to particular audiences (Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2008). My research is situated broadly within the narrative inquiry field of narrative research since the experiences of expatriates will be understood narratively through unstructured conversational interviews where the participants will have the opportunity to narrate their personal stories about their expatriation. However, the analysis will be conducted with TA. Consequently, the motivation behind the choice of a narratively informed methodology was to develop insight into how expatriates understand their experiences.

Narrative has been used successfully to understand different experiences related to psychological studies (Burman, 2003; Crossley, 2000). It is an approach that takes into account the interplay between the personal experiences that participants share with the
audience (Bamberg, 2010; Murray, 2003). Using narrative inquiry to gather stories of men and women who have been expatriates in Asia is not only important from a research methodology perspective, but also a useful method for understanding peoples’ experiences and exploring the potential for providing an education for those who aim to follow the same career paths.

Researchers claim that narrative inquiry can be useful in the exploration of specific periods of transition as well as a useful research method where self-identity is being explored (Lieblich et al., 1998). Participants present themselves through the way they share their stories; thus the creation of a narrative is vital to how they define themselves (Riessman, 2008). Furthermore, through the creation of a narrative identity people integrate their past, present and future to define themselves (McLean & Pasupathi, 2011; Riessman, 2008).

The field of narrative research is extremely diverse both methodologically and theoretically (Andrews et al., 2013; Birch, 2011; Burman, 2003; Riessman, 2008). Narrative research does not have a single heritage, theoretical orientation or standard methodology which has led to several approaches and uses of narrative in qualitative research (Riessman & Speedy, 2007). Riessman (2008) proposed four major types of analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic and visual. She mentioned, however, that the boundaries between such types are sometimes blurred. She also suggested that the thematic and structural approaches are the foundations of narrative analysis whereas the other two are based on these.

Thematic analysis differs from the other types in the scope to which they attend the content, the language and the structural features of the told stories (Riessman, 2008a). According to Riessman (2008), thematic analysis is the most widely used analytic strategy and it focuses on “what” is said more than “how” it is said. The interest lies in the content of speech and analysts interpret what is said by focusing on the meaning and
language is mostly viewed as a resource rather than a topic of investigation (Riessman, 2008). Structural analysis concentrates mostly on the words, metaphors and the sequencing used by participants (Bal, Bakker & Butterman, 2011). Dialogic analysis explores how conversation between speakers is interactively constructed as narrative (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Visual analysis explores how people use images as a means of communication (Tiidenberg, 2015). Admittedly, when researching for which analytic method was appropriate for my research, I struggled to understand some of their differences and at times I felt confused about the plethora of perspectives used in narrative research. I also experienced difficulties in understanding how I could possibly link other approaches to my research. In fact, many researchers have emphasized the issue of the researcher becoming overwhelmed by the range of methods available (Hanninen, 2004; Rogan & Kock, 2005; Tahar, 2009).

Researchers pay attention differently to the stories depending on their research purpose and they give attention to various methods of analysis for their data where the main themes are the content approach varying from what is being told, to how it is being told and why it is being told (Squire et al., 2008). Other researchers focus on the whole life story, while some pay more attention to smaller segments of the interview material (Bailey et al., 2004; Dickie, 2003).

Therefore, a narratively informed thematic analysis was appropriate for this research in order to learn through participants’ stories about the challenges they faced in the new cultural environment the coping strategies employed and how these affected them emotionally. For this purpose I found that thematic analysis was appropriate to identify these challenges and strategies within the participants’ stories. In the next section I will provide a detailed account of thematic analysis.
3.2.4. My stand in the research

I personally believe that people formulate stories so as to give meaning to their experiences and representations of their reality. Moreover, I believe the narratively formed interviews are a product of both the participant and the researcher (Phillion, 2002).

As mentioned in a previous section, my epistemological position also included the view and the roles of the researcher. As described, I have a constructivist approach which leads to the conclusion that all data will be influenced both by the participant and the researcher. Barrat and Stuffer (2009) suggested that the relationship between the researcher and the participant needs to be examined in detail in order to explore the influence of the researcher’s beliefs and values during the process. Thus, my personal point of view about the topic is demonstrated in a reflective section of a following chapter within this research which includes all my personal views as well as the impact that the research had on me. During the interview, however, I did not share any of my personal experiences with the participants in order not to influence their stories. Moreover, during the analysis I tried as much as possible to exclude my personal views of the topic. My thoughts and feelings about the research topic were also discussed with my supervisor and my peers during supervision which allowed me to discuss my particular subjective reactions and keep my personal thoughts and feelings separate from those of the participants.

My study is situated within a narratively informed thematic framework because it aims to understand the action of the participants (i.e. coping mechanisms of expatriates), individual meanings (i.e. how each participant perceived their expatriation and the challenges faced), and socially situated actions that are produced within a specific time (i.e. during expatriation) and place (i.e. in China) for a specific purpose for a particular audience (expatriates). Special attention was given to the expression of thoughts, emotions and feelings of the participants (Tamboukou, 2010). Another reason why a
narratively informed design was suitable for my research is because a story can also provide an inside perspective on culture (Bell, 2002). For the present study, culture plays an important role in the construction of the participants’ narratives and how they experienced their reality of living and working in a vastly different culture.

3.3. Method

As detailed above, the research adopted a qualitative narratively informed method and the transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. In the following section, I will describe how this approach and all the steps of the procedure and analysis were applied.

3.3.1. Participant Recruitment

The goal of qualitative research is to gather rich and in-depth material rather than a representative number of participants (Manson, 2010). There are plenty of ways to recruit participants, however, the present study followed the method known as 'snowball sampling'; also called 'chain sampling' (Kurant, Markopoulou, & Thiran, 2010). This method is performed by asking well-situated people to recommend potential participants (Noy, 2008). By asking a number of people if they can suggest another participant suitable for the research, the snowball gets bigger and bigger (McLean & Campbell, 2003).

Due to the nature of qualitative research, which aims to get rich and in-depth stories, I decided to recruit six participants. Larger numbers of participants would prove to be a challenge to the thesis time-line of analysis, and smaller numbers would not provide enough depth to answer my research questions thoroughly. According to the literature there is no reasonable answer to how many qualitative interviews are enough for a research. Researchers suggest that the number of participants depend on the aims (Becker, 2012). For instance, if a researcher is exploring a single case then even one participant can be enough since comparison with other groups is not present (Brannen & Nilsen, 2011). On the other hand, researchers who have investigated sociological or
generational issues have used up to 260 participants (Brannen, 2004). This specific research is not aiming to compare the findings with other groups or to report a sociological transition among the expatriates, but is mainly looking to identify the emotional challenges faced by a specific number of participants. Of course, the results and the findings are not universal and they cannot be considered as representative of the whole expatriate community. Therefore, six participants is enough for the present research in order to identify some of the issues that people faced during their expatriation.

Participant recruitment is often influenced by the researcher's location and personal connections (Robinson & Mckenna, 2014). Hence, the connections I had from the time I was in Shanghai in 2013 were used. A person I knew who was working as a director for special education, developmental, behavioural and mental health services institute in Shanghai was contacted, but unfortunately she had repatriated. When I explained that I was interested in recruiting participants for my doctoral thesis, she redirected me to the current director of the institute and I was able to contact her via email. Other expatriates I met through networking back in 2013 were also contacted, but some of them did not reply to my e-mail while others did not show any interest in participating.

As a result, the new director of the institute became the key facilitator in my research. First, I contacted her via e-mail explaining the aim of my research and attaching a participant’s information sheet and a consent form. She was also provided with the contact details of my research supervisor. The director created an e-mail including all the expatriate employees of the institute. The e-mail included a brief introduction about myself as a counselling psychologist trainee and a few details about my research topic as well. She also created another e-mail including expatriates outside of the organisation where she also included similar details about myself and my research topic. The director also brought me in direct e-mail communication with other organisations such as the community centre in Shanghai where they circulated a similar email about my research.
From the first e-mail, twelve individuals gave a positive answer and from the second only three individuals expressed their interest to participate in my research.

As a next step, I sent separate e-mails to each one of them introducing myself and giving more details about my research topic and the research questions. I attached the participant’s information sheet along with the consent form. Unfortunately, there was a gap between our initial communication due to various responsibilities of the participants, busy work schedule, time different and Internet restrictions. As a result participants expressed their availability for the summer time but unfortunately some were no longer interested or they told me they would be in their home countries for holidays and it was not an ideal time for them to participate in my research. The snowball sampling also became a central feature of the recruitment and alongside the interview I asked participants if they knew anyone else who would be interested in participating in the study. One participant gave me the contact details of two other potential participants, but only one was able to participate, the second one had health issues at that time. As a result, six people participated in this study.

In the following sections, I will provide details about the participants and the interviews.

3.3.2. Participants

The sample consisted of 5 females and 1 male, aged from 25 to 50 years old. Even though there were a few males included in the e-mail communication, only one expressed interest in participating in the research. Some others expressed their willingness to participate, but due to Internet restrictions in China we were not able to conduct an interview. None of the male participants gave any information or reason about not being able to participate in the study therefore I do not have any official reason or proof about their absence. I provide my own thoughts and assumptions about this within the Reflexive
Analysis chapter. All participants were qualified in different sectors, from financial business to social work and psychology. One participant was a recent graduate who was working at the time of the interviews. At that time, all participants had been living and working in Shanghai ranging from 4 months to 7 years. All participants were English speakers. The criterion of choosing English language speakers was due to it being the only second language I have the skills in which to conduct an interview and provide analysis. This research did not exclude any participant on grounds of ethnic origin or other characteristics such as colour, gender, religious beliefs or professional background.

In the table below I present the participants’ demographics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of years lived in China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>30 - 40</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White American</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>American with Asian background</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>26 – 36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>American with Asian background</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.4 Presenting the Participants**

This section introduces the participants with their names changed for confidentiality and provides an overview of their background and story. At the time of the interviews, all participants were expatriate professionals living and working in Shanghai, China.

**3.4.1. Interview One – Philip**

At the time I interviewed Philip, he had already spent seven years in China. He was in his early thirties and self-employed. He was an assigned expatriate to Shanghai. I communicated with Philip via e-mail and the correspondence included a participant
information sheet and a consent form to see if he was interested. Once I obtained his positive response, we arranged to have a Skype interview.

When the interview was conducted, I was at home and he was in his office. Before the start of the interview, I offered him time for possible questions regarding the research topic and I made sure he had read the information sheet. I began the interview by explaining that it would be a conversational interview, unstructured and I would only ask him a central question which was to share his experience, thoughts and feelings regarding his life in China from the time of his arrival until now.

Philip was very descriptive in his interview and he gave specific details and descriptions. He outlined his feelings and thoughts during the interview and not only did he describe his experience of living in China, but also the different personality he developed during his stay in Shanghai. He talked about the process of adjustment, the relationship with other expatriates, what he found helpful and what was more challenging for him. He gave great emphasis on the fact that he is now living with his partner and how much this affected his time in China. Philip also spoke about the positive side of being an expatriate in China and how this aided his personal and professional development. He was not sure when they will repatriate back to their home country but as he said as this is a stressful thought for them they usually postpone it. When we finished the interview he sent the consent form signed and dated to my email address.

3.4.2. Interview two – Brigitte

Brigitte was thirty years old and she was an assigned expatriate as well. She had been living in China for about a year. Brigitte volunteered to participate in my research from an e-mail that had been sent to all the staff members of the organisation she was working at. I sent her the participant information sheet and the consent form. We had a Skype interview during her lunch break at work and I was at home. I explained what my
study was about and mentioned all the details of the interview process and my interest to focus on her thoughts and feelings of living there. Before we started, I gave her enough time to read the consent form, the participant’s information sheet and ask any questions regarding the research and the interview.

Brigitte seemed to be very open about her feelings and she described the challenges she faced during her time in China. She also focused on the coping strategies she had and she was very descriptive of the emotions of anxiety and distress she was experiencing at that time. Brigitte talked also about the practical difficulties she faced and how they took away her independence and individuality. She also said that she considered it highly likely to repatriate within the next year. Once the interview was completed she emailed me her signed and dated consent form.

3.4.3. Interview three – Tania

Tania has been in Shanghai for the last six years and she was a “trailing spouse”. I contacted Tania after a suggestion from my previous participant who had already spoken to her about my research. I emailed Tania with all the relevant documents (participant information sheet and consent form) and we agreed to have an interview via Skype. During the interview, I was at my home and she was at home too. I explained my research topic and she was given time to read the forms.

Tania talked about her experience of being in China, the challenges she faced, including psychological and medical issues and how she managed to cope during this time. She mentioned the cultural differences and the struggles she had to face. She also talked about the difficulties of repatriation and she was also very anxious herself because she would have to choose either to repatriate or remain in China for a couple of years more. At the end of the interview, she emailed her signed and dated consent form.
3.4.4. Interview four – Aby

At the time of the interview, Aby was a self-initiated expatriate in her late twenties. She had been living in Shanghai for more than a year with her fiancé. We communicated via e-mail and a time for our Skype interview was agreed. During the interview, Aby was given time to read the participant information sheet and the consent forms she had already received from me. I explained the procedure and then Aby told me her story of living and working in China. Aby was the only participant who found her experience pleasant and the challenges were more positive than negative. She expressed her thoughts and feelings and how her expatriation experience was a positive step to her professional career. She also talked about being self-disciplined and what she had learnt about herself. Aby did not mention any thoughts of repatriating soon, but she also said she did not want to spend a lot of time in China. At the end Aby emailed me a signed and dated consent form for my records.

3.4.5. Interview 5 - Claire

Claire was a newly qualified therapist who had recently started her work. At the time of the interview Claire was in her fourth year in Shanghai. She was in her mid-twenties and was from another Asian country. Even though I thought that she might have some commonalities with Chinese culture, since Claire’s story proved the opposite, I decided to include her in my research. After explaining the procedure, I gave her time to read the participant information sheet as well as the consent form. Claire’s story concerned adjustment struggles in Shanghai and especially the use of language. Claire was the only participant who focused on spirituality and meditation as a coping strategy. She also supported the argument that counselling psychology can be very helpful for the adjustment of expatriates as well as other issues such as repatriation, separation and anxiety. Interestingly, in her narrative, she described the importance of
interacting with locals as a helpful method to learn about the culture, traditions, society and language, which are some important elements for better adjustment.

3.4.6. Interview 6 - Zoe

Zoe was the last participant of this research. At the time of interview, Zoe was in her mid-forties and in her 7th year in Shanghai. In our initial email communication, Zoe was sent all the relevant documents to let her decide if she wanted to take part in the research. When we arranged a Skype meeting, Zoe was in her office and I was at home. I reassured myself that she had read all the documents and returned the consent form before commencing the interview. Zoe, in her story, talked about the personal and professional challenges she faced during her journey as an expatriate focusing on the importance of peer-support and social network.

3.5. Researcher

In qualitative research it is recommended that the researcher expresses his or her own personal and professional background to the audience of the research in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Morrow, 2005). In this section I will present briefly my background, my assumptions and thoughts related the topic. A more detailed reflective analysis can be found in the following chapter.

I am a white, Greek male student on the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology course at the University of Manchester and I have been in practice as a trainee counselling psychologist for the last 3 years. In 2013, just before finishing my second Masters in Psychology, I had the chance to get a six month internship in Shanghai as a consumer behaviour analyst for a company owned by an Australian expatriate. That was my first contact with the country, Chinese culture and the expatriate community. During my adjustment time in Shanghai, I faced many positive and negative challenges and I tried to develop my own coping strategies. In my attempt to adjust, I tried to learn as much as I could about the culture, history, the mentality of the host country nationals as
well as some social norms. After 2013, I visited Shanghai again on February 2016 for a couple of days. Although I have not spent years but only a few months in Shanghai, I found similarities between my story and those of the participants.

My experiences could be characterized as preliminary compared to some of my participants who have had a full settlement of about 7 years. I had, however, to be aware that my feelings and thoughts might blur my understanding and interpretation of the stories. This awareness permitted me to acknowledge my thoughts, but to keep them separate from those expressed by the participants. Moreover, having experience as a counselling psychologist in training and being aware of the importance of staying with my clients’ needs and agenda, taught me to be an active listener, which was a useful skill during the interviews. I tried to engage with the participants’ pace, give them a safe space to express their thoughts and feelings and acknowledge their experience without interruption. The interview process details are described in the following sections.

3.6. Data Collection

3.6.1. Conversational Interviews

For the purpose of the present study, the stories were gathered through conversational interviews. The primary narrative research method is the conversational interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In this method, each interview agenda is established interactively in which the researcher’s questions are built on responses to previous questions (Quinn-Patton, 2001). Conversational, unstructured interviews with open ended questions enable participants to unfold a story in their own words and the researcher can access their personal experiences (Riessman, 2008). These interviews are described as a conversation between teller and listener in which both develop a meaning together (Turner, 2010). The researcher’s positioning can add depth to the interpretations of the participants’ stories and consider alternative interpretations (Alvarez & Urla, 2002). Since these interpretations are shaped by the researcher’s social positioning, it is
important to report their biographical details, philosophical stance and personal experiences related to the topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Conversational interviews emphasize the dynamics between the participant and researcher; the former is empowered because the researcher is responsive to his or her agenda (Limerick & Limerick, 2007). The goal of the interviews was to generate a detailed account of events or experiences shaped during expatriation (Murray, 2003; Riessman, 2008). Conversational interviews have been seen as a transparent method of data collection which can also serve a wide use of the research purposes (Smith, Hollway & Mishler, 2005).

Conversational interviews were considered as the most appropriate choice for collecting data that would allow a depth of response that was required to give insight into the expatriates’ experiences. Other methods of qualitative data, for example focus groups would not be practical due to my limited contacts with expatriates, the geographical distance, time difference, as well as other difficulties such as China’s Internet restrictions which could limit the participants’ availability. The nature of the narrative research interview also resonated with the interest in relationship and partnership that the researcher brought to the study as a former expatriate and counselling psychologist (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000; Kelly & Howie, 2007).

Conversational interviews also allowed me to develop a relationship with the participant, leading to a more transparent and in depth experience which would probably not have been possible through the use of questionnaires. The relationship between the researcher and the participant during the interview can facilitate the gathering of data grounded in the participants’ experience, making the material richer in content (Grafanaki, 1996). As noted, creating a relationship with the participant can be important to the whole process, but in order to achieve this relationship the researcher is required to have some specific skills such as active listening, genuineness and warmth (Kvale, 2008).
Such skills are also important in a therapeutic setting and I was very familiar with the use of those skills due to my professional identity as a counselling psychologist.

### 3.6.2. Interview Schedule & Protocol

The design of the schedule was influenced by the constructionist value given to in depth answers. Prior to conducting the interviews, I created a schedule which consisted of a number of guiding questions asked to the participants (Appendix 1). Even though conversational interviews are typically unstructured, a little prompting from the researcher can be included to enable minimal direction in case participants changed topic or focused on something different to the main question (Bamberg, 2010; Kelly & Howie, 2007). The interview questions helped the participants to start their story and narrate the challenges they faced. I had only a limited number of questions so as to allow the development of rich and spontaneous responses (Kvale, 2008). Due to the limited number of existing studies related to the present research, there are not much research available from which I was able to get ideas for my interview schedule. Also, the majority of the existing literature consist of quantitative works, which only gave me a few details from which I could base my interview questions on for the present research questions. More precisely, there was not a specific area on which I wanted to focus, hence the reason for not using any structured interview method.

### 3.6.3. Procedure

Interviews for this research were conducted on-line via the use of Skype software. Skype is not only a method of communicating with friends and relatives, but software which has been used for research and educational purposes. Educational implications of Skype consist of teaching, learning and team working (Roulston, 2010). It also allows researchers conducting qualitative methods to collect their data through interviews with people who live in different countries (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). Participant
recruitment is the same as face to face interviews and the participants are contacted via

e-mail in order to arrange a suitable time and date for the interview. In Skype cases,
ethical issues are considered the same as in face to face and online interviews. Informed
consent was obtained via email to make sure that all participants were fully aware of the
audio recordings. Furthermore, access to verbal and non-verbal cues in Skype interviews
can provide equal authenticity as face to face interviews (Sullivan, 2012). Also, prior the
interviews I informed participants about the confidentiality issues around Skype.
Specifically, Skype reserves all the rights to own all the verbal and written conversations
between the users for security purposes. Participants, however, did not wish to download
another software, due to their limited time out of work, which has different policies.

After having identified the interview method, I contacted the key contact who
assisted with finding my participants and she circulated an email which included the
participants’ information sheet and a consent form to read prior to the interviews
(Appendix 6). One difficulty I faced was that the interviews took place in July, a time
when many of the expatriates were back home for holidays, and this made our
communication more difficult. As a result, the first interview was conducted in July and
the last in October. Unstructured interviews are normally long, but I tried to be mindful
of time (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The proposed interview was set at approximately
60 minutes for each participant, however some interviews lasted 30 minutes, while others
lasted 70. The interviews took place via Skype at a jointly-agreed time and date to ensure
participants’ comfort and safety. During the interviews, I was at home, one participant
was at home and the rest were in their place of work.

At the beginning, my background and the reason for the research was briefly
narrated and all the procedures of anonymity were explained. By making sure that all
their names will be changed, confidentiality was achieved and their consent to record their
stories using a digital voice recorder was given. Participants were asked to take time to
read the consent form and the participant information sheet before the recording began (Appendix 7). Prior to each interview, I familiarized myself with the interview questions. To start the interview and make it easier for participants to begin telling their story, I invited them to give some brief information about themselves and their reason for being in China. The conversation was developed by asking how they came to China and how they took this decision. Participants were asked if it was the first time they had lived and worked abroad. After that, the participants started narrating their stories about relocation, adjustment challenges and coping strategies. In addition, I took notes during the interview to remind myself of any useful points made which I wanted to discuss more in depth. During the interviews, clarifications were sought to what the participant had said and each participant was encouraged to further explain their answers. I also summarised what they narrated in order to further assist my understanding of the meaning of what they were saying, but also to indicate that I was actively listening and engaging with what they were saying. During the interviews, my own experience as a former expatriate in Shanghai was not shared.

Once the interview was finished, participants were asked to email me a signed consent form. At the end of each interview all the data was transferred to my laptop and the transcription process begun. After the transcription was finished, the initial recordings were destroyed. The final transcript was sent to each participant for correction, but no issues were reported. A detailed explanation of the transcription process is situated in the analysis chapter.
Table 2 - Procedure Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
<td>Suggested by another participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Brigitte</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
<td>Volunteered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Tania</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>Interview Protocol</td>
<td>Suggested by another participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Aby</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
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<td>Claire</td>
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<td>Unstructured</td>
<td>Volunteered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>Interview Protocol</td>
<td>Volunteered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7. Transcription Process

The interview transcription was verbatim and included all utterances by both the participant and myself as researcher. Some of my utterances were non-verbal, such as “uh huh”, “mhmm”, “yeah, aha” etc. in an attempt to show the participant that I was following what they were saying and to encourage them to continue with their story (Davidson, 2009). Non-lexical sounds such as laughter or sighed were also reported. Since it is important for the researcher to engage and immerse with the recordings in qualitative analysis, I decided that it would be beneficial to conduct the transcription myself. Hence, the recordings were scanned and the transcription process was carried out without any assistance. All interviews were conducted in English.

Transcribing the interviews was a lengthy process; however, some were conducted on the same day or the day after the interview, which enabled me from the beginning to get a sense of the expatriates’ stories and how they were told. I transcribed each interview separately before I proceed to the next interview in order to remember as many details as possible and also to reassure that I will not be confused with another participant’s information. The initial transcript was sent back to the participants for verification so any additional information thought of after the interview could be
included. Participants were also able to remove any information they did not want to share or thought inaccurate. None of the six participants asked for anything to be removed or amended and the transcript was confirmed as a true account of their story. Possible identifying information was also deleted as agreed and a pseudonym was used for each participant.

3.7.1 Data analysis rationale

In the following section, I demonstrate and explain the process of how I analysed the interviews. I will first introduce the thematic analysis before moving on to describe the rationale behind choosing this specific method.

3.8. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely used qualitative analytic method in psychology and it offers an accessible approach to qualitative data analysis (Roulston, 2001). Like other qualitative methods, TA facilitates the gleaning of knowledge of the meaning made of the phenomenon under study and provides the necessary groundwork (Holoway & Todres, 2003). TA identifies, organises, analyses and describes the data in rich detail (Boyatzis, 1998). The goal of TA is to highlight the most salient constellations of meanings from the analysed material, which in the present case, the interviews. For example, the present study examined the emotional challenges and coping strategies of expatriates who live and work in China, therefore a TA of interviews of people who were expatriates in China would reveal different themes about the challenges they faced and what coping strategies they followed. Also, TA with the creation of themes and subthemes will allow further exploration on how these people chose their strategies and which deeper factors influence their emotions. Thus, a TA can inform researchers and other counselling psychologists about the issues expatriates might face.
Clarke and Braun (2013) have described the theoretical flexibility of TA because the search for patterning across language does not require adherence to any particular theory of language or explanatory meaning framework for human beings, experiences or practices. This means that TA can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks and is suited to a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Consequently, this allows me to apply TA under a narratively informed theoretical framework where the data collected with conversational interviews. Moreover, TA is also suitable for constructivist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a method which can be used for a broad range of research questions, from those about peoples’ experiences or understandings to those concerning the representation and construction of particular phenomena in particular contexts. Furthermore, TA is a useful method for working within a participatory research paradigm where it can summarise key features of the data. Also, it highlights similarities and differences across the data set. TA usually generates unanticipated insights and allows for both social and psychological interpretations of the data set. TA is able to offer systematic element characteristics of content analysis, but also permits the researcher to combine analysis of the frequency of codes with analysis of their more tacit meanings (Joffe, 2011). TA can be very valuable for researchers to ‘thematisate’ the meanings of a text. As such, TA fits with the present study in which my central focus is on how expatriates in China experienced adjustment to a different culture (Andrews et al., 2008), what challenges they faced, what coping strategies they followed and what the emotional impact on their personal, professional and social lives was.

The analysis of the interviews will be methodical, focused and detailed with the ‘whole’ story being retained. TA can also provide a straightforward approach to extracting meaning from a text which can reveal a problem and provide useful insight into its implications for therapeutic practice (Riessman, 2008). For this research,
therefore, TA was chosen to investigate the stories and, in addition, NVivo (Appendix 2) coding software was used to analyse my transcribed interviews (Bazeley, 2007). The step by step process of analysis will be evaluated in a later section.

3.8.1 What is a theme?

Since TA refers to themes it would be beneficial to examine more closely the notion of a theme. A theme captures something which is considered by the researcher as important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There is not a specific answer within the literature on how many themes should appear in a research or what the correct theme is. The researcher’s judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is and there are no rigid rules about theme identification. According to the literature, the key to identifying a theme is whether or not the theme captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003).

