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Psychological Contracts at an International Joint Venture University in China.

Richard J. Galletly

Liverpool University

Author Note

Richard J. Galletly, University of Liverpool, Foundation Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool, L69 7ZX | richard.galletly@liverpool.ac.uk

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Dedication and acknowledgements

This journey would not have been possible without the constant support of my wife, my parents, and my children. It is to them that I dedicate this thesis.

I would also like to thank the participants for sharing their experiences with me, despite our understanding of the risks we faced together.

Finally, I am most grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Rowena Senior, Dr. Iona Burnell and Dr. Anne Qualter, whose guidance, patience, expertise, and support have made this thesis possible.

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List of abbreviations

CPC	Communist Party of China
CMO	Context Mechanism Outcome
CR	Critical Realism
DREIC	Description, Retroduction, Elimination, Identification and Correction
GT	Grounded Theory
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAS	International Academic Staff
IHRM	International Human Resource Management
IJV	International Joint Venture
IJVU	International Joint Venture University
JV	Joint Venture
LC	Language Centre
MoE	Ministry of Education
P[number]	Participant [number]
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
PRC	People's Republic of China
PC	Psychological Contract
PCB	Psychological Contract Breach
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Abstract

The Psychological Contract (PC) is an important concept within International Human Resource Management which has been defined as an employee's beliefs about the 'terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement' between an employee and their employer (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). When managing International Academic Staff (IAS), International Joint Venture Universities (IJVU) must seek to understand the needs and wishes of IAS, to aid retention and to manage them appropriately. Turnover levels of IAS are higher than most IJVUs would like, and therefore this understanding of the PC and PC breach must be understood. This research project explores how IAS working within an IJVU in China experience their PCs and various PC breach, what impacts there are on these IAS and how they respond to any breaches they experience. Working within a Critical Realist meta-theory and framework, this project applies a Critical Grounded Theory analysis to qualitative research within an ethnography of a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in China. Based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews within a single case study Chinese IJVU, new theories about the mechanisms leading to PC breach are developed, through an iterative process between the data, the literature and the researcher's reflexive process. Findings about the mechanisms leading to PC breach are divided into three levels of reality, according to the Critical Realist framework: cultural, social, and individual levels. Key findings emerge: first, at the cultural level, some IAS learn to fit in and adapt to insider norms and practices common to the local national culture; second, at the social level, some IAS learn to remain loyal towards other insiders, exchanging favours with influential connections and volunteering; third, at the individual level, some IAS experience PC breach due to perceived unfairness and betrayal. The concluding chapter of this report examines how this research contributes to both theory and practice of managing IAS through an understanding of the PC in context, within the case study IVJU and beyond. In summary, this

research demonstrates how some IAS are adapting to the context of a Chinese IJVU by fitting in with norms and practices common to the local national culture, remaining loyal to other insiders and nurturing influential connections; those IAS who have found ways to adapt to the national culture may avoid experiencing PC breach and perceived unfairness. This research contributes to the wider discourse about how IAS experience PC breach in Chinese IJVUs and Chinese organisations more generally; furthermore, it suggests ways that IAS can learn to adapt their behaviours to suit the national culture.

Keywords: Psychological Contract; International Joint Venture University; Chinese Guanxi; Critical Grounded Theory; Critical Realist Evaluation.

Psychological Contracts at an IJV University in China

Chapter 1: Introduction

My initial search for a research topic began as a simple inquiry into the case study organisation, asking ‘what is going on here?’ For a long time, I had been rather inquisitive about an apparent opacity within the organisation, together with a lack of understanding expressed by the employees in the organisation about how and why decisions were made in the way they were. It seemed very unclear, both to me and the people I spoke to, how the organisation operated. I began conversations with the staff that I met while going about my day, exploring simple questions with them, somewhat randomly inviting them to open up about the questions that developed, serendipitously. These conversations progressed to the point that I developed a certain itch that could not be scratched, a bothersome question: that of opacity - or the distinct lack of transparency. I began simply by asking, with the expectation that a path would be lit along the journey to the formation of an answerable question, not by intending to prove or disprove any theory, but to explore a nagging question about the social reality I perceived.

A few members of staff I met commented on experiencing apparent unfairness around promotions and expressed how disappointed they were. They felt there was an opacity, as one employee put it, processes were perceived to be “murky” and “corrupt”. Allegations of cronyism were made. I couldn’t quite identify what was missing initially, something that everyone seemed to need, like oxygen had been removed from the air. The people I spoke to seemed to lack a candid communication about what was missing. Why the secrecy? Why weren’t the people I spoke to being informed, with clarity, about the issues that mattered to them? And who, if anyone, benefited from this apparent murkiness?

I had been reading about how transparency, candour, and trust (O'Toole & Bennis, 2009) were considered 'fundamental' to leadership (p. 2) and felt that these three qualities were essential to the positive management of people in the organisation. I noticed each of these qualities seemed to be absent or at a low ebb. I felt I should write about this lack, or absence, of qualities that seemed so essential for the people I spoke to. It became difficult to describe this opacity and need for transparent communications with only the blunt tools I had to explain them. I noticed there were quite serious impacts on the people with whom I spoke, at the psychological level. They seemed disappointed, distrustful, and quite suspicious. The question of transparency seemed to impact on them deeply, at a psychological level. It seemed to lead the employees I spoke with to think about leaving, to disengage, or at least to question their place in the organisation.

It is important to note that O'Toole and Bennis (2009) viewpoint is not the only perspective on transparency in leadership theory, and there exist multiple viewpoints. For example, within the practice of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), a leader develops high-exchange relationships with selected followers who are perceived to be more loyal and supportive than others. This high-exchange relationship is contradictory to the drive towards greater transparency that O'Toole and Bennis (2009) suggest, since insiders will have better communication pathways with their leaders, developing better relationships with them when compared to outsiders, due to the support and perceived loyalty leaders receive from insiders (Yukl, 2010).

It became evident that what I was witnessing may have been a cultural phenomenon, expressed exclusively by foreign (i.e. non-Chinese) staff. I began asking these foreign staff how they were feeling about the organisation, not with the initial intention to study culture, but to search for, and to define, this apparent opacity they were perceiving and to investigate their responses to it. I began to ask why this transparency seemed so important to them, when

it was absent, and how this need for transparency differed for international academic staff, when compared to their Chinese colleagues. I began to ask what the purpose might be for the organisation to withhold such apparently important information, and how individuals within the organisation might benefit. Perhaps there are alternative sources of information that the International Academic Staff I spoke to were not aware of or did not receive.

Any research that is conducted in China must take into account the cultural context of being foreign, working in a Chinese organisation, and the geopolitical changes taking place between the start date of my doctoral thesis (2018) and today (2022). To begin with I had not considered what cultural impacts there would be upon my initial research questions, deciding to focus entirely on the Psychological Contract (PC), rather than on culture. However, since reading about Critical Realism as a theoretical framework (discussed further in the methodology section), I discovered that I can consider cultural influences within my question in addition to the other strata of social reality (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 2013).

This research project has been a personal journey, and my selection of research questions reveals my positionality in relation to the research. As an international member of academic staff, also working for a Chinese university, I have a personal incentive to understand the experiences of my colleagues, to understand my own position, and how my personal frustrations connect with others, since we are professional insiders with similar experiences. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 62) have argued that researchers do not have to choose between becoming either ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ researchers in relation to our participants, since it is possible for us to share their experiences and knowledge, whilst offering our support within a research relationship that is neither hierarchical nor manipulative. Similarly, I believe that understanding and reflecting on my perspective as an insider researcher can enrich this study, for example how I connect with the experiences of

my participants. But I shall endeavour to articulate my personal position as a researcher, reflexively, so as to not lose sight of my objectivity.

Professionally, I am interested in the management of people, particularly in the management of International Academic Staff (IAS) and in meeting their needs as employees. Perhaps naively, I expected that my employer had the same interest in these needs and had initially sought to conduct this research as a way to show that I have gained an understanding of a group of people that the organisation wants to retain.

As a foreign academic in China, I share with my participants the same experiences. I am an insider-researcher, being part of the same group that I study. We share personal stories, information that my participants share with me can be interpreted from the viewpoint of shared understandings, since I can interpret their reference points with my personal experiences. I am interested in them, since I am also interested in my own experiences and how I find these experiences challenging. But for different reasons, they may succeed in some areas where I have not yet succeeded; conversely, I may succeed where they have not. I am therefore sensitive to the emotional responses they may have to their experiences of setbacks and perceived unfairness and understand their drives to succeed.

I am interested in the personal stories told by International Academic Staff (IAS) as they progress from one career stage to another, through their promotions and job changes. I am also interested in telling their stories, capturing their hopes, dreams, and disappointments, to reach a better understanding not only for their benefit, but also for future IAS who may also struggle to understand the social mechanisms within which they find themselves: apparently benefiting from being foreign, whilst at the same time inconvenienced by it. The contradiction of being both privileged and disadvantaged while being an expatriate in a foreign culture is one that I am very familiar with, including its benefits and disadvantages. Some thrive while others suffer.

Theoretically, I wanted to build on existing knowledge to analyse the existing mechanisms and contribute towards an understanding of the social processes within the organisation, for the benefit of future staff and to be able to transfer these understandings to other, similar organisations. I have had conversations with people whose challenges I understand well, from an insider-researcher standpoint, and have sought to combine an analysis of these conversations with a review of the relevant literature, following a Grounded Theory approach (discussed further in the Methodology section).

In this thesis, I have adopted a critical grounded theory approach to an ethnographic study of a single case study organisation, applying a critical realist perspective to identify the generative causal powers that shape the practices and processes experienced by the participants in the organisation. Kempster and Parry (2014, p. 2) describe this methodology as a 'critical realist grounded theory'. I have first sought to understand the 'lived experiences' of the IAS in the organisation, then to identify the 'causal powers' shaping their experiences of the Psychological Contract within the organisation. The approach I have taken to the analysis is retroductive, since I have applied theory to the data 'to illuminate or suggest generative causal powers as well as context-specific causal powers' (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 3). I have then attempted to develop theories to explain these causal powers.

Finally, I am interested in the deeper questions brought into focus by this research project, because I am fascinated by the apparent functioning of social mechanisms within organisations more broadly, particularly those that appear unfair or unequal. I am fascinated by inequality in society generally and learning about where systems exist that serve to keep some people back while others thrive remains a crucial question for me. I began the project with the assumption that there exists inherent unfairness in the world that must be come to terms with and finished the project having developed a more pragmatic perspective on the social systems and insider mechanisms which facilitate this unfairness. I developed an

understanding that to some extent the process of becoming an insider can be learned and refined as a social skill, rather as one learns the accepted behaviours within a certain national culture. I decided upon the term ‘insiderism’ to most appropriately describe the process of becoming an insider, a theoretical mechanism through which insiders earn a privileged access to information, power and influence; however when referring to the literature, I later came to the important realisation that this concept I had named ‘insiderism’ falls neatly within the well-documented description of Chinese guanxi (Yang, Chen, & Zhang, 2009, p. 58). Insider privileges can be perceived as fair, unfair, or perhaps both, but it seems clear within guanxi theory that there exist mechanisms towards the inside (i.e. becoming a member of an in-group), as well as mechanisms toward an out-group. Guanxi is an important theory that I shall discuss in greater depth later.

I have not developed theory in this thesis without the influence of my personal values and prejudices. For example, I must state from the outset that I am critical of any mechanisms in place that serve to keep in-group members protected from out-group members, since I sympathise with those who perceive themselves to be members of an out-group within an organisation. Also, my quest to highlight unfairness within the organisation may be welcome to those who seek to shed light on the process (of becoming an insider) for their personal benefit, if they believe they currently find it difficult to move from outsider to insider status. However, this quest may also attract attention from those who wish to keep the same mechanisms in the shadows, not made public for all to read. Those who would rather keep their machinations secret and obscured would not be keen to have my findings published, particularly where it shows established insiders to be less than truthful, less than transparent, even verging on corrupt or disingenuous. I recognise that in revealing apparently clandestine mechanisms to positions of power I may have exposed myself to considerable risks.

Shining a light under a rock can expose a nest of bugs, as unwelcome or inconvenient they may be. Similarly, truths exposed may be damaging to the reputation of an organisation. The impacts of this reputation risk brings the safety of my family into focus, being at substantial risk to hostile forces whilst living overseas within an authoritarian regime, one that grows more forceful and with more expansive global ambitions (Inboden, 2021). Francis Bacon describes the situation best by writing 'he that hath wife and children hath given *hostages to fortune*, for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief' [my italics] (Bacon & Mallet, 1740, p. 309). Bacon's message has a personal significance for me, following the impacts of my overseas work on my family.

I have explained my positionality and personal perspective towards the research, in the next section I shall explain the key concepts that are important when setting the context, about the national culture, the organisation and its international academic staff. By setting the context and describing the participants, I hope to set the scene for the research that follows.

A brief introduction to Chinese Guanxi

As the Chinese saying goes 'who you know is more important than what you know' and in China one's network connections may be more consequential than any knowledge or personal qualities (Nie & Lämsä, 2015, p. 854). Seligman (1999) describes this situation:

> 'Forget the organization charts. Forget the formal structures that make up any Chinese corporation or government unit, or any explicit set of regulations or procedures that specify who is supposed to do what to whom. As anyone with a modicum of experience in the People's Republic of China (PRC) can tell you, the key to getting anything important accomplished in China lies not in the formal order, but rather in

> who you know, and in how that person views his or her obligations to you. The Chinese call this concept guanxi. The term literally means ‘relationships,’ but in this context it translates far better as ‘connections.’ Of course, it is by no means unique to China: Western society is hardly without its own concept of ‘pull.’ It's just that the Chinese have raised guanxi to an art. It pervades the social order, and nowhere more than in today's PRC. If you have guanxi, there is little you can't accomplish. But if you don't, your life is likely to be a series of long lines and tightly closed doors, and a maze of administrative and bureaucratic hassles.’ (Seligman, 1999, p. 34)

Guanxi (关系) is arguably a universal social phenomenon, common to all cultures. It involves a ‘reciprocal exchange [of favours] between two people,’ a petitioner and an allocator (Hwang, 1987). The relationship between the parties has ongoing interpersonal implications for the ‘continued exchange of favours’ (Pye, 1982). In guanxi, the role of intermediaries is an important feature, in linking two parties, the intermediary gains guanxi, and each person becomes indebted to the intermediary, for their help, and is more likely to ask for favours from the intermediary in future rather than from their new contact (Chen & Chen, 2012, p. 429). In the past, guanxi has referred to the relationship between two parties because of their similar backgrounds or shared experiences, for example the relationship between family members, relatives, and schoolmates. But guanxi between supervisor and employee can improve over time with better communication, trust and mutual liking (Van Vianen, Shen, & Chuang, 2011, p. 913). Guanxi may explain management decisions taken in the Chinese context and it has been argued that expatriate employees should take care to understand the ‘explanatory power’ of guanxi over supervisory decisions (Law, Wong, Wang, & Wang, 2000, p. 751).

Insider groups in Guanxi social relations

Insider and outsider groups feature strongly in the emergent theory developed within this thesis; moreover, inside groups are also a feature of Chinese guanxi theory found in the literature (Li, Zhou, Zhou, & Yang, 2019, p. 668). Peter Ping Li (2019) argues that to join a 'xi' group, or influential inside network, a newcomer must seek to join via enlisting the support of a non-focal member as a third party reference. This third party 'broker' will indirectly connect with a focal person or 'focal ego,' who is the most influential insider (p. 664). For Li et al. (2019, p. 664) this means a newcomer must demonstrate his or her 'loyalty and commitment' to the inside network to earn the 'trust' from all or most of the members of the inside network. The process, therefore, of expanding an insider network, or 'xi' group, is via a transfer of trust with this 'reinforcing broker,' or third party to the influential insider (ibid). Within these xi groups there exist a hierarchy of social exchanges, with 'in-group' members having strong loyalty and support, whilst 'out-group' members have only conditional support from insiders (Takeuchi, Wang, & Farh, 2020, p. 249).

Guanxi may prohibit employee 'voice,' since to voice an opinion may cause losses to inside, or focal members of the network (Song, Wu, & Gu, 2017, p. 455). This prohibition of employee voice serves to protect a powerful inside group, who may find themselves beyond criticism as a consequence. As Song et al. (2017, p. 456) argue, when employees voice their concerns they may highlight leadership failures, exposing themselves to substantial personal risks to their psychological safety and wellbeing.

Guanxi in organisations may result in 'preferential treatments' for insiders (Su, Sirgy, & Littlefield, 2003, p. 311), with the Chinese showing more loyalty and commitment to those in-group members perceived to have stronger guanxi (Hui & Graen, 1997). Furthermore, Hui and Graen (1997) comment that this feature of guanxi is highly relevant to foreign staff in

joint venture organisations because typically, they argue, ‘foreigners do not establish any guanxi with Chinese’ (Hui & Graen, 1997, p. 457).

The International Joint Venture organisation

Joint Venture (JV) organisations are legally and economically separate entities ‘created by two or more parent organizations that collectively invest financial as well as other resources to pursue certain objectives’ (Yan & Luo, 2016, p. 3). When two or more parent organisations operate across national and cultural boundaries, these JVs are termed ‘International Joint Ventures’ (IJV) (Yan & Luo, 2016, p. 3). IJVs are of interest to universities wishing to set up an overseas campus in China due to the continued growth of the Chinese Higher Education sector (Fazackerley & Worthington, 2007; Peters & Besley, 2018). The IJV combines the strength of the two ‘founding parents’ who share the risks and rewards when the third entity is created (Griffin & Pustay, 2015, p. 388). One suggested advantage of IJV universities to the Chinese economy is to develop the quality of the local higher education market and to improve education in the country more generally. However, despite the advantages of setting up an IJV in China there exist challenges relating to the complex relationships between its founding parents. The success and effectiveness of the IJV partnership is argued to be dependent on the trust between the founding parents (Wilson & Brennan, 2008, p. 168). Fazackerley and Worthington (2007) comment that with an IJV, the relationship between partners is essential and without trust there is ‘nothing to hold [the relationship] together’ (Fazackerley & Worthington, 2007, p. 21).

Several strategic alliances have been formed between international and Chinese universities. These founding ‘parent’ international universities that have chosen to set up an International Joint Venture University (IJVU) in China may be doing so to raise their

collective international profiles (Everest, 2016), but also to supply a steady stream of Chinese students overseas, to take advantage of the financial incentives of working in an ideal business-focused new site, and to exploit opportunities to build a completely new university from scratch (Everest, 2016). The benefits of an IJVU to both 'parent' organisations may be that JVs require a lower cash input than full ownership, have lower start-up costs and lower exposure to financial risk; furthermore, there is relatively quick access to the new market and market-related information (Griffin & Pustay, 2015, p. 389). Investing in an overseas IJVU may not only prove to be an expensive long-term investment for a university, but also the resulting IJVUs may begin to compete with their parent universities for the same students (Yi, 2013), meaning that an international university investing in a Chinese IJVU may effectively be creating and supporting a competitor. Furthermore, since the Ministry of Education (MoE) is a powerful entity in the Chinese Higher Education sector, where the power to award degrees belongs to the state, not the university (Yi, 2013, p. 44), the international partner university is relinquishing considerable control to the Chinese partner. This competitive scenario for international universities seeking to partner with a Chinese organisation, and the potential for impacts on their international reputation, indicates that international universities must proceed carefully when seeking a JV partner. Potential strategic issues also exist within IJVUs; for example, strategically important information may be disclosed to a competitor and there may be unintended misunderstandings within the relationship. As in marriage, the compatibility of the two partners is critical to the success of the union (Griffin & Pustay, 2015, p. 400).

The Case Study organisation

The case study organisation in this thesis is an example of these strategic alliances, an International Joint Venture University (IJVU) combining the strengths of the two founding parent universities, one British and another Chinese (Everest, 2016). This case study organisation combines the practices of both Chinese and British university systems, to create a new model in a legally separated third entity (Yi, 2013, p. 480).

International Academic Staff: foreign staff in a Chinese organisation

In this study, IAS are defined as non-Chinese staff who have teaching, service or research responsibilities (Fowler, 2017) within the IJVU. English is the usual language of instruction since Chinese IJVUs are seeking to not only develop the language competencies of Chinese students but also attract students from other Asian countries (Fazackerley & Worthington, 2007). IJVUs, therefore, rely heavily on attracting and retaining IAS. Salt and Wood (2014, p. 93) have argued that research active academics will be concerned about restrictions on their 'academic freedom, research opportunities and independence' in China. Nevertheless, the Chinese authorities expect a high proportion of teaching staff to be international (Salt & Wood, 2014, p. 90) and seek to attract and retain talented IAS (Peters & Besley, 2018, p. 2). Salt and Wood comment that the Chinese authorities require that high proportions of teaching staff should be foreign, but that 'research active' academic staff might not be willing to work overseas (Salt & Wood, 2014, p. 90). It is also argued that staff who are good teachers and more interested in administration than research might be more willing to work in China.

The importance of hiring International Academic Staff

Critical to the maintenance of IJVUs are the International Academic Staff (IAS) employed by them, since they maintain the perception of the university as international (Fazackerley & Worthington, 2007) and contribute to a diverse curriculum (Hristov & Minocha, 2017). Perhaps most importantly the IAS employed by the organisation form a tangible part of the compatibility of the IJV with its parent universities (Salt & Wood, 2014) and also they contribute an important aspect to the competitive advantage of the IJV (Li, Roberts, Yan, & Tan, 2016). IAS are considered essential to IJVU in China, since they enhance the perception that the university provides an international education, taught in English; they also provide a 'western face' to satisfy the demands of high fee-paying parents, who expect 'top research staff' (Fazackerley & Worthington, 2007, p. 8). Furthermore, as Hristov and Minocha (2017) have argued, IAS can transform the delivery and content of programmes, providing a more meaningful internationalization, and help to diversify academic practice. Peters and Besley (2018, p. 1) have commented that attracting IAS is recognized as a strategic priority by IJVUs, however these IAS can prove challenging to recruit. Fazackerley and Worthington (2007, p. 8), for example, described attracting IAS as the 'biggest single problem' when setting up an IJVU campus in China.

Conversely, a possible risk of employing International Academic Staff is that they may bring with them troublesome ideas about the university as a 'stage for the drama of democracy's ebb and flow' (Perry, 2020, p. 18) which contrasts with the ideological view of the Communist Party of China. Authoritarian governments may fear 'inciting anti-regime activism' through supporting higher education, also that the university may serve as a stage for 'political youth mobilisation', undermining their power (Perry, 2020, p. 18). Thus, employing IAS may bring challenges as well as benefits for the IJVU, since employing a

westerner can add prestige to the organisation as it is perceived by Chinese parents, however it can prove inconvenient when these IAS espouse views that are not in alignment with the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC). The organisation is not the only side of the relationship facing challenges, IAS themselves experience challenges when adapting to working in China. For example, IAS may themselves feel obliged to temper or hide their views when talking to their students since the CPC has an 'increasingly repressive impact' on its institutions of higher education (Ruth & Yu, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, the employer may be at risk when IAS leave the IJVU and make their experiences public.

The challenges IAS face when adapting to working in a Chinese organisation

Being a foreigner in China brings with it many challenges that IAS may scarcely appreciate before they arrive. IAS can be expected to fit in with the local culture without much training since adapting new staff to the host culture requires time, effort and funds (Neri & Wilkins, 2019, p. 67). Cai and Hall (2016, p. 207) argue that better staff induction practices might have improved initial expectations and motivations. IAS need support when adjusting to the new national and organisational culture. Neri and Wilkins (2019, p. 466) recommend helping IAS to adjust to working in an IJVU by adjusting their work, how they work with others and helping them adjust to life in the new country.

Further challenges for IAS include adapting to the new host culture, where many can feel 'isolated,' as Cai and Hall (2016, p. 215) observe, parents of international children can find it challenging to find appropriate schooling for their children, preferring to plan to return to their home countries for their children's education post primary school level (Cai & Hall, 2016, p. 216). Non-Chinese staff can find it challenging to cope with a changing political landscape relating to what can be said and what cannot be said in China, risking dismissal for

expressing ‘opinions that stray from the official orthodoxy’ (Perry, 2020, p. 11). Conversely, there are IAS who have managed to adapt to the host culture effectively enough to act as a bridge between east and west, spanning the boundary between the host culture and IAS.

IAS as cultural ‘boundary spanners’

Some IAS have learned to exploit their personal connections when working overseas, developing powerful roles as a consequence. These influential ‘boundary spanners’ include academics who have had experiences of both cultures; they have learned to adapt, perhaps forming a cultural ‘bridge’ (Li et al., 2016, p. 792). Li et al. (2016, p. 792) comment that these cultural ‘boundary-spanners’ may support the management when there are cultural conflicts, helping deepen cultural understandings and improving communication between the cultures.

Conversely, it must be understood that foreigners may overestimate their ability to integrate and function as cultural boundary spanners. Due to a growing nationalism in China, especially among online communities (Zhang, Liu, & Wen, 2018, p. 758), in addition to how isolated many IAS may have become due to highly divergent political views (p. 781), IAS may be increasingly less able to bridge the gap between cultures.

Structure of this dissertation

The purpose of this research is to develop theory relating to the understanding of the Psychological Contract as it is experienced by IAS in a Chinese IJVU.

First, I shall review the literature that supports my choice of research questions in Chapter 2 (a literature review); following this, the methodology will be explored, including a

discussion of Critical Grounded Theory and Critical Realism in Chapter 3. From there, I shall proceed to explore the themes and concepts that have emerged from my analysis of the data, developing theory and retroductively comparing these theories with the data. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 blend theory development with existing literature on the themes identified. Chapter 4 discusses the experiences of IAS within the IJVU, focusing on the cultural level, Chapter 5 focuses on the social-interpersonal level, and Chapter 6 examines the individual level of the experiences of IAS. In the concluding chapter, the implications of my research for both theory and practice will be outlined. Finally, I shall outline how I have developed theory in each of the three areas: cultural, social, and individual. Before any of the above can be achieved, however, we must turn first to a review of the literature that has informed the selection of my research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Academic staff from a variety of national cultures, including both Chinese and international colleagues, work together in the case study organisation, a Chinese International Joint Venture University (IJVU). Some International Academic Staff (IAS) are better adapted to the organisational context of this IJVU, perhaps understanding the local national culture of China better than others; but also, they are better prepared for the cultural differences and social environment within which they work. These culturally adapted IAS are better prepared for the interplay between the apparently different thinking and behaviours exhibited by Chinese and non-Chinese staff. Within this contextual background of multiple cultures and varying degrees of adaptation, there exist differing expectations and perceived breach of promises made to international staff, who may respond to these perceived breaches in a variety of ways.

This literature review introduces the key foundation theories leading to the development of the research questions explored within this thesis. In the following section I shall explain the Psychological Contract (PC) and PC breach, leading to a discussion of how PC breach might be experienced by IAS working in the organisation.

The Psychological Contract

In this section I shall define and explore the Psychological Contract as it relates to IAS in the case study organisation.

The Psychological Contract (PC) is defined as a work-based form of a ‘social contract’ (Pesqueux, 2012, p. 15), being a perceived but unwritten contract between an employee and their employer, being in most cases entirely open to interpretation since it has

not been put in writing and does not exist as a physical document. The PC has been defined as an employee's beliefs about the 'terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement' between an employee and their employer (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). The first reference to a 'psychological contract' was made by Chris Argyris in 1958, who first coined the term 'psychological work contract' to describe the relationship between workers and their managers (Argyris, 1958, p. 112). Argyris first used the term without providing a conceptual definition, however, and a definition was later provided by Denise Rousseau in 1989.

> The Psychological Contract is 'an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party. A psychological contract emerges when one party believes that a promise of future returns has been made, a contribution has been given and thus, an obligation has been created to provide future benefits' (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123).

The most influential writers on the subject of the PC, according to Kraak and Linde (2019, p. 111) are, in order of importance: Rousseau (1995), Morrison and Robinson (1997), Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, and Bravo (2007), and Guest (1998), Conway and Briner (2002). Kraak and Linde (2019, p. 111) argue that the most influential writers on the PC since 2013 have been Tomprou, Rousseau, and Hansen (2015), for their contribution to understanding the formation of the PC in its early stages, recommending that 'sense makers' within an organisation can assist inexperienced newcomers during the formative stages of the creation of their PCs and to help construct the image presented to society by the organisation more widely (p. 357-8).

There remain challenges relating to gaining an understanding about the formation and development of the PC. Guest (1998, p. 651), for example, comments that definitions of the

PC identify that the contract is ‘unwritten’ with implicit ‘reciprocal expectations,’ that one party to the contract may not be aware of. This ‘implicit contract,’ can be based upon ‘beliefs,’ promises and obligations, making it challenging to provide a more concrete definition (Guest, 1998, p. 651). It is, therefore, arguably an important task to explore the creation and development of PCs in context, so that the formation of the PC can be better understood and managed by organisations, impacting on their new hires and how the organisation is perceived more broadly. It is widely acknowledged that more research on the PC is needed, however as Conway and Briner (2005, p. 109) point out, much of the current research connected with the PC is quantitative. They argue that while quantitative methods are suitable for detecting ‘associations between attitudes at a very general level,’ (p. 109), these methods are little use in studying the ‘experience’ and ‘evolution of psychological contract content and breach’ (Conway & Briner, 2005, p. 109). Further, since an extensive application of survey methods has ‘hampered’ theoretical advances in the area, Conway and Briner suggest there is an ‘urgent need’ for more ‘appropriate’ methods, by which it can be assumed that they are referring to qualitative research methods such as the ‘diary method’ that they give as an example (2005, p. 109).

Seeck and Parzefall (2008), for example, have argued that although many studies exist to identify the scope and content of the PC, much of the existing research neglects the influence and personal perspectives of the employees themselves on the formation of their PC (p. 9). Seeck and Parzefall (2008) were able to investigate employee agency in the formation of their PCs in the workplace qualitatively by conducting semi-structured interviews, resulting in important findings relating to self-actualisation and agency in PC formation (p. 13).

Contents of a Psychological Contract

In a Psychological Contract, there exists a tacit understanding perhaps only recognised by one party which may be completely unknown by the other party (Rousseau, 1995). For example, an employee may have expectations about pay, conditions and promotions that her employer has not agreed to and is not aware of. A written contract usually describes an understanding about the nature of the future working relationship between the signatories, in which each party to the written contract knows what they should receive from the other. The somewhat obscure nature of a psychological contract means that any definition may change, since this contract (being not written) exists only in the 'eye of the beholder' (Rousseau, 1989, p. 137).

According to Herriot (1997) the contents of a PC may include the need for: recognition, security, justice, honesty and loyalty (Herriot, Manning, & Kidd, 1997, pp. 157-158). The first four terms (recognition, security, justice, and honesty) are arguably employee-focused, for example justice and recognition for an employee's work. In contrast, 'loyalty' is arguably employer-focused, and may exist in the mind of the organisation (if we anthropomorphise it). Being 'loyal' toward the organisation may change according to the definition of loyalty, who defines it and what their motives are for defining loyalty in this way. 'Loyalty' may be interpreted as a situation where employees are expected to volunteer to work extra hours for no pay, take on additional responsibilities or take a pay cut to ensure the survival of the organisation (Herriot et al., 1997, p. 158), perhaps as Touhouliotis (2018) argues, academic faculty are being 'complicit' in their own 'exploitation' (p. 41). According to Conway and Briner (2003), the expectations an employee has relating to their PC may include: pay, security, career development, and promotions. Employees may expect these

provisions in return for their loyalty, in addition to their willingness to volunteer, contribute and work overtime (Conway & Briner, 2005, p. 39).

Variations of the contents of a PC between national cultures

It has been proposed that the formation, perceptions of violations and responses to these perceived violations differ across national cultures (Thomas, Au, & Ravlin, 2003, p. 452), indeed Thomas et al. (2003) suggest that collectivist national cultures such as China may not have a strong need for a PC at all, the PC being assumed from a western perspective. Furthermore, the term 'contract' itself assumes an individualist relationship to the organisation and is therefore in contrast with the collectivist view (Thomas et al., 2003, pp. 452-453). In contrast to this view, Jiahong and Vantilborgh (2020) have emphasised the impact of differing cultural contexts on the 'subtle nuances' that emerge within the PCs of staff who are either native to Chinese culture or expatriates (p. 146). Jiahong and Vantilborgh (2020) have recommended that organisations should consider the cultural differences between expatriate employees and Chinese staff, since the PCs of expatriate staff may differ from those of the host nation. Furthermore, they recommend that organisations with expatriate staff in China should pay attention to these cultural differences to avoid PC breach amongst their expatriate employees (Jiahong & Vantilborgh, 2020, p. 147).

Individualism and collectivism

Geert Hofstede (1980) introduced the idea of a individualism-collectivism continuum scale upon which every national culture sits. This contribution has been termed the 'most important yield of cross cultural psychology to date' (Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996,

p. 237). However, Taras, Steel, and Kirkman (2012) have argued that Hofstede's measures have now lost their predictive power and need to be updated, arguing that their relevance has been eroding gradually over the decades since they were published. Despite the theory's age, Minkov et al. (2017) have confirmed empirically, using data from 56 countries, that many of the important facets of the individualism-collectivism index proposed by Hofstede remain sound, having good face validity and predictive properties (p. 401).

Hofstede's (1994, p. 225) definition of individualism states 'everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family;' furthermore, Thomas et al. (2003, p. 455) define individualism as 'the tendency to view one's self as independent of others and to be more concerned about consequences of behaviour for one's personal goals.' However, the term 'individualism' has earlier and perhaps more fundamental meanings within classical liberalism, being described by John Locke (1689) as the rights to 'liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.' In addition to these, Locke (2013, p. 7) argues for the rights of each individual to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'. These liberal arguments for the rights of the individual may conflict with the day-to-day reality for individuals in China.

Collectivism refers to 'the tendency to view the self as interdependent with selected others, be concerned about consequences of behaviour for the goals of the in-group, and be more willing to sacrifice personal interests for group welfare' (Thomas et al., 2003, p. 455). Collectivist societies also require that individuals are integrated into a strong cohesive group, emphasising the collective identity, emotional dependence, group solidarity, sharing and obligations (Kim, 1995). Zhang and Han (2021) comment that in collective societies individuals must obey the collective when personal interests and the group are in conflict and that in a collectivist culture, it is paramount that the individual should obey the will of the collective. Opponents of democracy, for example, may argue that it is better for the

individual to submit to the will of the collective (Ocay, 2020) since individuals may become victims to the tyrrany of the majority - they should instead bend to the power of the state.

Thomas et al. (2003, p. 455) argue that individualism and collectivism are important to the PC because of the motives connected to the 'self-concept', since this concept of self is 'central' to the nature of the exchange agreement that employees have with their organisations (p. 455). Thus, an individualist may form a different PC with their employer than a collectivist since they differ to the extent that the PC is important to them. Collectivists are less likely to re-evaluate the PC with their organisation, perceiving that their expectations will eventually be met and viewing any breach of PC being due to pressures from outside the organisation rather than attributing blame to the organisation itself (ibid). Furthermore, collectivists will prefer to be part of an 'in-group' within the organisation, interpreting any conflict as originating from 'out-group hostility' (Thomas et al., 2003, p. 455).

Collectivism and in-groups

Thomas et al. (2003) argue that there is a preference amongst collectivists for an 'in-group' and of hostility towards an 'out-group'. This observation is important since it matches the findings of this thesis: that there exists a preference for insider groups and that IAS (being mostly individualists) are not accustomed to the collectivist practice of treating in-groups preferentially. Triandis (1993, pp. 164-165) provides the following distinction between the preferences of individualists and collectivists towards 'in-groups':

Collectivist attitudes towards in-groups	**Individualist attitudes towards in-groups**
Self is defined in terms of in-group relationships.	Self is defined as an independent entity.
Relationships with insiders are close, with much concern for integrity.	Relationships with insiders are casual with little emotional involvement.
Self-sacrifice for the group is 'natural'	Less willingness to self-sacrifice for the in-group
In-group harmony is required	Debate and confrontation are acceptable.
Conflict with out-groups is expected	Conflict with out-groups is accepted, but not desired.

Transparency and Leader Member Exchange

In-groups are not unique to Chinese organisations; they are also found in the western leadership practice of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), in which a leader is likely to develop closer relationships only with highly trusted followers. These relationships develop mutual dependence, loyalty, and support, with greater status and benefits conferred upon the preferred high-exchange individual (Yukl, 2010, p. 236). Several problems are associated with this insider privilege, since it leads to considerable resentment amongst those considered outsiders (Yukl, 2010). Omilion-Hodges and Ptacek (2021, p. 5) have also noted that leaders build *unique* relationships with each follower, sometimes solidly based on trust and respect with a select few 'insiders,' and a more formal relationship with those considered 'outsiders.' This practice of *selective* trust is common to Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). Omilion-Hodges and Ptacek (2021) suggest that the practice of LMX selectively benefits insiders, conferring on them greater autonomy, influence, voice, satisfaction, and more frequent promotions. Given that leaders are selective about with whom they build these relationships, the benefits are conferred only to selected insiders (Omilion-Hodges & Ptacek, 2021, p. 14). For an outsider, LMX creates an altogether different relationship with the leader,

characterised by a decreased voice, less satisfaction, less support, and limited professional development (ibid).

It might be assumed that the practice of transparency in organisations is widespread; however, in practice leaders are more selective about who they trust with information, and who they don't. O'Toole and Bennis (2009) have argued that a focus on transparency in organisations should serve to counter the tendency towards the 'groupthink' suffered by teams that haven't yet had sufficient experience disagreeing with each other (p. 4). Sharing values and assumptions with other team members may be a necessary part of holding a group together, they argue, but when teams suffer from a 'collective denial and self-deception' (p. 4) they cannot make the necessary strategic corrections or innovate. Transparency is, therefore, the logical solution to the embedded problem of this groupthink. O'Toole and Bennis (2009) have also argued that it is important to encourage employees to 'speak truth to power,' thereby preventing mistakes from lying undetected (p. 9). High-exchange relationships between leader and insider, such as that found in LMX, operate in opposition to the transparency espoused by O'Toole and Bennis (2009), since one of the benefits enjoyed by insiders is the sharing of privileged information and delegation of authority as a result of their enhanced status, loyalty and support of the leader (Yukl, 2010, p. 235). Within LMX information sharing is preferential towards insiders, therefore it follows that the overall effect of LMX will be a reduced transparency - as a consequence of this selectiveness.

The Psychological Contract: a one-sided agreement

The Psychological Contract (PC) is perhaps best seen as a metaphor to describe the employment relationship (Guest, 1998), but crucially, the contents of the PC are not agreed in writing between an employee and their employer. The PC contains the word 'contract' which

implies that this contract functions in a similar way to a written legal contract, in which case we would consider both sides of the contract: the employee and the employer. Since the PC may be formed exclusively in the mind of the employee it may seem one-sided, being unwritten and unknown to the employer. The employee may add items to her PC or remove them entirely without notifying her employer. This means that the employer may be completely unaware of the contents of the PC of the employee and therefore an employer may unintentionally breach a PC. The PC is personal and subjective; furthermore, being unwritten the PC does not have to be shared and therefore cannot be agreed upon by an employer - which may lead to misunderstandings (Guest, 1998).

A PC between an employee and their employer may include promises about future returns based on the contributions made by the employee. It being a one-sided obligation, the employer may at a later stage inadvertently breach the terms of this unwritten contract if the terms are entirely subjective and formed within the mind of the employee. Employees may have unwritten expectations about fair compensation or promotion opportunities, for example, that are not shared by their employer (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 256). Both parties may have differing understandings of the PC, since it is possible that neither party is aware of the other's agenda. Perhaps it should be concluded that the PC should not be described as a 'contract' at all, if only one party is aware of its contents.

Because it is not disclosed to the employer, being open to interpretation, breach of the PC may exist only 'in the eye of the beholder' (Guest, 1998, p. 652; Robinson, 1996, p. 246). Employees may be left to make sense of their PCs alone, including formation and possible PC breach (Parzefall, Riitta, & Shapiro, 2011, p. 23). Arguably, employers should develop more interest in the construction and understanding of these PCs so that they may gain an enhanced stake in the PC development process, to mould the PC contracts in ways that are beneficial to the employer and to avoid being excluded when there is perceived breach or

violation. Employees may not be clear about who or what the other party is to their PC, whether the other party is their direct manager or the organisation itself. Employees may perceive that their organisation is the other party, perhaps anthropomorphising it. This anthropomorphism is arguably in error since the organisation cannot be capable of signing the other side of an agreement that has been constructed in the mind of the employee (Conway & Briner, 2005; Conway & Pekcan, 2019, p. 15).

Psychological Contract Breach

When the reality of work does not meet an employee's initial expectations, especially relating to the perceived fairness of the rewards received in return for the work done by the employee, they may experience disappointment as a consequence (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 247). The concept of PC 'violation' was first introduced by Rousseau (1989, p. 128) and the concept of PC 'breach' was proposed five years later, by Robinson & Rousseau (1994, p. 258). Psychological Contract Breach (PCB) describes the change in outcomes when compared to the initial expectations an employee has, leading to distrust or disappointment resulting from a broken promise (Conway & Briner, 2005, p. 64). The consequences of a perceived PCB will include feelings, thoughts, and actions. Employees may feel frustration, disappointment, anxiety, anger, betrayal, sadness and upset (Kiefer & Antoni, 2019, p. 86), they may think that they cannot trust the organisation anymore. Consequently, employees whose PCs have been breached may exert less effort, be less willing to volunteer (Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefooghe, 2005, p. 70), they may retaliate by turning up late, possibly taking revenge or committing sabotage (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 227). The consequences of PCB may also result in resistance, resentment, loss of trust, reduced organisational commitment, reduced performance (Conway & Briner, 2005, p. 70), weakened

loyalty, reduced ‘organisational citizenship’ and eventual exit from the organisation (Conway & Briner, 2005, p. 72; George, 2009; Guest, 1998).

It can be concluded that the consequences of PCB are mostly emotional, with multiple possible causes. A common outcome being a weakened loyalty to the organisation. That said, many staff may experience PCB and choose to reframe any negative experiences constructively. Furthermore, those employees who are able to apply self-management after experiencing PCB may receive more support in return from their organisation (Sturges et al., 2005, p. 833). Given that an employee’s expectations can be entirely unknown to the employer, it is not surprising that employees often perceive that their employer has breached their PCs (Robinson, 1996). This means that any study of PCB is often the breach of a *perceived* contract rather than actual breach of contract (Robinson, 1996). An individual’s beliefs about the PC may not be shared by the other party to the contract (Robinson, 1996, p. 575), consequently PCB may be perceived to have taken place by the employee, possibly without the knowledge of the other party.

Tomprou, Rousseau, and Hansen (2015) have commented on the need for a post-breach PC, in which the organisation can join together with the victim’s efforts at problem solving and help to re-establish a functional PC following a perceived PCB. Similarly, Solinger, Hofmans, Bal, and Jansen (2016) have recommended working on the recovery process, post PCB. Understanding PCB may help with the induction of new starters into an organisation, since experiences of PCB can prove to be ‘tipping points’ for their socialisation processes (Woodrow & Guest, 2019, p. 20). To extend knowledge in this area, Conway and Briner (2005) have encouraged further qualitative investigations into the processes and mechanisms of PCB, for example recommending in-depth, qualitative case-studies (p. 108).

Trust in the context of Psychological Contract Breach

Trust is considered to be an essential component of the development of the PC (Rousseau, 1989, p. 125) in addition to 'fairness' and 'delivery of the deal' (George, 2009, p. 129; Guest, 1998). Without fairness and trust, it is argued, PCB can develop, therefore fairness and trust are considered essential at work (Guest & Clinton, 2011). However, distrust might not necessarily be the opposite of trust. An alternative perspective on trust is that it is non-linear and multi-dimensional, with the possibility of both low trust and low distrust existing at the same time (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998, p. 445). Lewicki et al. (1998, p. 454) have argued that a complex relationship of simultaneous trust and distrust can coexist, perhaps including the ambivalence for both trust and distrust. This possibility for the coexistence of trust with distrust reflects Jukka's (2017) description of the 'trust ambivalence' common to the Chinese cultural context, since Jukka et al. (2017) argue that trust and distrust can coexist and interact as part of a yin-yang duality (p. 496).