It is not uncommon for a theme to emerge from the data or sometimes even during the interviews (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). In fact, a theme can be directly observable across a series of interview transcripts (Joffe, 2011), for instance, some participants talked about the importance of the social network when they were describing how they coped with emotional difficulties. As a result, social network consisted of a theme which later answered one of the study’s research questions regarding the expatriates’ coping strategies. Other times, a theme can be more latent within a context and it can be identified from the interview transcripts, for example, expatriates referred to the importance of living conditions in China which was not identified during the interviews. Themes are thus patterns of explicit and implicit content.
3.8.2. Latent themes

Researchers have pointed out the differences between a semantic approach where the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the researcher is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In contrast, a TA at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data and starts to identify and examine the underlying ideas within the content of the data. This latent level corresponds to the aims of this research in which I was able to extract meaning from the overall stories of the expatriate individuals and be able to find similarities and differences in their stories to obtain a deeper understanding of their emotional challenges and their coping strategies. Moreover, by using TA the researcher focuses on situating the stories into the relevant context of time and place both for the study and the participants in terms of their cultural background, age and also at what stage of their life participants were at the time of the interview as working expatriates, retired, or repatriates. More specifically, through this analysis I was able to see participants placing themselves in place and time when describing their journey in different stages from their arrival to the present moment of the interview, but also in its cultural and historical context. Analysis within the latent tradition tends to come from a constructionist paradigm where broader meanings are reported as underpinning on what is actually articulated in the data (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

3.8.3. TA versus other methodologies

As has been mentioned earlier, TA can be characterised for its flexibility in comparison to other qualititative analytic methods and therefore fits with my personal views and my constructivist epistemological stance. TA differs from methods such as conversation analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith & Obsorn, 2008) which are tied to a particular theoretical or epistemological position. Other methodologies, such as grounded theory, are different
manifestations of the method within a broad theoretical network. Additionally, there are methods independent of theory and epistemology and they can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. TA belongs to this group and it is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms within psychology (Roulston, 2001). Due to its theoretical freedom, TA constitutes a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a detailed account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To further explain why thematic analysis was the most appropriate option for this thesis, it may be useful to outline other methods of qualitative analysis. Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) is primarily used in the generation of a theory, which was not the aim of the current study due to both its exploratory nature and its focus on the experiences of expatriate participants. Another method of analysis is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which also explores the meanings individuals give to their experiences (Smith, 2004). It could be argued that IPA would also be suitable for the present thesis, however, this research focuses on the emotional challenges of expatriates during their time in China. Therefore, an untrusted narrative-informed interview method would be more appropriate to explore each participant’s personal experience and IPA has an existing epistemological stance which does not correspond to my personal views.

IPA is a method which provides an entire method of constructing research as well as the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research; critical realism and contextualism (Smith & Osborn, 2007). IPA also involves the structure of questions for analysis and it also requires a structured interview process (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), whereas the present thesis used narratively-informed unstructured conversational interviews. Furthermore, the present study followed constructivism as its ontological
stance which does not believe in following a structured method of interview. An important element of thematic analysis is flexibility. This is due to its nature of being only a method of data analysis and not an approach of conducting qualitative research (Wiles, Rosenberg & Kearns, 2005). Since thematic analysis is not tied to a particular philosophical and epistemological approach, some researchers might argue that this can be a disadvantage. However, this facilitates openness to the way each researcher wants to develop his/her data according to their research question(s) (Wiles et al., 2005). IPA also focuses on the coding and theme development of each interview, while narrative thematic analysis concentrates on the development of themes and sub-themes of the whole data from all participants (Larkin, & Thomson, 2012).

3.8.4. Inductive approach of TA

This method of analysis allowed me to have an inductive approach for the present study. Themes are not mediated by the researcher’s theoretical perspective, interview method and the whole analytic method attempts to situate the stories by taking into account time and place (Riessman, 2008). This means that the development of themes is focused on the stories and not on the ideas the researcher can place on the data. This also matches with the constructivist values of the study, as well as with the lack of existing literature about counselling psychology and the emotional challenges of expatriates in China. This approach also helped me gain insight from the interview material as a whole rather than simply exploring one aspect in detail. Thematic narrative analysis also provides a useful method of managing large amounts of data generated from the interviews and it allows the researcher to organise the data in a coherent way and develop patterns across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Approaching the data as a whole allowed me to achieve a deeper understanding, a clearer image of the emotional challenges, but also of the coping strategies expatriates use during their time in China and relate this with counselling psychology and therapy.
3.9. Analytical Process

A thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 3- Analytical Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1 - Familiarising myself with the data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2- Generating initial codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3 - Searching for themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4 - Reviewing themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5 - Defining themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6 - producing report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once I completed the transcription I started the first part of my analysis where I closely read the stories and write comments next to the text which later aided to identify the five key themes and contextual details of each story. I also highlighted the parts where participants where emphasizing on their emotional challenges and coping strategies. In this stage, each interview was read separately from the others. A detailed and careful analysis was carried out where I tried to engage with the data, identify and specify the main themes of each story. Afterwards, I created a table for each story where I included the identified themes. A sample of this table can be found in Appendix 3.

The second part of my analysis included a better insight in the cases and I tried to capture the main meaning of my participants’ stories. On this stage I started coding each transcript and made a note of each code alongside the data extract (Appendix 4).
On the third stage having all the codes and been immersed in the data I started focusing on identifying themes (Appendix 5). I am also using the table I have created in order to identify and note the main issues, and those which were repeated could create a theme. The points and issues which mentioned once were not included in the themes table. Moreover, I checked if any of these themes could be included as part of a broader study-wide theme, coming up in other participants’ stories. A sample of this stage can be seen in Appendix. During this stage I stayed close and focused to the way that participants represented their stories in order to avoid any assumptions. My communication with my supervisor and the supervisory team meetings were also helpful to keep me as close as possible to the participants’ stories without adding my own point of view.

On the fourth stage of the analysis I looked for commonalities and differences between the stories in relation to each theme before I proceeded with the construction of the final major themes. Every time a participant was talking about a specific theme which was common I copied the specific blocks of text from the story and pasted it on the relevant theme list in the new document (Appendix 6).

After I collected all the themes and the blocks of the text for each story separately I proceeded in to the fifth stage of my analysis where I checked which of these could either consist a sub-theme of a bigger theme. Then, I created tables with the main themes and sub themes of each story and I read again each story focusing on the sub - themes in order to make sure I had included all of the relevant blocks of texts under each sub-theme. I finally created a table. Afterwards, I moved into the next, final, stage of the analysis. During this stage I focused on each theme to make sure all sub-themes were listed and they were under the correct section.

3.10. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is a standard of quality, related to the concept of validity (Morrow, 2005; Riessman, 2008). Validity and reliability is the main
focus of the qualitative research to identify the ‘absolute truth’. This, however cannot be suitable to narrative research which mainly focuses on the rigour and credibility of the study (Riessman, 2008a). Focusing on the trustworthiness of a study, we aim to validate the social world where reality is constructed by each individual’s discourses, actions and experiences rather than focusing on the identification of the ‘absolute truth’ (Mischler, 1990). A number of researchers have set out different criteria for trustworthiness, rigour and credibility. This study will follow the guidelines for validity and quality in qualitative research devised by Yardley (2000).

I maintained the credibility of this study through keeping a reflexive journal and making decisions in order to demonstrate transparency throughout the process. As I mention in the Reflexive Analysis chapter, the inspiration for this topic is based on personal experiences. These experiences, personal views and values did not influence the interviews, the analysis and the results of this work. I tried to exclude my views from this work and the only part I express those views is the Reflexive Analysis chapter where I analyse all the procedure of conducting the present study and which measures I kept to optimise the trustworthiness of this qualitative research. I also provide a detailed analysis about the insider-outsider status. Furthermore, this study’s interviews were conducted through Skype. Participants were informed that Skype is the owner of the every material, conversation or text within the software. Participants were offered the option to download an alternative software without the above ethical issues, however, none of them agreed they all preferred to use Skype for their interviews.

3.11. Transparency

Transparency refers to honesty about the research process such as auditing, notes and methodologically detailed description on how this research was conducted. In the methodology chapter of my research, a reader is able to follow the process of my study.
There is clear documentation of all the research decisions and activities written in the appendices. More specifically, in the application of thematic narrative analysis which is detailed in the following chapter, the stages of the analysis can be identified and all relevant tables are documented in the appendices. The regular contact with my research supervisor was also essential in achieving transparency. The feedback I received about my interpretations and on how the narrations were reported enabled me to reflect on my work and achieve knowledge of my personal assumptions and biases in order to limit any potential negative impact on the participants’ narratives. One important element of a study’s transparency is clear documentation and disclosure of the challenges and unexpected twists over time. In the participants recruitment I mentioned that one of my key contacts had repatriated so I had to recruit participants through another person. At that time I was under a lot of stress since I was unaware if she could assist with my research. Moreover, all the practical challenges such as the time difference, Internet restrictions as well as the fact that the interviews took place during the time where the majority of the expatriates were on holiday and that delayed our communication were mentioned.

People who helped in the completion of this research were acknowledged. In addition, there are clear statements of how I proceeded with the research material. I found it important to notify the reader of my position as research towards the research and the context which it is situated therefore together with the procedure I have also explicitly reflected on the impact of the research in my role as the researcher which is a section on the methodology chapter as well as a previous expatriate and finally a trainee counselling psychologist. Within this research I was both researcher and connoisseur with respect to the topic having been an expatriate in China myself. Both positive and negative implications about being an insider-researcher are clearly mentioned in the reflective chapter. Additionally, all the underlying principles of Narrative Interview and TA
throughout the research process have been described. In this case, I tried to engage the participants in the analysis process by sending them the interview transcripts followed by the findings and themes of my research. The reason I did this was in order to maintain the transparency of this study, but also to allow feedback and changes.

3.12. Coherence

Coherence refers to the effort of the researcher to gather different parts of a story in order to create a whole, complete and meaningful image where the reader is able to understand the arguments or even why the researcher has chosen a particular methodology for the study (Lieblich et al., 1998). Coherence usually takes place on three different levels: global, local and themal (Riessman, 1993). Global refers to the general aim of the story teller in revealing his/her story. Themal refers to the commonality of the emerging themes throughout the stories and local coherence is related to the way participants share their stories. For the purposes of the present research, the reasons why a narrative methodology was chosen for the completion of this research has been analysed and can be found throughout the methodology chapter. With this in mind, a reader can clearly see in the analysis and presentation of the results sections the use of direct quotes derived from the interview in order to give extra strength to the arguments made and also to keep the stories as a whole.

3.13. Persuasiveness

Lieblich et al., (1998) state that persuasiveness is an important part of the concept of trustworthiness and validity. Persuasiveness can be achieved when the researcher’s claims are supported with evidence from research studies and when different interpretations are taken into account (Lieblich et al., 1998). The present study includes arguments supported by previous research on expatriation. Moreover, the supervisor’s and participants’ feedback were used to assess if the findings could uphold the criteria.

The research requires sensitivity towards the participants since they might have to narrate sensitive situations of the past. During the interview and during the whole process of the research the participants were treated with respect. As mentioned throughout the methodology chapter and in the ethics section, my training as a counselling psychologist helped to show empathy to the expatriates’ experiences, which included in some cases sensitive material. Respect, transparency and trustworthiness can be seen by the reader throughout the project. I acknowledged the personal and private nature of the topics discussed so all the data were safely collected and stored in an encrypted folder on my laptop following ethical guidelines and this can be found in this methodology chapter. The use of language in the forms were appropriate for the participants as shown in the appendices where the participant information sheet is provided.

3.15. Commitment to rigour

Throughout the whole research process, including the interview stage, I was committed to offering a high standard of duty of care to the participants. All the ethical guidelines were followed by letting my participants to choose if they wanted to participate in the study or withdraw at any time. As mentioned in the previously, the participants were also involved throughout the whole analysis process by providing them the results and also by being open to any feedback for further development. I was committed to conducting a useful and as in depth as possible interview with the focus being on the expatriates’ narrative.

3.16. Impact and importance

The present research aimed to give expatriates the opportunity to express how their feelings and lives were influenced by the challenges of being an expatriate and the coping strategies they followed during their adjustment. I offered Skype meetings to any of the participants as regards the progress and findings of the research.
3.17. Credibility

Credibility refers to trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the findings. Credibility could be earned through reliability, replicability, consistency and accuracy of the findings (Yardley 2000). In depth description to explain culturally situated meanings with abundant concrete detail was used. For the purposes of the present study, detailed method of analyses, including tables with the step by step procedure followed can be found in the present chapter and in the appendices numbers are also mentioned. The analysis was detailed and all the themes and sub-themes were created after careful study.

3.18. Pragmatic Use

Pragmatic use is an important element of the rigour and credibility of narrative research. It leads to the contribution of the knowledge, the urge for future research within qualitative studies and it simply refers to the description of interpretation that were produced, the requirement to make the process visible and the availability of the primary data (Riessman, 2002). Following the above guidelines I will clarify my study aims and its implication for future research in the discussion and conclusion chapters of this study. I have also presented a section about the contribution to the knowledge and future research in the hope that more researchers will explore similar topics about the expatriate population.

3.19. Ethical issues

As with any research, ethical considerations are important in the present study. For the present study I followed the British Psychological Society’s Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) and the Health and Care Professions Council Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists (2012). Moreover, the research followed the procedural ethical framework of the University of Manchester SEED. All participants had
time to read the details of the research and what the research would involve. Participants were reassured that there was no requirement to take part in the present research and they were permitted to withdraw at any time if they were unsure about their participation. They were given the opportunity to ask any questions directly to me or my research supervisor whose contact details were available on the participant information sheet. Consent was monitored and at the end of every interview participants emailed their signed and dated consent form. Participants received the finalized transcript with a pseudonym allocated to each one of them in order to demonstrate that none of their words were changed and that their real names were changed. For confidentiality, all the transcribed documents were kept in encrypted files and all the initial recordings were deleted.

I was mindful of the need for an additional approach to ethics, that has been termed, ‘ethics in practice’ which refers to the moment-to-moment ethical decision-making that arises when interacting with participants in research (Guilleminn & Gillam, 2004). My training in counselling psychology has equipped me with the necessary skills to show great understanding of the participants, if they experience any emotional moments. I was prepared prior to the interviews that if any of the participants experienced emotional moments due to the sensitive nature of their narration, they would be allowed to stop the interview and have some time until they were ready to continue. In the case that they felt they could not continue their story, then they would be able to withdraw. If required, I was able to provide the participants with a list of resources and services in China which could offer psychological support in case of need.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I explained why a qualitative method was more appropriate for this particular study. Also, I described the philosophical underpinnings guiding my study and more specifically the reason for choosing the constructivist approach. Furthermore, details about narrative analysis and thematic analysis were included. This
chapter included the method in practice with specific details about the recruitment and the interview process along with the ethical considerations, and the criteria for trustworthiness, transparency, coherence, pragmatic use, commitment to rigour in order to assess the quality of the present study were also detailed. In the following chapter I present my data analysis.

4. Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of the research presented in the sections that follow. A detailed, step by step description of the total analysis process is given as well as how the five themes and sub-themes to be presented at a later stage were derived. To remind the reader, the overall purpose of the research was to explore the emotional challenges facing expatriate professionals when they relocate to China, and how this has affected their personal and professional lives. What coping strategies do they follow? The research questions considered were as follows:

1. What emotional challenges do expatriates face during their stay and work in China?

2. What strategies do they use to cope with those challenges?

The research questions will be analysed in this section since the findings are generated from the narratives of the participants.

4.2. Presentation of the findings

As described in methodology, thematic narrative analysis was used to analyse my data. During coding, five themes were developed. Each theme consisted of two to four sub-themes. The analysis process has been described in detail in the previous section and the tables are available throughout the Appendix section. Five main themes were found
in all the participants’ stories. The following themes were identified: Challenges, Coping Strategies, Adjustment, Personality and Cultural Differences. The following table presents an overview of the themes, including sub-themes.

**Table 4 - List of Themes and Subthemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Emotional Challenges</td>
<td>a) Emotional difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Positive Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) The challenge of the unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Repatriation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Coping Strategies</td>
<td>a) Social network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Importance of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Professional Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Adjustment</td>
<td>a) Adjustment to daily life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Living conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Work satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personality</td>
<td>a) Traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Personal Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cultural Differences</td>
<td>a) Communication and Interaction with locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Cultural differences at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Culture shock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before proceeding with an analysis of each theme and sub-theme, a brief summary of each participant’s story will be presented. The analysis of the narratives will be evaluated in a later section containing the themes and sub-themes, including blocks of
verbatim quotes from each participant which expressed the theme during the interview. A summary of the most important narratives about each theme from each participant follows.

### 4.3. Summary of the participants’ stories

The previous chapter provided an overview of the stories participants’ shared during their interview, whereas this chapter provides an overview of their backgrounds and stories. Further detailed presentation of these stories and the themes created through their analysis is presented later.

**Philip:** In his story, Philip described his experience of being an expatriate in China for the last seven years. He did not choose to be there, but was sent by his company. He talked about the challenges he faced during his adjustment, the cultural differences and how he finally managed to deal with this transition from one place to another. He gave a very interesting and detailed description of what he noticed the time he first arrived in Shanghai, such as the different smells, the people, traffic, Chinese characters on signs, and the first place he stayed.

Philip also talked about his frustration at having a job he did not like and how this, along with other experiences, influenced his emotions. As a coping strategy, he gave great emphasis on the social network and family, in particular how interaction with other people, mainly expatriates and the fact his fiancée moved over, helped him to adjust to life in China. He also considered looking for professional help for issues related to work, but not for adjustment difficulties. However, he did not do so due to the limited access to therapeutic sources in Shanghai. During his narrative, Philip described a transition from having unpleasant experiences to achieving success at work, discovering the opportunities he had as an expatriate, as well as his personal development.
**Brigitte:** Brigitte described her time in China as stressful since she had to deal with many personal and professional difficulties. Although she had only been in Shanghai for a few months, she was knowledgeable about the social, cultural and political system of China, which gave her a better understanding of the cultural differences. Her story mainly focused on the lack of autonomy and individuality due to language barriers, restricted Internet access, and other practical issues which led her to being dependant on other people. She also talked about feelings of isolation, and the different perceptions between China and the USA regarding social work.

**Tania:** By the time I interviewed Tania, she was unsure for how long she would remain in Shanghai since she and her family were considering repatriation. China was Tania’s second assignment in East Asia, but this was a split assignment, that is her husband was working in a different city from where she and their children were living. The split situation, the difficulties of raising children on her own in a very new foreign environment led her to develop anxiety, depression along with suicidal ideation. Tania was the only participant who sought professional support in China; however, she did not reveal any further details about this experience.

She mentioned that in China expatriates might be reluctant to seek psychological therapies because issues such as depression can be a stigma at work. She also focused on social networks and how expatriate communities can support newly arrived individuals or families. Both Philip and Tania emphasized individual personality and how much personality traits can influence adjustment.

**Abby:** Abby’s narrative was from a different perspective to the rest of the participants. She described her expatriation as full of positive challenges and how she had discovered different aspects of her personality. She said, however, that an important element of that was due to the fact that her fiancé was already settled in
China and he had prepared everything in advance. Abby mentioned that despite the fact that professional support is not a necessity, however, it helps to reconstruct a mindset about accepting the difference, adapting to the new environment and “not trying to reconstruct what you had at home in your new life”.

**Claire:** Claire’s narrative mainly focused on coping strategies and personal development during expatriation. In her personal story, she described the techniques she applied in order to alter her point of view and be able to have a better adjustment. She focused on religion and how spirituality aided her adjustment process, how she achieved a different outlook on reality through meditation and prayer. Claire also described the importance of interacting with locals and the significance of the family as a support mechanism. She also talked about how psychology can help expatriates.

**Zoe:** Zoe’s narrative mainly concentrated on expatriates’ challenges and especially when the whole family expatriates. She talked about the value of support groups and the obstacles of language and culture. Zoe described her difficulties and how she was able to cope through community groups.

As mentioned previously, the study generated five themes, which will be analysed below. This section does not include any parts of the above nor any other part of the interview transcripts.

### 4.4. Emotional Challenges

#### 4.4.1. Emotional Difficulties

People who expatriated to China experienced different emotional challenges during their stay on the Chinese mainland. The participants of the current study recounted the challenges they faced during their stay in China, but also how these difficulties turned into positive life experiences. Most of the participants described their arrival in China as an overwhelming experience where they faced many impediments and negative emotions. Some of them described feelings of loneliness
and disappointment at being in an unfamiliar environment without any support network. Unfamiliar language, dark and ‘not very homely’ apartments and work disappointment led some participants to describe themselves as “homesick and emotional”.

I remember actually having a small break one day at work and I was about six months in and I was a bit teary, I was feeling quite homesick that day. (Philip, 230-231)

Feelings of frustration and distress in an unfamiliar environment were experienced during the adjustment period. This participant’s frustration led him to a denial of accepting the new concept of his life as an expatriate and this can be clearly seen below where he describes his denial to even learn any basic Mandarin until after his first twelve months of stay. This negative approach, particularly without any psychological or therapeutic support, could be an obstacle to the adjustment of expatriate individuals.

I didn’t start learning or putting in a concerted effort to learn Chinese until 12 months. I didn’t learn the numbers until I’d been here for 12 months already, ‘because I hated it so much. I was just like, well, “I’m never gonna stay here for that long”’ (Philip 74-76)

The above narrative describes the individual’s feelings of “hatred” toward the whole new environment. He also expressed a willingness to return to his home country, which can be a cognitive effort to show that he has some control over the difficulties he is experiencing and can place himself as a powerful individual with an ability to make choices and influence situations. He is attempting to create a safe environment, supported by the thoughts of returning back home as a solution to all the unexpected difficulties. The first challenge people have to face is leaving their comfort zone and trying to adapt to a new environment.
I think just by moving to another country, you are forced to be out of your comfort zone (Claire 91-92)

Even though participants shared very different experiences, several commonalities were identified in their feelings. In some stories, participants described how their frustration of being in China led to high anxiety, distress and frustration.

It was… I felt like I was out of control. I didn’t have any resources available to me when I first got there…(Brigitte 22)

...all of my independence, it felt like had been taken from me. And I didn’t have any way to communicate with anybody I knew, or anybody…(Brigitte 25)

The above quote shows that being in an unknown environment can make individuals feel powerless, dependent and unprotected in the situations they are experiencing and, as a consequence, potential psychological difficulties. It is, however, important to mention that some participants’ anxiety was developed due to language barriers, limited access to work and online resources. An interesting snippet of the above interview quote is the description of a life without autonomy and a constant dependency on others.

Tania was the only participant who talked about being diagnosed with depression, anxiety and having suicidal thoughts during the first six months of her arrival. She did not give much information about her diagnosis or any other information about suicidality. Tania, however, described the difficulties which led her to the development of depression.

It is also important to mention that anxiety and depression do not necessarily coincide with adjustment difficulties for all participants.
At that time I developed depression, effectively quite suicidal. And we had to make a decision whether or not in-patriate, we were given that option; it was that serious (Tania 23-26).

According to her narrative, the initial trigger for her depression was the split assignment, and, consequently, having to raise her children on her own.

.... You know, it was kind of like moving to another country by yourself with your support system in another city, and it was a very extremely stressful time (Tania, 21-22).

She described relocation as a very stressful procedure for herself in particular, and for many other cases with split assignments.

On the other hand, Emotional Challenges do not only refer to negative feelings or emotions. Different individuals may not experience any negative emotional experience during their expatriation or they may face emotional difficulties due to other reasons unrelated to expatriation, such as work or personal issues.

So, I arrived and had an apartment, had a partner, had someone who could do everything for me, had a company that was well established and I enjoyed it straight away (Abby, 31-32).

A supportive environment was the element that aided the quick adjustment of the above participant. It is, however, important to mention that each participant had different experiences and strategies to expatriation. The above quote contradicts another participant who faced emotional difficulties even though she had a family and an apartment ready for her.

The people that come out and they're put up in a big expat villa and they get a driver and... A lot of expat wives, for example, they find it quite hard (Philip, 475-476). Being here made me question all the time “why I had to be here” I felt very low and very tired. Looking back I realize it was a very draining procedure to adjust (Claire, 25-26).
Another participant described her first time in Shanghai as a draining, distressful and tiring procedure. A difficult adjustment and emotional challenge could occur due to the different circumstances of someone’s experiences and, in this participant’s case, most of the difficulties occurred because she was a foreign student studying in Mandarin at a Chinese University. As will be demonstrated in another sub-theme later in this chapter, language can be a significant barrier to the general adjustment phase and it can also cause difficulties such as feelings of loneliness, due to lack of understanding, frustration and distress due to lack of communication with local authorities and, in some cases, anxiety. The present participant explained that her first challenge to living in China was the language barrier.

*I could speak Chinese because we learn in Singapore as a subject in school but learning psychology mandarin in the university was a huge change for me, a very big struggle that was a very difficult thing...* (Claire, 11-13).

### 4.4.2. Positive Challenges

Expatriation is not only a concept of difficulties, but one with positive aspects. The participants of the present study described how their time in China had many positive outcomes in their personal and professional lives. These challenges led to feelings of happiness, comfort and confidence. Moreover, they stated that, according to their personal experiences, living in Shanghai is a unique experience due to the city’s diversity, and high standard of living.

*You know, I was 21 when I first moved to China. By 22 I was running the sales department for China for a 260-person company that was something good, it gave a lot of confidence* (Philip)
It’s such a brilliant city, it’s so diverse, you’ll learn about yourself and other people, and it really is wonderful, quality of life is very good in most ways, despite things like the air and health and whatever else, and it’s land of opportunity, it’s like New York of the East” (Abby).

Many people decide to expatriate due to the work opportunities offered and this is identified in the following narrative.

The company moves most people here because they’re smart, they’re well educated and they’re here to teach and they have values. So, these people who come over are usually upper management level, so they got something to do. Very important (Brigitte).

Another challenge which can lead to a positive result that most of the participants mentioned was that going through difficulties brought them closer to other people, mainly expatriates, and they created strong friendships.

From a personal perspective, well, I mean my best man at my wedding is somebody that I met out here, just a great guy. And also some of my groom’s men are people that I met out here as well, and I’ve made, I think, friends for life (Philip).

Additionally, one participant pointed out how expatriation was a unique experience, giving her more confidence in doing things she would never have done before. More specifically, she described that having to deal with difficult circumstances in an unfamiliar environment with a lack of language skills gave her more confidence of coping in difficult situations and she became familiar with the ‘unknown’.

It’s a unique experience. And like I told you earlier, it makes you more comfortable to do things that you wouldn’t have normally maybe done before (Brigitte).
Another interesting finding of this study is the feeling of superiority. Participants talked about how living in China was a unique learning experience of witnessing the class division and financial instability of the country. One participant stated that it is a positive experience for her family to witness the differences of living in a country with more poverty than their own homeland, therefore they will be able to appreciate more what they have in their lives.

*the good definitely outweighs the bad. I mean, I can start a listing. My children grew up in a foreign country and they’ve seen poverty, they’ve seen excess, they’ve seen what it’s like to have no freedom, they’ve seen what it is to have censorship, they have an appreciation for things that I know, if they grew up back at home, they would not have seen (Tania).*

*I am happy I made friends from all over the world, learn so many new things and I got life experiences that I would never live If I was not here (Claire).*

*Living here has many difficulties but it can also create so many nice feelings and moments (Claire).*

Living in a different place, interacting with people of a different culture can be a positive life experience, a life challenge as described by the participant above who also experienced happiness and a unique moment in her life.

**4.4.3. The challenge of the unknown**

The creation of this sub-theme derived from the participants’ narratives in which they suggested what future expatriates would have to be aware of before relocating to Shanghai. Findings in this sub-theme illustrate the importance of the participants familiarity with the place they were about to start a new life. Almost all of the participants were unaware of Chinese society, culture, norms, language and tradition, which created more insecurity, cultural isolation and a struggle to adjust.
I don’t know anything about China, apart from that they make a lot of things there.” That’s literally what I was... I was quite naïve I guess [with respect] to China. (Philip, 32-33).

So many times I asked myself what am I doing here? I was here because my dad was working here for a long time and my sister my mother and me were all back home but when it was the time to apply for college we had to come here (Claire, 21-22).

Participants who did not chose to relocate to China seemed to experience more difficulties than those participants who did choose Shanghai as the place to expatriate. Self-initiated expatriates tend to be more aware and informed of the cultural differences of the new place they are about to inhabit, thus they tend to have less anxiety during the adjustment period.

So, I came out here on a mood kind of let’s see if I can make this work. Because, for me, I’m very aware of the concept of social work out here (Abby, 18-19)

Findings suggest that people who want to expatriate should not only be aware of the new culture, society and norms of the new place, but they need to be informed of any potential difficulties.

I wasn’t prepared for it – heavily warn them that there are these very specific difficulties that you’re gonna face. And it’s gonna be a lot less scary I think if they know going in (Brigitte, 251-253).

We expected to go home back to the States after three years. But we had about a three-week notice that we are moving in China. So, it was quite shocking, very kind of upsetting, very stressful. (Tania, 11-14)

The above quote shows that a number of expatriates are sent to a new foreign location without any prior preparation or information about cultural differences. These
assigned expatriates might not have time to prepare themselves before they arrive at their destination and this might lead to psychological difficulties.

4.4.4. Repatriation

Repatriation is a challenge for expatriates. Some individuals might be willing to return to their home countries as a “parent country escapism” in order to “escape” from adjustment difficulties.

*And when I first arrived I thought, I signed a three year contract, and I said “I’ll do six months” (Philip, 76).*

Once they, however, settle in the new place, establish a social network, career development and more importantly have a psychological adjustment then it becomes difficult for individuals to repatriate and start a new life back in their home country.

*I haven’t thought about repatriating yet, but I am sure it will be a struggle (Abby 101).*

One reason for this is that people develop different experiences during their stay in China and they also change aspects of their personality. This period can be closely connected to the presence of other people who are going through the same process and experiences and under these circumstances a strong bond can be created.

*So, I know for my friends who have repatriated to their home country, they said it was just as hard or harder moving back. Because you’ve changed but everybody else has kinda stayed the same. And I know a lot of my friends who’ve repatriated, their core group of friends are now other people who have repatriated, because we have the same experiences (Tania 335-338).*

The above quote shows that people who repatriate might even face more difficult adjustment. Expatriates become a close group, they may experience similar challenges
and create their own shared understanding of these experiences, showing an important empathy toward each other.

*I will be happy when I will go back in the States but then, I don’t think I will people will understand my experiences from Shanghai and I’ve been very close to people here as well, so that will be hard for me (Brigitte 120-123).*

Other findings suggest that repatriation of some social group’s members can cause psychological difficulties. People who remain in the foreign country might face difficulties dealing with separation.

*I think our group was very lucky as well, ‘cause we had probably 20 lads and then their wives and girlfriends, and we were all incredibly close (all of us were). And then, within a really short period of time, 15 of those people left, so then you’re left with a really small group. And it’s quite hard (Philip, 166-169).*

When I asked Claire if she was willing to repatriate, she was quite surprised.

*Oh wow! Well..., I think... one day I will go back to Singapore which will be a new life again, a new adjustment (Claire, 134-135).*

Almost all of the participants seemed to be willing to repatriate, but when asked whether they were ready, most seemed to be unprepared and, more specifically, they were unprepared to face another adjustment process, this time, in their home country.
4.5. Coping Strategies

4.5.1. Social Network

The first coping strategy participants’ mentioned in their narratives was the use of a social network and how important it was to their adjustment to the new environment.

*I would say join a sports team or a team of some sort, you know, whether its chess or whether it’s football or rugby, it doesn’t really matter I think. You know, making a concerted effort to go out and join these groups and, from a social perspective, I think it’s really important because it will make a big difference* (Philip, 359-362).

Social network was a crucial element to this participant’s adjustment. People tend to show more empathy to one another during the adjustment period.

*So let’s say I come from America you come from Europe we meet in Shanghai, can we help each other* (Zoe, 70).

More specifically, the participant described that interacting with other expatriates made a “massive difference” to adjustment and everyday life. Participants also noted that joining social groups is fundamental for adjustment since it was their main source of support. According to Tania’s narrative, people from her network guided her to support organizations, community centres and counselling services where she started getting help for her depression and anxiety issues.

*I’ve met some very good people that helped me through tough, difficult times and they’re now my best friends* (Claire, 80).
Brigitte stated that in the first couple of weeks she spent a lot of time isolated in her room without having any social interaction. She was experiencing high levels of stress until she moved into shared accommodation with eight other female expatriates. She pointed out that her adjustment then shifted into a smooth process where she had the chance to start exploring the city of Shanghai.

You can only spend so much time in your room – and I’ve done that, I spent three days just in my room, by myself, and there’s a certain cleansing about it, it’s a certain…, like a rest almost. But at the same time you feel lonely and isolated, I need to get out, I need to interact with humans. I don’t know what I would have done if I didn’t have friends here. We’re going through the same thing, kind of (Brigitte, 63-67).

Abby, in her narrative, stressed that one important reason for her quick adjustment was that she was welcomed by a group of her fiancé’s friends. She also mentioned the importance for expatriates to become active in order to find a social group to join once they arrive in China.

You have to be not afraid to go to an event on your own that maybe you’re not really invited to, and be able to manage. I had an entirely ready-made group of friends. I have a huge network and I got it very quickly, because I was in a position where people gave it to me, and I was very grateful, you know (Abby, 66-69).

Abby said that a helpful way to join a group is the through the work network. Philip also talked about the vital role of sport groups in his life and Tania referred to daily activities such as parent organisations, gym, libraries and community groups.
Finding friends… If you have children, the school is a great support system. I think for a lot of people, the trailing spouse without children, they have a hard time, because where do they find friends? So, the gym is a great place (Tania, 69-71).

In the same context, Claire’s narrative pointed out the importance for her to have friends and local friends in particular which was her main support group during her adjustment.

So I was surrounded people who were willing to help me. I had friends who were willing to help me with everything and I am also pleased with my teachers who were patient with me (Claire, 40-42).

Moreover, she talked about the need to make the right choice and be surrounded by people who might be willing to help a new expatriate with his/her adjustment.

I remember one of my teachers said “I could let you write your essay in English but I will not do that because that how you will learn Chinese” she was very helpful because she told me her experience of being a student in Japan, she told me how much she struggled when she was there as well. So I realized I am not the only one who has this struggle but other people faced the same difficulties (Claire, 42-46).

As in another participant’s narrative, it can also be identified in Claire’s interview that friends or people in the supporting environment can also reinforce what an individual feels with their own experiences.

4.5.2. Importance of the Family

This sub-theme refers to the support that participants had from their family or spouse. Some of the participants, however, did not have a spouse or family with them.

I guess by having that security blanket of somebody else’s family, they massively supported us and I think really helped (Philip, 19-20).
This participant referred to the first period of his expatriation where he had the support of a friend’s family. He uses the word “blanket” metaphorically in order to represent the warmth and the security that someone can have with the presence of a family especially when he/she is living and working abroad.

*And then of course “X” you know, she moved out and that changed everything, you know really I think that that made things a lot more kind of just homely, felt maybe a little bit more like an adult, rather than living with friends and having a flatmate* (Philip, 95-98).

This participant also emphasises how his life changed after his fiancée moved in with him. He pointed out that his whole life changed after this and, more importantly, he felt “homely” and “adult”. Through this narrative, the participant presents himself as more protected and more adjusted to the foreign environment. He describes himself, not as an unprotected young man living with flatmates, but as a responsible adult who has all the support and warmth from his fiancée, who is also a strong link to his home country. More specifically, the presence of the family makes him feel the same comfort as he would feel in his homeland.

*It would be much better for me if I had family here* (Brigitte, 92).

*Having a group of friends and of course a supportive family my family and my friends helped me with everything* (Claire, 101-102).

Another participant expressed her thoughts saying that it would be better for her if she had her family with her since it would probably make her feel more secure and able to adjust more easily, whereas another quote shows again the importance of the family during difficulties.

*“G”my fiancé, then other people, then everyone here, I mean the type of networking role that I’m in, as well. So, extremely quickly I felt settled. I was using the word ‘settled’. Probably within a few months, I would say* (Abby, 35-37).
The above quote shows the importance and support of the spouse during settlement. Due to the reason that her fiancé was there a long time before helped her to adjust faster, find accommodation, create a network and be able to look for employment. This explains the great time difference between this participant who says that her adjustment was a matter of a few months and others whose adjustment took years.

There are, however, other more controversial examples about the family and expatriation. For instance, a family member might not be as supportive as in other cases due to having a heavy work schedule and the individual might not receive enough support from the family system at the time he/she needs it.

*I spent a lot of time on my own because my father was working for many hours every day (Claire, 12).*

The quote below shows that having a family around during expatriation can also be a stressful experience, especially for the trailing spouse. This case is about a female who is a mother and wife having to deal with all the difficulties on her own since her husband was working in another city, hours away from Shanghai.

*that’s where as a trailing spouse – it’s stressful for the working spouse, but, for the trailing spouse, you’re trying to keep the whole family together while doing things in one country or this country, whatever. (Tania, 325-327).*

Later on in the interview she says:

*I think for a lot of people, the trailing spouse without children, they have a hard time, because where do they find friends? (Tania, 70)*

*So, for the typical couple, whereas the man is the breadwinner and the woman is a trailing spouse, I think it’s more difficult for the trailing spouse, because the man is coming for his job. So, even though his job description, his job function may be*
different, he has a routine; he has colleagues; people are close to him (Tania, 182-185).

This part described how the family could also be a challenging situation for some people, especially for the trailing spouse. Her description shows a hierarchical society model in which the male is the breadwinner and the female stays at home taking care of the children. This situation could be the case for female expatriates to societies which offer less employment opportunities to women. It can also create challenges in creating a social network since, according to the participant’s experience, she did not have the opportunity to make connections with other people unlike her husband who was surrounded by colleagues and work support groups. Social isolation in the new environment was a negative element for her adjustment especially when she developed depression and anxiety.

4.5.3. Professional Support

Despite the fact that almost all of the participants had emotional and psychological difficulties, only one used counselling psychology services. There are different explanations and reasons for this decision from each participant.

I guess, considered looking for professional support, it has not been because of in my mind the struggles of living in Shanghai (Philip, 282-283).

Professional support can be useful for a wide range of reasons when someone expatriates. The above quote illustrates the fact that this participant thought of seeking psychological support due to work related issues and not because of the difficulties he faced as an expatriate during the adjustment period.

But I don’t think, you know... It’s not like there’s a plethora of options out there. I think that in the UK you could, if you took a similar city in the UK, like London, there is hundreds of people that you could go and see, rather than here there is a very small
selection. And you would only wanna go and see a foreigner as well, because I just think that the medical industry, if you were to put Psychology within that medical arena – I guess it is, right? it’s mental health – from a local perspective, I mean it’s very different (Philip, 322-328).

Another important finding is that searching for a therapist in China is a challenging procedure. Expatriates from different cultural backgrounds might prefer to have therapy with a non-Chinese therapist and the reason can be due to the different attitudes toward mental health. Also, according to the above narrative, there are other causes such as there is not a plethora of foreign therapists in Shanghai, medical insurance does not cover psychological therapies possibly creating a financial barrier to people who want to have a private therapist. Moreover, another reason of not having psychological support in Shanghai is provided below:

First of all, insurance doesn’t cover it, medical insurance. Chinese insurance for sure doesn’t – health insurance. And they’re hard to find. – knowing what I know now, people who can be barred from practising in the States can come here and practise. There’s no-one regulating that. You know what I mean? Which is another thing that’s very off-putting (Brigitte, 225-229).

Furthermore, another difficulty in accessing psychological therapies can be the unclear circumstances in which foreign practitioners obtain their license to practice. According to Brigitte, who is a social worker in a private institution, the different system and different regulations may allow under-qualified foreign practitioners to work and this may cause uncertainty about the quality of delivery of the therapeutic services.

In addition to the previous participant’s reason for not feeling comfortable using psychological services, there is the stigma factor, which can be a powerful reason to turn expatriates away from the therapy room.
You know, even in the States or western countries, mental health illnesses, depression, there’s a negative stigma. But in China it’s even worse so (Tania, 109-110).

Mental health issues can be a stigma for many people especially at work, in a social or even a family environment. Interestingly, some societies tend to see psychological issues such as depression as a negative stigma and this can affect many parts of their life and more importantly work. Thus, a lot of expatriates avoid psychological therapies in order to avoid social stigma.

On the other hand, Claire explained why psychological support and especially counselling is important for expatriates. According to her narrative, counselling can help people obtain a broader understanding of their difficulties. It can assist in seeing a clearer picture of the difficulties rather than focusing on daily difficulties. Moreover, she said that counselling is an important aid to people building a life in a place outside their comfort zone.

I think its important for psychology to make people understand with what they are dealing with, it’s not only about going out and making friends. For kids who follow their parents is very difficult to leave their comfort zone and come here in a place where the system is different, the colour of your skin is different, the language, everything. (Claire, 110-113)

People should be able to recognize what they are going through and that expatriation is a life full of transitions. Adjustment is not only a phase with some basic practical difficulties, but it also comes with constant transition, emotional loss and general adaptation.

You have to be able to recognize that you have been moved from your safe place into something very different, you are like a fish out of the water. For expats language is
difficult but you see everything difficult because you are adjusting to everything and people forget this, you are trying to adapt into the transition (Claire, 113-116).

I know many international schools who have counselling psychology services and I know they organize courses for the teachers and students on how to deal with the loss and the transitions (Claire, 129-131).

Counselling psychologists can assist expatriate adults and children in dealing with their feelings of loss, distress, anxiety, which might be common during the transition period of relocation. More narratives of the present study’s participants also showed that counselling can support them in their adjustment.

But, through resources – a mini centre, counselling, friends that I was able to make – I pulled through and this is our sixth year in China (Tania, 24-25)

... And I went to see a psychiatrist, I also did counselling for six months. It took probably a period of six months before I felt kinda back to myself again. (Tania, 147).

Counselling is a very supportive tool for expatriates facing different kind of difficulties such as adjustment difficulties, personal or work related issues. It is, however, stated by the participants of the current study that a social network might be a stronger support than counselling therapy or any other type of psychological services.

I think that, if you have a strong network, if you have a strong partner and you can make friends and you can create these connections at work and elsewhere, you probably don’t need support. I never needed that support, I don’t need more than I have (Abby, 171-173).

Creating strong bonds in a social network and having a supportive partner can be effective for expatriates emotional challenges and adjustment difficulties. It does not, however, provide the same results as professional therapeutic support. There are,
however, many agencies and organisations which support expatriates during their first time in China.

*I mean we have an open house actually tomorrow. We have our first Shanghai Orientation of the year Saturday (Tania, 87-88).*

...*a lot of the other companies have expats come over, they are trying the very best they can, you know, to support people straight away with practical and many times with emotional issues (Brigitte, 30-31).*

Some also offer psychological support, but their main focus is on the practical difficulties people might face. While these organizations might be an important help to the expatriate community facing practical difficulties, there is less focus on emotional difficulties.

**4.6. Adjustment**

*4.6.1. Adjustment to daily life*

Adjustment to daily life can be composed of various elements such as differences in work, cultural and cross-cultural obstacles, and many more. This research identified some of the difficulties people might face on a daily basis and the participants’ narratives focus on the daily life difficulties of living and working in China. One of the participants working in an organisation which provided support to newly arrived expatriates describes what they perceive as important information and from this we can identify some potential challenges which many people face in their daily routine.

*And we bring in five, six speakers to talk about how to navigate the medical system, because most of it is completely different from your home country. We bring in our counsellors to talk about culture shock. We talk about air/water quality, we bring in a tech expert, because, you know, the internet stinks here and TV and... We*
also bring in usually a husband-and-wife team to talk about work-life balance and other issues (Tania, 63-67).

Access to medical services and receiving the right service seemed to be an important factor for expatriates, and the lack of knowledge about medical resources and health insurances can cause both physical and psychological difficulties. Another important aspect is the environmental conditions as described in the above quote. Having to live in a polluted atmosphere, with poor water and air quality can cause many problems on a daily basis and people might not be able to have a healthy lifestyle. Also, lack of internet resources is a very important element affecting adjustment. Participants mention that lack of internet access can cause loneliness because they might not able to contact their relatives or find useful information about the area where they live.

You don’t have Google Maps. If I need to figure out how to get to this address, I need to find a Chinese friend to look it up on Baidu (Brigitte, 53-54).

Oh, the internet hasn’t worked for a week. I can’t stand this.” And all your friends here commiserates us, “I know, the VPN is not working” (Tania, 208).

Daily difficulties vary from person to person and this study shows that the above difficulties might not exist for others, which shows a subjective understanding of the issue of adjustment. The quote below demonstrates that daily adjustment difficulties, such as limited internet access may not be an issue for daily routine.

I don’t have China days like other people do. A lot of people around me will say “Oh, my God, that’s fitting again” and all this, and as soon as I say it, but actually it’s cause I’m parroting what they are saying, I don’t think it at all (Abby, 138-140).

Difficulties can be caused by a biased outlook people have from their own ideas. One participant described these issues as a “First world problems” which suggests that people struggle because they tried to re-create what they had in their home countries.
And if I went back to the UK, I would know that, you know, I could just go to Sainsbury’s and get everything I need, rather than here I might need to go to a few different shops to get the ingredients. So, you know, tiny small First-World problems, right? (Philip, 285-287).

In a previous sub-theme (Positive Challenges), a feeling of superiority was described by one of the participants. In the present sub-theme and on how people approach their daily difficulties, thoughts of superiority and hierarchy between the cultures can be observed once more. Expatriates, describing themselves as people who come from “First World” countries, deal with unknown, second or third world issues without any attempt to understand or embrace the cultural difference. It can also be hypothesized that lack of cultural empathy, the denial of embracing the different culture can also affect maladjustment and psychological difficulties.

4.6.2 Living conditions

Choosing where to live in a foreign environment can also affect the adjustment process. People familiar with the area they live in or with good housing conditions can probably tolerate other daily or adjustment difficulties. The next set of quotes will be from two participants who, during their interview, described how their feelings and daily routine were affected by their housing conditions. Parts of their narrative describing how feelings and emotions changed with a change in living location is given.

... it was furnished – it was a brand new building, it was brand new furniture and things like that, but it was just very kind of cold and not particularly sort of homely (Philip).
...You sort of come home after a day’s work and then you sort of come back to just an empty apartment. All the apartments in Shanghai are quite dark as well, quite naturally I think. And so it’s sort of a bit depressing I think in a way (Philip).

The above description shows how the participant linked his feelings and emotions to accommodation. He reflected his feelings of loneliness, isolation and his identity as a newly arrived expatriate who was about to face new experiences with a dark, cold apartment and “not homely” apartment.

Then when my fiancée moved in we lived in a nice apartment which was much better that the ones I used to live, I enjoy living there now (Philip).

Later on in his narrative, he described a shift in his emotions and opinions about his living conditions due to the fact he was living with his fiancée. It can been seen that living and housing conditions can affect expatriates adjustment but also it depends on their feelings and thoughts on how comfortable they can be during the adjustment.

Other participants’ narratives were about the areas where they lived.

I was sort of... I wasn’t downtown Shanghai. It was sort of on the outskirts of the city, it was a very local area, all the restaurants were super ghetto, like, really ghetto actually (Philip).

I’ve been in my own apartment for three days, it’s great. We’re in the middle of things, we can go out and do stuff (Brigitte).

Especially in Pudong, Puxi is better because there’s more Western..., it’s more Western-focused. Pudong, there’s really not a lot. It’s mostly Chinese, it’s mostly suburbs. People just live out there. So, when they see you, they don’t wanna deal with you, they don’t wanna deal with not being able to speak to you, they won’t pick you up. It was hard to get cabbies to take us back. There is discrimination (Brigitte).

Participants described that living in different areas can make their living better in terms of facilities and quicker adjustment. As described, living in less central areas
can make them feel isolated and more distressed about the daily routine which might involve better access to services, work or even to places where is easier to speak English. Most importantly, the perception of participants about living in local areas described as “ghettos” and less “Western” can also be noticed. There is no clear statement from the participants if that description was about them feeling more comfortable with the local environment or if it was a cognitive attempt to re-create a virtual scenery where they would have felt more adjusted. Moreover, there was no clear justification for the statement “ghetto” and “very local” as a neighbourhood of Shanghai was described and it can be perceived as controversial since expatriates already live in China.

4.6.3. Work Satisfaction

Work adjustment and satisfaction have been one of the main descriptions in participants’ narratives.

I asked Abby to tell me what would be toughest challenge during her adjustment in China.

*Abby, 40-44: Work. Work for me. I knew that about myself before I came. I just knew that work for me is what gives me my identity –So, without that, I think I would have felt like a person with no role in this society. The work was the most crucial I think.... I feel confident about my role here and what I can bring. If I was just a volunteer or something like that, I don’t think I would be so quick to attend things or...*

Admittedly, work for Abby was the most important aspect of her expatriation. She said that having a job is a life role where people give to society. She also provides a description about the importance of status among other expatriates since for her being a ”volunteer” would not have given her the same confidence to participate in expatriate events and gatherings. Her narrative portrays a hierarchy in the expatriate community
and the fact that the higher position people have, the more respect and confidence they will have in the community.

In other circumstances, work can bring feelings of disappointment.

*The job wasn’t what I expected (Philip, 71).*

More specifically, the above phrase was mentioned eleven times during the interview, which clearly shows the frustration this individual felt at the start of his expatriation.

In other situations, work can be a way of dealing with problems and issues which may occur during expatriation. The following quote shows how work was used as a behavioural and cognitive element in order to activate the individual and deal with depression.

*I started working here. I knew I needed to get out of the house, have some kind of routine and do something (Tania, 149).*

*Work at community groups helped me a lot to meet more people and have a routine in my life (Zoe, 53).*

Zoe also described how employment helped with adjustment by bringing her in touch with people and create a new routine in which she was able to find new interests and activities.

### 4.7. Personality

#### 4.7.1. Traits

Personality traits can be one of the most important influences on a person’s adjustment. It plays an important role in how people approach the new environment, how they deal with difficulties and how they place themselves in the new cultural context. Tania discussed how important personality traits were to her situation by
mentioning the changes she did in order to achieve better adjustment and deal with stress.

*And it’s hard for people if that’s not your personality. I’ve learned... My normal personality before I became an overseas trailing spouse is I’m quiet, I just do my own thing whenever. But, moving overseas, no matter what your personality, it forces you to put yourself out there, you don’t have a choice – or you’re just not gonna survive, you will be miserable, you’ll get depressed, you... You have to force yourself to make friends, to connect with the outside world (Tania, 74-79)*

And she continued

*It is definitely your personality how well you will adjust. And everybody will have their ups and downs, it’s just normal. But the faster you can find the connection, the easier will be (Tania, 82-83).*

Tania talked about adapting her own self to the new expectations by changing some of her behaviour and personality characteristics. Achieving a behavioural change was a way to have a quicker adjustment for herself. There is not a universal model of personality trait which will help people cope with situations. Each individual is different and everyone can achieve their own personal change in their own way with or without support from counselling psychologists.

Tania’s statement, can, however, encourage people to consider that some behavioural and cognitive changes can facilitate adjustment. She emphasized being more active in creating social networks and finding solutions to the unexpected difficulties. Moreover, approaching cultural differences by being more open and willing to embrace the difference can be a very effective element to adjustment. Personality traits do not only describe how someone can be an active expatriate in daily life, or how this person can change simply as a way to fill their free time with activities. In Abby’s narrative, she described the cognitive aspects of being able to embrace the different culture by having a
cognitive reconstruction.

“Don’t try and recreate what you have at home, here”. And that’s relevant now, because it’s the only thing I remember. It’s the one thing that I thought to myself when I was first coming here. “Just remember”, my thought to myself was “Just remember. Just because you like having porridge every day in England doesn’t mean you’re gonna have any day in China.” And it was about not trying to recreate, because if I was that, then I’d be really negative. “Just remember, you’re not having that porridge any more”. You do it, you’re setting up a new set of things that are available. So, for me that one piece of advice on that blog post has stuck with me and it really helped actually. Break those routines and don’t expect to recreate them (Abby, 222-230).

Abby stated that she kept in mind that living in another place is a procedure of living in the context of a different culture and not a re-creation of an iconic “Western” environment. ”Remembering” or, in other words, having a cognitive awareness of the differences and being comfortable with the “different” made adjustment an easier process with less emotional difficulties. Abby said the word remember repeatedly in an attempt to demonstrate how important it was for her to have a mindset which aided her adjustment by mentioning to herself that she was not there to live according to the routine she had back in her home country . “Breaking the routines” can also be interpreted as the creation of new routines which can make the individual embrace the new cultural context, to make use of the given resources and comfortable with the new norms. This helped Abby to avoid frustration and not to feel “bad” about living as an expatriate.

I learn that when you manage your thoughts and you have peace it gives you more clarity, it’s okay not to understand how things work in China, its okay to make mistakes you will learn. It takes time to adjust and it takes time to learn, you have to embrace the different and change your mind-set (Claire, 59-62).
Claire emphasized the process of how cognition and thoughts can either facilitate or make adjustment even more difficult. Managing thoughts, accepting the difference and regulating expectations can also facilitate the adjustment process of expatriates. Counselling Psychology and therapy can play an important role in helping individuals to manage their thoughts and reconstruct their mindset in order to facilitate adjustment.

4.7.2. Personal Development

Personality traits and the attempt to achieve changes in personality can lead to personal development. Many of the participants placed emphasis on their personal development.

*I think China just kind of toughens you up* (Philip, 427).

Having to deal with unexpected difficulties, living and working in a different cultural environment may lead to different personality changes and the development of each participant. In the quote above, we can see that this participant considers themselves to be “tougher”. The participant did not, however, give any further explanation about this statement. It can be perceived as a description of someone who experienced different pleasant or unpleasant situations which led him to be a more tolerant and experienced individual.

*All these unexpected situations make you see different parts of yourself* (Brigitte, 190).

*Living here you definitely know yourself better* (Abbey, 210).

Having to deal with unexpected challenges, both negative and positive while living in a foreign environment with different cultural norms and customs may cause individuals to identify different parts of their personality and also understand themselves better. Also, participants described how they developed skills depending
on the situation. For instance, Tania gave an example of developing language mechanisms in order to distinguish herself and get attention in social situations.

And I used to say things in Chinese, if I could say, you know, get back to the back of the line. I don’t even say them in Chinese any more, I just say them in English: get back to that line. And they look at me like “What! She speaks a different language”.