Transactional and relational aspects of the Psychological Contract

Rousseau (1990) distinguishes between two forms of a PC, describing these as 'transactional' and 'relational'. For Rousseau, the 'transactional' form of the PC refers to an economic, extrinsic focus, and the 'relational' form of the PC refers to a socio-emotional, intrinsic focus (Rousseau, 1990, p. 390). Collectivist value-oriented cultures, such as China will most likely prefer a relational PC over a transactional one (Thomas, Ravlin, Liao, Morrell, & Au, 2016), and so understanding cultural variation is key to correctly understanding the PC for employees in a JV organisation: different cultures will have different expectations, either for a transactional or a relational PC.

The transactional and relational aspects of a PC will vary in importance for different national cultures. Thomas et al. (2016, p. 273) have shown empirically that collectivist value orientation cultures such as those found in Chinese organisations prefer the relational aspects of the PC and not the transactional aspects. This finding lends weight to the theory that Chinese employees in the case study IJV will prefer a relational approach to the PC, which contrasts with the preferences of (mostly western) IAS who may prefer a transactional form of PC. Thomas et al. (2003) summarises transactional and relational terms as follows:

Transactional terms:	economic	partial	written	static	narrow scope	public
Relational terms:	emotional	whole person	unwritten	dynamic	pervasive	subjective-tacit

Transactional aspects of the Psychological Contract

A transactional contract may include the signatures of both parties, similar to a legally binding contract, in which an employee's time is exchanged for money. But a PC does not include these written signatures and can hypothetically be modified by either party without mutual agreement or even awareness of the deal (Guest, 1998), effectively leading to a perceived breach of trust. A transactional form of PC is closer in nature to a legal contract and therefore better suited to being expressed in writing. However, it could be argued that if the PC is not written, it cannot be called a 'contract' at all, and any 'transactional' elements of that unwritten 'contract' are figments of the employee's imagination. Hamilton and von Treuer (2012, p. 478) argue that transactional contracts tend to be short-term and are connected with stronger intentions to leave. This short-term nature of transactional PCs may match the temporary nature of the employment contracts of IAS, and contrast with preferences amongst local Chinese staff for a relational PC (Thomas et al., 2003).

Relational aspects of the PC

The relational side of a PC should involve an emotional investment, with an open-ended commitment and the inclusion of the whole person in terms of an employee's personal growth and development goals (George, 2009, p. 13). Relation-focused PCs are more long-term than transactional PCs, associated with stronger job-security; therefore, Hamilton and von Treuer (2012, p. 478) argue that with a relational PC we should expect a reduced intention to leave. Relational aspects of the PC include steady employment, stable benefits to employees' families, a concern for personal welfare, stable wages and benefits, inclusive decision making and secure employment (Hui, Lee, & Rousseau, 2004, p. 321). The relational PC, preferred by the Chinese, emphasises the personal side of working relationships including loyalty and socio-emotional concerns (Thomas et al., 2003, p. 452).

Instrumentality within the Psychological Contract

Instrumentality is the shift of thinking towards 'what's in it for me?' (Bal & Hornung, 2019, p. 147). It is one of the bases upon which people communicate for personal gain, providing rationality for market transactions, while maximising advantages in relation to (or at the expense of) another person (Bal & Hornung, 2019, p. 147). Perhaps the transactional side of the PC better reflects instrumentality since the transaction better describes the exchange of the needs of one person for those of another. For an individual who sees their current job as a 'steppingstone' to another career, rather than for the long term, an instrumental attitude towards their employment is perhaps better expressed as a 'transaction' than as a 'relationship' (George, 2009, p. 12).

The Psychological Contracts of International Academic Staff

A key part of retaining IAS at an IJVU in China could be to better understand their expectations, needs and wishes (Cai & Hall, 2016); however, many of these expectations may remain unknown to an employer, being part of the PC (Robinson, 1996, p. 575). For IAS, their commitment to the organisation is positively influenced by their psychological adjustment to their new socio-cultural environment (Chen & Chiu, 2009, p. 810). It is possible for the organisation to take this need for psychological adjustment into account when inducting new staff to the organisation. Chen and Zhu (2020, p. 12) find that IAS have 'vague and idealistic expectations' about working in China, leaving many IAS unable to fit in with the new culture. Understanding the needs and expectations of IAS can help smooth this transition process to the new culture and organisation.

Expatriates may have unrealistic expectations that the organisation and host nation are responsible for PC obligations that the organisation cannot be aware of (Perera, Chew, & Nielsen, 2018, p. 1474); it could be argued therefore, that communications should be clear from the start, since the employer will be unaware of these perceived obligations and perhaps unable or unwilling to fulfil their side of the agreement. Much of the PC may be assumed by IAS, and it might help to clarify how one-sided their PC is, existing only in their mind and not likely to be fulfilled. Perhaps more attention should be paid to the environment and atmosphere in which IAS will work (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997, p. 321), including developing an understanding for the cultural environment and a more constructive attitude towards the PC.

IAS may form a completely unrealistic PC when joining a Chinese IJVU, being based on attitudes they have developed while working in the west. They may also find themselves surprised by the unexpected organisational practices they notice in China, being a collectivist

national culture, with preferences for in-groups and hostility towards out-groups (Triandis, 1993). It is possible that IAS will find these practices unfair, leading to PC breach, frustration, disappointment, reduced commitment and potentially a weakened loyalty to the organisation (Conway & Briner, 2005).

The Psychological Contract within International Human Resource Management

Contemporary examples of studies relating to the PC continue to demonstrate its credibility as a concept within the International Human Resource Management (IHRM) literature. Highlighting the moderating effects of national culture on the PC over the last 20 years, Jayaweera, Matthijs, Katharina, and Jong (2021) have identified the importance of interpersonal relationships at the individual level within the concept of PCB, and its connection to resulting job performance and turnover intentions. Furthermore, within 138 selected studies, Jayaweera et al. (2021) have identified that PC relationships vary across cultures, indicating that national culture practices moderate the outcomes connected with PCB. Jayaweera et al. (2021) have collected and analysed the extant literature relating to the relationships between performance, turnover, PCB, together with cultural practices such as the ‘institutional collectivism’ (p. 579) found in Chinese organisations (Zhang & Han, 2021). Jayaweera et al. (2021) argue that managers should be more aware that employees may respond to PCB differently, depending on their native culture (p. 590). Furthermore, gaining a better understanding of the way cultural practices shape PCB-related outcomes can help international managers to improve employee performance and reduce turnover intentions. International managers may continue to mistakenly assume that one policy will suit all cultures (Edwards, Chikhouni, & Molz, 2019). Jayaweera et al. (2021) urge managers to take a different approach dependent on whether they are in low-collectivist or high-collectivist

societies. Managers are encouraged to consider ‘group-based incentives and rewards,’ for example in high-collectivist societies, to maintain employee job performance post-PCB (Jayaweera et al., 2021, p. 591). Jayaweera et al. (2021) recommend IHRM practices to suit the national culture based on geographic areas or cultures. However, they do not make recommendations for mixed culture organisations, such as a Chinese IJVU case-study organisation.

The Psychological Contract continues to be important within the field of contemporary IHRM, particularly within the area of national culture. Sparrow (2018, p. 226) explains that several mechanisms exist through which national culture impacts upon the PC of employees, it being evident that previously the PC had been researched only in the developed world, ignoring many less developed nations, such as China which has recently received a great deal more attention (ibid). Sparrow (2018) has provided several examples of how the PC is becoming increasingly relevant within Chinese organisations, with the relational aspects of the PC leading to stronger organisational commitment and turnover intentions. This is in contrast to the transactional aspects of the PC, Sparrow (2018) argues, which are not as strong for Chinese employees.

Jing, Xie, and Ning (2014) surveyed 228 employees in China to investigate the nature of the relational and transactional aspects of the PC amongst Chinese employees. They found that the transactional contract was not related to employee intentions to remain, but that relational aspects of the PC were related to a commitment to change, meaning that the Chinese employees in the sample were found to be more strongly influenced by the relational aspects of the PC than they were by transactional aspects (p. 229). Jing et al. (2014) commented that a relational contract, being long-term, is essential to promote a commitment to change amongst Chinese employees, since those Chinese employees with a higher ‘relational attachment’ to the changing organization are more likely to be more willing to

make the necessary sacrifices for the prospect of beneficial returns (p. 1110). Bao, Olson, Parayitam, and Zhao (2011) studied the PC amongst Chinese executives, finding that Chinese employees differ from westerners since Chinese employees rely more heavily on interpersonal and social exchange relationships than they do on legal contracts. Bao et al. (2011) also argue that an exchange of favours, or reciprocity (p. 3389), remains important for Chinese employees, emphasising that employees must perceive positive interactions with their employer (i.e. a positive interpersonal relationship) so that there continue to be positive reciprocities between the employee and their organization. Bao et al. (2011) conclude that the correlation between PCB and organisational commitment remains sufficiently strong amongst Chinese executives for the PC to be considered significant within the Chinese cultural context.

Within this literature review I have identified several opportunities for the creation and extension of knowledge that will be valuable to a better understanding of the Psychological Contract in the context of a Chinese IJVU. To this end, I have designed the following Research Questions which I shall attempt to answer in this thesis.

Research Questions

1. How have IAS experienced their PCs at the IJVU?
2. How has their PC changed during the period of their employment at the IJVU?
3. How have these experiences impacted upon on the IAS member?
4. How do IAS describe their responses to any perceived breaches/violations of their PCs

Having laid the foundations in a review of the literature, and identified my research questions, I shall now turn to the methodological concerns connected with my research and the methods and tools I have used to explore the Research Questions specified above.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter documents the research approach I have taken, in as transparent a way as possible. It is a chapter that aims to describe the history of the project. To achieve this, it is necessary to record how the project has developed over time, the challenges I have encountered, and methods applied to overcome those challenges. Qualitative research has been referred to as a 'personal journey' (Charmaz & Keller, 2016) in which the researcher's personal motivations place the research in a subjective context, in which knowledge is constructed (Charmaz, 2014, p. 234), rather than discovered or uncovered. Since I have a personal involvement with the case study organisation, it is necessary to recognise the relationship between myself and the participants, as well as my ethical responsibilities towards them (Reich, 2021); furthermore, in the interests of transparency, I should declare and explain my personal interests, experience and viewpoints from the outset, explaining the position I take in relation to the organisation and the participants. While conducting this research, I have been accepted by my participants as an organisational insider conducting 'insider research' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55); therefore the interviews I have conducted have been influenced by my subjective interpretation of the context, based on my knowledge and experience as an organisational insider.

Academic motivations for selecting the approach

I am motivated to study the case organisation because of my interest in organisations generally, organisational cultures, and of my personal experiences while working in a

Chinese university. As an employee of a Chinese university I have been conducting 'insider research,' which occurs 'when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58). As an insider of the organisation, I share an experiential base and identity which provides me with legitimacy when interviewing the participants who are International Academic Staff (IAS), as am I. This insider status within the participant group allows me to be better accepted by them than would a researcher from outside the organisation. However, this insider status does not extend to the national culture since I am not Chinese. Being a foreigner in China (i.e. 'international') may bind my experiences closer to those of other IAS, since we share an outsider status as regards the national culture. In relation to the participants, it is important to recognise that positionally I am perceived to be similar to them, but not the same, since there remain differences between us, having differing sociocultural backgrounds and experiences.

Reich (2021, p. 576) suggests that qualitative research 'is qualitative because of the explicit ways that it considers the *positionality* of both the researcher and the researched as core aspects of inquiry,' defining positionality as 'the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group' (Reich, 2021, p. 576). Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014, p. 80) also comment that the term positionality is used 'to describe and delineate one's position in relation to others, including research participants.' Madison (2005, p. 7) argue that an insider researcher should recognise their 'positionality' within the organisation they research, since researchers are not neutral, innocent, or objective; moreover, Madison (2005, p. 9) argues that this positionality requires that researchers direct their attention beyond their 'individual or subjective selves'. In fact, my experiences are inescapable and colour every minute aspect of the decisions I have made; however, as Dwyer and Buckle (2009) point out, being an 'insider researcher' does not mean that we, as researchers, are completely the same as the group we

study, neither would a researcher who is not part of the group be completely different from that group (p. 60).

In this study I have the benefit of considerable closeness to the participants of study, which I do not see as a weakness or a limitation, but as advantageous and requiring an 'ethic of care' towards them (Reich, 2021, p. 577). When selecting the research approach and questions, I am aware that I have been influenced by having experienced similar personal challenges to my participants whilst working overseas. These challenges and experiences have guided my investigation and selected research approach. I have also been motivated by a desire to help the participants of the organisation, thereby aiming to improve their lives to some extent.

Professional reasons for selecting the approach

My experiences in the workplace have led me to develop an interest in the satisfying and dissatisfying aspects of work, hence the broad focus on 'well-being' (Cooper & Leiter, 2017, p. 41), more specifically the unwritten understandings that exist between employers and employees relating to employee well-being.

Through conversations with colleagues, I developed an interest in the apparent unfairness they have experienced and the apparent opacity in the organisation. By understanding these issues, I may empower others, especially those who are responsible for leading and managing people. As such, my knowledge about how the organisation operates can be described as 'emic' (from the perspectives of within a social group) since I am an organisational insider, but also 'etic' (from the perspective of the observer) since the knowledge and experiences gained from this thesis can help place these understandings in a broader context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). When applied to other organisations, my

research contributes to the broader well-being agenda: to an understanding of how we can improve the working lives of many people.

As a Senior Teaching Fellow in the Management division of a business school, I have led modules containing learning material that touch upon the major thematic areas of this project. For example, employee 'well-being' has been identified as an emergent topic in the textbooks 'Human Resource Management' (Torrington, Hall, & Taylor, 2008, p. 352), and 'Organisational Behaviour' (Robbins & Judge, 2021, p. 54); furthermore, expatriate issues are covered in Wall, Minocha, and Rees (2015) textbook 'International Business'.

In Part 1 I shall detail the decisions I have taken, leading to the selection of a Critical Realist meta-theory (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016) with a Grounded Theory methodology (Kempster & Parry, 2014). In part two I shall discuss the data collection and analysis phase. Throughout this chapter I shall discuss the credibility and transferability of the findings of this thesis to demonstrate research excellence.

PART ONE: SELECTING AN APPROACH

Aims and outline of part one

In this part, I shall outline my reasons for selecting a Critical Realist meta-theoretical framework combined with a Critical Grounded Theory methodology. This decision emerges from an interest in the experiences and challenges faced by the participants I have interviewed and my ontological and epistemological standpoint about the social world within which the participants exist, which I shall explain in more depth in this section. Existing research has often focused on the Psychological Contract (PC) from a quantitative perspective, for example the most common method being the cross-sectional survey (Conway

& Briner, 2005, p. 109), these quantitative methods are designed to identify associations at a very general level and as Conway and Briner (2005) argue these cross-sectional surveys are 'of very little use' when studying the content and breach of the PC (p. 109). To understand the how, why and for whom of PC creation and breach, Conway and Briner (2005, p. 109) argue we need more 'appropriate means'. This thesis attends to this methodological and knowledge gap by exploring the experiences of IAS in a case study organisation, focusing on the 'explanatory mechanisms' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. 65) of PC creation and breach.

A paradigm is defined as a 'world view,' a 'view of what counts as accepted or correct scientific knowledge or way of working,' a 'shared belief system or set of principles,' and the 'identity of a research community' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017, p. 6). Since the earliest paradigm, positivism, holds the view that knowledge is 'hard, objective and tangible' (ibid) it can be discounted as inappropriate for this investigation, since I intend to focus on perceived experiences (these being neither objective nor tangible). The knowledge collected within this project is 'personal, subjective and unique,' therefore I would describe the approach taken within this thesis as 'post-positivist' (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 6). In this part, I shall explain the methodological, ontological, and epistemological decisions I have made, and the impacts of those decisions for my thesis.

An introduction to Critical Realism

Critical Realism can prove difficult to define. It contains a collection of meta-theoretical positions, with one unifying feature: a commitment to formulating an appropriate 'post-positivist philosophy' (Archer et al., 2016). Critical Realism (CR) has been described as a collection of philosophical viewpoints on a range of matters including ontology, causation and explanations (Archer et al., 2016). It is first and foremost a critique of positivism,

developed in an effort by social theorists to construct a social science as a viable alternative to positivist meta-theory (Archer et al., 2013; Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). Positivism is focused on regression models and a quest for the laws that govern nature, laws that cannot be found in social science. In contrast, Critical Realists oppose this reductionist viewpoint and propose an alternative paradigm. Other paradigms do exist, for example post-modernism, however a pertinent critique of post-modernism is that it provides an interpretation of social phenomena without any explanatory mechanisms. For this reason it is very challenging to develop new theories within a post-modernist theoretical framework, since there are levels of reality but no explanatory mechanisms (Archer et al., 2016).

Despite being a relatively new concept, CR is becoming increasingly recognised as a significant meta-theory for the social sciences (Hoddy, 2019), it informs the development of new methodologies, including Critical Realist Grounded Theory (Kempster & Parry, 2014). CR allows researchers to examine social phenomena and develop theories to explain their causal mechanisms through an iterative process. CR-informed research can be applied to help identify the ‘root causes’ of societal problems through a process of theory development (Hoddy, 2019, p. 111); furthermore, Hoddy (2019) suggests CR can support the creation of the sort of theories movements require for social change.

The origin of CR is attributed to Roy Bhaskar (2009), who argues that the social world is a ‘stratified and open system of emergent entities’ (cited in Cunliffe, Cassell, Cunliffe, & Grandy, 2018, p. 203). These ‘entities’ (Bhaskar, 2009, p. 147) can include an organisation - being made up of people and resources. Organisations as entities may be transformed by ‘causal powers’ or mechanisms within the social structures, effecting a transformation and resulting in new properties for the organisation (Cunliffe et al., 2018, p. 205). For example, a new leader may transform an organisation through the application of transformative social mechanisms.

Real social mechanisms may not be observable to the researcher, however, and Cunliffe et al. (2018, p. 206) argue that there may be multiple social mechanisms having an effect that are not readily observable. A CR perspective accepts that while there may be no directly observable link between the mechanism and an outcome, there will be 'deep causal' mechanisms in operation (Cunliffe et al., 2018, p. 206), including cultural, social and psychological explanations for an outcome.

The argument for ontology

Roy Bhaskar (2016) has argued that it is crucial to the discussion of Realism to distinguish between 'knowledge about the world' (epistemology) and the study of 'being' (ontology). This is not the sort of distinction we would normally make in our everyday lives, therefore it does not seem at first glance to make a great deal of sense given that we would not normally differentiate between such concepts as 'knowledge' and 'being' (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, chpt. 2.1). Perhaps it is not so important to distinguish between our knowledge about the world, and what is really there, but these concepts are not interchangeable and for Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) there is an important distinction between our knowledge, and what that knowledge is about. This important distinction is between the two concepts: *epistemology*, 'the philosophical study of knowledge,' and *ontology*, the 'philosophical study of being' (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, chpt. 2.1).

A world that is unstructured, undifferentiated, and unchanging may suit a simplistic view of causality, such as that found within the positivist theoretical framework, in which when we have understood the causal laws in operation then these laws will always fit our observations. However, our experiences of the real social world in which we live can often contradict any laws a positivist theoretical approach attempts to impose upon it; thus, Bhaskar

(2016) argues, there must be a separation between any epistemology and ontology, since any understanding of the social world cannot be reduced to epistemology alone. To explain this viewpoint, a positivist approach would attempt to reduce the nature of being in the social world down to a study of what can be known, furthermore this knowledge would be reduced to a series of laws about the social world. This epistemology would (within a positivist world-view) be seen as the final step in developing an understanding about the world, but for Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) this reductive approach neglects the 'study of being,' or *ontology*, about which social scientists are most interested.

The idea that causal laws and scientific knowledge can depend on empirical regularities (i.e. positivism) continues to dominate much thinking about social science; however, this deductive thinking is clearly wrong, argue Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016). Deductive reasoning begins with an existing theory and proceeds to test logical propositions by seeing whether the results of an investigation match these expectations (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Researchers following a deductive approach can only get unique results through experimentation in closed, controlled systems; but for social systems - being open systems - there can be no regularity and these open systems are impacted by multiple, unpredictable processes which may not be considered within a deductive empirical framework. The search for the causal laws found in deductive thinking is to collapse three levels of reality (the 'real,' the 'actual' and the 'empirical') into one single domain, which Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) argue is an error since each level must be considered separately. Critical Realists argue for ontology to be considered as distinct from epistemology and for causal laws that are distinct from patterns of events. In this way, CR applies a transcendental argument, asking 'what must the world be like' for an activity to be possible (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 3).

Critical Realist (CR) ontology is structured and differentiated. There is a distinction between the *real* and the *actual*, including a stratified view of the world in which the *real* is

separated from our understanding of it so that we must develop theories about the processes leading to the outcomes we observe. Also, for scientific purposes there is a distinction between what can be tested in a closed system, deductively, and what happens in the 'real,' social world, since the social world is understood to be an 'open system' (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, chpt. 2.3). For this reason, it is argued, deductive empirical practices such as positivism are not a good replacement for the CR approach to theory development for the social world.

As social scientists, we must develop theories about the social world, but any laws we might create may not always be observable in the social world, since it is an open system, being subject to multiple unpredictable influences over which we have no control. Furthermore, we cannot close a social system such as a school or an organisation (these being open to unpredictable social influences), therefore a deductive approach to create such laws would not be practical, neither would such laws have predictive power for an open system. Multiple mechanisms will always be in operation in open social systems at distinct, stratified levels of reality, making a deductive approach unworkable (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, chpt. 2.3).

Ontological realism

When defining Critical Realism (CR) we must consider the importance of *ontology*, since a defence of ontology is at the core of CR. Archer et al. (2016) define ontology as 'an inquiry into the nature of things,' since for Critical Realists reality exists and operates independently of our awareness and knowledge of it – therefore it is necessary to inquire into the nature of reality. In the past, social scientists have sought to focus solely on 'how we know' (i.e. *epistemology*) at the expense of answering questions about the nature of reality

(*ontology*). The result of this exclusive focus on epistemology while ignoring ontology has left sociology on shaky ground, as regards any claims about the nature of the world, and an uncertainty about how it provides explanations for social phenomena (Archer et al., 2016).