So, I’ve learned to use my Chinese and English depending on the situation, and a lot of it is a protective mechanism (Tania, 276-280).

Tania described how she developed a protective mechanism by using a mixture of Chinese and English when she tried to reprehend people for not standing in a queue. According to her description, being in a society with a different approach to social norms such as standing in a queue, created an unprotected environment for herself.

Come here – you have to build an armor to protect yourself emotionally (Tania, 280).

Participant is using the word armor to demonstrate the level of her endeavour to protect herself emotionally from being exposed to a society with different norms and customs. It seems from the above description that dealing with different values can cause uncertainty, confusion and distress to people who then develop methods and techniques in order to feel emotionally protected. Finally, this sub-theme demonstrated how participants achieved personal development due to the expatriation experience and that could be either through developing skills to cope with different circumstances or due to the whole experience of realizing different aspects of their own character during their adjustment to a different society.

Before that I used to panic quiet a lot. So my faith helped me a lot with this, I know I cannot change things here but I said please help me understand and have a different mindset so when I realized that it helped a lot. I realized that focusing in things
I didn’t like and in things I couldn’t change. Faith gives you peace, hope and it makes you feel that everything is possible (Claire, 58-61).

Claire described how her faith helped her see things from a different perspective. Through praying, meditation and relaxation she was able to have a more open mind and cope with unexpected difficulties. It made her understand things better and she did not focus on the daily difficulties as much as she used to. She believed in herself and she approached adjustment and other daily difficulties without getting stressed or panicking.

**4.8. Cultural Differences**

Cultural differences can be considered a very broad topic for discussion. In the present research many participants discussed and emphasised the cultural differences between themselves and host country nationals. They describe how these differences can either be an obstacle to their communication, living, work and general adjustment or, in other situations, how it can be a useful process. The following sub-themes were created based on the participants narratives.

**4.8.1 Communication and Interaction with locals**

The first contact with a foreign environment can cause different feelings and emotions.

*I mean, you see all these, like, Chinese characters everywhere, nobody apparently speaks English, and I’m like “Well, how am I gonna get to work?”*(Philip, 52-53).

A vital element of communication is the language used for social and work interactions. Learning a different language can be a difficult procedure and it should not be a requirement for all those people who expatriated to China. From this description, however, it can be understood that not being able to communicate can be overwhelming and, in this case, it can also cause anxiety and distress to the participant.
According to the participants of the present study, communication is also a matter of mental understanding and acceptance. Communication is not only based on language usage, but on culture as well. The following three quotes show that understanding the cultural background is more important than speaking the actual language.

*Sometimes communication is hard with people due to different culture* (Brigitte, 113).

*You have to understand the Chinese mentality first* (Tania, 303).

For Tania and Brigitte, achieving communication was of uttermost importance, firstly to understand the way of thinking and the cultural norms and secondly for linguistic purposes. Also, participants explained how important it was for them to interact with the local community. Interaction with locals can facilitate different parts of the general adjustment and it can also assist understanding of the different culture. In the following narratives, two of the participants described how local people aided their adjustment process.

*so there was a Chinese girl – that I’m still very good friends with today – that helped me find the apartment and get a bank account sorted out etc. I just said to this girl that was helping me find the apartment* (Philip, 45-47).

*I need to find a Chinese friend to help me with practical things such as payments, ordering online and other area that language is important! It’s, like, resource. How do I live here?* (Brigitte, 53-54).

This part, however, depends on both sides since sometimes participants might feel rejected by the host country nationals.

*The only way to really learn how to communicate was by communicating with locals, and sometimes they’re really open to you and are really excited, and sometimes
they’ll make fun of you and just laugh. But in the learning aspect, yeah, it’s very helpful. It’s the only way I think to do it (Brigitte, 195).

In other times, it might be the expatriates’ perspective that cultural differences is a burden to developing social relationships.

She was the only local person from a social perspective that I knew. She was very friendly, she was a really sweet girl and she helped me a lot, but ultimately it was somebody that was from a very different culture, very different background and, you know, all sorts of different things (Philip, 205-207).

Expatriates’ might also find it difficult to communicate with host country nationals due to the different cultural background. Philip did not specify what the differences he found as a barrier to communication were, however, in his narrative, he talked about the different approach Chinese people have about expatriates as well.

I went to a doctor, I was feeling ill and I can’t remember what it was, but he basically said that I was stressed and I was drinking too much and I was working too much, without asking me any questions about whether I even drank alcohol or what my job was or how many hours I worked. His immediate answer was “Oh, you are a foreigner, you must drink too much, you must work too much, you must be so stressed”, right? (Philip, 328-332).

It cannot be considered that all expatriates face the same difficulties or that Chinese people have the same approach for all expatriate aliens, but the above narrative is an indication that communication depends on both sides. There were many parts of all the participants’ narratives which could be considered as a perspective from a superior Western culture. In contrast, there are also examples in the participants’ narrative of Chinese people approaching them as the superior culture which brings a conflict between the “West” and the Chinese culture.
I have friends from different parts of China and this helped me a lot to understand the different culture in the different parts, the life and also helps you see things in different ways because like I said China is huge (Claire, 97-98).

On the other hand, Claire described how interacting with locals helped her to understand the culture and that was a very important element in her life as an expatriate. *Having local friends made adjust much better and It helped me not to see myself as a foreigner anymore* (Claire, 94).

A very powerful quote from Claire’s narrative came after her interaction with locals created less feelings of stress and it also gave her the sense of being in a more familiar environment.

“so it’s beneficial if they can to make friends local Chinese people, although it’s very difficult, because a few of them speak English” (Zoe, 92).

Zoe, in her narrative, said that interacting with locals can sometimes be challenging because only a few Chinese people can speak English.

### 4.8.2. Cultural differences at work

Cultural differences can also influence the work environment and people might struggle with the difference approaches to work.

... there’s universal international definitions of social work, and they all are pretty much under empowerment, but now China has a new, you know, they have their own definition now and it’s just helping an individual be a better communist, that’s their definition of social work. It’s hard, it’s different (Brigitte, 107-110).

Brigitte described the different approaches toward social work between her cultural background and the one that she now has to work in. Having a different outlook
can lead to difficulties at work and it can also cause miscommunication between people. For example, Tania described the different approaches in psychological terms.

– On my first incident of depression - I couldn’t even take care of my own child. And we had a family meeting to decide whether or not I should put myself in hospital. And this was the highlight of the meeting where my mother-in-law said to the psychiatrist: “I think she’s making this up for a tantrum. Because the Chinese people don’t get depression.” And that is a very common thought in China. That depression is just, you know, you can power through it, it’s not a disease, it’s not an illness, you’re just making it up (Tania, 111-117).

Tania described the different view people in China have about depression. This was an example of hers to describe the difficulties she had to face during her adjustment period, but it also demonstrates the difficulties that culture can bring to the psychological approaches.

Another example of cultural differences at work was the aspect of harmony among people.

You know, for example, the easiest way for me to understand the mindset is that in general – obviously I’m making huge generalisations here – in place like England the concept of truth and what’s correct is more important than the principle of harmony amongst people. Here, the model is the exact opposite: that harmony is number one. And it justifies lying, and it justifies changing things. So, I’ve had to rewire myself (Abby, 144-148).

This participant’s narrative showed a fundamental difference at work between China and the UK. Harmony is an important cultural element which might differ markedly from culture to culture. This participant, however, admitted that she had to
change her viewpoint, even if it was difficult, and be more comfortable by adjusting herself to the new cultural norms.

4.8.3. Culture Shock

Culture shock is a very diverse term which can include parts of different language, cuisine, environment and even living in a society with a different social construct.

All these, like, different smells and sounds and just people, like, just crazy basically when I first arrived (Philip, 72).

Philip described his version of culture shock based on the differences he noticed during his arrival. He used the word “crazy” as an overall description of what he witnessed on arrival and with this word he demonstrated his overwhelming feelings about being in an unfamiliar environment for the first time in his life.

Culture shock can also be a matter of the different perspective Chinese people have about society.

So, I would have to say, for me coming here was an extreme shock, because even though I’m Chinese, I’m not... the culture here is very different. It’s more of a me first, family next, friends next, and then everybody else. And part of it is from the history, the Cultural Revolution, to take care of yourself first before you take care of anybody else (Claire, 260-263).

Tania, even though she has a Chinese background (but born and raised in the USA), described how Chinese cultural norms were a stressful and shocking experience for her. Nevertheless, Tania did not consider the collectivist characteristics of Chinese society and how these affected their outlook.

On the other hand, there were participants’ who described themselves as tolerant with cultural differences.
There are so many differences but I am very tolerant (Abby, 137).

Abby suggested that her tolerance of the different society was not a shocking experience. According to her, embracing the difference and being able to recognize cultural differences but still being able to work and live within this context was a positive experience which also contributed to a less stressful adjustment and a further personal and professional development. Claire also talked about being tolerant with cultural differences.

If you have an expectation to find things like your home country will bring more difficulties (Claire, 65).

She also used a powerful quote from her father to emphasize acceptance. Accepting the difference regardless of her personal preferences was a very powerful and thoughtful procedure in achieving a quicker, better and less difficult adjustment.

...My dad always used to say “you don’t have to like it, just accept it and understand it” so that being in a new country and in new culture (Claire, 66).

On the same note, Abby mentioned the importance of embracing the difference without having an expectation to find similarities.

If you think you will find everything the same then you will struggle, just embrace the new culture and that came to me when I had this mindset to be more open and accept (Abby, 239-240).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined my data analysis, included quotes from the participant’s interviews, provided the five main themes identified and an analysis of each subtheme. In the following chapter my personal reflections in relation to my research question and aim will be presented.
5. Reflexive Analysis

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented a synopsis of the thematic analysis results which aimed to answer the research questions. A powerful element to increase the trustworthiness of the interpretation of qualitative research is reflexive analysis, in which researchers acknowledge their role in the interview and how this may influence the generation of data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Reflexive analysis refers to the critical examination of the assumptions underlying researcher action (Cunliffe, 2004). As described in the methodology chapter, the world is viewed through our own experiences, our own realities are constructed making us eclectic in the information we notice in our interactions (Cunliffe, 2004; Eastmond, 2007). Moreover, our actions and behaviour can affect the responses given by participants, as a result the findings might follow a particular direction that has been influenced by the researcher (Finlay, 2002). In other words, the interpretations I make from the data might differ from another individual researching the same topic.

In qualitative research, reflexivity has a long history; from introspection towards critical realism, subjectivist accounts and lately towards a socio-political post-modern context which attempts at a deconstruction of the research encounters (Finlay, 2002).

Feminist researchers have been notably interested in the role of reflexivity in psychological studies (Wilkinson, 1988). In some research papers, it does not always appear using the term reflexivity, but as a method of investigating how the researcher and intersubjective elements impact on the research outcome (Barry & O’Callaghan, 2009). Through the use of critical reflection, researchers are able to monitor the research process, indicating its transparency (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Reflexivity is considered one of the basic criteria of qualitative research since it reveals the honesty and authenticity of
the researcher’s perception of the topic under investigation as well as unveiling the reasons for the choice of this specific topic (Richardson, 2000; Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, reflection enables researchers to learn through experience and bridge the gap between theory and practice (Fook, 1996). Reflexive analysis can extend the self-understanding and knowledge development of the researcher, challenge the validity of their interpretations and, subsequently, correct any distortions in action resulting from such reassessments (Mezirow, 1990).

Many researchers have highlighted the importance of considering research vulnerabilities when in-depth and detailed data is gathered about sensitive issues because of the potential disturbance this may cause (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The fact that I have been an expatriate in China pricked my interest in the present research topic and I am aware that the topic may bring back some memories of personal experiences and particular feelings about my own time there back in 2013. It was, therefore, significant for me to describe my own experiences and try to indicate that significant experiences did not have any influence on the interviews conducted nor the interpretation of the interviews during the analysis stage. I kept a reflective journal during the process of data collection and analysis so I would be able to express and recognize my own assumptions, values and interests. (Barry & O’Callaghan, 2009). Researchers believe that reflexive journals can enable analytical thinking and self-analysis about one’s personal stories (Creswell, 2007). In addition, transparency contributes to the trustworthiness of the research and researcher accountability (Parker, 2005), which allows the reader to make their own decisions about the extent of researcher influence (Lukinsky, 1990). This chapter outlines my own reflections on the research process and the potential impact it might have had on the interpretation of the narratives. Ethical considerations, recruitments, insider versus outsider status and reflections on the participant interviews will be described.
5.2. Recruitment Issues

When I first started recruitment I was very optimistic that I would find plenty of participants since the subject is one that is under-researched from a counselling psychology perspective. This became a frustrating process since the geographical and time difference appeared as a main stumbling block. Due to the participants’ heavy work schedule and my commitment to research and training, it was difficult to find suitable dates for the interviews. Most participants suggested that the summer months would be more suitable since they would have returned to their home countries for holidays and they would have better access online without Internet restrictions. This, however, did not happen as planned because most of the participants preferred to ignore their e-mail for several weeks, which was stressful for me because it delayed further data collection. I was put in a position of thinking about my research topic and research interview. I did not want it to be seen as an obligation but rather as a researcher about to interview them about their experiences of expatriation.

5.3. Interviews

One other issue I faced during the interviews was that some participants did not fully comprehend the meaning of the ‘conversational interview’. As far as I could gather what they had in mind was more of a structured interview where they would give me short answers. Although that applied to only two of my participants, I was concerned about the nature of the interview since I did not wish to conduct structured or semi-structured interviews and I did not want to lead the interview with my own assumptions and thoughts about the topic. Instead, I preferred to explain thoroughly what a conversational interview is about so they could tell their stories as they preferred. That allowed me to follow my initial plans. Whenever short answers were given, I used my counselling skills to paraphrase what they said rather than compose questions which might be considered as a lead for their answers.
5.4. Transcription Difficulties

Despite the recruitment issues, the interviews were conducted smoothly on the whole. The transcription phase started with some difficulties mostly due to the Skype method of interviewing. Sometimes the connection was slow or there was external noise at the participant’s place, which delayed transcription (Slembrouck, 2007). Also, in one interview, I did not place the recorder in an ideal position so I had to spend extra time figuring out the participant's words (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). When I started the process I realised that I was slow at typing, which made me anxious and tired. I frequently became self-critical for not being able to accomplish the task faster and it took several hours of my day to listen to one participant’s story. At that time, I expressed my concerns at the group supervision session and my supervisor and peer trainees confirmed that it was normal for transcription to be a long process. Thereafter, I was more optimistic and took advantage of the time to become even more familiar with each narrative, which later helped with the analysis.

*The following table demonstrates the transcription time of each interview*

**Table 5-Transcription time of each interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Length (in minutes)</th>
<th>Hours of Transcribing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>58:45</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigitte</td>
<td>45:03</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tania</td>
<td>47:15</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>39:31</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>43:22</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>37:09</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5. Technical Difficulties

During the planning of the recruitment and the actual interviews there were some minor technical issues for some of my participants which ranged from restricted access to emails and the use of Skype due to the Chinese government restrictions.
5.6. Participants’ Anonymity

Anonymity is central to ethical research practice in psychological research. My aim was to assure participants that no personal information will be disclosed. Before the interviews, all participants were informed that their data would be anonymized and that any identifiable information would be totally removed. All the participants agreed, which made them more comfortable during the whole interview procedure. Apart from the ethical considerations, I wanted to protect participants within the community and I did not want any identities to be revealed within a closed group of people. Participants were further reassured of this anonymity when their interview transcripts were sent. For me, this reassurance was not only a matter of ethical procedure for the completion of the present research, but also a matter of respect towards the participants who had voluntarily narrated their stories in order for this study to be completed and an appreciation of their willingness to contribute to the study which will help other expatriates in the future.

5.7. Confidentiality

One of the most important aspects of confidentiality in a research study is the use of pseudonyms for participants and for the location of the research. Participants were select their preferable pseudonym. According to researchers, using a pseudonym is believed to be a respectful way of inviting ownership and input into the research procedure (Lee & Hume-Pratuch, 2013). Giving participants the opportunity to think of and select their own meaningful pseudonym can also be assumed an act of care and thought from the researcher (Crow & Wiles, 2008). Some participants gave themselves a pseudonym, while others let me choose one on their behalf. I looked online in electronic name lists to find a name which sounded different to the real names of the participants. All the chosen names were ‘English’ and had no relation to any cultural background of the participants. In an effort not to choose unsuitable names, I requested their approval
before using them for my research and all participants responded positively (Lee & Hume-Pratuch, 2013).

5.8. How many Participants?

When I first conducted the research proposal and during the initial stages of the present research I intended to have twelve participants with an estimated thirty minutes to one hour for each interview to gain in-depth information from various perspectives and a wide range of participants (Mason, 2010). As described in the methodology, there is no magic number about the number of participants. In the present study I aimed to explore the experiences of expatriation among these participants. This study did not aim to compare findings with another sample group such as expatriates of different ethnicity or people who expatriated to another country from China. Therefore, six participants seemed to be sufficient in order to describe the subjective experiences and identify some of the emotional challenges and coping strategies people might use. In the methodology chapter I provided an explanation of why I have chosen this number of participants based on the indications of National Centre for Research Methods review about “how many interviews is enough”.

After the initial recruitment issues, I realized that twelve participants would be a difficult task and would most likely cause a significant delay in the overall research process (Jette, Grover & Keck, 2003). My first interview with Philip lasted 58:45 minutes, which was the length I had initially anticipated. I was pleased with the interview outcome since Philip gave a lot of descriptive and in-depth information (Riessman, 2008) about his experience of expatriation; he gave details about his life and work in Shanghai, but also the challenges he faced. Transcribing Philip’s interview was a challenge due to the presence of external sounds and fast talking. Since it took approximately six hours to complete, this raised some concerns about the time that would be needed to transcribe another eleven potential interviews. On further reflection on the length of the interviews
and the recruitment issues mentioned above, I decided to discuss these concerns with my research supervisor. We concluded that six people would be a sufficient number (Creswell, 2007). Smaller participant numbers would allow for the collection of more detailed information, thus researchers suggest that fewer participants are required when the amount of data obtained from each participant is high (Bowen, 2008; Riessman, 2008). In some cases researchers reported that high participant numbers might be restrictive on the amount of information generated and included in the analysis (Bowen, 2008).

After finishing the six interviews, which lasted approximately forty to fifty minutes each, I felt that I had sufficient data to proceed to the analysis. Afterwards, I reviewed the research rationale to reassure myself that I had gained enough in-depth knowledge on the subjective experiences of the six participants. I felt that all the interviews were significant as a whole, so I attempted to include as much as possible from each interview into the final account.

5.9. Gender of Participants

At the time I submitted the research proposal and when I first contacted my potential participant I decided to keep the inclusion criteria open as regards gender. Following the interviews, I felt that a male presence was absent since five of the participants were female and only one male. I felt I might be missing some elements important for the whole research outcome since, according to the literature, expatriates in China are predominantly male (Black et al., 1990) though subsequent research has shown high numbers of female expatriates (Selmer & Lauring, 2010). I felt that men could also give important knowledge about their experiences of expatriation and the difficulties they
faced during their time in China. I could potentially compare and contrast the outcomes of any applicable results concerning the difficulties that men and women both share.

Female participants gave a different perspective about their life in China. Not only did they describe the challenges they faced as foreign workers, but also the difficulty of being simultaneously wives, mothers and expatriates. Contrary to previous research findings, the majority of the female participants did not mention anything about gender discrimination (Peltokorpi, 2008). Moreover, the female participants introduced the term “trailing spouse” which was an unknown term to me at the time of the interview. They were enthusiastic during the interview sharing personal information and I was frequently surprised about the depth of the information they were willing to share with me. They also showed interest in the process of my research and asked to read the final thesis and even share the outcomes with their colleagues, which is a great honour for me.

5.10. Male Participants

Male participants were included in the e-mails sent from my link contacts, but only one showed interest in participating. Philip gave a detailed interview and shared personal information about his expatriation experience. He talked about some experiences he faced from the time he first arrived in Shanghai until recently. He was very descriptive about the difficulties he faced when he started his journey and how some of the challenges proved to be beneficial for his personal and professional development.

When I talked to some female participants about the lack of male participants they asked if I would be willing to interview their significant others. At first I thought that would be an opportunity to add more “colour” to the existing research so I accepted the offer. A couple of days later, however, I regretted my decision and I informed my participants that I would not be able to accommodate more interviews so they should not ask their partners. Even though an inclusion of more male participants could increase the trustworthiness of the study, I decided against it for various reasons (MacLaren et al.,
One was that I did not want to increase the number of participants and cause potential delay to the completion of the analysis. Another important reason was that I did not want the next participants to be familiar with potential answers their partners might have given. Furthermore, I did not wish to see the initial participants’ story from a different perspective, assuming that the other member of the family might have had a different experience which would influence my feelings and thoughts about someone’s story, and possibly influencing the data analysis.

Due to the above reasons, I hesitated to include male partners as participants in the research. Although I felt that their stories could enrich the data and my action might reduce the present study’s trustworthiness, I chose to stay with my initial feelings and ideas about each participant’s story. The trustworthiness of this study may possibly be reduced due to this gender disproportion and not for any other reason since the literature suggests that female expatriates can have higher degree of work-related adjustment than male expatriates (Peltokorpi, 2008).

I would have possibly proceeded with interviews if these male participants were colleagues and/or friends so I asked them to introduce my study to their male expatriate counterparts and I waited for over a month for an answer but I did not receive any reply. At this stage I took the decision to resume the data analysis without including any more male participants.

5.11. Reflecting on the gender ratio
Once I had decided to exclude the male partners, I started to reflect and wonder why male participants did not participate. I expected that males would be interested to participate since the research evidence shows that there is a high number of male expatriates in China. There might be more than one reasons why men decided not to participate on the current study, however, I do not wish to make assumptions of possible reasons but instead reflect on my feelings.

The majority of the people included in the e-mails sent from my link contacts were female. According to research, the majority of male expatriates in China work as managers, bankers or directors in organisations (Mack et al., 2011) probably with a very busy work schedule so they would be unable to spend time as participants in a research. Another possible explanation was that men might not be willing to share their emotional experiences about their time in China to the same extent as women. In fact, to be fair, there were also women who did not express interest in the present research, but women were the majority of the participants.

5.12. Disciplinary Reflexivity

By the term ‘disciplinary reflexivity’, we refer to the requirement of a discipline to explain its own form and influence with literature documenting how the disciplinary background of a researcher affects what they choose to study, how they proceed and what they find (Wilkinson, 1988). The importance of reflexive analysis also fits with the epistemological stances of this study because it accounts for the existence of multiple realities that inform one’s research. As detailed in the methodology chapter, this study was conducted utilising a philosophy that embraces the subjectivity of human experience. Counselling psychology also focuses on each individual’s story and this offers the practitioner personal as well as professional development. Personally, I have seen myself changing and developing through the training and I have chosen a research topic which also shows the personal and professional development of the participants through their
experience of expatriation. In the following sections, I will demonstrate the influence of counselling psychology on my work during this research.

5.13. Listening to my Participants’ Stories

At this point I would like to express my reflections on the interview process, how I arrived at the decisions I made in the process of research, and the influence of the discipline from which I developed my researcher identity. I have been in doctoral training for the last two and a half years, studying theories which embrace a pluralistic model (McLeod, 2005). Pluralism is a philosophical standpoint which fits in the field of counselling psychology by emphasising different responses and world views by placing specific interest on the experience of each client and the stories they tell about their current issues and what these stories mean to them (Schaffer, 2009). This philosophical standpoint has without question influenced the way I carried out the research and how I encountered the participants in this study (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

Listening to the stories of clients being at the centre of the therapeutic procedure, I looked for a research approach that fitted with these values. Following the pluralistic framework which emphasises a valuable collaborative relationship between the therapist and client, the client’s views are of central importance (Cooper & McLeod, 2007). Complying with this perspective, when reflecting on my expectations of this study, my aim was to achieve a collaborative stance, valuing the participant’s view, rather than imposing preconceived questions driven from a researcher’s set agenda. I had, however, a form of participation by paraphrasing and reflecting on the participants’ answers to show my understanding and reinforce them to continue and give me more in-depth information. However, I did not blur the role of therapy and research at any time during the interviews.
In the following example, I demonstrate the communication between me and Philip during the interview:

**Me:** So, you mentioned at the beginning that when you arrived it was like you went in a motel and [there] was some difficulty. So, as far I realise, the first difficulty was the lack of language, then the lack of, you know, having a group, having a social support or something [A: Yeah]. And the other one was the housing, the living conditions or something. [A: Yeah.] So, for you – If you can remember back then – which was the most important for you, the one that caused you the most, let’s say, difficulties of you adjusting here?

**Philip:** I would say it’s probably friends. I was thinking about it on the way to work this morning. X and I are getting married next July, and so I’ve started to put together a few ideas for my speech – sorry, this July, not next year, this July.

As can be noticed above, I reflect on my participant’s first part of narrating his story about his life in China and then I ask a question which emerged from his own story. Following this method I wanted to link the questions with the participant’s story and create continuity in the narrative rather than asking pre-planned questions which might not be relevant at that particular moment.

### 5.14. Reflections on the Analysis

For many researchers, especially those training in counselling psychology, gathering stories can be achieved with ease, but difficulties can possibly arise when a researcher reaches the stage of determining how to make sense of the gathered stories (Etherington, 2007). The philosophical approach I followed as a counselling psychologist was to focus on the subjective experiences of each participant. Therefore, I approached the research analysis with the intention of placing each expatriate at the centre of the inquiry rather than as objects of research. Hence a brief description of each participant is
included in the Analysis as a demonstration of the uniqueness of each person’s story. I wrote a small paragraph of each story as if I was retelling the story to provide a complete picture of the story rather than leaving the reader only with specific parts of the thematic analysis.

During the analysis I tried to reflect as much as possible on the moment of each interview in order to be able to give a sense of representation of each story in a way that valued the depth and texture of each participants’ unique experience. I was surprised by the emotions, thoughts and values I discovered in each story, something I did not notice during the interview.

In contrast, the identification of themes and sub-themes of each interview created a mixture of emotions. Even though I kept to all the research guidelines in order to interpret the participants’ stories without adding my own views on the topic thus increasing the trustworthiness of the study, I sometimes found myself having different views from some participants. For example, I am a person who is keen to embrace different cultures and explore different societal norms. I take the opportunity to take on board different values and views from different cultures in order to broaden my personal horizons. On the other hand, some of the participants expressed criticism of Chinese society and their norms and some comments appeared to have a sense of ignorance. The insider-outsider status (detailed in a later section) was another reason why I experienced a mixture of feelings during the analysis stage. Specifically, I realised that I sometimes had different views on several topics, such as the adjustment process. For instance, I believe that adjustment is a process whereby a person has to play an active role in creating their social life, activities, hobbies and also to get to know the society in which they will live. Consequently, I had a different opinion from those who tended to blame the different societal norms or the political system for their maladjustment. Another area where I experienced this mixture of feelings was when we discussed “the importance of support”.

149
I believe that professional support can be beneficial to an expatriate or the expatriate family. In contrast, some of the participants described the social network as more beneficial in order to cope with emotional challenges. This, however, does not mean that I do not respect the views of the participants and their personal lived experiences.