Ontology informs our investigations about the social world since it focuses on developing an understanding about its nature. Sociologists work with certain beliefs about causal mechanisms and processes, beliefs which are not easily reducible to empirical data, neither do these beliefs lend themselves to empirical verification (Archer et al., 2016). CR is concerned with the nature of these causal mechanisms and processes, providing a practical framework within which to describe social phenomena. Critical Realists are concerned with mapping the 'ontological character of social reality', including events that we can empirically examine, aiming to inquire into cultures, social structures and what affects human interactions (Archer et al., 2016). Critical Realists use the facts we encounter in the social world as a springboard to understand the processes, mechanisms and structures which cause these events. This CR approach requires an understanding of the layered and complex nature of reality (Archer et al., 2016).

Critical Realism as meta-theory

Fleetwood and Ackroyd (2004, p. 20) define a *meta-theory* as a useful 'non-disciplinary category that refers to everything in the realm of thought outside theory and empirical work'. *Meta-theory* concerns philosophical matters such as ontology, epistemology, causation, and methodology - each of which being applied in empirical research. Roy Bhaskar intended CR to be an alternative to positivism - this being the dominant meta-theoretical framework of the time, writing that 'the domain of the real cannot be reduced to the domain of the actual … and even less to the domain of the empirical' (Bhaskar, 1997, p.

140); furthermore, statements about the nature of the world (ontology) cannot be reduced to statements about our knowledge of the world (epistemology) (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). This new approach challenged the reductionist arguments of the time, revitalised the study of social sciences, and demanded a shift towards the study of the fundamental nature of social phenomena and their properties (Hoddy, 2019).

Bhaskar's view, expressed within the framework of CR, is that reality is structured, differentiated and changing, consisting of natural and social objects and structures with 'causal' or 'generative mechanisms' that explain the causality of events in the social world (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 3). According to Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016), social scientists move from perceptions of events in the empirical domain towards the 'actual' and the 'real' (p. 7); furthermore, new knowledge about the social world can be generated through an understanding of the structured and generative mechanisms in the 'domain of the real' (p. 7), as well as knowledge about the conditions under which the mechanisms are activated (ibid).

CR rejects conventional approaches to cause and effect, in which causality may be proved by experimentation within closed systems, as is the case within positivism. Since the social world can only be observed in open systems (which cannot be controlled for experimentation). Critical Realists emphasise instead causal 'powers' and 'liabilities' which emerge due to relations, structures, and mechanisms. For Critical Realists, there exist only 'potentialities' which may or may not be exercised and may or may not produce a regular pattern of events (Hoddy, 2019, pp. 112-113).

CR combines a realist ontology with an interpretive epistemology, rather than reducing these two to one, as positivist metatheories do. Within CR, the world is 'real' since it exists independently of our beliefs and perceptions about it, and furthermore that our understandings of the real social world are socially constructed rather than their being a direct

connection between our perceptions and reality; thus ontology cannot be reduced to epistemology (Hoddy, 2019, p. 113).

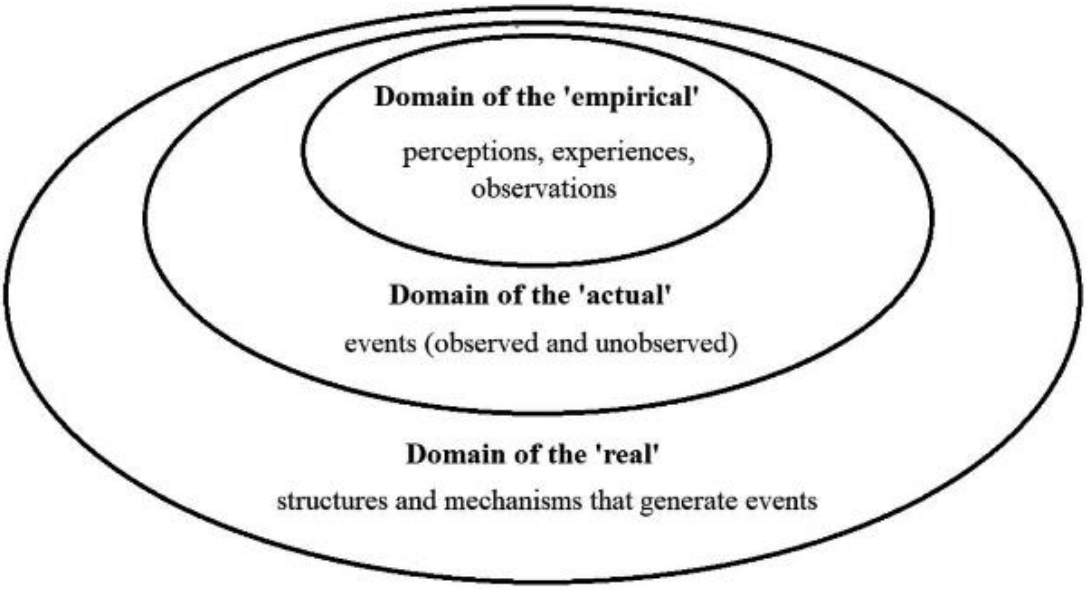

Figure 1 Critical Realist view of stratified reality (Hoddy, 2019)

Retroductive reasoning

Reasoning in research and evaluation has two commonly described forms. These are induction or inductive reasoning, and deduction or deductive reasoning (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). *Deductive* logic begins where a researcher proposes a hypothesis generated from a theory whereafter the researcher tests these propositions with experimentation to test whether reality matches these expectations. *Inductive* logic, on the other hand, derives conclusions by building theory from observations, i.e. from the ground up, developing conclusions from multiple observations (Greenhalgh et al., 2018).

Realist research and evaluation applies a *retroductive* reasoning approach, in which it is proposed that ‘hidden causal forces’ underpin the identified patterns or changes in patterns,

implying hidden mechanism behind or beneath the observed phenomena. Realist researchers ask 'why do things appear as they do' (Olsen, 2010). This practice of *retroduction* implies going beyond, behind or beneath observed patterns to discover what produces them (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2003). But also the practice of *retroduction* serves to understand the ongoing processes that lead to a production of observed outcomes or effects, a practice of inference in which events are explained by identifying the mechanisms which produce outcomes (Sayer, 1999). This practice of retroduction uses both inductive and deductive logic, insights, and guesses - thinking through the causal powers which are working to produce patterns or changes in patterns (Greenhalgh et al., 2018).

Identifying the underlying mechanisms goes beyond using only the observable evidence; retroductive theorising also requires that the researcher should use their own common sense, expertise and knowledge to form, develop and test theories about the causal processes and mechanisms underpinning the outcomes they observe (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Theories that are developed via retroduction may be impossible to test initially, as truly novel theories often are. Greenhalgh et al. (2018) describe how Charles Darwin's theory of species evolution via natural selection is an ideal example of retroductive theory development. The theory of natural selection explains the formation of new species, including biodiversity, helping us to understand evolution. Darwin's (1859) inspired view of evolutionary change featured mechanisms that are not readily observable or testable, being arrived at instead via retroductive reasoning.

A new model of scientific discovery and development

According to Bhaskar's transcendental realist view, the world is seen to be stratified and differentiated, including independent levels for the 'real, the actual and the empirical'

(Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 7). When looking for causes of phenomena, we are searching for explanations for these phenomena in the form of causal mechanisms, crossing these layers, since the empirical is our way of explaining an understanding of the real, it does not replace the real social world. Science emerges then as a way of explaining why and how things work the way that they do, leading to observable outcomes, expanding our knowledge rather than producing further descriptions and laws which later prove to be ineffective due to the changeable nature of our social reality (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016).

Bhaskar has proposed a simple model, a 'logic' of scientific discovery that follows from this ontology, what he refers to as the DREIC schema: *Description, Retroduction, Elimination, Identification and Correction* (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 30). First comes a *Description* of patterns or events, then *Retroduction*, or imagining possible mechanisms leading to the observed phenomena. With *Retroduction,* Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) argue, we imagine the possible mechanisms which would account for the patterns observed, leading to a large potential number of mechanisms being created by the researcher. This theory development leads to an important stage of pruning back those theories that do not fit empirical observations, Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) refer to this stage as *Elimination*. It then follows that the researcher must *Identify* which of the theories of mechanisms is the more efficacious generative mechanisms out of those structures he has eliminated. The final stage stands for the iterative *Correction* of earlier theories in light of the *Identification* of the most likely mechanisms. The least likely theories must be discarded in favour of the more likely theories.

Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) suggest that by moving through this cycle of theory production to an identification of the generative mechanisms causing the phenomenon in question, the need for an endless and time-consuming process of confirming or disconfirming theoretical predictions can be avoided. Thus, Bhaskar's retroductive process moves

immediately to a new round of discovery, beginning with the imagining of plausible real-world mechanisms.

Dualism between society and the individual

The social world is concerned primarily with the enduring relations between groups and individuals, such as between managers and workers, politicians, and their constituents. These relations are the subject matter of social science, within which themes are often used to describe such relations as oppression or subjugation. For example, the goal of emancipation from any master-slave relationship is not primarily the liberation of slaves, but the overthrow of the master-slave relationship itself: the overthrow of slavery (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016).

Thus, a relational theory itself is required, since it describes these important relationships within social science, each with a different level of scale. Bhaskar has suggested seven 'levels of scale' for these social relations (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 56), three of which I have selected for analysis within this project, the *individual*, *meso*- and *macro*-level. I have named the *Individual* level the same as Bhaskar, interpreting this to be at the same 'biographical' level argued by some to be the most important level of the social sciences, being connected with experiences of PCB, it is arguably essential to this thesis. I have interpreted the *Meso*-level as the *Interpersonal* relations between functional roles, including between manager and employee, these being common relations being described by the participants in this study. Finally, I have interpreted the *Macro*-level defined by Bhaskar as 'whole sectors of society' as a *Cultural* level. Although Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) describe psychology within a 'sub-individual' level, including unconscious drives, motives and reasons for action, I interpret the experiences of individuals at the level of the Psychological

Contract to be closer to a sense of self which is best explained at a biographical '*Individual*' level, rather than any unconscious drives that might be uncovered during psychoanalysis.

Realist evaluation

Realist evaluation is driven by the development of theory. In a social programme, such as the leading of an organisation, there will be theories about social betterment - how to improve things - and social programmes are shaped by a vision of change that can succeed or fail according to how appropriate that vision is (Pawson & Tilley, 2004, p. 2). A realist evaluation of this social betterment theory should identify whether the change has been successful or not. Realist evaluations are explanatory, and we can test the programme theory to refine it. But to refine a social programme, we must ask multi-faceted questions, since the answers will be complex (being social) and we cannot ask simple questions such as 'does this programme work?' Instead, with a realist evaluation, Pawson and Tilley (2004, p. 2) argue that we must ask more complex questions such as 'what works for whom, in which circumstances, in what respects, and how?' Moreover, Pawson and Tilley (2004, p. 3) argue that such questions may lead to inconveniently vague answers for policy makers that will not always prove welcome, since social interventions can never be finalised, being an ongoing work-in-progress.

Pawson and Tilley (2004, p. 6) write that social programmes, being 'sophisticated social interactions set amidst a complex social reality' require an analytic framework, including *Context*, *Mechanism*, and *Outcome* (p. 6). Pawson and Tilley (1997) defined realist mechanisms using an example of gunpowder causing an explosion via a chemical reaction due to its composition. The *Outcome* (O) will be the explosion, and the chemical reaction is the *Mechanisms* (M) that causes the explosion – thus, the mechanism is a theoretical

explanation for the outcome. Finally, this chemical reaction can only occur in the right *Context* (C), or physical conditions in which an explosion is possible (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. 58).

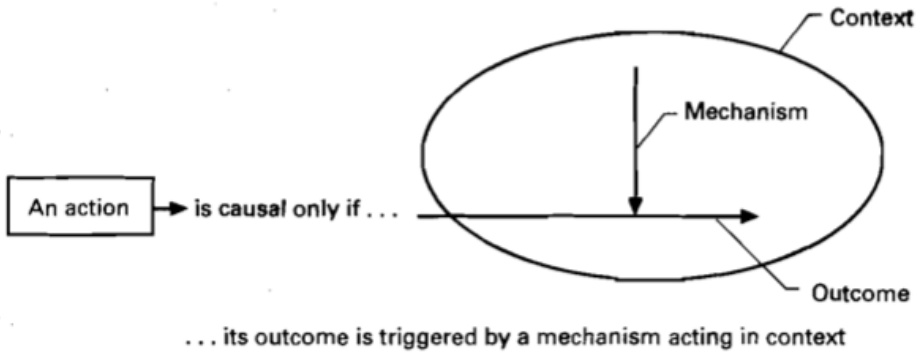

Figure 2 Generative causation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997)

Pawson and Tilley (1997) explain that a Realist Evaluation is theory driven, producing hypotheses to explain a theory of change in the form of mechanisms and contexts. Realist evaluators should explain these theories using the three ingredients: *Context* (C), *Mechanism* (M) and *Outcome* (O). Effectively this structure should help to answer the more complex social research questions that Pawson and Tilley (2004) describe, for example: what works (O) for whom and in which circumstances (C), and why? (M).

Within a social programme, there will be complexities, since programmes are complex interventions introduced into complex social systems (Pawson, 2013). With one intervention into a social system there will be ‘winners and losers’ as a consequence of that intervention (Pawson, 2013, p. 15). Realist Evaluation proposes that there will be patterns or mechanisms (M) to describe what happens (O) to whom, and why a programme works in one circumstance for one person, and not for another person or in different circumstances (C) (ibid, p. 21). Pawson (2013, p. 97) explains:

> ‘Interventions only work for certain individuals in certain circumstances, but we do not suppose that winners and losers will be found at random. Evaluation science assumes that there will be some pattern to success and failure across interventions.’

Within the case-study organisation, IAS with a variety of responsibilities and career paths will have differing outcomes and it can be assumed there will be winners and losers of the social programmes initiated. The different contexts in which programmes are implemented, Pawson (2013, p. 30) comments, are ‘as wide as society itself is wide’. When a single intervention is applied broadly to an organisation (e.g. promotions processes and policies), there will be multiple complex outcomes, triggering a myriad of different changes for the various stakeholders in the organisation (Pawson, 2013, p. 33).

The methodological link between Critical Realism and Grounded Theory

Critical Realism (CR) does not attempt to either establish laws or certainties about the meanings of events. Instead, Critical Realist inquiry aims to develop causal explanations for social phenomena across a stratified reality, describing the relevant structures and mechanisms relating to the phenomenon of study (Hoddy, 2019). The CR researcher moves towards explanations applying a theory-building process similar to detective work, with the aim to interpret what is happening in the social world (Hoddy, 2019, p. 113). A CR researcher begins with the experience of something, such as a social problem, and then works backwards (retroductively) to explain what is happening, or what the causal mechanisms are. This process of retroduction involves theory building from empirical data, while drawing from pre-existing knowledge and experiences of the same phenomenon from the literature. *Abduction* is ‘theoretically redescribing or recontextualising’ the phenomenon in question

whereas *retroduction* is a thought operation in which the researcher postulates the 'relevant causal mechanisms that may account for' the phenomenon in question (Hoddy, 2019, pp. 113-114). In practice, however, retroduction and abduction can be similar and overlap (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016)

Grounded Theory (GT) has been proposed as a useful methodology for synthesising data and making inferences about the conditions, processes and causal mechanisms relating to both abductive and retroductive reasoning (Kempster & Parry, 2014). As a methodology with growing popularity, Grounded Theory resonates with CR since by following a GT methodology, the researcher moves from data collected empirically to the development of abstract theory - in a similar way that Critical Realists are expected to move from empirical data to causal explanations through the careful development of concepts, theories, and mechanisms.

Grounded Theory fills an important methodological gap for CR meta-theory, since it provides what it needs most: a *methodology*. GT techniques can support the collection of data, coding and analysis stages of research project underpinned by a CR meta-theory (Hoddy, 2019, p. 111). GT therefore serves to support the ontological framework provided by CR with a method of producing data for analysis and investigation.

Grounded Theory

Kathy Charmaz (2014) provides an early history of Grounded Theory as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). She describes a tension between quantitative and qualitative methods in the 1960s, while much qualitative research at the time remained 'opaque' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7). Glaser and Strauss (1967) began to refocus qualitative methods upon the analysis process; giving their data a specific analytic treatment, they began developing

theories from research being grounded in the qualitative data they had collected, rather than deducing testable hypotheses or building from existing theories (ibid, p. 7). At the time it was difficult to get any research work taken seriously without quantitative measures to persuade outside audiences and much of the debate around methods centred on the objectivity and replicability of the research, which made justifying qualitative methods a challenge (Charmaz, 2014). Glaser and Strauss (1967) provided a systematic strategy for qualitative research practice, this may have gone unnoticed given the dominance of quantitative research at the time, nevertheless their work gained symbolic and practical relevance amongst qualitative researchers. Glaser and Strauss (1967) aimed to move qualitative analysis away from descriptive studies towards 'explanatory theoretical frameworks' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 8). They recommended:

- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses,
- Using the constant comparison method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis,
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis,
- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps,
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction (theoretical sampling), not for population representativeness, and
- Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

Towards a Critical Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT) has been a popular, but often uncritically accepted methodology (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 258). It has been argued that with a GT approach, theory was simply there to be discovered and would somehow emerge from an analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Belfrage and Hauf (2017, p. 259) have argued that a further *Critical* approach has been missing from the epistemological position of GT. This need for criticality is where CR contributes.

Hoddy (2019) argues that GT has now moved into closer alignment with CR. Whereas early Grounded Theorists have previously resisted conducting literature reviews prior to data collection, contemporary GT allows researchers to draw on their 'pre-existing theoretical knowledge, hunches and hypotheses' as necessary starting points and building blocks for the development of further theory (Hoddy, 2019, p. 114). Contemporary GT has already moved in this direction as practitioners have already had to deal with the logical problem that theories cannot be generated by induction alone.

Roy Bhaskar defines *ontology* as the 'philosophical study of being' and *epistemology* as 'the philosophical study of knowledge' (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 23). Since both ontology and epistemology are crucial to any understanding of CR, GT needs a critical reworking so that the two approaches can connect. Hence, I shall now explore the concept *Critical* Grounded Theory.

Critical Grounded Theory

Belfrage and Hauf (2017) have argued that as a theoretical 'position,' CR is useful for studying organisations, but that it needs a suitable methodology. It is for this reason that they

have proposed Critical Grounded Theory (CGT) as a suitable methodology to combine with CR (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017). Moreover, Belfrage and Hauf (2017) have suggested that CGT methodology can benefit Critical Realist philosophy when applied to organisation studies. Applying CGT to CR in this way may not solve every meta-theoretical argument, but it does help to develop a critical methodology that is useful for the study of organisations and other social phenomena (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 252). Hence, Critical Grounded Theory (CGT) reworks GT as a study of organisations to make it compatible with the ontology and epistemology of CR (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 258).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocated for a purist approach to GT, analysing the data without first being prejudiced by reading any related literature; thus, in traditional GT the researcher is encouraged to 'bracket' out theory (Charmaz, 1994, 2014). However, for Critical Realists, theory is essential to understanding the context of an organisation and for the researcher to recognise in themselves the social antagonisms and moral concerns that drive the need to explain these social problems; moreover, for Critical Realists the researcher is not a 'disinterested observer,' but an active member of the society they wish to study (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 259).

Since I have also taken a CR perspective, I recognise that the pure form of GT is not a suitable methodology for my doctoral thesis; I recognise that I am influenced by moral and social concerns to the social problem I perceive and have developed what Belfrage and Hauf (2017) refer to as 'proto-theories' to explain the phenomena in question (p. 254). Belfrage and Hauf (2017, p. 254) argue that these 'proto-theories' turn into initial conceptualisations and explanations about a social problem, which are later revised and developed. Thus, we cannot study reality without acknowledging our extant knowledge about it; furthermore, this is how ontology and epistemology should connect leading to a *Critical* approach to GT –

acknowledging our positionality and the prior understandings we bring to any analysis of reality and its mechanisms.

Kempster and Parry (2014, p. 11) have applied a CR ontology together with a GT methodology using abductive reasoning to look for generative 'causal powers' that explain the phenomena of leadership learning within a social context. They sought to explain the 'lived experiences' of managers, to identify the causal powers that shape leadership learning in particular contexts (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 11). Thus, Kempster and Parry (2014, p. 8) have argued that a *Critical* GT can be applied to develop an 'integrative picture or story' that can explain a phenomenon.

Kempster and Parry (2014, p. 88) have described how researchers can apply theory to the data they have collected to 'illuminate and/or suggest *generative causal powers* as well as context-specific *causal powers*.' Furthermore, they suggest that researchers may apply *retroduction* to develop theories to explain these 'generative causal powers' (ibid, p. 88). *Retroduction* (also called *abduction* or *abductive inference*) is defined as 'the activity of theorizing and testing for hidden causal mechanisms responsible for manifesting the empirical, observable world' (Jagosh, 2020, p. 121). Using an *iterative* approach (i.e. involving repetition) to data analysis, a researcher can develop proto-theories to explain the causal powers, or mechanisms in their qualitative data (Kempster & Parry, 2014). Kempster and Parry (2014) describe applying a *retroductive*, *iterative* dynamic within their thematic analyses, by firstly making sense of the data and generating possible initial themes, secondly reading the relevant literature that suggests potential themes, and thirdly by revisiting their data to question their initial interpretations (i.e. looking at the data again with a fresh perspective). Kempster and Parry (2014) have sought out potential themes for the causal powers (mechanisms) identified in their data by seeking out relevant literature; in their 2014 paper, this included identifying and applying 'social learning theory' to their data (Bandura &

Walters, 1977). In this thesis I have also applied theoretical frameworks from existing literature relating to Chinese guanxi (Chen & Chen, 2012, p. 415), this has helped to develop theory to explain the mechanisms I have identified at the cultural and social levels.

By referring to extant literature, for example literature relating to Chinese culture and then returning to the data, I have been able to develop new theories in this thesis to explain the mechanisms I have identified in the data. By referring to existing theory during the data analysis process, my theory development has been influenced by that theory and builds upon it. For a Critical Realist, causal powers or mechanisms must vary between differing contexts, and there may be similar mechanisms in operation, or different mechanisms, in different contexts. In this thesis, understanding the context is essential, since the research has been conducted in an organisation that is infused with Chinese national culture - an inescapable feature of the 'contextual layers' of an organisation (Pawson, 2013, p. 60).