Moreover, my ability as a researcher to select specific parts from the participants’ interviews to create themes and subthemes to answer the research questions, and my ability to select which part of the text will be placed under a specific subtheme could be considered as an influence on the analysis and its results (Naaeke et al., 2010). I personally believe that there were no intentional influence on the results, but they were formed in such way in order to answer the two research questions.

My intention in this section was to express how the discipline of counselling psychology has influenced my listening to the stories and how the voices of the male and female participants in my research were represented. My personal views and my inside and outside status will be described in the following section.

5.15. Personal Reflexivity

Personal reflexivity is considered as being linked to the identity of the researcher and the form of the research (Wilkinson, 1988). For myself this applies as a male in his late twenties training in counselling psychology. Features of my personal identity are likely to have an impact on the research since the topics a researcher chooses in the first place are likely to derive from personal concerns (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). In this case, I have been influenced by personal experiences since I was an expatriate in China myself back in 2013. The time I spent there was significant for me and my future since it was a life changing experience influencing my life in many aspects. In fact, it is essential for qualitative research to emphasise the personal experience while we carry out research related to personal experiences and how we as a researcher interact with it (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008).
Reflecting on my own identity and life experiences has led me to become more comfortable with the use of reflexivity, something I was reluctant to do two years ago (Eastmond, 2007). Through this process, my interest in expatriation and cultural studies became realised. I began to look back through my own experiences of being an expatriate in China and also at my development during the course. This allowed me to focus on myself separate from my identity as a trainee counselling psychologist. Overall, my reflections demonstrate that I acknowledge my present identity both as a researcher and practitioner in terms of being a counselling psychologist conducting research about the emotional difficulties of expatriates, but also dividing myself in terms of remembering and stating my past personal experiences as an expatriate (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

In the following sections, I will briefly outline some of my personal expatriate experiences, how it relates to my topic and finally my feelings about conducting this research. This attempt is not just a spotlight on me, but also why through my training I immerse myself in learning about the experiences of expatriates and the meanings that people make from such experiences.

5.15.1 Time in China

Back in 2013, I went to Shanghai to work as an intern for a marketing company as a consumers’ behaviour analyst, in practice this meant assisting the marketing department with new clients. It was the first time I had been in a completely different sociocultural environment lacking language skills and away from my family and friends. When I first arrived, I did not know what to expect from the job, life and how I could develop some social interactions. In my reflexive journal I wrote in 2013:

*It’s everything different here, it like I am on a different dimension but somehow I like it, I am very optimistic about this.*
China is a place with a great history, tradition, culture and philosophy. As it was my very first time in Asia, I wanted to explore the differences in culture, society, norms and most importantly to observe the differences between Chinese and European mentality.

5.15.2. Challenges

The first challenge I faced was the lack of language.

*I can’t even buy what I want from the mini market, (personal reflexive journal, 2013).*

Language caused a lot of insecurity, confusion and sometimes I really felt helpless. I can recall the second day at work when I got lost for more than an hour in the streets of Shanghai. The most important incident as written in my journal:

*Nobody speaks English, I was lost and nobody could give me directions. Even this expat guy I stopped he said “I am on a rush, sorry”. I was glad I found that Chinese girl who could speak English so she stopped a cab and gave clear directions to the driver (personal reflexive journal, 2013).*

It was the first thing I took action on. I enrolled on a language course but I did not have much time to attend so I only went twice. If I had had some knowledge of the language before my arrival, I am sure I would have been able to solve half of my daily life issues. In the beginning, I would get really upset, but after a while I got used to it. Someone told me “When you come here, you should know the language” which was a
sign of people’s pride in their country. They would not make any effort to understand you, but you should be able to understand them since you are in their country.

Another important challenge I faced was the feeling of exhaustion, which was a combination of the environmental conditions and job requirements. My boss one day told me:

“Daily life in China is like a boxing game, you have to fight”

It was summer time, Shanghai was really hot and the pollution was high, as a result I was feeling really tired on a daily basis. Long work hours, long distances and despite a very modern underground system, it was usually crowded. Despite being a challenging task, it was an opportunity for me to live a new experience. I was able to make myself more tolerant in crowded places, I became more patient and I knew that I had to pre-plan my daily schedule, which was something really helpful for my life back in Europe. Moreover, when I was in China, I faced some emotional difficulties such as anxiety about coping in the new environment on a daily basis. Sometimes, I felt isolated because I was away from my family and friends, which was one more reason for me to socialise and create friendships in order to share my experience.

Another challenge was the uncertainty of the future because if I wanted to remain as an employee I had to find a visa sponsor. That lasted a couple of weeks before I decided to move back to the UK to continue with my Doctoral studies. These challenges brought a need for coping strategies. My personal coping strategies were in the form of friendships and personal education. In my free time I used to go to galleries, museums or visit new places with my friends in order to explore the city of Shanghai or the cities nearby. That not only worked as a method against feelings of loneliness, stress and distress, but it was also helpful to educate myself.
5.15.3. Opportunities

The whole experience of living in Shanghai was an opportunity for personal development. I have been interested in knowing how other people live in different societies, how they approach life, their daily difficulties and happiness and I always thought this could be a chance to enrich my personal values.

I started asking other expatriates who had been there for many years to share with me their knowledge about Chinese society and cultural norms. Through these long conversations, I was able to become more familiar with the Chinese since I was able to understand more of their culture. I learnt that people in China have their own way of dealing with things, completely different from the European approach. I was able to see a totally different culture, mentality and social norms with major historical and political influences.

The differences with European mentality were plenty, however, the one that I really appreciated from Chinese society is their view on society as a whole rather than focusing on individuality, which mostly agrees with my own values. Moreover, the political, philosophical and social norms enriched my own values by making me able to have an approach into difficulties from a different perspective.

5.15.4. Friendship

During my stay in Shanghai, I met many people from all over the world. I heard many stories about their lives and how they ended up in Shanghai. In addition, I met some people who I considered friends during my stay in Shanghai. Nowadays, those people are still my friends and our bond of the expatriate experience is still strong. For many years, I struggled to understand how people who spent only some months together could be such close friends. Once I had started this research and decided to reflect on my experiences, only then did I realise that I had faced many common challenges which were both difficulties and opportunities as well with these people. We were exploring something
totally new which later had a massive influence on our lives. The people I met in Shanghai back in 2013 were those I shared one of my greatest life experiences. There were those I shared my insecurities of being in a foreign place for the first time in my life where I had to share my struggles, ask for help, discuss my future goals at a time I was hoping to stay longer in Shanghai. Most importantly, I was able to share every moment of this experience with them.

5.15.5. How I decided to conduct the present research

During my training as a counselling psychologist I decided to look into a field which was under researched from a counselling psychology perspective. After having many discussions with my supervisor and other peers, I decided to look into the issues that expatriates in Shanghai might have. I wanted to conduct research with a major focus on the emotional challenges of people who take the decision to live and work in a foreign land and how therapists can contribute to helping them achieve a better life. At first I wondered if the topic would be interesting enough and exciting to produce. After reading the existing literature and putting myself in the place of understanding some of the challenges people might face, I was able to identify the gaps within the research. I became passionate about the subject and I thought it would be an opportunity for qualitative studies to be introduced into a field dominated by quantitative studies. This research can contribute as well to educating therapists of expatriates and their needs.

I noticed that many therapists were expatriating to China and were interested in working with expatriates or in community centres whose main client group is foreigners. Having research based on the emotional difficulties of the expatriate community, would be an important aid towards the knowledge and development of those therapists.
5.16. The Research as a form of change and development

The second part of the reflexive analysis is to see how the research feeds back into life experiences (Morse, 2000). I realised that as a doctoral student I had to choose a topic which would sustain my interest over a prolonged period. I hope from the reflections detailed above that I have expressed the reason for my topic enquiry. From this interest and throughout the research process, there was change and development in the research which influenced both myself and my participants. From the first moment I used my contacts to find more participants, I witnessed different feelings as some people were enthusiastic about this study while others were more hesitant in participating. This caused once again feelings of insecurity and self-doubt which were discussed with my supervisor and peer trainees. As I have written in my journal:

“Having to invite and talk to potential participants for a doctoral research was a new experience for me. I was wondering if the unstructured interview and the length of the time would be appealing for them or should I have used a structured interview.”

Despite my insecurities and after discussing my issues with my supervisor and reading more of the methodology theory, I became more secure about my choices and I was able to provide a detailed explanation to any potential participant who had any hesitation about the study and the interview method. When I first started interviewing my participants, I felt that some of them were unsure how this research might help other expatriates. I spent some time explaining the reasons I believed this could be a very important piece of research and how it can be used by other therapists in the future. This explanation gave inspiration to certain people who decided to share even more personal information about their experiences as expatriates. The self-reflection obtained during the time of my preparation, study and discussions with my supervisor became an inspirational tool for my participants, all of whom contributed to a piece of work which can potentially aid other expatriates facing emotional difficulties.
5.17. Insider – Outsider

As a researcher it is vital to acknowledge the fact that the information the participants shared with me was based on my identity as a person who has been an expatriate and basic experience of living in China. Postmodern theory emphasises on the importance of understanding the gender, class, and ethnicity of the researcher (Greene, 2014). In this section, I reflect on myself as a researcher and as a person who has experience of living and working in Shanghai and how this may have influenced the present research.

The term insider research refers to those researchers who conduct research within a population of which they are also members. At the time I was conducting the present research, I was not an expatriate in Shanghai, however, I share an experiential base with the research participants and I am aware of some basic situations they referred to (Carling et al., 2014). As it will be discussed later, this status allows a faster and complete acceptance by participants, therefore leading to a detailed narrative which could bring depth to the data which might not have been gained with an outsider status (Greene, 2014). During the research process insider status could be helpful because the participants could offer deeper information because since they knew I was familiar with the expatriate community, the adjustment procedure, some difficulties and challenges they would feel more comfortable to speak.

In contrast, outsider status also aided the procedure because the expatriates knew I was not a current member of their community, therefore they would be able to talk to someone about their emotional difficulties, share personal information without worrying about seeing me again or being concerned about my social interactions since many of the expatriates are known to each other.
In the following sections, I will outline some issues related to the insider/outsider status that I faced during my interviews.

5.17.1. Terminology

My previous expatriate experience, which could be considered as an insider’s status, was often a disadvantage as it appeared that sometimes participants made assumptions about my knowledge (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). During these times I had to inform participants that I was unaware of what they were referring to so they would have to explain it in more detail. During my interview with Abby, she referred to a term people use about harmony and how this correlates with the workplace.

Abby: Here people have the rule of Hexie even at work which can cause some difficulties to us.

Me: What is hexie? Can you please explain that to me?

Abby: It’s Harmony. It’s very important to keep the harmony at work in between workers rather than pointing out the truth. Here harmony is number one. And it justifies lying, and it justifies changing things.

During the moment when Abby was explaining that term to me, I felt that she might believe that I am a total outsider since I did not know one of the basic terms which reflects one of the basic value of Chinese society and philosophy, harmony. Nevertheless, I did not get distracted by these negative thoughts at that moment and I stayed focused for the rest of the interview.
5.17.2. Politics

Some participants referred to the political system, the Cultural Revolution and the influence of communism on current Chinese society. However, I chose not to ask any further questions nor have a conversation about this since it was not directly in my area of interest. I am sure that each person has different political views and approaches to the Chinese system, however, this topic was not directly related to my research questions nor research interest.

Brigitte: So, that’s the biggest thing for me, it’s just the complete and total acceptance of... You were saying that communists, socially they’re communists, but capitalists really. And it’s kind of hypocritical and bothersome.

Me Yeah. It’s their own unique approach into things like that.

It could be argued that the political circumstances might influence some peoples’ adjustment, but this was not mentioned by any of the participants. Moreover, I did not wish to influence or bias the research with any overtly political views.

5.18. Reflecting on interviews

This instigated thought around how expatriates who have been living and working in China dealt with their issues and the coping strategies they used. It was important for me to create an understanding from a counselling psychology point of view and to explore how therapists can support expatriates with their issues when abroad. This motivated me to give the expatriates an opportunity to share their stories in the hope that their subjective experiences and individual needs would be recognised.

During the interviews I felt that I was going back in time to such a memorable place and experience in Shanghai and despite the city’s rapid growth I could still feel familiar with the place. Even though all the participants had different stories from mine and they all were different from each other, I often felt nostalgic about the place, the
people I met, the experiences and challenges. The participants’ narratives highlighted a different perspective about expatriation, which made me realise that expatriation is not simply a relocation with a high salary and full of excitement, but it can be a very demanding, challenging and, in some cases, an emotionally traumatic experience.

Chapter Summary

This reflexive analysis has assisted me in making sense of my position in this research and the possible impact I might have had on it. While writing this chapter, I developed thoughts and expressed my own personal feelings and experiences which might have been dismissed at earlier stages of the analysis. This chapter has reflected on the issues I faced when I was recruiting participants and their resolution.

I have also reflected on my personal experiences of expatriation which have played an important role in my decision to conduct the present study. I have reflected on insider and outsider status and how the participants may have viewed me during the interviews. Finally, I have expressed my thoughts and feelings about the stories I heard with the hope that I have provided sufficient research reflections to the readers to enable them to make their own judgements about the extent of my impact on the research.

6. Discussion

6.1. Introduction

The aim of my research was to explore the emotional challenges that expatriate professionals face when relocating to China and how this has affected their personal and professional life. I wanted to examine the coping strategies followed. My goal was to generate accounts of the phenomenon of expatriation and the emotional challenges faced, from a counselling psychology perspective, and how these affect their personal and professional lives due to a change of country and culture. The theoretical background to this research was narratively informed by Riessman (2008) and the analysis was
conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to produce themes from the stories of the six expatriates of the study. Participants outlined very personal and detailed accounts of their experience and the following five common themes were generated from their narratives. Each main theme generated two to four subthemes. The first theme was Emotional Challenges: a) emotional difficulties, b) positive challenges, c) the challenge of the unknown and d) repatriation. The second theme, Coping Strategies, included the following three subthemes: a) social network, b) importance of the family and c) Professional Support. The third theme, derived from the analysis, was Adjustment, which consisted of three subthemes: a) adjustment to daily life, b) living conditions and c) work satisfaction. The fourth theme included findings about Personality and two subthemes were identified a) traits and b) personal development. The final theme was Cultural differences, which consisted of three subthemes: a) communication and international with locals, b) cultural differences at work and c) culture shock.

In this chapter, I will discuss the aforementioned main themes and subthemes and indicate whether the analysis is reflected in the wider literature and how this paper might contribute to wider research explorations and debates. Each subtheme will emphasise the lived experiences of the participants’ and their coping strategies in order for the reader to be able to follow the discussion related to the two research questions. At the end of the chapter, there is also a discussion of what counselling psychologists can learn from the present research, its contribution to knowledge and the literature, and the possibility of further research avenues are also discussed in the concluding chapter.

6.2. Emotional Challenges

The first theme identified in this study was Emotional Challenges, which consisted of four subthemes. As mentioned above, each subtheme was created based on the description provided by each expatriate participant in order to help us answer the first
research question (What emotional challenges do expatriates face during their stay and work in China?).

The term Emotional Challenges may already be known in the existing literature, however, the subthemes bring new and close insight into the emotional challenges expatriates face and the emotional issues these challenges can cause to expatriate men and women.

6.2.1. Emotional Difficulties

The first subtheme Emotional Difficulties demonstrates the negative emotional impact of the challenges faced by participants. Specifically, Philip said that during the first six months of his stay in Shanghai he experienced feelings of loneliness and distress. Foreign individuals on arrival in China usually lack the cultural skills required to successfully produce appropriate behaviour for foreign interaction, resulting in performance anxiety and distress (Takeuchi et al., 2005). He, however, described himself of being “homesick”. Feelings of homesickness are common among immigrants and international college students. Such feelings are mostly created by nostalgia along with memories of being at home surrounded by family and close friends (Scott, 2013). More commonly, difficulties in relocation and adjustment can create these feelings of homesickness and loneliness (Fu & Deshpande, 2012). Homesickness is not usually reported as a form of complaint, but is referred to as loneliness or isolation (Fu & Deshpande, 2012). Loneliness has been described as a pervasive feeling impacting on the individual’s health and quality of life requiring the attention of psychologists or other mental health related professionals in order to be investigated as a condition in itself and as a component of other conditions (Ponizovsky & Ritsner, 2000). Loneliness is generally described as an unpleasant feeling of isolation resulting from a lack of social support, family network and cultural isolation (Eveline & Booth, 2002).
Two major concepts of loneliness are discussed in the literature: loneliness as a result of social isolation and symptomatic loneliness which is described as a natural reaction to specific circumstances of life such as loss, abandonment, lack of social support, as a result of dissatisfaction with current social relation provisions (Ponizovsky & Ritsner, 2004). If we hypothesise that Philip’s story might be the result of natural consequences and a lack of social network due to his international relocation, then we can put Tania’s story into a more specific category in which her descriptions of loneliness are a result of loss and separation. International relocation brings high levels of uncertainty, making expatriates feel more stressed, uncertain and, in some cases, helpless (Templer et al., 2006). As described in the analysis, Tania was a “trailing spouse” living apart from her husband in a foreign country and responsible for taking care of the whole family, household and children. According to Cacioppo et al., (2009) relationships fulfil different personal needs, especially during the time of expatriation when family attachment creates a sense of safety and security to the spouse. Yet, as she states, the lack of attachment and the multiple responsibilities led Tania to depression with suicidal ideation.

Research evidence shows that many expatriates present both physical health (somatic complaints) and mental well-being issues, such as depression, stress, low self-esteem and lower life satisfaction (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2001). Research on expatriation has found that work satisfaction, personal life and family issues are related to depression. Studies which focused on the emotional well-being of expatriates during the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, for example, found that stress, anxiety and depression were the most common reasons expatriates sought psychological support (Andersen et al., 2014). The studies found that 9% of expatriates in Beijing were diagnosed with depression, which did not differ from previous studies from 2004 to 2007 which found that 10% of Beijing expatriates were diagnosed with anxiety and depression (Andersen et al., 2014; Jassawalla, Truglia & Garvey, 2004).
As mentioned above, Tania’s emotional difficulties are highly related to family separation, family responsibilities, and household duties and also with having to deal with her two children’s education and adjustment. Expatriate children need to attend new schools, learn a new language, make new friends and adjust to a completely different environment (Munton, 1990). The inability of the family to cope with cultural expectations has been identified as a source of anxiety and anger among expatriates in China (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). The present research also identifies these challenges that female expatriates might face when living and working in China. Participants like Tania and Zoe described the challenges of raising children in a culturally different environment and trying to be a successful career-woman at the same time. Women not only have to be competent as skilled workers, but they are also responsible for household maintenance strategies, family considerations, particularly the children’s education and spouse’s careers (Yeoh & Khoo, 1998). Initially, women would arrive in China mostly as trailing spouses, but over the last few years this has changed since female professionals are conquering the market to the same level as their male counterparts (Yeoh & Khoo, 1998), also evidenced in the present study.

Another challenge was the language barrier. For example, in the present study Claire described her first months in Shanghai as emotionally “draining”, stressful and isolated due to language barriers and social isolation. Host country language proficiency makes communication possible in countries where the foreign language skills of the host country nationals (HCNs) are limited and especially in countries like China where people tend to have some of the lowest average scores for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) in the world (Peltokorpi, 2008). Multilingual expatriate teenagers are further found to score higher well-being, experiencing lower levels of stress, show more cultural empathy and greater cultural acceptance (Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). Language will be further discussed in later sections. Language
barriers can also create a lack of social network ergo the expatriates might experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, stress, anxiety, homesickness and helplessness. Research findings also indicate that many expatriates, in a response to stress, may develop neurotic traits such as uncontrollable thoughts, or repetitive actions, or psychosomatic features (Berger, 2005).

Moreover, feelings of anger and denial were also described by the participants. For instance, Philip said in his story that during the first twelve months he did not make any effort to learn the language, even though he was aware of the difficulties caused due to his inability to speak Mandarin Chinese. Research has shown that people who immigrate usually experience feelings of anger as a response to the adjustment difficulties (Newman, 2014). Typically, early behavioural signs include irritability, lack of a sense of humour, suppressed anger, feelings of being targeted, tearfulness, inability to cope, poor eating habits, loss of sleep and an inability to concentrate and complete tasks adequately (Shortland & Cummins, 2007).

In the current study, feelings of helplessness were also identified when Brigitte described the first experience as an uncontrollable situation. Research shows that expatriates may feel powerless, extremely anxious due to maladjustment to the unfamiliar environment, others experience delusional ideation such as that HCNs are plotting against them or that their maladjustment is because other people oppose them (Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003). At this point, a possible argument could be that expatriates need up to six months to settle into a new place (Selmer, 2001), which means that peoples’ anxiety might increase due to a lack of practicalities such as a completely furnished home, access to financial accounts, internet access etc. Studies on immigration and expatriation have shown that due to practical difficulties such as an unfamiliar environment, a lack of language skills, people are often unable to access services such as the health system,
which can cause even greater feelings of distress and anxiety (Arola, Martensson & Kronlof, 2016). This creates a lack of independence and feelings of inability to fully function in a foreign society (Arola et al., 2016). A very good example, however, in contrast to the above argument came from Philip’s narrative in which he described that even if practicalities are covered, emotional difficulties can still exist. More specifically, he mentioned that even though some wealthy expatriates have all the material comforts, they still experience feelings of loneliness and distress.

Overall, the participants’ of the current study described various reasons for experiencing emotional difficulties. Emphasis, however, was given to the feelings of loneliness and isolation which resulted from different circumstances depending on each participant’s experiences. Specifically, Philip described feelings of loneliness due to the lack of a social network, whereas Tania experienced more feelings of isolation due to family separation. An emphasis was also given to Tania’s family duties and responsibilities which led her to frustration, depression and suicidal ideation. On the other hand, another participant described that their feelings of loneliness were a result of cultural isolation and the language barrier which caused emotions of distress, anxiety and low self-esteem.

6.2.2. Positive Challenges

Challenges do not only reflect negative aspects, but they can also have a positive outcome for the expatriates. To be more explicit, some people might benefit from cultural adaptation and international experience, while others might face a set of psychological challenges (Sanchez, Spector & Cooper, 2000). Researchers have pointed out that during one’s lifespan, challenges and difficulties are a natural part of the developmental process (Pires, Stanton, & Ostenfeld, 2006). Participants also talked about their positive experiences and how these gave them strength and increased their self-esteem. Therefore, I decided to call this subtheme positive challenges, since it gave a full account of positive feelings. This is a unique element of this study since the majority of the previous studies only emphasized the difficulties of expatriation. Participants in this study mentioned that
expatriation may have important benefits in personal and professional life. Scholars have pointed out that one main reason for people relocating to China is the huge global investment of the last decades, which encourages even more people to become expatriates (Selmer, 2001). Such people are mostly well educated professionals seeking better career development. In this case, participants talked about the professional development and the work opportunities they had during their time in Shanghai. For some, Shanghai has been described as the land of opportunity where people can achieve better professional development, career progress and greater financial stability. Expatriates have the chance to develop close friendships with people from their new social network, maintain relationships with people from different countries and cultures.

Another important finding of the present study is the emphasis given to the personal development of the participants. They described their experience as an opportunity to learn and develop their personalities as minorities in terms of language, race, and religion (Ward et al., 2004). Moreover, they focused on the importance of the friendships they developed with other expatriates and the strength of these relationships.

Participants also described expatriation as a unique challenge in which they can learn about different norms and behaviours than the ones they are used to, typically the ones learned in their home-countries (Ward et al., 2004). Expatriates living in China experienced the cultural values of the collectivist society of China and this may create a different perspective and approach to life situations (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011). Moreover, according to Spreitzer (2007), individuals who have been exposed to challenging circumstances such as cross-cultural adjustment tend to have better personal development of social skills, competence, and autonomy, but they also achieve a sense of learning and greater understanding. Professional and personal development of expatriates leads to an improvement in their lives and a change of personal values (Spreitzer, 2007).
As a result, this subtheme informs us about the positive experiences such as the personal and professional development expatriates can have. This is crucial for therapists in order to help their clients explore and identify these positive challenges and turn their focus away from the negative experiences to the positive ones.

### 6.2.3. Challenge of the Unknown

The third subtheme was called *challenge of the unknown* since participants described that the lack of information about the new place had contributed to their unawareness of their new life and its possible challenges. This subtheme gives us more in depth and new insight into what can lead to emotional challenges. Surprisingly, the majority of the participants did not receive any information about China, its culture, life or the norms before their arrival. Some described themselves as being “naïve” about the challenges. As a result, people were not ready to face difficult situations, which resulted in experiencing more worry and distress. Studies have found that prior information about a foreign place can be very helpful for adjustment and prepares people for any potential challenges (Leone et al., 2005). More specifically, preparation makes the expatriation experience less “scary” and it can regulate feelings of anxiety and distress (Leone et al., 2005). Hence, therapists should be aware that many of their client’s might not only have previous experience of living in a different culture, but they might not have even had any relevant information about the country in which they are about to live. This would be an additional reason for having a difficult adjustment and thus more emotional challenges.

The expatriate literature suggests that uncertainty creates difficulties in adjustment and decreases work performance (Adler, 2011). Studies have shown that expatriates usually experience a lot more stressors especially when they are not aware of the cultural difficulties during the process of adapting to a new society (Hovey, 2000).

On the other hand, expatriates who have more information about the new environment, the cultural differences and the history of the place can experience less
anxiety or distress during their adjustment (Hovey, 2000). Being unaware of social behaviour and cultural norms can create feelings of discrimination, exclusion, frustration of life and work especially if the HCNs work with expatriates, a lack of maintaining social network and feelings of not belonging to the host society (Hovey, 2000). These usually cause further anxiety, distress and/or depression in response to the unfamiliar environment (Oh, Koeske & Sales, 2002). These feelings usually arise from the process of acculturation in which individuals feel as being pulled between traditional values, norms and customs and those of the new society such as entering a new work environment or dealing with a new culture through school or university (Oh, Koeske & Sale, 2002). Not all individuals face the same feelings. For example, in the present study Abby said that she was well-prepared before relocation, which helped her considerably in dealing with the challenges.

6.3.4. Repatriation

An important finding which helps us to understand why emotional challenges might occur is the issue of repatriation. When participants talked about the challenges, they gave great emphasis on repatriation and the challenges they might face when they leave China and return to their home countries. This was described as a major challenge so repatriation consisted of the third subtheme of emotional challenges. Almost all participants said that repatriation might not be such a smooth transition. This important finding gives us another insight in the emotional challenges that expatriates faced during their time in Shanghai.

As detailed in the analysis chapter, participants described their concerns about repatriation, which was described as a stressful process in which they would have to experience a second adjustment, this time back home. They stressed that the idea of going back home created mixed feelings, such as distress, anxiety, loss and uncertainty. At first,
they mentioned that repatriation will separate them from a place where they developed a significant bond. They might also lose contact with people they shared common unique experiences possibly causing distress and sadness. Moreover, this study found that another reason that repatriation can cause emotional challenges is due to work circumstances. As mentioned previously, for many participants Shanghai was the land of opportunity to develop their careers. Some participants expressed concern that this career advancement might not be recognised back in their home countries and they might end up working in the post they had before expatriation.

Repatriates face employment difficulties since they have been used to working in a completely different environment with a result that their re-adjustment period might decrease their productivity (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). In addition, repatriates have developed some skills of working abroad which might not be relevant or important for their new career in their home country, bringing distress and disappointment (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Studies have found that 78% of repatriates face career issues, since the working conditions might be totally different, the fact that many return to their previous position while many of their colleagues who did not expatriate have progressed in their careers, leaving those who went abroad lagging behind on the career ladder (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Other reported issues include a lack of respect for acquired skills, loss of status and reverse culture shock (Bonache, 2005). The gap between expatriate expectations and reality on return might have a negative effect on their well-being and level of work satisfaction (Daily & Dalton, 2000). Repatriates might face a second round of cross-cultural adjustment in both society and at work, which has been linked to high levels of anxiety and depression (Bonache, 2005).

Another important finding of this subtheme derives from some participants’ interviews where they stated that they might feel an emotional distance with people such as family and friends. Specifically, they said that people who did not have expatriate
experiences might not be able to understand their multicultural development and the fact that they embraced different cultures. They said that people who “stayed back home” might be critical or distant to their developed ideas of multiculturalism.

So far, I have discussed the challenges which were identified in the analysis and its findings. These give us a newer and more insightful perspective of some of the emotional challenges participants experienced and the circumstances which caused these challenges. Participants of the current study talked about the various emotional challenges faced during their time in China and especially during the adjustment period, which ranged from six months to one year. Such emotional difficulties included feelings of loneliness, anxiety, frustration, anger and depression as well as some practical difficulties such as Internet restrictions, language barriers and environmental difficulties. Subthemes provided new and important information about expatriation which are not described in the previous literature and helped us to answer the first research question. Moreover, the section emphasized the emotional difficulties which caused various psychological and emotional issues to the participants. On the other hand, great emphasis was given to the positive challenges of expatriation including the personal and professional development. As described in the literature review, challenge is defined as a situation in which people need to frequently show determination in unknown situations (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). The third subtheme focused on those challenges resulting from the unfamiliar environment expatriates had to live in, including their unawareness of its history, society and norms. Finally, the issue of repatriation was discussed as the final subtheme which gave us further insight into the causes of the emotional challenges faced by expatriates during their time in China.
6.3. Coping Strategies

This theme answers the second research question of the present study (what coping strategies do they use to cope with those challenges).

6.3.1. Social Network

Analysis revealed that one major coping strategy was the social network. Participants described that being a member of social networks or of a sport’s team was a crucial element to their adjustment, since they were able to meet people and share their experiences or ask for help when needed. The community network is a crucial aid for expatriates to alleviate stress, frustration and worries, especially when close friends or family are not present (Caligiuri, 2000b). Specifically, participants mentioned that the existence of a community network was also helpful in increasing their security and confidence in living in a culturally different environment. This subtheme allows therapists to consider community work as an effective form of support and treatment for communities like expatriates or immigrants.

According to the research, human beings have a fundamental need to belong to groups, which motivates the establishment of significant interpersonal relationships and frequent contact with other people (Wang & Kanungo, 2004). Being a member of a social network gives expatriates the opportunity to meet new people and socialize, especially during the first months of arrival when the majority are still unfamiliar with the environment (Sanchez, Spector & Cooper, 2000). Expatriate social networks can be considered to include other expatriates, local working partners and local friends. For example, Philip, mentioned the life changing experience of joining a foot-ball team and in the analysis it can be seen how his life changed when he was “surrounded” by people he felt comfortable with, and later on he considered them as his friends. This study outcome reveals the importance of a social and community network and the effect that socialisation had as a coping strategy in order to eliminate feelings of loneliness and
homesickness. Interacting with host, home and third-country nationals is a valuable source of information about culturally acceptable norms and behaviour and it also reduces uncertainties associated with work and non-work situations (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). Social support helps to mobilise psychological resources and serves to provide feelings of reinforcement, recognition and affirmation that can enhance expatriate cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

Many researchers from the discipline of human resources and psychological sciences have regularly advised companies to introduce newly arrived expatriates to a local or regional network of other expatriates who can be an extremely valuable source of tangible information support in the beginning of their journey, regarding schools, shopping, visa regulations and the like (Osland et al., 2000). A stable social network provides social validation and support and expatriates are likely to seek out new relationships in the host country to manage the relocation challenges (Butcher, 2009).

The lack of social communication might have a significant impact on the psychological well-being of the expatriate and in some cases might cause distress (Wang, 2002). In places like China where contact with family and friends might be difficult due to time differences or technical difficulties, the social network is a vital process for expatriate adjustment (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

Through socialization in a particular cultural setting, individuals internalize norms for appropriate behaviour in specific interactions (Aarts & Dijkerhuis, 2003). It can be a useful resource of emotional support of informational and guidance support where individuals can create an adapting behaviour in the new environment and it also reduces the feelings of uncertainty among expatriates (Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2008). Research shows that social networks frequently help the better adjustment of the trailing spouse to
form friendships, to spend quality time with other expatriates especially if it is a non-working spouse (Au & Fukada, 2002).

6.3.2. The Importance of the Family

As detailed in the analysis, participants also talked about their families and the great support they received when they faced a difficult situation. They emphasised how helpful a family member can be to adjustment and how some participant’s life changed when a family member moved in with them.

As a result, I named the subtheme the importance of the family and I included it within the subject of coping strategies. For many people, the family might not be a coping strategy itself, but the present study revealed that expatriates felt the need for family security and warmth. They described their willingness to come closer to their families in order to overcome expatriation related difficulties.

In cases where the expatriates were not permitted (due to work or country regulations) to bring their spouse or family, they have been reported to have a more difficult adjustment than those who were able to move with their whole family (Coles & Fechter, 2008). Family support, family communication and family adaptability have been shown to be related to better expatriate adjustment (Heslberger, Hippler & Brewster, 2015). Partners and children can be a valuable resource for the expatriate, reminding her or him of the larger life beyond work (Lauring & Semler, 2010). Family is a resource of cohesion, adaptability, organization and structure (Kraimer et al., 2001). Lack of family support has frequently led expatriates to terminate their assignment earlier (Selmer, 2005). Evidence shows that family-related problems were ranked first in explaining the reason for early termination assignments. Claire and Zoe described the importance of living in Shanghai with their family. The power of the family is evidenced by numerous anecdotal examples of expatriates claiming that ‘the family keeps me sane – I would never be able to cope on my own’. Families are cultural systems which undergo developmental
stages and they try to maintain a sense of continuity and equilibrium to enhance each member's growth (Hechanova & Christiansen, 2003) and also help expatriates to integrate into the wider community.

On the other hand, there are cases in which the family presence brought more pressure and anxiety to an expatriate. Even though living with the family is very important for expatriates, it can often be the cause of anxiety, pressure, distress and even depression (Kupka & Cathro, 2007). Researchers also investigated families as some of the factors which play a role in the success or failure of expatriates. Takeuchi et al. (2002) found that partners and children present difficulties to general and cultural adjustment. Partners and families face a different situation compared to the expatriate worker (Dickmann et al., 2008). Expatriate employees go to a new country with a new assignment with a defined role and a set of responsibilities inherent in the job, with a ready-made social network, some of which may be familiar as part of the international organization if they were assigned from elsewhere in the same organization (Halsberg, Hippler & Brewster, 2015).

Spouses have opportunities for growth and self-development, but their lack of social support networks or organizational affiliation often results in loneliness, frustration, anxiety and low self-esteem (Shaffer et al., 2001). Expatriate families have to deal with the heavy demands of work and family for multiple reasons. Research shows that most of the 80% of the assignees are accompanied by a spouse, children or both (Kupka & Cathro, 2007). Research of domestic relocation has shown that moving overseas may be stressful for children, who frequently present adaptation issues with the cultural and school environment (Sanchez et al., 2000). Having a balanced family life and being able to cope with family and work demands increases expatriate well-being and work satisfaction since research indicates a better work output.
6.3.3. Professional Support

The third subtheme focused on the importance of professional support and how therapeutic services can assist expatriates in coping with emotional challenges. Surprisingly, five of the participants never used counselling services, even though they contemplated it. They preferred the aforementioned types of support, such as social network, family support, interacting with colleagues or joining expatriate groups. This is an important finding for us therapists when considering whether the usual one to one or group therapy is a preferable option to the expatriate population. This subtheme can influence therapists and theorists in developing services such as community work groups in order to provide a mixture of social and therapeutic support.

Previous literature did not give emphasis to the importance of professional support nor to the development of counselling or other psychological disciplines in order to support expatriates with their issues. One participant only talked about using counselling services and another talked about the importance of counselling therapy for expatriates. Previous studies have mainly described that expatriates get support either from their organisations or from their social network. Studies of the last decades have focused on the expatriate – work relationship and how people could be stable and fit for their employment and they had to prioritise their activities in order to fit in with their personal and professional responsibilities. (Hutchings et al., 2008; Wang, 2003). These studies did not take into consideration any aspects of general and psychological adjustment (Shaffer et al., 2001). Moreover, those studies focused on the family aspect to demonstrate the difficulties which a family can cause to an expatriate’s career (Farh et al., 2010).

Organisational support referred to the support provided by colleagues and work supervisors, which aimed to help newcomers with the acculturation process during the process of adjustment (Kraimer et al., 2001). Studies, however, found that organisation
support could not support expatriates to a level in which anxiety, distress or other emotional issues could be managed and it has found to be unable to prevent expatriate psychological withdrawal and, in some cases, an early assignment termination (Shaffer et al., 2001). Taking important decisions during the period of adjustment added additional anxiety to their already stressed lives (Wang & Kanungo, 2007).

Interestingly, participants talked about the lack of therapeutic services in Shanghai. Such lack of resources and particularly the lack of therapeutic resources at work and within the expatriate community have been noted (Shaffer et al., 2001). The difficulties of accessing psychological services since most medical insurance in China does not cover such costs have been identified. Licciardone (2001), in his research of expatriate access to health services, states that the majority of American expatriates access foreign clinics for counselling services due to different insurance policies. There is also a lack of trust, with expatriates preferring foreign clinics because they want to be reassured of the therapist’s qualifications.

Having a therapeutic session may not necessarily be due to adjustment or acculturation issues, but for personal issues which might be irrelevant to expatriation. Skuja and Norton (2009) reported the most frequently discussed expatriate issues; marriage, employment/financial problems, legal visa worries, loneliness, mental health related issues, male-female relationships, available social services and problems related to cultural adjustment. Moreover, the same study found that many of the expatriates were reluctant to seek psychological therapies because it could create a label of potential failure in their work. Many professionals did not want to share with colleagues or friends the fact that they were accessing psychotherapeutic support because their hypothetically successful career and life would be stigmatized (Skuja & Norton, 2009). Thus, confidentiality is one of the most important issues among qualified expatriate therapists.
Expatriate families also access psychological therapies for couple or marital counselling, issues with children, behavioural management, learning or emotional difficulties and individuals for a variety of interventions (Berger, Eame & Pardos-Ruano, 2008). The presenting problems for the expatriate family usually seem related to relocation or living overseas (Berger et al., 2008). When families expatriate, the nuclear family is magnified because the extended family, social network and local community disappear, which results in restrained emotional resources and coping abilities (Berger et al., 2008). As a result, some of the most common family issues might be arguments, irritation, anger and anxiety mostly derived from relocation and adjustment (Berger et al., 2008).

Due to the diversity of the expatriate community, a therapist should be more aware about the cultural differences and should create an atmosphere to welcome all the different cultural backgrounds. There are many different client groups for whom cultural consideration are important and it might not be similar to the mainstream culture especially for a place like China. Expatriates require culture-sensitive support on first arrival in the new environment which can cause high levels of stress due to the change of home, parting from loved ones and previous support networks, language and climate change, loneliness, financial worries, children’s education and the like. The multicultural literature often addresses the need for cultural cohesion as well as for cultural diversity. Therapists need to be aware that if they pursue a cultural agenda clumsily they can do more harm than good with issues such as cultural discrimination or racism (Nelson-Jones, 2002). Therapists working with expatriates might have to deal with clients who have the same background as them or they might come from a completely different culture. They would have to be aware that the therapeutic goals might be different and the challenges might be perceived differently. Therapists should avoid using the mainstream predominant “western” form of therapy and adapt it to the clients’ cultural background.
In this section, the coping strategies identified by the analysis were discussed in order for us therapists to understand the ways expatriates chose to cope with their emotional challenges. Emphasis was given to the social networks, which was the most common choice of the participants. They described the help they received through socialising and support from friends and also placed great emphasis on the family. Family had a unique role which, according the participants, can either be a coping strategy or in other cases cause further emotional challenges. Finally, professional support was discussed. According to the findings of the present study, professional support was not a choice to deal with challenges and difficulties. This gives us a new perspective and motivation to create alternative forms of therapy, such as community support and adjust our roles from the traditional therapeutic practice. In the next section the process of expatriate adjustment will be discussed.

6.4. Adjustment

This section attempts to answer to the first research question of the study because it demonstrates the daily issues that participants described during their time in Shanghai and it takes a closer look at expatriate daily life and how their daily routine can affect them psychologically. I will discuss the challenges expatriates might face during this adjustment period and, at the same time, illustrate some of the coping strategies mentioned. Moreover, this section attempts to answer the second research question as well, since it discusses the ways that participants were able to handle the adjustment challenges.

Selmer (2001) has defined adjustment as the socio-cultural characteristics required to achieve effectiveness in interpersonal exchange with HCNs (Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999). There are multiple views of adjustment within the current literature and definitions vary. Adjustment has been defined in term of subjective well-being or the
unhappiness that expatriates feel about their circumstances (Munton & West, 1995). Moving from a familiar place to a foreign country may involve changes and, more precisely, cultural changes. This involves dealing with unfamiliar norms related to the general culture, business practices, living conditions, weather, food, health care, daily customs and political systems, plus facing a foreign language on a daily basis (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Being able to adjust overseas can be a challenging procedure and the present study has identified three subthemes which give a novel and unique perspective by mentioning issues unreported in previous research outcomes.

6.4.1. Adjustment to daily life

So far it is known that cross-cultural adjustment and work adjustment are frequently cited in the literature as the major adjustment difficulties. This study found that daily life activities might be one of the most challenging issues during expatriation and it might play a significant role in adjustment. In addition, this study brings to our attention a specific issue not discussed by previous researchers. The first adjustment issue described by the participants was adjustment to daily life. Participants mentioned that issues which might be obvious and easy for someone who lives in his/her home country might be complicated or difficult for an expatriate living in a culturally different environment with different rules. For instance, participants said that difficult access to medical care caused them high levels of stress and insecurity.

Expatriates face unique daily challenges while working and living in Asia. Sociocultural differences might have serious impact on the psychological adjustment of expatriates, with maladjustment often leading to mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression and other issues such as tension and fatigue. Participants in this research mentioned various daily life difficulties, ranging from language barriers, miscommunication with locals, environmental difficulties, internet restriction, dietary problems, not being able to achieve daily tasks such as paying a bill or difficulties
accessing health-care. These issues mostly refer to the concept of socio-cultural expatriate adjustment, which focuses on the ability of the individuals to ‘fit in’ or to negotiate interactive aspects of the host culture by the amount of difficulty experienced in the management of everyday situations (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). Additionally, not being able to access the Internet caused more feelings of anxiety. Thus, this subtheme gives us important information on how daily life difficulties can cause emotional challenges.

Daily life presents expatriates with a variety of challenges, which are best overcome by people who have access to a wide source of information about the culture (Johnson et al., 2003). Expatriate men and women are frequently confronted with decisions regarding health care or housing, issues which can be complex for individuals living in a relatively unfamiliar environment (Johnson et al., 2003). Researchers suggest that many of the aforementioned issues can be managed once an individual has better understanding of the existing culture, something which can be facilitated by a social network (as analysed above) or by interacting with HCNs, which will be discussed in a later section (Vianen, Brown & Johnson, 2004). One of the most difficult stages of general adjustment is adaptation to daily life, comfort with the new setting, coping with differences in things like the weather, food, living conditions and transportation (Takeuchi et al., 2002).

On the other hand, as has been mentioned multiple times, people narrated their subjective experiences. I thought it would be interesting to comment in one of Philip’s comments that adjustment to daily life is just a matter of perception and he characterised many of the issues that expatriates face as “first world problems”. As I noted in the analysis, feelings of superiority over the local culture and society were described. Studies have demonstrated that expatriates from European countries, the USA, Australia and other so-called Western countries frequently share such feelings of superiority which
sometimes stems from their country’s colonial history (Fechter & Walsh, 2010). Also, it is important to note that most of the times expatriates are assumed to move as highly skilled individuals and therefore their relatively privileged position in these cities or their right to be there as working migrants is taken for granted (Fechter & Walsh, 2010). However, studies showed that these assumptions are not made by all expatriates and not all of them believe in social class and hierarchy differences (Fechter & Walsh, 2010).

An important factor concerning adjustment was the living conditions of participants; the circumstances under which they lived and how comfortable they felt. Participants expressed the importance of having a nice and “homely” or centrally located flat, which made living in a new environment easier. No previous literature has taken a close look at expatriate daily life routine and issues. This study takes the focus away from work adjustment and gives insightful information about the daily routine of expatriates and how this routine can cause emotional challenges. According to the literature, living conditions influence the general adjustment and the emotional well-being of expatriates (Hachanova et al., 2003). Studies have shown that those who reported having a more stable adjustment without any emotional difficulties were those expatriates who have better living conditions. In fact, Templer et al. (2006) found that the general living environment, living conditions, lifestyle and daily routines have an important impact on the lives of expatriates in the new cultural setting. Those who had prior information and managed to set living conditions as a priority were those who appeared to report less psychological distress, better general and cross-cultural adjustment (Temper et al., 2006). Prior information also gave newcomers a more realistic expectation of the new culture, lifestyle and they seemed to be more able to handle acculturation (Earley & Ang, 2003).

Knowing these difficulties, therapists can be aware of the issues of daily life which are crucial for expatriate well-being. Through this subtheme we can not only understand further causes of emotional challenges, but also recognize that expatriates who focus on
developing their daily routine by having better housing, social network, information about healthcare or other daily-life related development can eliminate and cope with some emotional difficulties. For example, therapists can inform their clients about the importance of having a daily routine and how their emotional well-being is influenced by this. This subtheme, therefore, brings novel and unique information both about the challenges faced and how they can be dealt with.

6.4.2. Work satisfaction

One of the main descriptions in the narratives of the participants was work satisfaction, which was also an important reason for their general adjustment. In the present study, participants described how work was a form of satisfaction contributing to better emotional and psychological well-being, but also aiding general adjustment. Being able to find psychological comfort in one’s work role has proven to facilitate overall expatriate adjustment. Work adjustment aids the degree of confidence in him/herself to set and complete goals competently (Hechanova et al., 2003). Therefore, this subtheme relates to positive challenges, because it gives more detailed information about work satisfaction and it can work as a motivation in order to develop other areas where expatriates might face issues or struggles such as in everyday life situations.

Over the last 40 years, research has shown that work is highly related to motivational processes (Ellemers, Gilder & Haslam, 2004). Scholars have examined work as a source of motivation affecting individual behaviour both in work and non-work environments (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Work motivation can be gained by the insights of work and it fulfils many of the individual’s emotional and behavioural needs such as social identity (Ellemers, Gilder & Haslam, 2004). Employment, for expatriates, is more than a standard source of income or a routine which would aid general adjustment in China, it is also a sense of identity. In the current study, Abby described herself as a
valuable individual with an important role in society that was an identity of recognition and respect within the expatriate community. As it has been detailed in the analysis chapter, Abby said that she would not feel the same if she was just a volunteer and she would not even attend expatriate gatherings and events. This important finding explains why employment satisfaction correlates highly with positive emotional challenges. Also, from Abby’s statement we understand that concern about a potential loss of employment could lead to greater emotional difficulties, since for some, expatriation is synonymous with a high ranked job. Work identity has been shown to be related with social identity, which can help specify the circumstances under which individuals are likely to perceive themselves; as a separate individual or as a part of a collective (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001).

An important finding was how one participant, Philip, who was disappointed in his work was negatively affected in his emotional well-being. Research investigating the work adjustment of Western expatriates in China revealed that expatriates have to deal with an unfamiliar work context which often leads to feelings of frustration, difficult general and non-work adjustment (Selmer, 2006a). Work dissatisfaction can increase emotional difficulties such as stress, disappointment, depression and, in some cases, it might lead to early repatriation (Selmer, 2006b).

On the other hand, employment can work as a coping strategy for many expatriates since it is the first place of social interaction with other expatriates or host country nationals. Specifically, employment can be the reason why other expatriates might have a quicker and less stressful general adjustment, since work can be the source of social interaction, a very important coping strategy for international assignments.

Expatriates can start their social relationships in the workplace, interacting with other foreign employees without concerns of any cultural or age differences (Li, Xin, Tsui & Hambrick, 1999). Work is also a place where expatriates can create social links with
HCNs and benefit from obtaining more knowledge and information about the country where they are living (i.e. China), about cultural differences, customs and the social behaviour of the local people (Bell & Harrison, 1996; Selmer, 2006b). In addition, in other cases like Tania’s, work was the main form of activity to help expatriates overcome depression, frustration and be more active within the expatriate community. Mataix-Cols et al. (2005) found that work can be an important element for social adjustment, especially for people diagnosed with mental health issues such as depression.

In the above section, the specific and detailed stages of adjustment were discussed. Important issues which feature as material for therapeutic work include everyday life, living conditions, work satisfaction, and how they can all influence expatriate adjustment to a new environment. In the next section, personality traits and their role on adjustment will be discussed.

6.5. Personality

The analysis of the present study identified that personality traits play a significant role in expatriate adjustment and it can be an indication of how people will react and cope with the several emotional challenges they might face during expatriation. Previous quantitative studies mentioned the correlation between personality and adjustment, but there was no close investigation of the behaviour which can influence adjustment. The present research did not measure or identified any personality traits according to the quantitative models or theories but since participants mentioned personality characteristics in their interviews such as “open-mindedness” or “acceptance” I tried to explore how the general quantitative personality factor research is reflected or even challenged in the material in this study. Therefore this section mostly helps the reader to understand that counselling psychologists have to be aware of traits and characteristics in
order to help the client cope with expatriation challenges. It shows how thoughts and behaviour can influence the process of adjustment.

Personality also relates to the second research question, which helps us to understand how people cope and adjust to a new environment, how they see themselves within a new cultural context, but also how they deal with difficulties in the foreign environment. Being open and receptive to new situations, often described as “open-mindedness”, a willingness to learn and explore, otherwise described as “curiosity” have both been highly related to expatriate adjustment (Kets de Vries & Mead, 1991; Teagarden & Gordon, 1995). In the Big Five framework, both traits belong under ‘openness to experience’ and studies have tried to find what impact they have on peoples’ adjustment (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Although personality traits been found to be an important element, there is still no clear answer on which ones will help individuals to adjust faster, simply because every individual has or constructs personality traits differently from others (Moynihan & Peterson, 2001).

Participants of the present study described a process of change of themselves in order to be able to cope with difficulties and achieve better adjustment. Tania talked about how she experienced changes in her behaviour to deal with expatriation difficulties. She described herself as a quiet, family and work orientated type, but when she moved overseas she had to change, she had to be louder and more sociable in order to create a social network and avoid being “depressed” and “miserable” as she described. She also said that it depends on someone’s personality on how “well” they adjust, it depends on each individual to achieve some cognitive and behavioural changes to facilitate their adjustment process and to be able to deal with unexpected difficulties. Personality traits are associated with a preference for problem-focused rather than symptom focused coping strategies (Selmer, 2002).
6.5.1. Traits

Participants in their interviews mentioned characteristics which can be matched with some of the above traits, especially ‘openness to experience’ and ‘extroversion’, however they did not mention anything related to ‘neuroticism’. This subtheme was called traits, because it helps us understand which personality traits can facilitate expatriate adjustment. It also emphasised which traits can help expatriates deal with their emotional challenges. Also, some personality traits, which will be described in the following paragraphs, may cause further emotional difficulties, whereas other traits can become the basis of coping with difficulties.

These five categories form a taxonomy of the ‘higher order’ personality traits and account for a majority of the variances in personality measures (Selmer, 2002). Five personality factors, often labelled extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience, are the most common traits which can facilitate adjustment (Goldberg, 1992). In order to understand what these traits are, a basic description of each one is provided.

Agreeableness. Agreeableness is an interpersonal characteristic associated with aspects of social perception (Berrett & Pietromonaco, 1997) and cooperativeness. Agreeableness indicates collaboration, sincerity, respect and empathy for others and it can show tolerance and patience as well as responsibility in problem-solving (Selmer, 2002). Individuals with this trait tend to adhere to others norms and seek to develop friendships with others. A highly agreeable expatriate attempts to learn how the locals think and accommodates their feelings and actions when possible (Selmer, 2002). Therefore, expatriates who form friendships with Chinese nationals will learn to appreciate how locals conduct things and solve interpersonal problems by seeking harmonious relationships with others (Lawler, 2005).
**Conscientiousness.** Conscientiousness demonstrates a respect of the social roles and shows trustworthiness to others (Huang et al., 2005). An expatriate with high conscientiousness consistently works competitively in his/her adjustment and is willing to work in an orderly and well-planned manner. These individuals are likely to have better work adjustment.

**Openness.** Openness to experience mostly defines people who can accept cultural differences and are ready to take up a new challenge; it also implies intellectual curiosity, flexibility and a non-judgemental attitude (Black, 1990; Barrick & Mount, 1995). One open to experience has an interest in learning new things in the new setting. An “open-minded” expatriate is one who approaches the host-country with fewer stereotypes and expectations (Huang, Chi & Lawler, 2005). Expatriates with a tendency to be open to experience usually face different norms and customs in China than in their home-country, and these expatriates fit better into both Chinese culture and local living conditions. They show respect to the local practices and find it easier to meet the requirements of the new life.

**Extroversion.** Extroversion is related to the quantity of social interaction and to character traits such as being gregarious, assertive, active and talkative (Barrett & Pietromonaco, 1997). Extroversion promotes social orientation and a desire to communicate with HCNs in order to understand the host country culture (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Extroverted sojourners have been shown to enjoy better adjustment and better work performance compared with their introverted counterparts (Caligiuri, 2000). The reason an extroverted expatriate is more likely to adjust better than an introverted one is because the former is willing to engage more in general living activities, interact more both at work and in public and form relationships with the HCNs (Lawler, 2005). In terms
of this study context, China, extroverts will probably be more comfortable in *guanxi*\(^1\)–building and maintenance and have greater motivation to form relationships with the local Chinese. On the other hand, introverts might be more accepted by some locals, especially in a culture that emphasizes deservedness and conservatism (Lawler, 2005). Chinese culture considers a person who is modest and not aggressive to be morally better than others.

*Neuroticism.* Neuroticism is associated with lessened emotional control and stability (Hofstede, 2001). In the case of expatriates it might be a weak or negative relationship between neuroticism and adjustment. On the one hand, the Confucian culture in China emphasizes harmony and caring relationships among individuals so expatriates with high neuroticism will trigger negative sentiments such as anger and anxiety and evoke an unpleasant climate. Expatriates who seem to have high neuroticism are more likely to lose their temper when facing problems in life and work and they might have communication difficulties with the locals or employees (Huang et al., 2005). On the other hand, Chinese culture normally abides by the principles of hierarchical relations, therefore if an expatriate has a high managerial position, employees might still respect him/her.