Researcher reflexivity and Critical Grounded Theory

In the study of education, Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) argue that researchers should pay attention to value questions as a matter of course in their methodologies. They argue that to achieve an 'ethically reflexive sociology of education,' (p. 147) researchers should:

- Be explicit about the value assumptions and evaluative judgements that inform their research,
- Be prepared to defend their assumptions and judgements to the extent that they might not be shared by others,
- Take seriously the practical dilemmas of the people they are researching, and

- Take responsibility for the political and ethical implications of their research (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2006, pp. 147-148).

With this doctoral thesis I have sought out apparently unjust social structures, such as insider networks and Chinese guanxi, as well as what I perceive to be unfair processes and mechanisms within an organisation. As such, my agenda is emancipatory in its focus, being about freeing those IAS who are trapped in what some perceive to be an unfair and unjust organisation. I am looking to confront any social injustices I find and have been clear about these perceived injustices without softening the language or engaging in censorship. Gewirtz and Cribb (2006, p. 148) argue that to be 'ethically reflexive,' researchers should take responsibility for 'the political and ethical implications' of their research. It has become clear to me that there are substantial risks to both myself and my participants when exposing a less than flattering view of the organisation, both considering the political climate in China, with nationalism 'long ingrained' in the Chinese Communist Party's ideology and identity (Doshi, 2021, p. 27), and the potential for recriminations weighed upon both my participants and myself.

Methodological consequences: Critical Realism with Critical Grounded Theory

Hoddy (2019) has demonstrated how Grounded Theory (GT) methodological techniques can address the ontological demands of Critical Realism (CR). Hoddy (2019) writes that since CR is relatively new, empirical research applying a CR meta-theory has only just begun to emerge, this means that applied Critical Realists continue to find only a limited number of methodological templates. Hoddy (2019) has provided an example of a CR framework with GT as a methodological approach, this illustrative study demonstrates the

use of GT techniques together with a CR meta-theory for the social sciences (Hoddy, 2019, p. 11). Using coding techniques to identify and postulate CR mechanisms, Hoddy (2019, p. 12) shows how GT can be applied within a CR meta-theory.

As explained earlier, Kempster and Parry (2014) argue that CR ontology is understood best through the actions of one or more *Mechanisms*, or causal powers, the *Contexts* within which these mechanisms operate, and the *Outcomes*. The concept of *causes*, or causal mechanisms, is central within this explanatory framework. Within Kempster and Parry (2014)'s research, there are contexts with structures, but agents and entities also have their mechanisms, both internal and external, including structure and agency. Kempster and Parry (2014) attempt to describe this phenomenon, as well as the causal powers that produce it, to develop *and test* theories and concepts to explain how causal powers shape events at the human level.

Testing, Kempster and Parry (2014) argue, is a significant step, since Bhaskar (1978) has argued for the need to test the theories developed by Critical Realists, against a pragmatic common referent, to check that the theory produced 'seems to fit the practice of experience' (Kempster & Parry, 2014). To put this simply, the explanations provided by CR theory should make sense in light of the experience of those with knowledge of the case.

Without Critical Realism, GT has not proved valuable when attempting to justify reliability and validity (Kempster & Parry, 2014). To overcome this challenge, Kempster and Parry (2014) argue that CR can be used within GT as a complementary retroductive approach with CR-informed steps. These steps help when moving from simple coding to linking categories, from which a story is developed to provide an explanation for the phenomenon (Kempster & Parry, 2014).

An important step when integrating CR with GT is to develop the awareness of a 'stratified reality,' furthermore that empirical data is influenced by 'underlying mechanisms'

(Kempster & Parry, 2014). By drawing on existing ideas and theories, explanations can be generated either empirically from the data or suggested to be occurring. In this way, theories are postulated to explain social processes, and these theories are 'offered up' for critique by other researchers, to confirm the usefulness of these theories for other contexts, transferring these theories to different contexts thereby confirm their validity (Kempster & Parry, 2014). This framework provides a structure for a CR-informed GT, demonstrating the logic of the development of the retroductive argument.

For Kempster and Parry (2014), Critical Realist GT seeks to develop an explanation of social processes and practices by identifying *generative causal powers* that shape such processes and practices. Secondly, it explains how these generative causal powers are contingent upon local emergent causal powers. When these explanations are developed, they should be analysed for their plausibility and tested for their rigour when implemented into an evolving analysis (Kempster & Parry, 2014).

Grounded Theory and empirical research

Pure GT methodology is intended to be an exploratory approach, requiring the researcher to enter the analysis stage without preconceptions from existing theoretical knowledge before collecting data about a general phenomenon. The collected data are then compared and coded, concepts and categories are then connected to generate a theory that should 'emerge' from the data (Hoddy, 2019, p. 114). Some theorists detract from the idea that there is compatibility between GT and CR since it is challenging for the researcher to identify emergent theory from the data, questioning whether theory can 'emerge' from the data at all. Furthermore, *pure* GT denies the role of pre-existing theory from the outset,

making it a challenge for the researcher to identify underlying mechanisms, therefore to identify mechanisms a theoretical foundation may prove transformative (Hoddy, 2019).

Despite these reservations and objections to applying GT methodology within a CR theoretical framework, Oliver (2012) has identified that there are several areas of agreement between GT and CR including contemporary developments within GT that have moved the methodology towards a 'family' of methods (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) that can operate with a variety of epistemologies (Hoddy, 2019, p. 113).

GT can be applied to get at meanings and implicit actions which might not be registered with empirical data, in a way that has recently brought GT into the realm of inference covered within CR. For example, contemporary approaches to GT allow the researcher to draw on 'pre-existing theoretical knowledge, hunches and hypotheses' to develop the initial building blocks for the development of theory (Oliver, 2012, p. 10). This contemporary approach to GT - starting with 'pre-existing theoretical knowledge' to develop more abstract theories - has grown in popularity in recent years, since researchers have recognised that induction *alone* cannot generate theories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

The ethnographic approach

Ethnography is a social research method whose meaning can vary and overlap with other approaches, therefore a simple definition has so far been elusive (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 1). Ethnographic research involves the study of culture and behaviour, and has its origins in social anthropology, the study of societies 'different from one's own,' but since ethnographers began to research within western societies, ethnography has broadened to include western 'case study' organisations (ibid, p. 1). The meaning of ethnography has been reinterpreted and recontextualised over time, having a 'complex and shifting role' in the

social sciences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 2). Sidestepping the task of providing a definition, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue it is simpler to ask 'what do ethnographers do?' They answer:

> Ethnographers 'participate, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 2)

Of the naturalistic approaches, I considered ethnography to be the most suitable for my project because it is an approach which places in the foreground the 'subjective consciousness' of experience (Cohen et al., 2017, section 11.1). Furthermore, the ethnographic paradigm assumes:

- Meaning arises out of social situations and is handled through interpretive process,
- Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic,
- Knower and known are interactive, inseparable,
- The attribution of meaning is continuous and evolving over time (Cohen et al., 2017, section 11.1).

Key elements of ethnographic research include the intention 'to create as vivid a reconstruction as possible of the culture or groups being studied' (Cohen et al., 2017, section 11.1), so that:

- The world view of the participants is investigated and represented,
- Meanings are accorded to phenomena by both the researcher and the participants,
- The research is holistic: it seeks a description and interpretation of total phenomena,
- There is a move from description and data to inference, explanation, suggestions of causation and theory generation (Cohen et al., 2017, section 11.1).

Each of the above descriptions of ethnographic research paradigm rings true for my understanding of the methodological approach to this doctoral thesis.

Reflexivity and ethnography

Both positivism and naturalism assume that it is possible to isolate social data, uncontaminated by the researcher, by turning him/her into an automaton or neutral vessel – neither of which are possible in social research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 15). But since researchers are an inseparable part of the social world they study, the orientation of the social researcher will be shaped by their own histories, values and interests (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, the consequences of ethnographic social research are not value neutral - perhaps supporting one or another political viewpoint. It is therefore necessary to recognise the influence of the researcher, reflexively, but also that this reflexivity does not undermine the researcher's efforts to produce knowledge (ibid, p. 15)

Conclusion

In Part 1 of this Methodology section, I have argued for a combination of two approaches: a Grounded Theory (GT) methodology with a Critical Realist meta-theoretical

framework. GT has been shown to be an effective methodology whose strength is shown through the generation of codes and themes for the analysis of qualitative data. CR is a contemporary meta-theory for the social sciences that has been in search of a suitable methodological partner with which it can be combined to develop theory through the identification of suitable mechanisms (Hoddy, 2019). CR and GT seem well matched, but as Hoddy (2019) has pointed out there have been few examples, with the exception of Kempster and Parry (2014), of a successful combination of the two approaches.

The combination of CR with GT may create a stronger union than each in isolation since without a CR framework, GT cannot show how theory is developed from data (i.e. without *retroduction*), furthermore without a GT methodology, a CR meta-theoretical framework cannot produce themes or perform an effective analysis of qualitative data, being primarily a meta-theoretical position (about the need for an *ontology* among other things) rather than a methodology (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). Themes identified via GT alone cannot lead *inductively* to theory development, requiring instead the *ontological* framework provided by CR (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Having connected two strong approaches, each of whose strength depends upon the other and with a scarcity of examples in the literature of this approach being applied in research, this thesis contributes to the development of knowledge with an innovative approach, being a combination of two innovative approaches to the challenge of social science. Now that I have established my ground in the selected methodological area, I shall continue to explain how the project was designed including the specific methods and tools used to collect and analyse the data.

PART TWO: DEVELOPING & DELIVERING CREDIBLE RESEARCH

One of the key criticisms of ethnography is the lack of generalisability of the findings to different contexts, in fact not all qualitative research is intended to be generalisable (Falk & Guenther, 2021). Qualitative researchers can, however, seek 'analytic generalisation' in which a theory that is developed in one context is applied in another and that case supports the same theory so that 'replication' of that theory can be claimed (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 543). Qualitative studies often have what has been called 'face generalisability,' where there is no reason not to believe that the results could apply more generally to similar settings (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 551).

Evaluating qualitative research has proved a challenge, since there is little agreement on the nature of evaluation in qualitative research, and there continues to be an impact of traditional positivist evaluation criteria on qualitative research (Cho, 2017). Quantitative methods are understood to have well-established strategies and methods whereas qualitative research is 'still growing and becoming more differentiated in methodological approaches' (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 311); furthermore, it is often argued that qualitative research should not be assessed using the same evaluation criteria used for quantitative research, since the methodologies differ.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 219) provide criteria for evaluating naturalistic inquiry, including: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, where the 'degree of transferability' answers the question whether a working hypothesis developed in one context may apply in a second. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 124) suggests that this degree of transferability depends on the similarity between the two contexts, what they call the 'fittingness'. Understanding that this 'fittingness' is so essential for an effective evaluation of qualitative research, it seems more important to accurately and completely describe the

selection of a sample to achieve transferability, rather than seeking a larger sample size (Mackenzie, 1994, p. 779). Qualitative researchers may often apologise for the small sample sizes used in their research, when this argument misses the point of qualitative research – the objective is an appropriate selection and description of the sample to achieve an improved transferability (Mackenzie, 1994). Furthermore, Mackenzie (1994, p. 548) argues that the value of a qualitative study may depend on its *lack* of statistical generalisability, i.e. not being 'representative of a larger population,' since the selected case should highlight a specific population or 'extreme case,' making a contribution to theory precisely *because* it highlights a social process that is less likely to exist in other groups.

Generalisability and transferability

It may be problematic to suggest that the findings of qualitative research can be generalised to further contexts (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 549), and external generalisation (to other cases) assumes that the case study was a sample drawn from a larger 'universe' of similar cases. Seeking this 'statistical generalisability' misses the point of qualitative research, which is that the theories developed may be applied as 'heuristics for other studies' (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 549), in other words, that they are transferable. Therefore, 'transferability' has become the usual term for this approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The reader of qualitative or case study research may apply the findings of such research to her context through an interpretation, and theory developed in one context may be exported to another context, without making general statements about every context (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Since I have argued for the importance of describing the sample *selection* process carefully, I shall dedicate much of this section to that topic.

In the following section I shall describe my reasons for selecting the organisation as a case study, my positionality as a researcher and gaining access, how I developed trust and how and why I selected the participants I did. Moreover, I shall describe the participant group, ethics considerations and how consent was gained.

In these sections, I will draw upon evaluative criteria for qualitative research including credibility, transferability, and dependability. With this evaluation it is hoped that I can provide evidence for the transferability of this research to further organisational settings and contexts.

Reasons for selecting the case study organisation

Much of qualitative research emphasises the uniqueness of the group of individuals in question (Cohen et al., 2017, section 8.9). Since in this study I do not seek to generalise to a wider population, as a quantitative researcher would, Cohen et al. (2017, section 8.9) argue it does not make sense to describe a 'sample'. The selection of the case study organisation for this thesis is based on its 'fitness for purpose,' and since I am applying a grounded theory methodology, this thesis seeks to analyse the data until 'theoretical saturation' is reached (Cohen et al., 2017, section 8.9). Geertz (1973) argues that the size of the selected sample should be large enough to generate a 'thick description,' without overloading due to a sample of participants that proves too large to study practically with qualitative analysis methods (cited in Cohen et al., 2017, section 8.9).

The organisation has been selected specifically to answer the Research Questions holistically within the relevant area of interest, as Verschuren (2003, p. 124) advises. It is a unique example of what Adelman, Kemmis, and Jenkins (1980) refer to as a 'study of an instance in action' (cited in Cohen et al., 2017, section 14.1), including 'real people in real

situations' that help to answer the Research Questions proposed for this doctoral thesis (Cohen et al., 2017, section 14.1),

The case study method has excellent potential, given the large range of experiences IAS in the organisation have relating to the PC. It provides the opportunity to produce a 'rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case,' blending a 'description of events with the analysis of them,' and focuses on 'individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events' (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 317). The case study method provides the opportunity to portray 'what it is like' to work within the organisation in the situations relating to the research questions, to gain a 'thick description' of the participants' lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings for a situation (Geertz, 1973, p. 6).

The 'single case study' method enables the researcher to 'focus on a critical case,' for revelatory findings, being an opportunity to research within a Chinese IJVU, an under-researched area (Yin, 2009, p. 46). The case study organisation was selected as a unique Chinese IJVU since it has the potential for such revelatory findings; furthermore, at the time the study began, the case study organisation employed over 100 long-term IAS (those with more than 3 years' experience).

My positionality as insider researcher

The selected case study organisation is an appropriate choice for me since I consider myself to be an organisational insider, having worked for many years within a Chinese IJVU as a member of International Academic Staff (IAS). I have extensive knowledge of the organisational context, having in-depth understanding for the personal issues likely to be raised by the participants. Being also an expatriate in China, I can empathise with their experiences and have extensive contextual information relating to the topics they are likely to

discuss, although this does mean I might not be fully neutral and must be aware of my biases (Rose, 1985). It also means that although I am part of the wider culture under study, my views or experience might not always consistent with those of my participants (Asselin, 2003, p. 100) and that I must conduct my analysis with my 'eyes open,' 'bracketing' my assumptions from the study, if this is possible. It is likely, for example, that insider language, acronyms and unspoken insider understandings may be shared between myself and the participants; these shared understandings are unlikely to be explored by an 'outsider' researcher to the same depth, and participants might be more willing to share their experiences with a researcher they feel is 'one of us' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58). For example, unspoken gestures, silences or nods to implicit knowledge have been shared between the participants and myself, relating to the necessities and challenges of working in China as an expatriate, in addition to many more unspoken understandings relating to the organisation. In this regard, I realise and 'enjoy the privilege of' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 57) having access to, and sharing, the experiences of long-term IAS such as myself, and I am bound to represent their concerns both respectfully and responsibly.

My role as insider-researcher

My role as a Senior Teaching Fellow within the management division of a Chinese Business School has given me an insider status within the selected case-study organisation, as a professional 'insider' in addition to 'insider-researcher' (Asselin, 2003; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). There may be conflicts between these two insider roles, and trust issues attached to these conflicts and overlaps. I may be trusted more than an 'outsider' researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58) and participants may share more with me because they assume (perhaps correctly) that I sympathise more with their case as a professional insider and member of IAS

with similar experiences. This is an advantageous position, but also a role that comes with considerable responsibility for the information the participants decide to share with me. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 59) argue that there may be downsides to conducting research as an insider, since an outsider-researcher can be more objective, where an insider-researcher might become too personally involved in the complexities of the organisation to be able to appreciate the bigger picture, objectively. This argument may be summarised as: not being a member of a group may better facilitate an understanding for that group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

For objectivity, Asselin (2003) argues, I should attempt to separate my expectations and past experiences, beliefs and emotions from the data; therefore I have used a continual process of self-reflection. I should also comment on the contextual setting of those comments, where appropriate. A quote, on its own, may not indicate the full 'contextual influences' (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 551) of what a participant wanted to express. A continual process of self-reflection, as recommended by Tilley, Chambers, and Mackenzie (1996) is essential when researching as an insider within a peer group; furthermore, it helps to record and acknowledge my feelings about the data collected in writing, as I have done. This method of self-reflection helps to develop what Tilley et al. (1996, p. 267) refer to as a 'position of critical suspicion'. These reflective accounts serve to supplement the interview data and to contextualise the analysis.

Gaining access to and developing trust with the case study organisation

Both access to the organisation and ethical approval were gained without hindrance or difficulty; furthermore, I lived conveniently near to the organisation. However, proximity and familiarity as an insider-researcher can put the trustworthiness or validity of the study at risk,

being open to accusations of prejudice or bias (Asselin, 2003, p. 100). Self-reflection, Tilley et al. (1996) argue, is an essential practice to stay objective, separating out my personal reflections from the data. Over the time I have known the organisation, I have developed relationships with other IAS, acting as both professional insider and insider-researcher. At times it could be argued that I may have become too close to some of the participants to retain an objective, unbiased and dispassionate distance from them (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55); however, Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 59) argue that a researcher does not have to be an insider member of a group to understand the participants' experiences. Trust is a key issue when conducting research of this nature, both gaining the trust of the participants and earning the perceived trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Asselin, 2003, p. 99). Therefore it is important to accurately represent the participants' experiences whilst 'bracketing out' the researcher's assumptions and biases (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55).

Ethical considerations

Reich (2021, p. 4) argues that researchers should develop respect for our informants and for ourselves, motivated by an intention to avoid causing harm. Conducting insider research raises several issues and the researcher should be aware that 'research can cause harm to individuals and communities, and at times, the researchers themselves' (Reich, 2021, p. 4). Through a desire to collect the experiences of people we perceive to be marginalised, an insider researcher may unintentionally harm the very people we seek to liberate (Compton, Meadow, & Schilt, 2018, p. 5). In particular, Hanson and Richards (2017, p. 607) argue, researchers who may be at personal risk should resist the impulse to 'go it alone' and should seek support from other researchers to ensure they are protected from harm. The only true ethical approach may be to aim to 'protect the humanity' of our participants (Reich, 2021, p.

4), including each other, since as professional insiders and insider researchers we may find that we may also become unintentionally harmed.

As a professional insider, I have built up a network of colleagues with similar concerns and viewpoints, who may be more likely to agree to participate given a personal connection with me. These colleagues may be more willing to contribute a point of view if they believe it is similar to my own, raising potential concerns or objections to the credibility of the project (Serrant-Green, 2002). Conversely, as Acker (2001, 'insiders and outsiders') has argued, I may be better placed to position myself as 'the outsider within,' cultivating an 'attitude of distance' from my participants, rather than treating myself as an insider. Acker (2001) argues that each individual may have multiple subjectivities (e.g. gender, ethnicity, political views), so that we can be 'both insider and outsider simultaneously' - an argument which does rather inconveniently muddy the waters.

Participants in this study have been invited to participate of their free will, without coercion. It should *not* be assumed that the IAS who chose to take part did so because they expected to share a viewpoint similar to my own, since in most cases they will have been unaware of my viewpoint about the issues raised within the interview; furthermore, in practice many of the participants expressed views I had not expected and views I did not share. As mentioned earlier, I have kept a reflective diary to record and mitigate any personal views I may have about the participants' experiences and perspectives. Writing this journal has helped me to retain a level of objectivity, since I have been aiming for a form of detachment by bracketing out my personal views, as Asselin (2003, p. 100) recommends.

I shall explain how the anonymity of the participants was ensured in the 'informed consent' section below. Participants remained anonymous to each other. Although private offices were used for the interviews, at no time were rooms reserved for the purposes of these interviews, therefore no secretaries, central room booking systems, or IT staff could have

identified who was meeting me for the purposes of any of the research interviews. Official permission from the authorities was not required for any private meetings on campus since the employees were already permitted to be on campus. I shall describe the recording and transcription process later in this section.

Informed consent

Written, informed consent was obtained from the participants. Each participant was emailed a standardised invitation to participate in the research, including a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and consent form (both can be found in the appendices). Informed consent was sought in a way that participants could agree to take part without duress. Participants were informed about the recording and storage of interviews, and no incentives were offered. Only one recording was made per participant. Participants have been fully informed in an open manner with full disclosure, without subterfuge or deception, about the project. Participants were told that they have the right to withdraw at any time. There exist potential risks for the participants, for example any participant who is identified to have made a statement critical of the case study organisation may potentially jeopardise their career progression prospects; however, these risks are mitigated through treating the comments of each participant anonymously. Any identifying information about the participants has been treated confidentially. However, to comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) about the storage of personal data, participants have the right to access any personal data that is stored about them (BERA, 2011, p. 8). Names have not been used, but a code for participants has been recorded for each interview (WUSTL, 2011); in addition, each MP3 file is identifiable by date. Transcripts of the recordings were provided to the participants to check for accuracy when requested.

Given the sensitivity of content, additional strategies have been put in place to manage the risks outlined above in relation to confidentiality. However as Bryman and Bell (2015) have pointed out, to some extent all information is compromised (p. 127). Questions were designed to prevent harm to the participants, who were informed of the potential risks to them, and given the opportunity to withdraw (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 130). A consent form was provided, including an understanding that words 'may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs, but [names] will not be used' (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 135). Although the case-study organisation has not been named in the final report, it may be possible for a reader to surmise from the accompanying list of references which IJVU is being referred to, and participants have been made aware of this possibility.