Overall, traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, intellect or openness and extroversion may contribute to a problem-focused coping strategy (Goldberg, 1992). Personality traits can also show cultural sensitivity, which mainly relates with acceptance and openness (Clegg & Gray, 2002).

\(^1\) Guanxi - describes the basic dynamic in personalized networks of influence (which can be best described as the relationships individuals cultivate with other individuals) and is a central idea in Chinese society
In the analysis, I also provided parts of Abby’s interview, which focused on her attempts at accepting the new cultural context. She talked about her personal experience which she sees as giving advice to newly arrival expatriates. Abby talked about the trait of tolerance and acceptance stating that people should have to accept differences and keep in mind the fact that they are living in another place with a different culture. Hence, attempts to re-create a similar environment or conditions the same as someone’s home country can only lead to frustration and more difficult adjustment. On a similar note was Claire’s narrative when she mentioned that people must accept cultural differences in order to be able to cope with the new reality. Personality traits have been regarded as the most important potential factors leading to expatriate adjustment. Marquardt and Engel (1993) found that expatriates who showed more patience, openness and humour, demonstrated better work and general adjustment.

6.5.2. Personal Development

Developing personality traits frequently leads to greater personal development. Personal development can be considered as one of the benefits of expatriation or, as mentioned earlier, a positive challenge. The present subthemes help us to understand how personal development can help expatriates to accept the challenges, create more coping strategies and eliminate emotional difficulties.

As participants shared in their narratives, they all saw themselves changing through this experience. They described themselves as developing protective mechanisms to be able to cope in difficult situations and to unexpected challenges. Participants also stated that personal development enabled them to understand things differently and approach situations from a different perspective. People with working experience overseas tend to have personal as well as professional development (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002). Through their international experiences, expatriates have reported that their choice to expatriate had a positive impact on their lives (Stahl et al., 2002). Studies indicate that
the majority of expatriate individuals became more confident and developed a global mind-set which has enriched their personal lives.

Having an overseas assignment was thought would only help their career and increase their income, but on repatriation and evaluation, participants concluded that this experience had further increased their social network, communication and interpersonal skills (Stahl et al., 2002). The fact that some expatriates who overcame the adjustment difficulties and stayed for the agreed length of time in their assignment can be considered as a development of emotional strength and stability (Stahl & Bjorkman, 2006).

In the present section, personality traits and their influence on adjustment were discussed and reflected with the previous research findings. This section suggests to professionals how they can work with different personalities and which traits can facilitate general, sociocultural and work adjustment. In the next, final section, the findings of cultural differences will be discussed.

6.6. Cultural Differences

This section discusses the cultural differences participants mentioned in their stories and how important these differences are in influencing expatriate adjustment and emotional well-being. This section appears to answer the first research question. Since cultural differences can be considered a very broad topic for discussion, it would be better to refer to the term as many scholars have described it i.e. the cultural distance to which the culture of the home country differs from that of the host country (Peltokorpi, 2002). As shown in the analysis, participants described how cultural differences were an obstacle to communication, life, work and general adjustment or how sometimes it could be a useful process.
6.6.1. Communication and interaction with locals

The first subtheme focused on communication and interaction with the locals and it was Philip who first described his experience of dealing with the unfamiliar Chinese characters and the fact that only a few locals were able to speak English. This difficulty caused further emotional issues to Philip, such as emotional and cultural isolation as well as higher levels of anxiety since Philip felt “disconnected” from the rest of society. Apart from Philip, Claire also talked about her experience dealing with the Chinese language and she described her emotions as predominantly feelings of anxiety and distress. Research has shown that expatriates tend to have language difficulties in communicating with Chinese people at work and in everyday life (Peltokorpi, 2008). Efficient communication depends on a common language, a condition that rarely exists in China. Expatriates are rarely able to speak Mandarin and most Chinese do not have sufficient English skills (Peltokorpi, 2007). In some cases, expatriates do not make an effort to learn the language due to its difficulty or, as discussed in a previous section, some expatriates may reject learning the language due to the anger that adjustment difficulties caused them and do not want to have a potential attachment to the new environment. Different cultural and sociolinguistic orientations are also likely to complicate conversations with the Chinese in English (Peltokorpi, 2007).

Chinese language proficiency helps expatriates learn the appropriate cultural values, which in turn enables them to have the appropriate behaviour and respect in public places, work and social interactions. This can be very useful for people who come from a non-strict environment such as European countries or the US to a high-culturally context country like China. Expatriates from European countries or the US are used to expressing their thoughts and feelings in communicative interactions, while the Chinese are more indirect in their communicative behaviour and make a greater distinction between insiders and outsiders (Peltokorpi, 2008).
For instance, the Chinese might be reluctant to express contrasting opinions, which sometimes can be misinterpreted by expatriates. Due to the natural tendency of people to interact in their native language, expatriates who do not know Mandarin can be either intentionally or unintentionally excluded from communication networks (Takeychi, Yun & Russel, 2002). An inability to speak the local language may put some people in the outsider group and lead to lower-quality relationships, which is often related to low work and life satisfaction (Takeuchi et al., 2002). Apart from work, language plays an important role in general adjustment as well. Language skills create and foster daily interaction with Chinese people and help expatriate men and women understand Chinese culture (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). The more proficient a person is in the language, the easier it is to obtain information, and communicate in daily life tasks such as ordering food, giving directions to a taxi driver or paying utility bills and other tasks. Basic language skills might also be important in China because Chinese people are found to experience high anxiety in communicative interactions with foreign nationals (Gudykunst & Nashida, 2001). Understanding that an expatriate is able to speak the local language might reduce anxiety and categorization of the expatriate as an out-group member.

Fluency in the host-country language has significant direct effects on expatriate adjustment. Speaking, reading, writing and understanding Mandarin Chinese has been demonstrated to impact positively on expatriate adjustment (Shaffer et al., 1999).

Participants gave great emphasis to the importance of understanding Chinese culture. Being able to adjust, live and work in a foreign environment requires study, exploration and understanding of the cultural norms, differences and forms of communication. The way that a society is formed and structured plays an important role in expatriate adaptability.
According to their experiences, the best way to achieve adaptability was by interacting with HCNs. General adjustment is highly linked to interaction adjustment, which refers to the interaction with other expatriates and with HCNs (Kim & Slocum, 2008). In the expatriate context, based on social learning theory, scholars argue that expatriates who are prone to socialising with HCNs have a greater interest in the new culture, take more opportunities to learn about it from contacting HCNs and adjust to the host country culture better than people who prefer to socialise only with other expatriates (Caligiuri, 2000; Ren et al., 2006). In the analysis, I noted that those participants who interacted with locals benefited not only with adjusting to the new culture, but were also aided in everyday life tasks such as finding a new flat, paying bills and learning more about the history of Shanghai. Interaction with host nationals also refers to the degree of psychological comfort regarding different communication and interpersonal styles used in the host culture (Bhaskar-Shirinivas et al., 2005).

In the analysis, I noted that Claire found interaction with locals beneficial for learning Chinese culture, but it also made her feel part of society. More specifically, she noted that she did not feel “a foreigner” any more. In fact, well-functioning social relationships with host country nationals have been identified as important predictors of cross-cultural adjustment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). In addition to being basic components of satisfying daily life, social ties when living in foreign countries are proposed to be an important part of adjustment as they provide emotional support for dealing with the associated stress and anxiety (Johnson et al., 2003).

On the other hand, participants described that sometimes HCNs were ironic, arrogant and unhelpful. They mentioned examples of visiting health professionals who were biased towards them because they were expatriates. It is important to note that this was only a subjective experience of the participants of the current study and this may not apply to others. Brigitte mentioned that she felt that Chinese people were sometimes
making fun of her and she often felt excluded from conversations. As has been mentioned in a previous paragraph, exclusion from social interactions might be due to language barriers. Interacting with locals does not only depend on the expatriate’s willingness to form a relationship, but it also depends on how the HCNs are willing to interact with expatriates (Liu & Shaffer, 2005). Empirical studies suggest that creating well-functioning social relationships with the Chinese is challenging because of their group-oriented behaviour, negative attitudes toward foreigners, indirect and suppressed expression, and different social manners and relationships with the opposite sex (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). One possible reason for the low frequency of intercultural interactions in China is the limited integration and deferential treatment of foreigners. Researchers proposed that the Chinese people tend to give foreigners well-mannered treatment by being polite on the surface, but distinguish them clearly as out-group members (Vance, 2005). Despite these challenging prospects for well-functioning intercultural interactions in China, it is possible to achieve social interaction with HCNs.

6.6.2. Cultural differences at work

As described in the analysis, cultural differences are not only obvious in everyday life, but also in the work environment. Participants of the present study found that cultural differences at work are a challenging area which influences their work and general adjustment and their general ability to work. As detailed previously, work adjustment is strongly correlated with work performance. For instance, Abby talked about the challenges she faced at work as a result of cultural differences. She said that the priority among the employees was harmony and a good maintenance of their relationship. How to approach people and ask them to do tasks or even if they have accomplished previous tasks caused her stress. What she described was part of the characteristics of guanxi.
Researchers have studied guanxi from dynamic perspectives, such as its importance on direct, foreign investment or on the foreign employees working in China (Wright & Cheung, 2006). Chinese employees perceive harmony as a very important element for happiness at work, organisational commitment and work motivation (Xiao, 2013). Even though guanxi is a very important characteristic of Chinese culture, it might be used inappropriately, which might cause some sort of bad effects which could have an impact on organisations and especially organisations where expatriates work (Xiao, 2013). Foreign workers and managers have to be aware that these cultural differences will play a very important role at work. An expatriate has to adjust to the new cultural characteristics and cannot approach Chinese employees in the same way with the same attitude as other foreign workers. This can sometimes cause communication issues depending on the position of the expatriate employee. Since traditional Chinese culture is based on hierarchy, many people tend to respect high positioned officials and managers even if they tend to be rude and do not respect the sense of harmony. On the other hand, the correct use of guanxi and prior knowledge of work harmony have been found to play a very important role for foreigners when they enter a Chinese workplace (Gao, 2006). The unique culture and context of the country need to be considered. The importance of guanxi for expatriates is mostly discussed in relation to work organisation. Those who hold this knowledge tend to be successful employees or managers, who can also benefit with promotion prospects (Xiao, 2013).

6.6.3. Culture Shock

The last subtheme discussed was the culture shock experienced by participants, which caused them many emotional difficulties and challenges. As noted in the analysis, some participants suffered from culture shock only during the first period of their stay, others for a longer period of time, whereas other participants did not experience it at all. Culture shock refers to the different values, attitudes and behaviours that someone can
find in a foreign place (Rajasekar & Renand, 2013). Participants in their interviews noted that an element of culture shock was society and its history, norms and values, language, and even the food and the different smells on the street. An unfamiliar cultural environment provides new stimuli for which appropriate responses have not been learned. Differences in expectations, language, food, eating habits, the concept of personal space and many more are frequently causes of stress because they may seem neither understandable nor ethically correct (Shi & Wang, 2013).

Scholars have suggested that adaptation to a new overseas setting usually begins with a period of excitement, followed by disillusionment and then a state of culture shock. This shock is a stress reaction when salient psychological and physical rewards are generally uncertain and difficult to control or predict (Kaye & Taylor, 2005). Therefore, expatriates remain anxious, confused and sometimes apathetic or angry until they have had time to develop a new set of behavioural assumptions that help in understanding and predicting the social behaviour of locals (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Here, as mentioned in the first section of emotional challenges, we can better understand Philip’s refusal to make an effort to learn Mandarin Chinese during the first twelve months of his stay in Shanghai. Most expatriates have to deal with psychological strain, a sense of loss, rejection, confusion, surprise, anxiety and feelings of impotence (Simons et al., 1993). People suffering from culture shock might present some common behavioural characteristics such as a preoccupation with the cleanliness of drinking water, food and surroundings, excessive concern over minor issues, fear of being cheated, robbed, injured, a dependence on long-term residents of their own nationality, depression, feelings of helplessness, anger over delays, and other minor frustrations (Kaye & Taylor, 2005).

On the other hand, other participants said despite the cultural differences they tried to avoid making assumptions about the Chinese culture and the behaviour of the local
people. They also explained that they tried to have a broader perspective about their daily life challenges and not approaching their life in China based on their cultural background. Claire stated that people have to approach differences with another mind-set, and show more cultural acceptance. They regularly emphasised acceptance and making an effort to learn the new culture and the history of the place. For instance, Chinese society has been heavily influenced by the Cultural Revolution, the communist party and also the rapid economic growth which have all contributed to shifts in cultural norms.

In the above section, cultural differences were discussed and reflected with the context of the existing research findings. It indicated that cultural differences play an important role in adjustment and cultural adaptation can be a challenge. It also raises awareness to practitioners that if individuals accept and embrace cultural differences, then they might be able to have better adjustment and deal with the challenges.

**Chapter Summary**

The present chapter has discussed the study findings in an attempt to answer the research questions and how it relates with the existing research knowledge on the topic. In the concluding chapter, the implications of the study, future suggestions and a final methodological discussion will be presented.
7. Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

This thesis aimed to explore the emotional challenges facing expatriate professionals when relocating to China, and how this has affected their personal and professional lives. This study has also attempted to examine the coping strategies followed and gain new insight into their experiences. This concluding chapter summarises the purpose of this study and discusses its findings, key issues and limitations. There is also a discussion about the contribution to the existing literature through the present qualitative study. Finally, its potential contribution to the field of counselling psychology will be presented as well as recommendations for future avenues of research which might shed light on our understanding of expatriation.

7.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the emotional challenges expatriates might face in adjusting to a new work and life environment especially on first arrival. The study also focused on the coping strategies described by the six participants of the study. The intention was to approach this exploration from the standpoint of counselling psychology, hoping to maintain the humanistic values of the discipline and striving to enhance any psychological support provided to expatriates. Coming from a perspective of valuing the enhancement and the promotion of the welfare of others, I hoped to contribute to its development by embracing the subjective experiences of expatriates as regards their emotional challenges, coping strategies and adjustment.

An unstructured narratively informed framework was used to provide one main orientating statement; ‘I am interested in hearing your own personal experiences of being an expatriate in China: What challenges did you face and how did you cope with it’. 
Following this perspective, it was hoped that it would allow each individual to tell their own stories, and allow me to acknowledge the varying experiences and intricacies of such stories. The main themes identified from the narratives include: Emotional Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Adjustment, Personality, and Cultural differences. In the discussion chapter, these themes were discussed further in relation to previous research.

7.3. Narrative framework: the methodology

My choice to follow a narratively informed framework was based on the aim of the study, which was to gain meaning from expatriate stories about their lives and work adjustment, their time in a different culture, the challenges faced and how they were able to cope. Researchers describe narrative as a lens into how humans perceive their lives within a particular culture and period of time (Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011). For me, it was important to follow as objectively as possible the participants’ own experiences and their understanding of how expatriation challenges has had a psychological impact. For that reason, a narratively informed framework was well suited to help me organize my research and conduct my interviews. Thematic analysis helped me to identify and organise themes derived from the participants’ stories and gain an understanding of how they perceive themselves, the challenges they faced and how they dealt with it.

Believing in the power of data, I focused on the participants’ stories to find the most appropriate way to approach the analysis process. It was interesting that even though the interviews were unstructured and the main question was “Which emotional challenges did you face during your time in China and how were you able to cope?” some common themes from their stories were expressed. For that reason, I conclude that Braun & Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis was the most appropriate approach for data analysis. Even though the analysis of the interviews was systematically organised focused and detailed into themes, the sense of the ‘whole’ story still remained.
A narratively informed thematic analysis has allowed me to critically investigate the understandings and meanings participants gave to their experience of expatriation. Through the process of this research (interview, transcription, analysis, discussion), I have attempted to take a subjective position in which the participants’ narration is the most significant and the data presented and analysed comprised of the information and experiences that the participants deemed important to share with me as researcher. I also acknowledge my contribution to the formulation of the data and my role as an active listener, a ‘vehicle’ to help participants share their stories based on the research focus.

7.4. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. It can be argued that the number of participants is small for a qualitative study. As detailed in an earlier chapter, the initial plan was to recruit twelve participants, however, due to several practical difficulties (i.e. time difference, internet restrictions etc.) I was not able to recruit more than six. While transcribing the six interviews, I attempted further contact with my link gatekeeper in Shanghai, but it was explained that it would be difficult for her to circulate more recruitment emails at her place of work. Moreover, since there is no specific number on how many participants provides the perfect sample in qualitative research, I concluded that this is dependent on the scope and intention of the study (Baker & Edwards, 2012).

Using a narrative framework and a thematic analysis each story was detailed and in-depth. Instead of approaching analysis as a search for generalization, I hoped to acknowledge the intricacies and complexities of each of the participants’ stories. For that reason, each theme included a number of sub-themes for in-depth analysis and space was given for a more detailed analysis of each participant’s story in order to gain insight into their experiences and not just to list a series of findings. As a counselling psychologist, I see the necessity of ‘giving voice’ to others (Goodman et al., 2004) by continuing to
document the diversity of expatriates’ experiences. In this context, the number of participants is somewhat irrelevant as each voice is valued in its own right. This is the reason I included parts of the participants’ stories and their background information both in the methodology and analysis section.

Another limitation to be considered is that the majority of participants were women and it could be argued that if there was a different proportion of men and women, some of the findings might be different. Participant experience varied from one to six years, which might influence their stories since the former may describe the difficulties and negative challenges, whereas the latter can give a broader picture of the expatriate experience. Another key point to bear in mind is that the majority of the participants were from the UK and the USA; and this is an unrepresentative sample of the expatriate community in Shanghai. It is also important to mention that this study explored a sample of the expatriate population living in Shanghai, China and the results might not represent expatriates in other countries, though the literature has confirmed and validated such findings.

7.5. Main insights from the literature and findings

In examining the stories of the participants, five themes were revealed: Emotional challenges consisted of the emotional difficulties people might face during expatriation, the positive challenges aiding personal and professional development, the challenge of the unknown and repatriation. The second theme referred to coping strategies including the social network, the importance of the family and professional support. The third theme described the adjustment process particularly to daily life, living conditions and work satisfaction. Personality was the theme which focused on traits and personal development while the fifth and final theme described the cultural differences reported by the six participants and focused on communication and interaction with locals, cultural differences at work, and culture shock.
7.6. Emotional Challenges

Interviews revealed that participants faced both emotional difficulties and positive challenges. Emotional difficulties were described as feelings of loneliness, separation from the family, friends, spouse, and the home country. For the majority of expatriates, emotional difficulties began when they had to leave their comfort zone and their safe space and move to a new environment. As reported by the participants and supported by previous literature, emotional difficulties can cause anxiety, stress, distress, feelings of loss and separation, cultural isolation, anger and tension (Fu & Deshpande 2012; Booth, 2002; Scott, 2013). It is important for counselling psychologists, however, to be aware of the fact that challenges can also have a positive impact on the life of an expatriate. This study, for example, found that participants benefited from work development and, according to them, this was not only due to their hard work, but also to the opportunities provided by the growing economy of Shanghai. Moreover, emphasis was given to personal development, which consisted of the development of new friendships and a strong social network, but more importantly participants were able to discover different aspects of their personality. This part is particularly important for counselling psychologists: members of a minority group became more respectful of cultural differences. A realisation of the differences of living in a collectivist society like China helped to create a different perspective of the different social norms, which influenced their general and work adjustment (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011).

This study demonstrated the importance of having pre-existing knowledge of the society and its cultural differences. It showed that participants who spent time informing themselves of China’s history, society and its cultural differences with their own background were able to tolerate more their anxiety and distress and reported faster general adjustment (Hovey, 2000). This is an important element for therapists working with an expatriate population since psychologists could advise clients to become more
aware of the society and its history. In this way, people can observe some of the cultural differences in their daily life, become more culturally tolerant as it might have a positive impact on their adjustment and eliminate negative issues such as anxiety or distress.

The final main point of emotional challenges relates to repatriation. A further difficult period of adjustment may occur when having to deal with loss on repatriation caused by a separation from people they had shared memorable experiences with and leaving behind the life and work created during those years as an expatriate (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Therapists have to be aware that repatriation can also be a cause of stress and the concerns people might have about repatriating back to their home-countries would need to be examined. It is worth mentioning that emotional challenges can be caused by a plethora of life situations during expatriation and there is no clear distinction on what is considered a negative or positive challenge. The next section focuses on how people dealt with the emotional difficulties and the coping strategies adopted by the participants of this study.

### 7.7. Coping Strategies

The present study found that participants had a variety of coping strategies in order to deal with their challenges. One important coping strategy was the importance of a social network and how interacting with other people has a positive impact on expatriate adjustment (Wang & Kanungo, 2004). For others, the family was essential in coping with difficulties since it was perceived as a security blanket creating feelings of safety. Therapists would need to consider the family aspect and explore how this works for expatriates, because it may have a negative impact on adjustment and well-being (Heslberger et al., 2015). For some, the family might cause more stress, especially when the spouse has no employment and is responsible for child-rearing. Family adjustment is a challenging procedure and for some of the study’s participants it was the cause of psychological issues such as depression. Therapists should be aware of the dual role of
the family in expatriate adjustment and it might be worth exploring the perception of the whole family on expatriation, adjustment and well-being.

Finally, this section described the importance of professional support. Only one participant attended counselling therapy to deal with depression as a result of maladjustment issues and family separation. Participants commented that visiting a therapist might have to do with other issues other than their expatriation challenges and research findings appear to confirm that expatriation difficulties are not the primary reason for visiting a therapist, but other issues such as family or couples’ issues are (Shaffer et al., 2001).

7.8. Adjustment

Adjustment was described as a crucial period for the participants of the current study. It is a period in which many of the expatriates faced the majority of their emotional and psychological difficulties. This study mostly emphasised in the general and psychological adjustment rather the work adjustment. Adjustment section aimed to inform counselling psychologists of the everyday difficulties expatriates faced and to bring more awareness to therapists of the reality they might face. It identified aspects that the previous literature did not analyse to any great extent, such as living conditions. From this, therapists can appreciate how living conditions play an important role in adjustment, and it also demystifies the assumption that highly paid expatriates living in a luxurious environment do not have the same issues as others (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). Finally, there is the question of work adjustment, which participants rated as a very important aspect of their overall adjustment and well-being. Therapists should keep in mind that many people became expatriates for business purposes. Adjustment at work plays an important role and therapists should approach consulting work managers, institutions and work supervisors so the new-comers can have better adjustment (Selmer, 2006a).
7.9. Personality

As described in the discussion section many participants mentioned that personality plays an important role in the adjustment and coping with challenges. It was discussed in an effort to explore how the general quantitative personality factor research is reflected or even challenged in the material in this study. This, however, does not indicate that the present qualitative research accepts the face values of the quantitative theories and methods about personality traits.

Participants described how personality can facilitate adjustment, assist in understanding cultural differences and, finally, deal with all the practical and emotional difficulties. People who tend to show more cultural acceptance and embrace differences without expecting similar behaviour or social norms in their home countries were more able to adjust and reported less stress (Moynihan & Peterson, 2001).

Therapists can focus on clients’ cultural acceptance, openness, awareness of cultural and social norms in order to assist expatriate adjustment. In addition, personal development was another important finding from the current study. Expatriates who reported having worked on developing personality traits of acceptance, tolerance and awareness of the environment they were living in appeared to be more adjusted, with better well-being. (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002). Other studies have also indicated that through personal development people were more able to create a better social network, improve career development and handle better their challenges (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002).

7.10. Cultural Differences

Participants talked about cultural differences and how these influenced their life and work. First of all, this section focused on the interaction and communication with locals. As participants said in their interviews, and has been confirmed by the literature, communicating with the local population helps in understanding cultural differences
leading to a less stressful adjustment (Peltokorpi, 2002). Communication with locals in a place like Shanghai, however, might be a difficult task for expatriates due to language barriers (Peltokorpi, 2002).

Research has also revealed that a good relationship between the local population and expatriate community does not only depend on the efforts made by expatriates, but also on their acceptance from the locals. Some participants mentioned that interacting with locals made them feel less “foreign”, whereas others found it difficult to maintain relationships with locals due to cultural differences. Moreover, cultural differences can impact on work adjustment. Participants confessed that due to different social norms and perceptions about work, they had difficulty in co-working with locals, for instance, the perception of ‘guanxi’ and harmony amongst employees can sometimes be a difficult concept for expatriates to comprehend.

In the following section, recommendations for meeting the psychological needs of the participants and what counselling psychologists can learn from the present study will be presented.

**7.11. Recommendations on meeting the participants’ psychological needs**

It would be beneficial for the therapist to conduct a background check in order to identify the person’s experiences about previous relocation or expatriation. Next it would be important to identify the challenges and explore whether these challenges are due to expatriation or other issues irrelevant to the situation. It would also be beneficial to distinguish between negative and positive challenges so the client might be able to identify the positive aspects of expatriation. Moreover, therapist and client could identify coping strategies and how the client copes with difficulties. Make suggestions about social network and explain the importance of human interaction and highlight the importance of interacting with the local population.
Therapists work should include some work on loss and separation. Furthermore, therapists should explore the family aspects and identify how positively or negatively the family impacts on the client’s life as an expatriate. Also, therapists should embrace multicultural work and suggest couple or family sessions. Another important issue where therapists could focus is the client’s thoughts on repatriation and work towards future adjustment in their home-countries. Therapists could provide psychoeducation about the different stages of adjustment in order for the client to understand the psychological impact of repatriation. Also, practitioners can work on acceptance, tolerance and explain how personal development could handle the challenges better, improve adjustment and better well-being. Finally, an important part of the work should be focused on the acceptance of the new reality. Therapists should work collaboratively with clients in order to accept the new cultural context, the different social norms so the client will be able to accept and understand the different environment.

7.12. Summary of the key implications of the thesis

In an attempt to summarise the main significant points arising from the current thesis, the following key implications can be identified:

Emotional challenges have both a positive and negative impact on the life and wellbeing of expatriates. Common emotional difficulties reported in this thesis were: anxiety, distress, depression, loss and separation and positive challenges were about work towards better professional and personal development. Moreover, it was identified that social networks are a very powerful coping strategy and families can have both a positive and negative impact on the life and well-being of expatriates. Families can have more difficult adjustment which might negatively influence their well-being and professional support can be important when dealing with expatriate difficulties especially with acculturation, separation, emotional challenges and adjustment.
Also, individuals, because of expatriation, experience significant changes at a personal level and the way they perceive themselves. Expatriation has also impacted on the individuals’ psychological well-being in situations where participants expressed feelings such as anger, anxiety, and depression. Expatriation impacted positively on the individuals’ psychological well-being in cases where participants expressed feelings of confidence, happiness in achieving a difficult task and satisfaction of being able to create a new life in a culturally different environment. Furthermore, expatriation can have a better outcome on peoples’ personal development when they become more culturally open and accept cultural differences. Understanding of cultural differences can have a positive impact on peoples’ well-being and adjustment. Finally, these research findings have a direct relevance in my role as a counselling psychologist, not only as an investigation into the emotional needs this group may experience due to expatriation, but to find ways to support them psychologically.

7.13. Contribution to knowledge

In this section I argue that, through my thesis and the study reported within it, I have made a contribution to knowledge in relation to the following areas: First of all, through this research I hope that my study has contributed towards developing a practitioner psychologist perspective on expatriation, which has been lacking in the literature. I believe that a psychologically-informed approach towards the emotional challenges and coping strategies of expatriates present within my thesis contributes to the development of psychologically-informed theoretical and practice perspectives of expatriates. This study found that expatriates can face emotional difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, isolation and loneliness during their time in China. One major challenge is the uncertainty and the insecurity of expatriation, which has been described as the challenge of the unknown. Therapists should be aware of the issues of uncertainty and they can further explore this or similar difficulties with their expatriate clients.
Moreover, another finding which, to my knowledge, has been under researched in previous studies is “repatriation”. In the analysis and discussion chapters, repatriation was described by some participants as a difficult decision which can cause feelings of uncertainty. Therapists can explore their client’s thoughts about repatriation and whether this causes further emotional difficulties. On the other hand, this study also outlined the positive challenges of expatriation which is another under researched area. Many of the previous studies emphasised the difficulties of expatriation and avoided mentioning its benefits. As described by the participants, expatriation can be a unique experience which can broaden horizons. It is important for therapists to be aware of this positivity and it will be beneficial for clients to further explore this positive aspect.

Moreover, I believe that my study has contributed to counselling psychology as a profession through demonstrating the potential of counselling psychology to engage in the development and generation of psychologically-informed theoretical and practical perspective on the positive and negative challenges faced by an expatriate population. This study may be an opportunity for counselling psychology to develop its identity in relation to working with adults and young people. As researchers and practitioners, counselling psychologists working with an expatriate population on national, private or voluntary services have the potential to mediate a development in the existing research.

This study found that one important aspect of the coping strategies is the social network, the importance of the family and professional support. Due to this, therapists could also work in community groups with the expatriate population which can have multiple benefits for the clients. Community work with expatriates can promote individual, couple and group counselling and psychotherapy as a resource for people in need of support for a range of emotional needs or difficulties. These community groups can involve several activities including arts, sports, creative writing, and cultural exploration, alongside psychological support. In this way, expatriates can benefit
therapeutically and they can also socialise, interact with other expatriates and share their experiences. For therapists, this commitment means an expansion of our professional activities beyond the counselling and psychotherapy realm to an advocacy and intervention at a community and policy level (Goodman et al., 2004). Community psychology centres can also include education centres and other services where clients can learn about the country’s history, culture and traditions which will then help them achieve a better adjustment during expatriation.

This study also provides an example of multicultural psychology. This study illustrated the work with different ethnic groups which might take place in a foreign environment for both the therapist and the client. In addition, group work within a population might be an interesting challenge for the therapist, who will have to accommodate people from several cultural backgrounds in one group. Group and community work can help expatriates deal with emotional challenges such as loneliness, anxiety, anger and other difficulties which were mentioned in previous sections. Sharing experiences within a group can help expatriates approach their experiences from a different perspective and also identify positive experiences and challenges. Another important finding which contributes to the existing knowledge and can assist therapists with their work is the fact that expatriation can be linked with personal development and personality traits. Therapists can promote culturally-based homework activities to help clients achieve a better understanding of the new society, which might also help with their overall adjustment. For instance, the present study found that many of the expatriates were facing issues due to the cultural differences at work. In this case, a therapist could potentially promote a homework task in which the client can explore aspects such as ‘guanxi’ so as to understand how work relationships are established.
Finally, this study identified specific, unique challenges not mentioned in previous studies, such as adjustment to daily life and it raises awareness of some of the issues therapists can explore with their participants if some of their difficulties are related to daily life struggles. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, living conditions can either facilitate the expatriate’s adjustment or it can be a negative factor causing emotional challenges. Therapy can be a place where expatriates can discuss such issues or even to be able to discover that living conditions could be a reason for difficult adjustment.

Thus, my study may be useful to other researchers who want to conduct research on expatriation, multinationalism, international psychology and immigration.

### 7.14. Further research possibilities

This research presents the emotional challenges and coping strategies experienced by six adult expatriates who lived and worked in Shanghai, China. The individual stories can form a foundation for further research incorporating a larger number of participants to investigate the percentage of expatriates who have faced psychological difficulties due to expatriation. Further study can focus on the positive outcomes of expatriation and link it with personal and professional development. This could be done using larger samples and quantitative measurement of psychological contract in relation to expatriation. This research has presented family issues, coping strategies, and the personal development of expatriates.

Further research can investigate specific groups of expatriates such as families and ethnic groups in relation to adjustment and how they perceive the challenges. Future studies can explore gender differences and what similarities or differences they have when they face emotional challenges as expatriates. Future research can focus on specific emotional challenges, such as anxiety or depression. Finally, this research suggests an exploration of psychological therapies for an expatriate population and the attempts to establish psychological support in organisations employing a large number of expatriate
professionals, such as multinational corporations, in order to establish therapeutic support which will meet the needs of expatriate employees and support them with any psychological difficulties.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Open ended interview questions

Opening question:

- Would you like to say a few words about yourself and your reason for being in China?
- Have you ever lived and worked in a foreign country?
- What challenges did you face/are you facing during your stay and work in China?
- How do these challenges affect you emotionally?
- Do these challenges affect your personal and/or professional life?
- How did these challenges affect your adjustment?
- How do you cope with these challenges?
- What positive experiences did you get from your stay and work in China?
Appendix 2

Print screen of the Nvivo Coding process

Q: Yeah, how you came in China and if you had any other experience living somewhere else before something like that.

A: Yeah, OK.

Well, after I finished college in the UK, I went and spent four months in Ghana doing a volunteer work and, once I came back to the UK, about six days later I just had the chance to me to Johannesburg, so I didn’t think for about eight months. So that was my first time. I was posted to the field and I moved there with my best friend and his family had... when he was born in South Africa his parents split up, so he went with his mother to Cape Town and then to America. We lived in the UK and I met him. His dad was always away and they haven’t spoken until his 2 birthday. So, I went to Ghana, he went to Johannesburg and then his grandad came in and he said: "Look, South Africa is great. Let’s go back. We can set up a couple of shops, my grandad owns an estate agency out there" and... I said: "Fine, let’s do that!".

So, I sort of went out there with my best mate and then we moved in with his family. So, it began to seem like, oh, you know, it’s sort of the murder capital of the world and it seems quite a dark place to go, but I guess by having that security blanket of somebody else’s family, they never supported us and think really really helpful.

And then after that I moved back and my visa ran out and they wouldn’t renew it. So, I moved back to the UK and worked in London for just over a year and then had the opportunity to move out of China.

The company that I was working for, it was an engineering consultancy business and they had an internship programme that ran and the idea was that the interns then became full-time staff. So, all of the full-time staff that were working were previously interns, and so I was the first ever...
Appendix 3
Identification of the Main Themes of The story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST STAGE – Example (interview 1)</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found a one-bedroom apartment. It was two minutes from work, because where else are you gonna</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>live in a city where you don’t know anybody. I mean, you see all these, like, Chinese characters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everywhere, nobody apparently speaks English, and I’m like “Well, how am I gonna get to work?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>I didn’t really sort of think “Well, I can show the taxi driver the business card”, ‘cause it</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>was all very overwhelming.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I just said to this girl that was helping me find the apartment “We’ll just go somewhere really</td>
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<tr>
<td>close to my work”. But, you know, it was furnished – it was a brand new building, it was brand</td>
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<tr>
<td>new furniture and things like that, but it was just very kind of cold and not particularly sort</td>
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<tr>
<td>of homely.</td>
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<tr>
<td>And the job wasn’t what I expected – the people that I was working with were not people that</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I really wanted to hang out with outside of work. There were other expatriates, but just maybe</td>
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<tr>
<td>not kind of on the same level as me in the sense of just personalities. We were fine working</td>
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<tr>
<td>together, but not really somebody I wanted to hang out with outside of work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I went go-carting with a colleague actually – who I did get on with quite well, I have to say,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and a couple of his friends – and I met a few people at the go-carting, and then that evening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they invited us out for dinner and then we all, you know… I joined the football team and then</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>suddenly I was surrounded by, like, 20 really good lads and it made massive difference. And</td>
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<tr>
<td>they helped me out with things like translation, and, oh, I need to get, like, a cleaner, you</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>know. So, they were very supportive but I think that, you know, that experience for me,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I was sort of… I wasn’t downtown Shanghai. It was sort of on the outskirts of the city, it was</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a very local area, and all the restaurants were super ghetto, like, really ghetto actually.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remember actually having a small break one day at work and I was about six months in and I</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>was a bit teary, I was feeling quite homesick that day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t say I was depressed by any means, but I just think that at points it did feel a bit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>lonely, a little bit depressed, but nothing that’s sort of out of the ordinary.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Adjustment difficulties |   |
| Adjustment and emotional challenges – living conditions |   |
| Challenges - Job dissatisfaction |   |
| Coping Strategies, building social network |   |
| Cultural differences |   |
| Emotional Challenges |   |
Appendix 4

Second Stage of the Analysis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECOND STAGE – Example Interview 1</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment Difficulties</td>
<td>Where you don’t know anybody. I mean, you see all these, like, Chinese characters everywhere, nobody apparently speaks English, and I’m like “Well, how am I going to get to work?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
<td>I joined the football team and then suddenly I was surrounded by, like, 20 really good lads and it made massive difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Challenges</td>
<td>I would say join a sports team or a team of some sort, you know, whether it’s chess or whether it’s football or rugby, it doesn’t really matter I think. You know, making a concerted effort to go out and join these groups and, from a social perspective, I think it’s really important because it will make a big difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties</td>
<td>The job wasn’t what I expected, China wasn’t what I expected, like all these, like, different smells and sounds and just people, like, just crazy basically when I first arrived, and I hated it to be honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive challenges</td>
<td>So, from a professional perspective, from a social perspective and, I guess, from a kind of personal development piece, it’s been about..., it’s made me more tough.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

you know, sit there and worry about it or just get on with life and take it in your stride. I think that that’s my kind of attitude towards things, so I don’t think that I really let it affect me, despite me having these feelings and these hardships, if you will, or struggles. I think I was just sort of “Just get on with that thing”. I guess that’s sort of “Be a man about it”, you know? I’m from Scotland originally and my dad grew up in Scotland in the 50’s and 60’s in Glasgow and so, you know, he is quite a tough guy and I probably kind of
### Appendix 5 – Third Stage of the Analysis

**THIRD STAGE (reporting similarities between the stories according to each theme)**

**Theme 1: Emotional Challenges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality traits</th>
<th>get that attitude from him a little bit, so I’ve never been sort of wrapped up in cotton wool. I’ve kind of always been quite exposed to things.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So, yeah, I guess that if you look at it from the other side, where people do struggle when they do have issues out here and struggles, then it’s probably because of their past experiences that haven’t got them ready for this experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Differences / mental health</td>
<td>I think that in the UK you could, if you took a similar city in the UK, like London, there is hundreds of people that you could go and see, rather than here there is a very small selection. And you would only wanna go and see a foreigner as well, because I just think that the medical industry, if you were to put Psychology within that medical arena – I guess it is, right? It’s mental health – from a local perspective, I mean it’s very different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some of the hardest things to do in the UK, for example, are the easiest things to do here. It’s like call and then it’s just done.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview 1: I remember actually having a small break one day at work and I was about six months in and I was a bit teary, I was feeling quite homesick that day.

The job wasn’t what I expected, China wasn’t what I expected, like all these, like, different smells and sounds and just people, like, just crazy basically when I first arrived, and I hated it to be honest.

Interview 2: It was terrifying, when I arrived immediately realised that this was probably – well, not a mistake but I was… it was very caught off guard

I could not speak anything. I couldn’t read anything. I couldn’t use my phone, no Google, there is no, you know, Facebook, I can’t contact anyone, so lost, just completely isolated.

I felt like I was out of control. I didn’t have any resources available to me when I first got there. I mean, I wandered around the airport for thirty minutes and I don’t know what I would have done if I didn’t see the little flag waving in the distance. I was just completely… all of my
independence, it felt like had been taken from me. And I didn’t have any way to communicate with anybody I knew, or anybody, period.

Interview 3: We expected to go home back to the States after three years. But we had about a three-week notice that we are moving in China. So, it was quite shocking, very kind of upsetting, very stressful.

The assignment was a split assignment, meaning my two children and I would be living in Shanghai, and my husband would be living in another city, and he would have to commute back home once a week, on weekends, to see us. So, not only... You know, it was kind of like moving to another country by yourself with your support system in another city, and it was a very extremely stressful time. At that time I developed depression, effectively quite suicidal.

Interview 4: certainly a female coming out for their other half – which is, you know, not too dissimilar to me – would normally come out here almost by no choice, and possibly would come out and then figure out what they’re gonna do. That’s what I see a lot in, not so much friends, but more clients actually

The biggest challenge regarding culture is work, because I manage Chinese staff and I work with some local staff, and I have had to educate myself on fundamental differences

Interview 5: the university was a huge change for me, a very big struggle that was a very difficult thing I had to adjust with as well aside from the new culture. I came here

Interview 6: Many challenges in a personal level, when we arrived here I was really stressed, I lost my sleep, my energy, I isolated myself.

Theme 2: Coping Strategies

Interview 1: I would say join a sports team or a team of some sort, you know, whether it’s chess or whether it’s football or rugby, it doesn’t really matter I think. You know, making a concerted effort to go out and join these groups and, from a social perspective, I think it’s really important because it will make a big difference.

Interview 2: you have to have everything pre-planned. You have to make sure, OK, do I have enough kwai – if not, what ATM will I have to go to to get it, because not all of the ATM’s work here.

Interview 3: And this is one of the things we do, is you have to have a support system and the community centre is one of them. Finding friends... If you have children, the school is a great support system. I think for a lot of people, the trailing spouse without children, they have a hard time, because where do they find friends? So, the gym is a great place.

Interview 4: I arrived and had an apartment, had a partner, had someone who could do everything for me, had a company that was well established, you know, it’s not a start-up any more, we’re in our 10th year. I had an entirely ready-made group of friends. I have a huge network and I got it very quickly, because I was in a position where people gave it to me, and I was very grateful, you know. Ali, then other people, then everyone here, I mean the type of networking role that I’m in, as well. So, extremely quickly I felt settled. I was using the word ‘settled’. Probably within a few months, I would say.

Interview 5: “why I had to be here” I felt very low and very tired. Looking back I realize it was a very draining procedure to adjust but we are a Christian family and my faith helped me to adjust to this because there was a point I said like “ I don’t want to be here any more” but I said “I am already here”. So my faith helped me a lot with this, I said “my God if you want me to be here why am I Struggling so much?” I know God want me to be here but please
help me with everything I am dealing here. I know I cannot change things here but I said please help me understand and have a different mindset so when I realized that it helped a lot. Because when I realized that focusing in things I didn’t like and in things I couldn’t change, when I chose and I said okay let me just try,

Interview 6: The only way to really learn how to communicate was by communicating with locals, and sometimes they’re really open to you and are really excited, and sometimes they’ll make fun of you and just laugh. But in the learning aspect, yeah, it’s very helpful. It’s the only way I think to do it.

Theme 3: Adjustment

Interview 1: Where you don’t know anybody. I mean, you see all these, like, Chinese characters everywhere, nobody apparently speaks English.

Interview 2: I didn’t have any way to communicate with anybody I knew, or anybody. You have to be in WiFi to be able to contact anybody, and you’d have to have the VPN working. My VPN wouldn’t work for like a month, and it was super stressful because what can I do!

Interview 3: So, the adjustment for me was difficult. Yeah. I’m still adjusting six years later. I’m only highlighting the bad things, but there’s pros and cons. And I know this might be going off on a tangent, but you know every once in a while you just have a really bad day. And you put it on Facebook and… you’re just like, “Oh, the internet hasn’t worked for a week. I can’t stand this.” And all your friends here commiserates us, “I know, the VPN is not working”

Interview 4: everything in my personal life that requires Chinese

Interview 5: So during that year it was a struggle due to language, I could listen but homework was very difficult for me. I was also not able to understand what the teacher was writing in the blackboard. So that took special effort for me, it was really tough because I could not understand many important things about my subject, that lasted about a year and a half. In

Interview 6: It’s so frightening when you come here and you can’t understand a word or you cannot navigate yourself, I just felt lost.

Theme 4: Personality

Interview 1: t then I think that, you know, you’ve got to be... Some of these issues, about it being hard in China and all these sort of different things... Yes, it is hard but I don’t, I think that... maybe previous experiences or maybe just the type of person that I am, I’m not like somebody that really lets that kind of thing affect me. I think I’m quite independent and I’m quite goal-orientated, so I’m sort of like “Yes, it’s a bit shit but what are you gonna do about it?”, you know, sit there and worry about it or just get on with life and take it in your stride. I think that that’s my kind of attitude towards things, so I don’t think that I really let it affect me, despite me having these feelings and these hardships, if you will, or struggles. I think I was just sort of “Just get on with that thing”. I guess that’s sort of “Be a man about it”,

Interview 2: it takes out a lot of things from your individuality, Oh, individuality and independence for sure. Yeah.

Interview 3: And it’s hard for people if that’s not your personality. I’ve learned... My normal personality before I became an overseas trailing spouse is I’m quiet, I just do my own thing whenever. But, moving overseas, no matter what your personality, it forces you to put yourself out there, you don’t have a choice – or you’re just not gonna survive, you will be miserable, you’ll get depressed, you... You have to force yourself to make friends, to connect with the outside world.

Interview 4: it must be a personality thing. Yeah... For me, my work is very closely connected to having a purpose in life. I don’t work for money and I don’t work just ‘cause I have to. I work because I think I have a role to play in society, and that’s what it’s like, you know, that’s my calling. I feel like I’m doing work that is my calling. I’ve always been someone
with very clear – I’m lucky enough to have a clear direction.

Interview 5: You have to be able to recognize that you have been moved from your safe place into something very different, you are like a fish out of the water. For expats language is difficult but you see everything difficult because you are adjusting to everything and people forget this, you are trying to adapt into the transition. Also things here are moving very fast, people relocate in different areas or they have to repatriate back to their home country and this has an impact to their kids as well who have to leave their friends and go back home, so you are dealing with all that. Like I have seen my sister who had different friends who relocated back to their countries

Interview 6: you have to be strong, you have to fight with all your worries and adjust yourself as quick as you can.

Theme 5: Cultural differences

Interview 1: think culturally, as well. I mean, you know, you’re from Greece, I’m from the UK, but we can still talk about things and we can still understand each other, despite being from a different culture, ‘cause we still have the same sort of type of education, same sort of approach to education and same kind of ideas about what is being a decent human being for example or whatever. Rather than here it is just a very, very different mindset, ridiculously so. So, I think, especially for something like mental health, you have to go to a foreigner. I’d never go to a Chinese therapist.

Interview 2: There’s a lot of cultural differences. Just things that… The pushing in the subway… I don’t understand a lot of the mentalities here.

“Is there deficiencies in mental health services in China?”, they’re gonna say “Oh, my God, yes! Poor people.” But if you ask a Chinese psychologist “Are there deficiencies?”, they’re gonna say “No, no, we’re fine, we just define it differently.” So, the only way you can quantify it really is by looking at numbers, like suicide rates, rates of alcoholism [etc.], what is mental health problems. And China doesn’t really store that information. They don’t have information on causes of death. And everyone is OK with that. And that’s, just that whole mentality bothered me, that whole complacency, that all… “Well, they’re listening to our conversations, but you know, what can you do?” It’s really hard. It takes away a lot of autonomy. You can’t… It’s just hard.

Interview 3: The adjustment for me was difficult. Yeah. I’m still adjusting six years later. But a lot of it is I’ve learned to push back. Because before I was always “Excuse me” [etc.], and they couldn’t care less if you say excuse me, because they’re gonna elbow you anyway. So now it’s not that I elbow them back. And I used to say things in Chinese, if I could say, you know, get back to the back of the line. I don’t even say them in Chinese any more, I just say them in English: get back to that line. And they look at me like “What! She speaks a different language”

... the culture here is very different. It’s more of a me first, family next, friends next, and then everybody else. And part of it is from the history, the Cultural Revolution, to take care of yourself first before you take care of anybody else. And I’m just naturally a very giving person to begin with, I mean when I’ve done my whole-stuff analysis on myself, oh yeah, I was in nursing, and then you know I’m volunteering at an orphanage, I’m here at the community centre, so… And then to come here and find that people couldn’t care less about you. You’re asking a person that you care for “Where is the flower”, getting into a translation app, and she just walks away.

Interview 4: And the biggest challenge regarding culture is work, because I manage Chinese staff and I work with some local staff, and I have had to educate myself on fundamental differences. You know, for example, the easiest way for me to understand the mindset is that
in general – obviously I’m making huge generalisations here – in place like England the concept of truth and what’s correct is more important than the principle of harmony amongst people. So, in some things the truth is the truth is that you didn’t say this, and if I say to you, Panos, “You didn’t do this report, did you? You didn’t do it on time, you’ve pretended”, that’s more important that I point out the truth to you than keep a harmony between us, that’s the model that I work on. Here, the model is the exact opposite: that harmony is number one. And it justifies lying, and it justifies changing things. So, I’ve had to rewire myself

Interview 5: If you thing will find everything the same then you will struggle, just embrace the new culture and that came to me when I had this mindset to be more open and accept. On that it helped a lot hanging out with Chinese classmate, it made a massive difference for me to understand where they are coming from and adjust better. I was able to make much more sense of the things I was experiencing. i.e. why they always dress in pajamas on the street? Or why they speak so loud? If you see it from your point of view it won’t make any sense and you will thing is strange.

Interview 6: There are many cultural differences and no commonalities with my own culture. But you have to be really open minded.
### Appendix 6

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Emotional Difficulties</td>
<td>2.1 Social network</td>
<td>3.1 Adjustment on the daily life</td>
<td>4.1 Traits</td>
<td>5.1 Communication and Interaction with locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Positive Challenges</td>
<td>2.2 Importance of the family</td>
<td>3.2 Living conditions</td>
<td>4.2 Personal Development</td>
<td>5.2 Cultural differences at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 The challenge of the new and the unknown</td>
<td>2.3 Professional Support</td>
<td>3.3 Work satisfaction</td>
<td>5.3 Cultural shock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1.4 Repatriation | 3. I remember actually having a small break one day at work and I was about six months in and I was a bit teary, I was feeling quite homesick that day (p1) I think just by moving to another country, you are forced to be out of your comfort zone(p6) | 4. The job wasn’t what I expected, China wasn’t what I expected, like all these, like, different smells and sounds and just people, like, just crazy basically when I first arrived, and I hated it to be honest | 5. I think that in the UK you could, if you took a similar city in the UK, like London, there is hundreds of people that you could go and see, rather than here there is a very small selection. And you would only wanna go and see a foreigner as well, because I just think that the medical industry, if you were to put Psychology within that medical arena – I guess it is, right? It’s mental health – from a local perspective, I mean it’s very different. | 6. Some of the hardest things to do in the UK, for example, are the easiest things to do here. It’s like call and then it’s just done. |
Appendix 7 - Email Communication with the Key Contact in Shanghai.

Hello Panos,

Let me forward on the info to those who may be interested in participating. But do they have to be working with CCS or can they be friends who are just expats? There are only two other employees at CCS who work with me who are expats, but I have many friends outside of CCS who are expats.

I am leaving for the States on Sunday and would be more than happy to interview with you again; however, I will be traveling for the next week and will not be available until next Friday at the earliest. Will that work?

Thank you,

---

Panos Platanitis <pplanitis@gmail.com>  
6/10/16

to Teresa

Hi,

Thank you for your reply. Yes, people out of the CCS can participate as well, everyone is welcome.

Yes, we have the interview any time and date that is suitable for you.
Appendix 8: Participant Information Sheet

Expatriates Emotional Challenges and Coping Strategies: A narrative approach

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study that is being conducted as part of my training as a counselling psychologist. I am currently a student on a professional doctorate course in counselling psychology and part of the course requires a piece of research undertaken with the aim of producing a doctoral thesis.

Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Researcher: Panagiotis Platanitis

Address of Researcher: Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building

The University Of Manchester

Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9P

Title of the Research

Expatriates Emotional challenges and Coping Strategies: A Qualitative Study

What is the aim of the research?

To explore the emotional challenges that expatriates face during their stay in China. To explore how these challenges affect the personal and professional life and what coping strategies are employed.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen because you are either an expatriate professional or you have been in the past and you have experience related to the relevant topic. The research design is narrative analysis. Thus, you would have to give an interview to the researcher about your experience.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you decide to take part, I would ask you to read and sign a consent form. We would arrange a time and date which will be suitable for both you and me. The interview will be via Skype.

In the interview, I will be interested in hearing your stories about the emotional challenges you have or had to face while you have been working and living in China. How these challenges have affected your personal and professional life and what coping strategies you developed to deal with those challenges. The meeting will last for approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio recorded. Throughout the interview, you would have the right to stop at any time or to not include sections of the interview if you felt the conversation was too sensitive.

What happens to the data collected?

The audio recording of our conversation will be transcribed into text by the researcher. The audio recording will be destroyed once it has been transcribed. The electronic transcribed document will be kept in a password protected file. Only the researcher will have access to the transcription. Some extracts from the transcription may be published in the thesis report and possibly as a journal article. The extracts will be anonymised (meaning that no one will be able to identity it is you) using a pseudonym (a different name) making them unidentifiable.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality is maintained. All collected data will be encrypted and stored securely in a file that is password protected. Only the researcher will have access to the file. Once safely stored the audio recording will be deleted from the audio electronic device. Transcribed interviews and data analysis documents will be stored using encrypted password protected files.

Any hard copies of transcribed or analysed data will be securely locked in a storage device which only the researcher will have access to. Participant anonymity will be ensured in all aspects of data collection, analysis, and publication. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants ensuring there will be no identifiable details in the thesis report. All of the data from the interview will be destroyed five years after dissemination of the findings. These safeguards are in compliance with the ethical guidelines for research from the University Of Manchester SEED, the British Psychological Society (2010) and Health and Care Professionals Council (2012).

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

Participation in the present study is voluntary.

What is the duration of the research?
The research involves meeting for one interview lasting between 45 - 60 minutes.

**Where will the research be conducted?**

The interviews will be conducted via Skype.

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

The findings from the research will be published in a thesis report to be assessed by the University Of Manchester. The findings may also be published in psychological journals and/or presented at relevant conferences.

**Criminal Records Check (if applicable)**

The researcher has had a DBS check from the university

**Contact for further information**

Panagiotis Platanitis email: Panagiotis.platanitis@manchester.ac.uk

**What if something goes wrong?**

You may contact the research supervisor:
Erica Burman
Professor of Education
Manchester Institute of Education
School of Environment, Education and Development
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
UK
Email: Erica.burman@manchester.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)161 275 3636

However, If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: , or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
Appendix 9: Consent Form

Expatriates Emotional Challenges and Coping Strategies: A Qualitative Study

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions, and these have been answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded.

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5. I agree that any data collected may be passed on to other researchers.

6. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree to take part in the above project.

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