Purposeful selection of participants

The sort of sampling usually conducted in qualitative research is referred to as either 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 62; Strauss, 1987, p. 38), 'purposeful sampling' (Patton, 2014), or 'purposeful selection' (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Some qualitative researchers prefer the term 'selection' rather than sampling, as Maxwell and Chmiel (2014, p. 553) argue, since to 'sample' implies a quantitative approach where a 'sample' should be representative of the population. In this thesis, as in most qualitative research, the sample is not intended to be representative of the larger population, since each of the participants has their own unique perspectives which are not generalisable, therefore I prefer to refer to a process of purposeful selection. Furthermore, a 'purposeful selection' of the appropriate sort of participants helps to understand the varied heterogeneity amongst each of the participants' viewpoints, treating them as individuals. It also allows those who are most willing to make a

contribution the opportunity to share their views about the phenomena studied (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 553).

I am interested in theory development and in extending knowledge, to encompass all perspectives, therefore I consider it my responsibility to include every invited IAS who has a point of view that they would like to share and have expressed a clear wish to do so. To develop theory, including different opinions and perspectives is essential, rather than only collecting perspectives that match with my own. Therefore, I invited all of the approximately 100 IAS, each with at least three years' experience, who did not to my knowledge at the time have management responsibility. I was not very concerned about the practicalities of interviewing and transcribing such a large number of participant interviews, partly because I had identified a software application that would transcribe the interviews with a high level of accuracy, quickly, reliably and cheaply.

Out of the 100 invited, a total of 16 long term IAS agreed to take part in this study. The participant group became less gender-balanced, given there are more males than females in the overall sample. Despite this lack of gender diversity, the larger number of participants does mean a greater diversity of viewpoints and nationality.

Selection criteria

International Academic Staff (IAS) are considered to be 'academic' since they engage with teaching, research or scholarship within their field (Fowler, 2017). Participants have been identified according to convenience (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 146) by using an academic staff list provided by the organisation, including the year they joined and selecting only those IAS with three years or more of service. Only these long-term IAS have been selected since significant time will have elapsed leading to the potential for

psychological contract breach, as Morrison and Robinson (1997, p. 251) suggest. These long-term IAS will also share common experiences, contributing towards the necessary 'comprehensive, complete, and saturated' development of theory (Morse, 1999, p. 5).

Each staff member has a unique staff code, the first two digits of which identifies the year they joined the organisation. This selection process resulted in a total of 100 people. I invited the entire selection of 100 IAS, by email, with the understanding that only those IAS who were sensitive to the issue of concern and willing to reveal their insights on the subject would respond. It is also likely that some IAS might decline to be interviewed because of their responsibilities, including teaching, administrative, marking and research. I have left it to them to make the decision. The selected 100 IAS have at least three years' employment at the IJVU, enabling them to draw from a sufficient range of experiences of potential PC breach than new members of staff. Of the 100 staff invited, 16 IAS agreed to take part. Several IAS who were invited have stated they would like to participate when reminded in person but did not respond by email. In such cases I did not follow up with any candidate, instead focusing on those who did agree without a reminder. In my professional experience nobody appreciates feeling pressured, even if it does sometimes get results participants may agree first but then regret it later and back out. I needed enthusiastic supporters for my project, and I was fortunate enough to find them.

Why did International Academic Staff choose to participate?

Based on the interviews I conducted and the conversations following those interviews, I have collected a few reasons the participants gave for deciding to take part. Some IAS chose to participate because they wanted to express an opinion about the PC and to make a contribution towards furthering knowledge, others are either current or former doctoral

students and are interested in learning about the methodological approach I have taken. Some have contributed as a personal favour to me, perhaps with the expectation that by contributing they may be able to influence changes in the organisation, either to further their personal agenda or that of the organisation.

Exclusion criteria

Chinese academic staff were excluded from the selection list. The key inclusion criteria for participants in this study is to be international, meaning they must be foreign to the host nation. I have interpreted being 'international' to mean that the participants cannot be Chinese nationals, including those returning from overseas. Foreign, non-Chinese IAS have been selected, because of the unique challenges they have experienced, challenges that will be explored in this thesis. A comparative study of both Chinese and non-Chinese staff would expand the possible themes to an unmanageable level and would not suit the selected methodology (it would not be an ethnography). I also considered focusing specifically on a select group of nationalities, for example only UK, US, Australian, or Canadian staff, given their assumed similar national cultures and native language. However, there are several weaknesses to this approach since it assumes homogeneity within the national cultures, for example, a UK passport might be held by IAS from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and there may be greater cultural diversity between a US and UK participant than similarities.

Inclusion of International Academic Staff with management responsibility

I considered whether it would be appropriate to include IAS with management responsibility in the selected sample of participants for this project, given the sensitive nature

of their roles relating to the promotion of staff (including myself) and the sensitive information they have access to. Managers may be less willing to contribute with their personal opinions, since for them to share personal viewpoints may be risky for their careers (i.e. they could be fired). I initially considered that it would be better to exclude IAS with management responsibility but encountered a few practical difficulties with this decision. Firstly, I had been approached by a few IAS with management responsibility who expressed an interest in taking part, and secondly that it was difficult to ascertain, using the list of staff provided by the organisation, who currently had management responsibility and who did not. Many of the contacts I have made in the organisation do have some form of management responsibility, as module leader or programme director for example. I considered that it would be unfair to discount the experiences of staff who have had management experience in the past, or currently. Furthermore, since I could not identify who had management responsibility and who did not, I decided *not* to exclude IAS managers, but to give them the opportunity to include (or exclude) themselves, as they saw fit. I also discovered that at least one of the IAS I had already interviewed had management responsibility that I was not aware of, proving it would be difficult to separate out managers from non-managers. The ball, I decided, was in their court - to make the ethical decision themselves. Managers may choose not to answer a question or can choose to excuse themselves from the project. I decided to invite every IAS, including former and current managers.

Criticisms and limitations of the selection process

A pertinent criticism to the process of selection described above might be that the IAS who have agreed to participate are simply less busy and more sympathetic to me as an insider-researcher. This may skew the results towards the experiences of those who have

fewer responsibilities or a personal connection with me. However, I doubt that within this diverse group of IAS they could be swayed by my personal viewpoints, even if they knew them. Nevertheless, in each interview I have sought to 'bracket out' my personal views (Asselin, 2003) and have remained an unbiased listener (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), I certainly have not shared my personal views on any of the questions I have asked with the participants.

Selection of the participant group

Cohen et al. (2017) have argued that appropriate data sampling is an important measure of the quality of a piece of research. However, approaches to sampling differ dependent on whether the research being conducted is either quantitative or qualitative. When conducting *quantitative* research, data is sampled from a larger subset - the total population - with a view to obtaining a representative sample. The representativeness of the sample obtained is arguably a good measure of the quality of that research and therefore a quantitative researcher must focus on obtaining a sample of an appropriate size. There is no definitive answer to how large this sample size must be. Cohen et al. (2017) advise that for quantitative research, a larger sample is generally preferable for the purposes of the statistical tests associated with quantitative methods, recommending a sample size of at least 30; however, this number is a rule of thumb and not set in stone. Furthermore, this proposed sample size should not be assumed to apply to *qualitative* research, for which a representativeness of the total population is *not* sought, rather the sample is selected for its appropriateness to the research questions asked (Cohen et al., 2017).

With qualitative research, a sample should be selected for meeting a unique set of characteristics, for example in this thesis I have selected only IAS with three years' experience of working in the case study organisation. It is more accurate to describe this

sampling approach as 'theoretical,' with a sample decided upon through a process of the *selection* of a group of individuals who are selected for their appropriateness to the research, as it is with Grounded Theory (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 223). Since the purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of a unique group of people rather than to generalise them, it follows that the question of whether the sample is representative of the wider population is arguably irrelevant (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 223).

That said, the selection of a group of people must be sufficiently large so that any new data collected does not result in a modified theory (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 222). With theoretical sampling, the researcher requires sufficient data to generate a theory, and no more. The research continues gathering more data until the theory remains unchanged, or until no further modifications are made. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 45) refer to this eventual state as 'theoretical saturation,' when no additional data are found that advance, modify, qualify, extend, or add to the theory developed (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 223). In this thesis, I have followed Glaser and Strauss (1967) Grounded Theory approach, in which the data collected is considered sufficient when any new data collected does not produce, modify, or extend the theory that has already been developed (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 93).

Of a total approximately 650 academic staff employed at the case study organisation (2019 staff list), the number of IAS with over three years' tenure (2019) was 100 (calculated by using IAS who appeared on the 2015 staff list). Of these selected IAS, 16 candidates were interviewed in total. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this report to protect the identities of the participants.

Interview protocol design

First, I drafted an introductory message to be read out at the start of each interview. This introductory message explains the topic of the research, and an explanation and definition of the psychological contract. The research questions are clearly stated on the interview protocol, and the interview questions are designed to answer the research questions. The questions are divided into five sections, each with one or two interview questions.

- General questions
- Expectations
- Experiential elements
- Changes/ breaches/ matches and mismatches
- Impacts/ emotional effects

I piloted the interview protocol with selected colleagues to check whether the instructions were articulated well, and that the questions were easy to answer, making clear that none of these trial answers would be used in the final report. I did not trial the questions with any of the participants included in the final study. After piloting a first draft of the interview questions I made changes to the language to make the questions easier to answer. For example, after trialling the interview questions, I found that simple encouragements like ‘tell me more about that’ or ‘really?’ were more effective than the more scripted ‘and why is that important to you?’ since the aim is to persuade the participant to open up and talk more, rather than attempt to guide the conversation. The final interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.

The interview process

Interviews generally regard knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations (Kvale, 2007), being ‘where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee’ (section 1.1). An interview can be seen as an exchange of views between two people on a topic of mutual interest, therefore, the interview is not subjective or objective, but as Laing (1990, p. 66) describes it, ‘intersubjective’. Moreover, an interview is not an ordinary conversation (Cohen et al., 2017, section 21.1), but relies on questions posed by the interviewer where the researcher has the responsibility to set up the rules of the interview. For qualitative research, Kvale (2007, 'conducting an interview') argues, a researcher should regard interviews as an ‘interpersonal encounter,’ meaning that the researcher should engage, understand and interpret the ‘lives and worlds’ of the participants, accepting ambiguity and contradictions. The interview is not an ordinary conversation, being question-based, about which the interviewer may express ignorance to the answers, but the participant may not (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 349). The benefits of interviews, when compared to questionnaires, are that within an interview the interviewer may check for understandings, adapting to the speed of the participant, and can adapt to the different understandings of different people for whom the questions may have different meanings. With an interview, the questioner can go into greater depth, whereby respondents may become more engaged and involved in the interview process (Oppenheim, 2000), leading to the potentially rich generation of data.

To provide structure to my interviews, I followed a standardised script with fixed questions; but to develop the interpersonal side of the encounter, thereby to encourage the participants to elaborate further and to show that I was listening and interested in what they have to say, I have sometimes deviated from this script by making encouraging comments (Cohen et al., 2017, p. 362). These comments varied from the least directive - making encouraging noises - to slightly more directive comments such as “Why is this issue

important to you?" and "How did these experiences impact upon you?" (Appendix D). Throughout the interview conversations I have tried to keep the interviewees engaged by showing that I have been listening to them, repeating back their words, without adding any judgements and remaining blank – without showing an expression that might indicate a personal viewpoint. Furthermore, I have avoided expressing a personal viewpoint, being more interested in theirs. Throughout the conversations I maintained a genuine interest, and avoided showing any approval of the participants' responses, as Arksey and Knight (1999) recommend. Following each interview, I wrote reflective notes to record my impressions.

Throughout the interview process, I have followed scripted questions with several alternative follow-up prompts to encourage elaboration by the participants. The full text of these questions can be found in Appendix D. The benefits of a standardised interview are that respondents will answer the same questions, meaning that their responses are comparable, and the use of the same wording reduces bias effects when several interviews are used. A possible disadvantage of this approach may be that it results in less flexibility when relating the interview to specific individuals and circumstances (Cohen et al., 2017); however, a standardised approach facilitates the more effective organisation and analysis of data.

Each interview lasted about 45 minutes and took place in either the offices of the participants, or my personal office. These closed offices are private spaces where discussions can take place uninterrupted, however we have to assume that academics and 'intellectuals,' including students, are being monitored by the Chinese authorities (Perry, 2020, p. 13). Cohen et al. (2017) proposes that an interview should be a 'social, interpersonal encounter.' However, bearing in mind the political context of interviewing IAS in a Chinese university, these interviews may not reveal the freely expressed views of participants, who may 'self-censor' to protect themselves and others, including myself, as a form of 'social desirability' to portray the organisation in a positive light (Miltiades, 2008, p. 282).

Collection and transcription of interview data

Transcription is a crucial step in the interviewing process, since there is potential for data loss or distortion (Cohen et al., 2017, 'transcribing'). Since the interview has been described as a social encounter, one problem with the transcript is that it does not record this social encounter completely (Cohen et al., 2017). Recording an interview filters out contextual factors, mutual understandings, neglecting the non-visual elements of the interview (Mishler, 1986). In addition, since data has been argued to be 'constructed' during a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), a transcript misses an opportunity to record the interaction between interviewer and interviewee – only recording a text of what the participant has said and missing the depth of the conversation. For example, visual cues such as body language are completely absent. Transcription can represent a change of form from a combination of oral and interpersonal to a very limited text record, and therefore any transcribed data should be understood to be an interpretation. As Kvale (2007, p. 93) puts it, 'transcripts are impoverished decontextualized renderings of interview conversations'.

I recorded the interviews using an iPhone, since I found this method to produce the optimal quality audio file. The quality of a recording becomes very important when transferring files for transcription, since even quiet speakers' words can be more easily discerned when the recording is better quality. Within 24 hours after each interview, the audio files were transferred to my personal iCloud account. These files were not stored in any other locations.

Recordings from my personal iCloud account were subsequently exported to a transcription application called 'Otter' also using an iPhone. Otter has a confidentiality policy relating to the data it stores for transcription purposes. This transcription was subsequently

cleaned for errors and checked for accuracy. I offered participants the opportunity to read through their transcripts and the audio recordings were later deleted. The transcriptions made using Otter were found to be highly accurate even with a broad range of accents, although some terms had to be taught to the application including acronyms, Chinese place names and Chinese words.

I recorded critical reflections after each interview, as Belfrage and Hauf (2017) recommend. This addition of my reflections helps to add depth to the analysis, revealing the contextual connections and additional meanings from an insider-researcher perspective. After transcribing the 16 interviews, and correcting any errors, the interview data was ready for the analysis stage.

Grounded Theory data analysis

When the interview data was ready for analysis, I decided to use Qualitative Data Analysis Software and to follow a Grounded Theory methodology as defined earlier. Since GT is said to be 'iterative' (involving repetition), the researcher must go back and forth between data and analysis, developing theory as they go (Charmaz & Henwood, 2017, p. 248). I used the software to create codes and attempted to develop an explanatory theory, checking that the coding matched the theory I had developed. Since GT 'invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods,' and interacting with the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1), it was essential to ensure that the theory matched the coding. In this way I was able to provide quotes to support my developing theoretical explanations.

With GT the researcher applies theory to the data to 'illuminate or suggest generative causal powers' (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 3). Thus, in this stage I began to generate

theories and mechanisms to account for the data (Charmaz & Henwood, 2017), suggesting generative causal powers (Kempster & Parry, 2014). I began by writing reflections following each interview, to seek an overall impression, identifying patterns or themes (Cohen et al., 2017, section 29.4), I then began creating codes using the qualitative analysis software. Finally, I created pencil sketch diagrams (or 'proto-theories') to describe the generative mechanisms I observed (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 254).

Coding

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software can improve the speed at which large volumes of qualitative data can be handled (Silverman, 2017, chpt. 16). I decided to use Atlas.ti (https://atlasti.com) since it allows several analyses to be conducted and stored using the same dataset, it is more convenient than using a spreadsheet and it is more effective with PDF files and cheaper than the best alternative, NVivo. With Atlas.ti, a QDA project file remains small even with large pdfs, making it less 'laggy' (blogs.warwick.ac.uk/ahariri/entry/atlasti_6_vs). I was able to use Atlas.ti software to create codes using gerunds as Charmaz (2014) recommends and to record descriptive memos.

Saldana (2021) defines a code as 'a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data' (p. 3). In this thesis, I have applied coding as a method of analysis and as a problem-solving technique, since it is not possible to analyse the full text; the data must be 'managed, filtered and focused' with the purpose of generating 'categories, themes and concepts,' and for building theory (Saldana, 2021, p. 8). Firstly, the transcribed data was imported into Atlas.ti as 16 Microsoft word files, then I began line by line coding. The purpose of my initial coding was to create themes and categories, initially providing thick

descriptions; this is known as ‘descriptive coding,’ in which I read the interview transcripts and assigned a code to that statement, capturing the main essence of the data (Saldana, 2021).

I later began to describe patterns by using *gerunds*, as Charmaz (2014, p. 120) recommends. Gerunds are formed when a verb is finished with *-ing* so that the resulting word behaves as a noun within a larger sentence, for example the sentence ‘*eating* this cake is easy’ contains a gerund being the verb ‘*eating*,’ which takes an object ‘this cake’ (Fonteyn, 2019, chapter 3). Coding using gerunds helps to detect processes, gaining a strong ‘sense of action and sequence,’ preserving the ‘fluidity of the experience’ of the participants, the goings on, plus gerund coding encourages the researcher to see the patterns from the insider’s perspective rather than remaining an outsider researcher (Charmaz, 2014, p. 120). I used the following gerunds to describe the experiences of IAS relating to the PC in the IJVU.

	Codes
1	continuing to distrust insider groups after promotion process
2	distrusting insider groups
3	entering the organisation
4	experiencing socialisation process to insider groups
5	experiencing the promotions process
6	experiencing violation, breach, mismatch of psychological contract
7	feeling fortunate and privileged
8	feeling powerless and responding with anger, turnover intentions
9	joining insider groups
10	looking for solutions
11	needing respect and recognition
12	perceiving opaqueness, unfairness, inequality and corruption
13	responding by taking a more flexible approach to career management
14	responding by taking control, personal agency, managing the self

I had now identified themes, using codes, to describe the experiences of IAS within the IJVU. I created on-screen diagrams using my codes within Atlas.ti to show the relationships between the codes; however, over time I realised that these on-screen diagrams were very limiting, and coding was not sufficient to develop an explanatory framework to describe their experiences, since description is not theory. The situation is described by Kempster and Parry (2014) as not being able to ‘see the wood for the trees’ (p. 13) and the

researcher needs an ontological framework to support the development of a theory and to generate explanations.

Theory development

Since a 'retroductive argument' moves 'from a description of the phenomena to a description of something which produces it or is a condition for it' (Bhaskar, 2009, p. 7), I decided that I needed to think more deeply about the conditions that explain a phenomenon, rather than relying on a simple explanation such as the codes I had generated. To arrive at a theory *retroductively*, I needed to ask: what are the 'causal powers' that produced the outcome, or the conditions for that outcome? (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 13). I needed to develop theories to explain how the causal powers affect the outcome and to test these theories against my data. To develop these theories I decided that I would need to apply a retroductive approach to look for the 'generative causal powers' of the phenomena within the context (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 3). Seeking out generative mechanisms, I have asked 'what must be true for [these] events to be possible?' (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 254),

I systematically moved 'back and forth' between the data and possible explanations for the phenomena, to gain 'a deeper knowledge of [a] complex reality' (Belfrage & Hauf, 2017, p. 255). Recording my proto-theories as they developed, I began making simple pencil and paper sketches. I decided to apply the context (C), mechanism (M) and outcome (O) structure defined earlier by Pawson and Tilley (1997, chapter 3) to describe: what works (O) for whom in which circumstances (C) and why? (M). The organisation is a complex social system (Pawson, 2013) and since 'realism insists upon a stratified view of the social' (Archer et al., 2013, p. 190) I sought to represent this segmented reality by considering three levels: cultural, social and individual. I identified metaphors about power that helped me to explain

the phenomenon of powerlessness at each of these contextual levels, for example ‘swimming with, or against the tide.’ I used diagrams to describe these theories as they developed, resulting in over 50 pencil sketches, all photographed and stored within my iCloud folder.

At the cultural level, I recognised that I would have to relate any theory to an understanding for the national culture and its impact on the organisation. I began developing proto-theories to explain this connection between the national culture and the experiences of IAS. Common to the diagrams I made to describe these proto-theories were: trust and trustworthiness, insiders and outsiders, power and powerlessness. I developed theories about the mechanisms relating to each of these proto-theories, to describe the causal powers. After developing these theories, I compared them with the extant literature, especially in connection with Chinese guanxi, realising that my descriptions of theory were similar to it.

Returning to the literature helped me to place the new theories I had developed into context and to understand their usefulness within the knowledge community. A common feature of these pencil sketches became the concentric circles of insider and outsider groups, rather like the ‘concentric circles after the splash of a stone in the quiet water,’ representing the affective and instrumental connections between people, common to Chinese guanxi (Yang et al., 2009, p. 56). I realised there was an important connection between the experiences of IAS relating to perceived insider and outsider groups and Chinese guanxi and discussed my proto-theories in depth with my supervisor over a period of about six months. I recorded reflective diary entries after discussing my ideas with both Chinese and non-Chinese colleagues to check that my impressions resonated with them. I knew that I had developed a theory when it began to show its ‘explanatory power’ (Pettigrew, 2000, p. 258).

Conclusion

In Part 2 of this Methodology chapter, I have explained the choices I have made to develop and deliver credible research, with explicit reasons for those choices.

I have described my positionality as an insider-researcher within the case-study organisation, including a discussion of the benefits and disadvantages of this insider-researcher role. I have discussed the ethical considerations of this study, both for the participants and myself within the risky context of a Chinese IJVU (Perry, 2020). I have explained and justified the selection process and exclusion criteria of appropriate IAS as participants. I have explained the Grounded Theory approach I have taken (Charmaz, 2014), developing theories retroductively by coding and suggesting the 'generative causal powers' for the observed phenomena (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 13). I have explained how I have compared these developing proto-theories with the existing literature, finding a close match between the theories I have developed through combining a process of retroduction with a reading of the contemporary literature relating to Chinese guanxi (Li et al., 2019).

In this part, I have shared the design of the project, explaining the processes involved while developing and delivering credible research. Now that I have made explicit my data collection and analysis methods, I shall proceed to a discussion of the theories that I have developed through my data analysis, through an interaction between the data, my reflections upon the themes I have identified and the relevant literature.

Chapter 4: The Impacts of Culture

> *'Never trust your Honour to another, unless you have his in Pledge. Arrange that silence is a mutual advantage; disclosure a danger to both. Where honour is at stake you must act with a partner, so that each must be careful of the other's honour for the sake of his own.'* (Baltasar Gracián, 1647).

Introduction

Foreign academic staff working in the IJVU must adapt to an organisational culture that is influenced by the national culture of China. In this chapter I shall argue that, at the cultural level, some IAS learn to fit in and adapt to insider norms and practices common to the local national culture, learning to develop and exploit their personal social networks and relationships, others are not as successful at adapting to the local culture. In this chapter I shall engage in a conversation between the empirical data and 'theories of extant knowledge' found within the relevant literature, as Kempster and Parry (2014, p. 8) suggest, to describe how I have developed theory to explain the 'underlying mechanisms' influencing the data (ibid, p. 8). I shall refer to the existing literature relating to Chinese culture in the organisation to support the theories I have developed. Since I shall refer to Chinese guanxi a great deal in my discussion of the data and theory development, I have provided a brief introduction to Chinese guanxi in the Introduction section of this report.

Explanatory mechanisms

In this chapter I shall discuss the underlying explanatory mechanisms (Kempster & Parry, 2014) identified following a Critical Grounded Theory analysis of my empirically collected data. Pawson and Tilley (2004) have provided an appropriate structure to answer complex social research questions using simple codes for *Context* (C), *Mechanism* (M) and *Outcomes* (O). These codes can be understood as 'what works (O) for whom, in which circumstances (C) and why (M)?' The key mechanism (M) I have identified for the IAS in the context (C) of this organisation is *Adaptation* to Chinese guanxi, in which the outcomes (O) for IAS could be either a successful or unsuccessful adaptation. I have further divided this key adaptive mechanism into two, as follows:

Mechanism 1: adapting to insider norms and practices

Mechanism 2: adapting to the dominant culture

MECHANISM 1: ADAPTING TO INSIDER NORMS AND PRACTICES

Theme 1: Powerlessness against insider groups

According to my analysis of the data, IAS in the organisation (C) experience powerlessness against the actions of insider groups (M) leading to anger, being resigned to the situation, learning to adapt, or disengagement and deciding to leave (O). This experience of feeling powerless about the actions of insider groups is consistent with Song et al. (2017)'s description of employees lacking a 'voice,' the hierarchy of insider groups described by Takeuchi et al. (2020) and the power of insiders described by Li et al. (2019). Each feature of this adaptive mechanism aligns with the extant literature relating to Chinese guanxi, a dominant feature of the Chinese national culture. IAS, being non-Chinese, may struggle to

appreciate the importance of the mechanisms of guanxi as Hui and Graen (1997) have argued. IAS in this study have commented that they feel powerless when faced with insider groups who control information flow and keep secrets; IAS often respond with anger. One participant describes her experience of these insider groups, when seeking research collaborations with industry.

> "There was a repeating pattern. At the beginning, things looked good. We met, we discussed about projects that we could implement together. And when the time came to save the day, nothing happened [she makes a gesture, like a magician performing a disappearing trick, 'poof']. Again, the same thing: a waste of time, okay. And expectations that something would come up out of this collaboration, spending time to meet and discuss prepared proposals. And although as I said, from in the initial steps, there was an interest from the external, possible collaborator that this would work, and it's so good to have a collaboration between universities and companies, and then nothing happened. *And I have some suspicions about that*." (P3 Lynne)

With Lynne's final comment about 'suspicions,' I noted that she has felt the need to self-censor in order to protect herself, or possibly me, by not saying what her 'suspicions' are. Since I am familiar with the necessity for self-censorship while working in China, it is clear to me as an insider-researcher that Lynne's statement requires considerable unpacking, taking into account the cultural and political context. I suspect that being a foreigner, she has not been able to develop the guanxi relationships necessary to make the collaboration work. As Li et al. (2019) explain, it may be necessary for Lynne to develop the trust of a 'broker' to win the 'loyalty and support' of focal persons within the 'xi' network, if she wants to make the research collaboration a success (p. 664).

Lynne expresses cynicism in connection with the PC breach she has experienced, saying her efforts were a ‘waste of time.’ Perhaps, being a foreigner to China she wasn’t aware that the inside game is to first develop a relationship network, or guanxi, with the right person, or ‘broker’ (Li et al., 2019).

Theme 2: Not being listened to by insiders

IAS early experiences upon joining the organisation have often set the tone. One participant recalls how she met senior level staff in the Language Centre, whereupon she suggested where her skills could be best put to use, introducing herself and her career achievements. Their response was disappointing for her, as she explains.

> “Anyway, they turned to me, and they said, ‘we'll put you where we need you.’ Wow, what a message was that? Just like, ‘Fuck you,’ … ‘we will assess who you are and where we should put you.’ … that was very dismissive.” (P14 Claire)

Claire’s experience is reminiscent of Seligman (1999, p. 34) description of ‘long lines and closed doors’ (or slammed doors) when describing Chinese guanxi. Her experience also speaks to Li et al. (2019)’s observation that newcomers must earn the trust of the focal members of an inside network before they can become accepted. In Claire’s case my understanding of guanxi suggests that in future she should seek a suitable ‘broker’ to gain influence with the in-group she wishes to join (Li et al., 2019, p. 664).

Greg recalls not being listened to by senior management who were apparently ‘dismissive’ about his suggestions, where he thought that improvements could have been made sooner. By not listening, he argues, senior management had missed an opportunity,

thereby developing further distrust. Greg felt he had not been listened to, perhaps because of an existing insider relationship between senior management and the ‘other people’ he alludes to.

> “I raised it with [a member of the senior management team] both one to one and in a forum. He was quite dismissive. Unfortunately, he's now listening to other people making the same complaint a semester later. It's unfortunate because that is one semester where you could have improved things.” (P9 Greg)

Greg’s description illustrates how he finds himself frustrated to be on the outside, having only conditional support from insiders (Takeuchi et al., 2020), but it also shows that he understands how counterproductive it can be to offer criticism to focal insiders, since highlighting leadership’s perceived failures will have been damaging for Greg’s career (Song et al., 2017).

Scott comments on a change of attitude towards academic staff he perceives within the promotions process. He finds the new attitude surprising, perhaps finding himself less respected, being an outsider.

> “Recently, a lot of responses from the top level have been, ‘well you're lucky to have a job’ it seems like, ‘and if you don’t like that you can …’ [he makes a hand gesture and silently mouths words that I interpret to mean ‘you can get lost’]. I'm not sure - I would imagine other places are like, ‘we require you to function as a university’ rather than ‘you're lucky to have a job here.’ So, that's a strange attitude that seems to be coming down. And yeah, I’m not a big fan of that.” (Scott P8)

Theme 3: Lacking a 'voice' - being an outsider

Being without union support, IAS may believe they are powerless against the organisation in China, lacking a legal 'voice.' As Adam comments, this lack of 'voice' can result in a lack of transparency, possibly because there is no legal requirement to consider the outside viewpoint. Adam comments also on the apparent power of insiders.

> "I think they, ultimately, are in control, because it's not like there's they're gonna have strikes here, are they? There are no labour unions … it's not very transparent." (P16 Adam)

Language Centre (LC) staff have commented on perceived lack of 'voice' when compared to other departments, experiencing a relative powerlessness because LC staff are perceived as purely teaching rather than academic staff. LC staff may feel less valued, leading to more transactional (an exchange of money for time) interactions with their managers. One IAS explains.

> "The feeling certainly was in the Language Centre that, you know, we're not taken as seriously as we should be, we have a much heavier teaching load … your voice is taken on in the token gesture kind of way, but it doesn't seem to give us much respect, really, even though we're probably on similar salaries." (P7 Robert)

Robert alludes to feeling on the outside when compared to others who may be perceived to be higher within the social hierarchy, matching Takeuchi et al. (2020, p. 249) explanations of in-groups and out-groups.

Greg recalls being listened to when he was part of the management team (an insider), using the term ‘voice’ to describe his experience. The term ‘voice’ reoccurs frequently when interviewing Greg, since he clearly assigns great importance to having a ‘voice.’

> “I've described it as *like having a voice*. So, when I was in the management team, had a voice, you make changes, you could, I chose how to do it with different people's voices and listening. But it was generally my choice.” (P9 Greg)

The importance of having a ‘voice’ resonates with guanxi, specifically the importance of wellbeing and ‘voice’ (Song et al., 2017), but also that insider groups enjoy greater loyalty and support (Takeuchi et al., 2020).

Theme 4: Insider favouritism, protecting the hierarchy

It has been argued that prohibition of employee ‘voice’ serves to protect focal members of the hierarchy from criticism (Song et al., 2017). Fiona also describes how focal insiders within the hierarchy seek to protect themselves.

> “I think there's a level of [Fiona thinks for a while to select the appropriate term] *defensiveness* about [thinks hard again] protecting hierarchy - that misunderstands the value of *team*, basically; I mean, it's this, [thinks for a while and restarts the sentence] that’s the direction that these decisions seem to be taken in favour of. It’s ‘We need to keep our power, we need to keep our ability to tell people what to do, we need to keep our power to control everything.’ Otherwise, chaos will ensue basically. And that, at times, puts the organisation in conflict with what is needed for people.” (P10 Fiona)

Fiona chooses the word ‘defensiveness’ to indicate that inside groups are aware that their activities to protect the hierarchy can be perceived negatively, hence the need for ‘defensiveness’ about these protective mechanisms. Fiona describes how the organisation needs the ‘power to control’ and is aware of the potential for conflict, or ‘chaos,’ she says. Fiona’s observation matches Li et al. (2019, p. 646)’s description of the ‘cocoons’ within Chinese guanxi in which insiders protect themselves from a potentially ‘hostile external context’.

Insider groups appear to favour other insider members, who have strong loyalty and support and consequently, favouritism persists towards other insiders (Takeuchi et al., 2020). Reflecting on this favouritism, Greg comments on a situation when his expectations of fairness during the promotions process were not met, leading to PC breach.

> “It seems that the current plays favourites [with some confidence, as if this is commonly understood]. So, if you're not one of those favourites, then for example, two members of the management team have been kind of *cut off* … and … Joint Delivery courses are going to be scrapped in a year's time. So, there's been kind of a *refocus*. And if you don't have his ear, then you might find your section cut [with a conspiratorial whisper], which doesn't *inspire* me to join that team.” (P9 Greg).

Reflecting on his current position, Greg continues to think out loud about his options, whether to join the insider group or stay safe on the ‘outside.’ He seems tempted by the preferential treatment I assume he experiences on the ‘inside’ (Su et al., 2003), but equally keen to keep his head down as an outsider.

> "So, again, would you [referring to himself] be joining the inner *inner* group, or would you be joining the inner *outer* group or … is it just better to just stay on the outside, just look in and carry on doing my module convenor job, and my tutor job." (P9 Greg).

Theme 5: Responding with anger, disengagement and being 'resigned to it'

Some IAS respond positively to changes in the organisation by adapting to a changing environment. They choose to survive while others choose to escape. Some IAS respond to experiences of powerlessness with turnover intention and disengagement. Greg explains how he feels he has few options.

> "I would have planned maybe to become manager again, get a few more years' experience in that and go on to something. However, because of the disorganization. I think, well, why bother staying three years? I might not get into your 'inner sanctum,' whereas I might leave earlier and gain more experience elsewhere." (P9 Greg)

Greg refers explicitly to an 'inner sanctum,' an insider code that I interpret to mean the in-group corresponding to the 'xi' group of influential insiders (Li et al., 2019, p. 668), but also alluding to a windowless room in a Hindu or Buddhist temple containing an image of the god to whom the temple is dedicated. This is not the first time I have heard the insiders being referred to with god-like imagery, and perhaps this metaphor also requires some insider unpacking. Insiders, it is argued, find themselves 'beyond criticism,' and employees who voice criticisms are putting themselves at considerable personal risks (Song et al., 2017, p. 456). Greg is using a religious metaphor to describe this situation.

When talking about applying for promotion, Lynne expresses her frustration and powerlessness.

> “Actually, for the last couple of years, I have stopped applying. Okay. Because I think it's a waste of my time. Okay.” (P3 Lynne)

Lynne describes experiencing powerlessness leading to what I perceive to be unfairness, disappointment, frustration, and bottled-up rage. Anger is an understandable response that Lynne has to unfairness she perceives relating to the promotions process. Lynne realises that she has been playing a game that she could not win, experiencing pain and anger at being denied a promotion. Jane describes similar anger in response to this perceived breach of PC.

> “And when I saw that I didn't get promoted again, I was just like, completely gobsmacked. And then I was angry at the feedback because the feedback was quite insulting. And also, I was angry because of the inequality. And then I, you know, stages of grief, I guess. So, I went through all the stages of grief, you know, kind of like this cannot be true. And hoping that if I talked to someone, they would change their mind, and maybe they just, they've written the wrong piece of paper with the wrong name on it. And you know, and all that kind of stuff. And then I got angry. And then now I'm just resigned. I'm just like, you know, that's it.” (P1 Jane)

Theme 6: Distrust towards an insider core

Some IAS have developed distrust of an insider core, ‘I don’t trust them’ says one. Greg considers joining the management team but is discouraged by perceived insider favouritism.

> “Personally, I didn't apply for that position. But now I'm thinking what is, you know, should I join that management team? Would I be, would I be foolish to get into the management team where that sort of thing happens?” (P9 Greg)

Theme 7: Insiders appear to hold power over others

Insiders appear to wield considerable power in the organisation. Being privileged with decision making powers, insiders may have the power to decide who can join the inside group by demanding they first demonstrate their loyalty and trustworthiness (Li et al., 2019). Being turned down for promotions leads some IAS to feel excluded by this in-group, who wield power from inside a strong hierarchy. Ambitious people like Paul feel closed out of promotions, as he describes.

> “It was more of the case that there were people who were *rumoured* to be in line, and then everybody else wasn't. So, nobody said to me ‘don't apply.’ But it was kind of widely known who would get the positions.” (P15 Paul)

Paul describes the use of ‘rumour,’ indicating that there was no explicit rule that only insiders would get the positions, but it was broadly understood who was in favour and who was not. Robert comments on a core group and their motives for preserving power:

> "I touched on it a little bit before is this core of very ambitious people who seem to hold a lot of power within their focus specifically on the Language Centre. I mean, I don't know enough of the rest of the university … there's this little core of people who are *very power hungry* [he clearly disapproves of this attitude]. And I personally don't think they have the interests of the Language Centre behind their motivations, it's just about personal ambition, really to get to advance as high as they can, in the Language Centre; I don't really think that's for financial gain - it's just *for a power thing* … so I don't trust them. Obviously, I'm not gonna name names, but there's about four or five of them, that I would just would not want to work with really … they influence me, because they are handing down policies and carrying out various administrative duties, which do influence me in the end, but I don't really trust people who have this real solitary goal of advancing - just to benefit themselves." (P7 Robert).

I suggested Robert was describing a 'Machiavelli character' here, to which Robert laughs mischievously and comments: "yeah, right," perhaps indicating shared knowledge about an individual or individuals within the organisation.

Theme 8: Opacity and the promotion of insiders

IAS comment that cultural mechanisms appear to work to maintain the appearance of transparency within the organisation even when processes are in fact opaque. Supporting and protecting stable and persistent hierarchies, networks and loyalties remains important for the survival of insider networks in the organisation, these opaque mechanisms being essential to guanxi (Li et al., 2019), including an exchange of favours that cannot be audited (Chen & Chen, 2012). Despite these opaque mechanisms, maintaining an outward appearance of

transparency remains important for the organisation in official communications, for example relating to promotions. Claire explains, with thinly suppressed frustration, how she perceives there to be covert underlying mechanisms relating to the promotions process.

> "I had applied to be a manager in the [department] and did not get that. Instead, of the three people who applied for the position I applied for, none of us were selected. Instead, someone who didn't apply for the position was selected [Claire is quietly fuming with rage]. Pretty demoralizing." (P14 Claire).

Interested to tap into this experience further, I pressed Claire to elaborate.

> "So, we were all interviewed. Yes. And I was told that the person who had gotten it did a better interview. But that was a lie because he didn't interview for that position," said Claire, clearly upset by this.

"It wasn't true." I commented. "Yeah," she confirmed (P14 Claire)

Events such as those described by Claire can have a demoralising effect on International Academic Staff. Perhaps Claire's experience illustrates the frustration IAS can feel about not being able to establish guanxi with influential insiders, not being aware of the mechanisms required to join an in-group, or having disengaged from the process of developing trust with focal people (Li et al., 2019).

Theme 9: The socialisation process to insider groups

Robert notices that an in-group has substantial power over who gets promoted, and who does not.

> "There does seem to be a kind of inner core within the Language Centre … they just seem to kind of rotate around the positions. And you can tell when, recently, there was a whole load of new positions that came open. And just informally from what I have gathered, you can tell that the people within this inner core were all kind of jostling for position for which one that they would all handpick for themselves, which one they want. But then they would open it up for interview, because they had to look like they're transparent. But of course, I really got the feeling that those positions were already decided." (P7 Robert)

Robert's comments reflect extant guanxi theory such that insiders must first earn trust from other insiders by demonstrating their loyalty to each other, requiring a 'broker' to vouch for new members who must earn their membership (Li et al., 2019, p. 664), these 'brokers' appear to be the same people who have the deciding power over who to promote to the new positions that had become available, and by extension membership of the in-group. Also, that these insiders are privileged with preferential treatment, perhaps selecting only those people for promotion who do not criticise other insiders, or highlight any leadership failures (Song et al., 2017). Paul comments that there is a socialisation process to joining insider groups, with some people "in line" for key positions. A core of ambitious people are promoted in "fast timescales," he argues.

> "We've talked earlier about ways in which I benefited from that system. But actually, benefiting from the system gave me an insider view of how it works. And an

> understanding that equally, I could be on the on the receiving end of that, or I could be on the less favourable end of that. So yes, I think a lot of staff have built up relationships with managers or with people making decisions, they are much more likely to get the promotion or get a position - if it comes up and they apply for it - or to get a favourable workload." (P15 Paul)

> "That experience has possibly opened my eyes to maybe how some things are done, and the selection process for some of those roles. And that if you didn't already have an idea that you stood a good chance of getting it or if you hadn't already built up some kind of relationship with the people who were, you know, dealing out those roles, then you hadn't already established a chance of getting them anyway." (P15 Paul)

Theme 10: Insiders keeping secrets and telling lies

Some IAS perceive a mechanism through which an insider core keep secrets and tell lies to preserve their power. This finding matches extant literature where guanxi can be compared with corruption (Su et al., 2003, p. 304), involving the sharing of mutual secrets and indiscretions (Barbalet, 2015, p. 1047). Perceiving this apparent unfairness connected with management decision making (Han & Altman, 2009, p. 100) appears to lead to experiences of disappointment and frustration for the IAS in this study. IAS have responded with anger to the apparent corrupt practices they perceive.

Theme 11: Insider secret keeping

Claire notices that ‘secrets are being kept’ to protect powerful insiders. This seems to be unsettling for her, since she values transparency. She comments that secret keeping and power are interconnected.

> “I think there is maybe some type of social capital, possibly *secrets that are being kept* in order to move into positions of power.” (P14 Claire)

Claire alludes to an opacity that she seems to find unusual, since for her, being culturally non-Chinese, guanxi networks do not seem natural. In guanxi, insider networks are supported by a protective belt or ‘cocoon’ that serves to protect the in-group from outsiders, ensuring a ‘harmonious relationship’ (Luo, Cheng, & Zhang, 2016). In the organisation, this cocoon seems to repel transparency, thriving on secrecy for the survival and protection of inside members. Some IAS have expressed a need for greater transparency and candid communications. Greg comments:

> “The current director, I have no trust at all in anything he tells me. And that leads to doubt. And it leads to conversation in corridors about what he did. ‘What did he say to you?’ ‘What did he say to you’.” (P9 Greg)

Guanxi literature describes how secret keeping and opacity may serve to protect insiders from personal risk in a potentially ‘hostile external context’ (Li et al., 2019, p. 4). Perhaps the director Greg is referring to is seeking to protect himself in a similar way, but Greg is clearly confused by this behaviour. Candid communications can create risk for insiders, but conversely shadowy behaviour can lead to uncertainty. Paul relates how he took responsibility for an academic journal. He asks for a teaching reduction to allow him time for

this task. His manager stays relatively silent about his question for months. When the truth finally emerges, Paul was shocked.

> "When I came back, I met with him, and I just said to him, you know, 'are we going to get a reduction in teaching load for the following semester?' and at that point he said, 'No.' So, I felt like I had been strung along. I felt like my I just felt like my time had been wasted, because I felt that he probably knew that's what was going to happen, or he knew that there was a very good chance that was going to happen." (P15 Paul)

MECHANISM 2: ADAPTING TO THE DOMINANT CULTURE

Theme 12: Low perceived trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is perceived differently within Chinese culture when compared to the west. To be perceived as trustworthy in the Chinese context, a trustee must develop strong informal relationships and connections, this trustworthiness being personalised and relational (Li, 2007, p. 439). For westerners, views of trustworthiness are more formal and depersonalised, being associated with attributes such as 'integrity' and 'promise keeping' (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 489). For the IAS in this study, perceived trustworthiness appears low because of the importance for westerners of this depersonalised measure of trustworthiness, preferring formal relationships to the personalised, informal relationships common to China (Jukka et al., 2017). This leads to IAS perceiving low trustworthiness, some feeling that they are being told lies. Jane comments on this perceived low trustworthiness.

> "I still have a stupid amount of idealism. But I take everything with a grain of salt. No matter who tells it to me. In fact, probably the higher they are, the more I take it with a grain of salt, even if it's in writing." (P1 Jane)

Perhaps Jane has experienced low trustworthiness for insiders in the organisation because she has a western expectation for 'integrity and promise-keeping' rather than focusing on the Chinese measures of trustworthiness rooted in respect and reciprocity, including 'personalised communication' and 'personalised benevolence' (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 492).

Theme 13: Learning to 'swim' with the dominant culture

Some IAS have learned to adapt to the organisational culture, finding ways to swim with it. Some IAS describe feeling frustrated by the way things work against outsiders. In response to the macro-cultural context in the organisation, outcomes for IAS can be positive or negative depending on how they manage to adapt. Thomas comments that anything is possible with the right attitude:

> "If you raise your hand and show them your competence, they will give you more and more responsibility here. They may not pay you for it." (P12 Thomas)

In Thomas' example, he has learned to adapt. Being flexible, he has learned to swim with the tide, rather than suffer trying to swim against it.

Theme 14: Learning to adapt to the culture

Successful IAS have aligned their thinking to play the insider game rather than being a victim of it - making the scenario work in their favour – they have adapted to the local national culture. They have adapted to the rules of the game of guanxi: exploiting relationships and networks to their advantage (Li et al., 2019). They learn the importance of building up relationships with decision makers, working strategically with insiders and managing their expectations about trustworthiness. Some IAS have learned to adapt to the culture of the organisation, perhaps by recognising the necessity of understanding the mechanisms of guanxi. Some IAS have adapted better than others, learning to fit in with the culture, taking a pragmatic approach. Rather than pushing back, they have adapted. Elena recognises the in-group mechanisms of guanxi.

> "Definitely a lot of people have talked about this idea of being 'in the club', maybe like socializing with the director or something - perhaps allowing you to make connections and perhaps making it easier to get promoted and get managerial positions, things like that. Maybe there could be some truth to that." (P11 Elena)

Some IAS may have adapted to the culture only at the surface level. This alignment may be superficial, lacking genuine alignment and being without genuine commitment. Some IAS have taken a pragmatic approach, understanding they must play the insider game. Adapting to the culture appears to have been strategically important to Mark's career, but he has found it a challenge.

> "I thought that this would be the vessel that I would sail through, but what I came up against were very different structures, very different cultures, working cultures. And I don't feel that I've particularly warned about that. I mean, for me, this whole issue is about preparation of international staff. I don't think we're trained adequately for the *clash of cultures organizationally*." (P4 Mark)

Theme 15: Boundary spanning

The existence of inside circles or 'cocoons' has implications for foreign staff, who may find themselves placed as outsiders and unlikely to develop the guanxi connections required to navigate towards the inside circle (Hui & Graen, 1997, p. 457). In a mixed cultural environment, those on the inside may be primarily Chinese, with foreign staff located in the out-group due to their weaker guanxi relationship connections. Despite being apparently placed in an outside group, bridges may exist between these circles, formed by 'boundary spanners.' These 'boundary spanners' may be either Chinese or foreign academic staff who have been exposed to both the Chinese and western cultures and are capable of communicating effectively across a cultural divide (Li et al., 2016, p. 19).

Paul considers his network.

> "… those groups are fluid, there's no permanent insider group. And I understand that. I mean those groups are a Venn diagram or something. They're all overlapping. And some people are in some insider groups, but not in others. And that's the way I feel, I feel definitely I have an advantage over a lot of people in the Language Centre through my connections. But there are other people that have advantages over me through denser connections or *better people* they're connected with." (P15 Paul)

Boundary spanning IAS have connections across differing cultural groups. Importantly, IAS must have connections, but it remains unclear from the data which connections are considered better than others. For example, it is unclear which connections Paul considers to be 'better people' to be connected with, either Chinese or non-Chinese.

Theme 16: Realising 'it's about people'

Thomas comments that being too reliant on the organisation is naïve, arguing that it is better to focus on relationships with people, similar to the Chinese preference for an informal-relational approach to the organisation (Jukka et al., 2017).

> "I take care of myself, right. I'm not naïve and thinking that the organization takes care of you is a little bit naïve, in my opinion. Because an organization is [just] an organization in that sense: it won't take care of you. Individuals will take care of you, or they will take care of you if it also brings them further. It can be that you support what they need to do, or they can do things easier, so I look at it more pragmatically." (P12 Thomas)

Further, Thomas explains how he puts individual relationships in the forefront of his approach to the organisational culture, again this is similar to Chinese guanxi and most likely a successful strategy (Jukka et al., 2017).

> "Again, an organization, I don't expect much from my experience. I think it all comes down to the individuals we deal with. Of course, there's company cultures and

> organizational culture, I understand that. But at the end it all boils down to the individuals." (P12 Thomas)

Within Chinese culture, Luo et al. (2016, p. 652) argue that guanxi 'cocoons' serve to protect inside network members from a hostile external context and that rather than rely on the rule of law, which can lack coherence and is 'subject to strong government control' (Su et al., 2003, p. 304), the Chinese have learned to place their trust in the rule of man over the rule of law (Li et al., 2019, p. 5). Similarly, IAS must also learn to nurture and protect their personal networks, stepping over to an insider way of thinking. As with guanxi, they must shift their way of thinking to preserve their network. Those IAS who haven't yet adapted will find themselves disadvantaged. Jane seems to have not been willing to adapt to guanxi, not being 'political' in nature she says. Consequently, she seems to have suffered when it came to her promotion application.

> "I got one of my colleagues who got promoted and is good at writing to help me rewrite [the promotion application]. And like I said, I'm really *not a political creature*. This person helped me decide, you know, which things I should highlight, which committees I should join, blah, blah, blah. I did all of that. Still nothing. And the feedback was quite insulting, really." (P1 Jane)

Jane comments she is not 'a political creature,' separating being political from her other responsibilities. Perhaps a better understanding of guanxi might have had a positive impact on her promotion prospects. Thomas, on the other hand, argues that 'political' skills are essential for his job.

> "The fact that you say, 'political game,' that's what I hear often 'that's so political,' 'it's a political organization,' 'politics, politics, politics.' I mean, it's about people. I want to say this: wherever you are, *that's also part of what you do*." (P12 Thomas)

Theme 17: Needing to be better prepared for the 'insider game' in the organisation

Some IAS have had unrealistic expectations from the start, not realising that there would be an insider game to play that involves understanding 'xi' networks within the Chinese cultural context (Li et al., 2019). After all, the importance of 'strong ties' in labor markets in China (a feature of guanxi) is often misunderstood (Barbalet, 2015, p. 1043). Many IAS may have perceived unfairness since they were not anticipating the importance of the insider game and being cheated by the game as they saw it. They expected fairness with transparency and did not find it, hence some IAS have experienced disappointment. Paul's experience illustrates this disappointment.

> "I feel like, [Paul sounds exasperated with himself] just looking back, I just feel very naive that I had these expectations [perhaps feeling tricked]. And that I was *kind of foolish to think that way*. So, it's more like, it's just looking back and seeing that I had expectations, which, realistically, I shouldn't have had if I've been thinking more clearly about things." (P15 Paul)

Paul may have felt 'foolish' with the realisation that he had not been prepared, but he is not alone with this lack of preparedness. Few IAS I interviewed felt they had been adequately prepared, and few still understood the mechanisms of Chinese guanxi.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered the experiences of IAS working in a Chinese IJVU at the cultural level. I have identified the key mechanisms that are characteristic of their experiences. Since the case study organisation is strongly influenced by Chinese guanxi, a well-established feature of Chinese Culture, the overall dominant mechanism at the cultural level is adapting to guanxi. Through adapting to insider norms and practices, some IAS have developed powerful influence within the organisation, developing mutually beneficial relationships with influential insiders. Underlying this success may be their ability to adapt to the culture of the organisation more effectively than others and to form meaningful relationships with key connections. Insiders have adapted to the dominant cultural norms and practices, understanding the power of social networks, social mechanisms, insider groups and how their connections influence the quality of the information they receive – all features of guanxi (Li et al., 2019) (M). Non-Chinese staff who thrive within the organisation appear to do so because they have consciously adapted to the organisational culture. Those who have not adapted, perhaps through choice, may experience powerlessness. They develop distrust, leading to disappointment, frustration and anger (O). This chapter builds on existing theory by developing theoretical understandings about how IAS experience PC breach as a consequence of their effective adaptation to guanxi, with varying outcomes depending on how successful they have become at adapting to insider norms, cultural norms and practices, all features of Chinese guanxi. At this stage I shall leave the discussion of culture and move on to an exploration of the social level of a stratified reality (Bhaskar, 2009).

Chapter 5: Social-Interpersonal Level

滴水之恩当涌泉相报 - "*a drop of water [i.e. a favour] shall be returned with a burst of spring."* Chinese proverb (Wang & Chen, 2009)

Introduction

As foreigners in China, IAS in the IJVU may (or may not) have adapted to Chinese culture whilst working together with both Chinese and other foreign staff. The experiences of IAS illustrate how they have responded to the host culture. Foreign staff may find social mechanisms operating within the organization that can lead to some confusion. Being unexpected, foreign staff may not be prepared for the impacts of culture on the organisation. To acculturate, IAS must first understand the social-interpersonal processes and mechanisms. In this chapter, I shall consider the social mechanisms and processes between individuals at the social-interpersonal level, engaging in a conversation between the data and the literature to explain the underlying mechanisms (Kempster & Parry, 2014, p. 8). I shall analyse the social-interpersonal level by considering the metamorphosis of becoming an insider, the benefits and disadvantages of being an insider, and the perceived unfairness of insider groups. I shall refer to the existing literature to support my theory development.

Explanatory mechanisms

In this chapter I shall discuss the underlying mechanisms identified following a Critical Grounded Theory analysis of my data (Kempster & Parry, 2014) referring, as I did in the foregoing chapter, to the structure provided by Pawson and Tilley (2004), these being

context (C), mechanism (M) and outcomes (O). I have identified that the key mechanism at the social level for IAS in the context of the organisation is a *loyalty* towards insiders, in which outcomes for IAS can be either positive or negative regarding their social status. This key mechanism can be divided into the following:

Mechanism 1: loyalty towards other insiders

Mechanism 2: prioritising the needs of the organisation

MECHANISM 1: LOYALTY TOWARDS OTHER INSIDERS

Theme 1: The metamorphosis of becoming an insider

To reach some degree of adaptation to the culture of the organisation, IAS should learn to develop a harmonious relationship with powerful insiders in the organisation (Luo et al., 2016), they should learn not to push back and to understand how social networks, connections and relationships function for self-protection (Li et al., 2019, p. 5). Joining an inside group means putting loyalty to members of the in-group first. It helps to be flexible, and to demonstrate commitment to the organisation (Zhang, Deng, Zhang, & Hu, 2016, p. 623), when seeking to join an in-group. Thomas has found that informal processes are more effective than the official promotions process in the organisation, being informally invited to take on roles after being rejected several times for academic promotion through the official processes.

> “You'd have to push for academic promotion. I applied I think six times. [I thought] ‘how many times can you apply?’ I was really good at filling out the paperwork. I had

> to push for other roles. Sometimes you apply, sometimes they ask you. *More and more often [I am] asked*, to be honest." (Thomas P12)

Thomas knows that applying for promotion formally is the transparent side of the process, but he is also aware of the informal, opaque processes or being "asked" as he describes it. Thomas seems willing to volunteer, making himself useful thereby raising himself above the competition. Listening to the full interview, I notice that Thomas seems to be not attached to the outcome and willing to go where he is needed, being flexible to the needs of the organisation.

However there does seem to be a dark side to this willingness to be flexible. Shifting to the in-group means maintaining a harmonious relationship (Luo et al., 2016), not pushing back, resisting or opposing the will of an insider core. Perhaps becoming an insider means putting the organisation first; however, Claire comments that putting the organisation first can lead to following orders and tolerating apparent insider cronyism.

> "You know what doing what you're told means: going along with your boss to the bar and making your boss look good [she sounds resentful]." (Claire P14).

Claire indicates that IAS can feel pressured to agree with the dominant viewpoint, later feeling misled or tricked. Building social capital is essential when joining insider groups, gained primarily through the reciprocal exchanges of favours, being reliable and willing to volunteer (Chen & Chen, 2012). This 'social capital' is an investment to be exploited later, for a successful career (Bozionelos, 2015, p. 69). Far from being corrupt, these insiders may simply be those who are more willing to help, less quarrelsome, being viewed as more trustworthy by other insiders because of the Chinese view of trustworthiness

being rooted in reciprocal relationships and 'benevolence' (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 492). Conversely, those who find themselves on the outside may be there because they are perceived as less trustworthy according to the Chinese measure of trustworthiness, being relational and based on strong informal relationships and connections (Li, 2007, p. 439). Paul's experiences illustrate how he is able to make informal relationships and connections work in his favour. He comments on the importance of using current in-group members to help with his promotion applications, because they are the people he would eventually have to work alongside. Getting along with those insiders seems a prerequisite, not because of seeking privilege through connections, but because of the necessity of getting along with the right people (Li, 2007).

> "Through that [role] I had a kind of relationship with [the director]. So, he was aware of me as somebody who was interested in doing something a little bit more, because the thing was totally voluntary. And when they needed somebody to do be the [leader] of that module, he probably looked at me and thought, 'this is somebody who is interested in taking on a little bit more. He's been working on [that project] for a while, he hasn't made a complete mess of it, why not give it to him.' And likewise, when I applied for the [role] - *I did actually apply for [the role]*. I went to speak to other managers about it - to get their input [from] people that I might need to work with. And they would be quite open about it, saying, 'Oh, I think you would be good, so I'm gonna help you. I'm going to tell you things that you could mention in the interview which will sound good.' Yeah." (Paul P15)

Paul recognises the importance of interpersonal connections, which appear to have brought him beneficial inside information and influence. He recognises that relationship

networks with influential insiders, for example with the director, can be developed to be exploited later. These important relationships can be nurtured through a reciprocal exchange of favours, such as the interview advice he received as well as the advantage of being viewed as someone who is willing to volunteer. Paul explains his reasons for seeking support from insiders when interviewing for an internal job.

> "I didn't go to them for interview tips, I went to them because these were people that I would genuinely have to work with. I was just doing my prep for the interview, I wanted to see how the [section] fit in with other parts of the Language Centre. But in the course of having an informal chat, people would say to me things like 'I hope you get it' and 'you might want to mention this in the interview.'" (Paul P15)

Paul seems politically astute, seeking out the support of insiders for a mutually beneficial deal for both parties. He frames this exchange of favours as a pragmatic approach to career development. Paul has first sought out those who can help him and has worked to develop a relationship with them before asking for their support. Paul's approach seems universally applicable but is especially effective in the IJVU given the cultural context, specifically in connection with guanxi (Seligman, 1999).

Building up relationships with influential insiders should provide benefits for each party, a quid pro quo relationship, as Paul has discovered. These insider networks can be developed and exploited for mutual benefit, the sharing of secrets and indiscretions, and for protection (Barbalet, 2015). However, Paul describes that some networks are stronger than others, with varying strengths and weaknesses. Paul has benefitted from a social system that supports insider networks by developing an understanding for the mechanisms in operation, leading to favourable outcomes at work. He explains,

> "We've talked earlier about ways in which I benefited from that system. But actually, benefiting from the system gave me an insider view of how it works. And then, an understanding that equally I could be on the on the receiving end of that [i.e. receiving the benefits], or I could be on the less favourable end of that. I think a lot of staff have built up relationships with managers or with people making decisions. They are much more likely to get a promotion or position, if it comes up and they apply for it, or to get a favourable workload." (Paul P15)

There exists a 'dark side' to this momentum towards the inside, since joining an insider group means adapting to the collective consensus, the keeping of secrets (Su et al., 2003, p. 304), and an unfair influence on managers' decisions (Han & Altman, 2009, p. 100). For Claire, joining an insider group means not putting up resistance to the insiders with whom other insiders might wish to develop social capital. Becoming an insider means adapting to the way things operate in the social system, the collective consensus, the agreed dominant central narrative. This insider viewpoint is strong and creates an inertia around which those who would join an insider group gravitate, building its power and repelling opposing views, similar to the guanxi 'circles' described by Luo et al. (2016, p. 652). Claire recalls an example of how those who agree with the insider viewpoint (or guanxi 'circle') are promoted because they do as they are told.

> "When [manager] called me into his office and said [whispering conspiratorially], 'You know, I have some bad news for you. You weren't selected for the [role]. Because the person who got it did a much better interview and was more of an outside the box thinker.' [name] = 'outside of the box thinker?' [she laughs at how

> preposterous this sounds when repeated] More like a beta male who doesn't threaten you. There we go. Because … he knows how to follow orders and do exactly what he's told." (Claire P14)

Theme 2: The benefits and disadvantages of joining an inside group

Those employees who join an in-group may gain 'beneficial treatments' (Su et al., 2003, p. 311), having apparently greater loyalty and commitment bestowed upon them by others (Hui & Graen, 1997). Insiders can treat other insiders favourably (Takeuchi et al., 2020), hence insiders are perceived to receive stronger support, perhaps being perceived as having an unfair advantage. Scott comments that these insider connections can lead to "extra work" in addition to apparent benefits; thus, being on the inside may not be the easy option, he explains.

> "People have said that certain people got promoted because they're friends with certain people and I don't think that's true … I [have a personal connection with] one of the people [in the university who is] quite high up. A couple of other people that are … [connected via this activity] were promoted. … People around said 'they only got promoted because they do that [activity] with that person.' … There's definitely a perception within the Language Centre that there's an appearance of cliques and people racing to the top of the management structure; most people would have some thoughts on that. But it's not really affected me. *The only thing I've ever got out with being friends with someone higher up was extra work*. When they were looking for someone to represent [a division] on a committee that required a lot of reading, my name popped up. But that's more of a negative than a positive thing - *it just means*

> *more work for me*. *Maybe these people want to use people that they know, who they can trust, and that makes sense*." (Scott P8)

Scott uses the word 'trust' here, but it is not clear whether he is taking the Eastern or Western perspective on the concept, since these differ (Li, 2007). To be trustworthy in the Chinese cultural context depends on the trustee's location within the guanxi social network, or how close that person is to the inside group. Peter Ping Li argues, 'a trustor places different types of trust at various levels to different trustees according to each trustee's relative position in a multi-circle centrifugal web of the trustor's social ties [i.e. guanxi)' (Li, 2007, p. 439). This Eastern 'trust' concept conflicts with the Western concept of trustworthiness which is more formal and depersonalised, including for example 'integrity' and 'promise-keeping' (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 489). Insiders within the IJVU may select other insiders based on a perceived trustworthiness based on Chinese measures, including 'personalised communication, commitment and personalised benevolence' manifested in reciprocity and 'relationship-rich respect' (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 492). Thus, insiders may only trust other IAS with whom they have developed a stronger relationship, rather than based on their perceived integrity.

Despite apparently becoming a member of an 'in-group' (Takeuchi et al., 2020, p. 249), some IAS have experienced a breach of trust even with an enhanced status. Jane, for example, found that being perceived as a member of a privileged in-group did not help her career in the way she expected. Even with in-group-level involvement in university committees and with connections to influential people, Jane felt that she lacked influence.

> "I don't really like seeing other colleagues being treated [with] the same inequality within the university, which upset me since I came here, but *I've given up beating my*

> *head against a brick wall*. And now … I know the movers and shakers. And it's even worse, because the movers and shakers promise staff and don't deliver. So, you think well, *where can you go now? Nowhere.*" (Jane P1)

Jane's situation seems contradictory, since despite being connected to influential insiders, she seems powerless. She describes what seems to be a breach of psychological contract, since she expresses a need for the recognition of her efforts, but experiences instead a breach of trust due to perceived broken promises (Conway & Briner, 2005). 'Out-group' members may have only conditional support from others (Takeuchi et al., 2020, p. 249), finding their opinions are not respected and their 'voices' not listened to (Song et al., 2017, p. 455). In this study, I have identified that Language Centre staff often find they are treated as being part of an 'out-group' within the university; being accorded less respect, their voices seem to be taken less seriously, as Robert describes.

> "The feeling certainly [is] in the Language Centre is that we're not taken as seriously as we should be; where we have a much heavier teaching load. *Our voice* in department meetings is taken on in a *token gesture* kind of way, it doesn't seem to earn much respect." (Robert P7)

Robert comments on the perception that LC roles are not viewed with the same prestige as academic faculty, leading to the apparent perception that LC IAS may be members of an 'out-group' (Takeuchi et al., 2020, p. 249). Conversely, it seems that membership of an 'in-group' or 'out-group' may be entirely independent of being employed within the LC or another academic department, since other participants have commented on 'in-groups' within the LC and 'out-groups' within other departments. Outsiders may be the

recipients of the decisions made within the ‘cocoon’ of an in-group, rather than contributors, being prohibited from voicing their opinions since to do so may cause losses to insiders (Song et al., 2017, p. 455), the purpose of this cocoon being to protect insiders from a ‘hostile external context’ (Li et al., 2019, p. 5). IAS in this study have commented on their experiences of not being listened to or having to relinquish their ‘voice’ (Song et al., 2017, p. 455). This prohibition of employee ‘voice’ weighs heavy on some participants, who feel their inputs are no longer valued. Having left the management team, Greg experiences a palpable loss of his perceived ‘voice’. Heavy with the burden of now being part of an out-group, he feels excluded from the decisions being made by the in-group. Having given up his role in the management team, he now wishes to regain the ‘voice’ he had before (Song et al., 2017, p. 455). Having this voice is a key benefit of joining an in-group, consequently leaving an in-group means relinquishing that voice.

> “Yeah. Now, as someone outside that group, it's now ‘our decision’ [with a mock manager voice]. I might still have an opinion there, but they don't have to listen to it. The biggest incentive for me to get back on a management team is to get that *voice* back. And yeah [considerable pause here, with a visibly heavy heart]. If I were to go back on it, I would want to realize that my voice would be listened to. That's the worry, that I would go back onto a management team where there are certain favourites of the director and I wouldn't be listened to.” (Greg P9)

Theme 3: The apparent unfairness of in-groups

It is evident from listening to the participant interviews and reading the transcripts that favours are apparently granted in exchange for mutual benefit (Barbalet, 2015) within

guanxi relationships that confer preferential treatment and influence to their members (Su et al., 2003, p. 311). This situation of a powerful inner 'circle' (Luo et al., 2016, p. 652) may seem unfair and unjust to an outsider, who might not benefit from these in-group networks, or not have an understanding for the cultural context. Paul explains that within the organisation there is considerable turnover of IAS, therefore there can be no fixed in-group, their members being constantly in flux.

> "*Those groups are fluid. There are no permanent insider groups*. Those groups are like a Venn diagram or something, they're all overlapping, and some people are in some insider groups, but not in others. And that's the way I feel. I definitely have an advantage over a lot of people in the Language Centre through my connections. But there's a lot of other people that have advantages over me through [he searches for the right word] *denser connections or better people they're connected with*." (Paul P15)

Paul has learned about insider advantages gained through valuable 'dense connections.' He understands the value of these connections, and that to have influence the connection he has must have some power themselves (i.e. 'better people'). Paul's perspective shows the importance of learning to adapt to the organisation. As his comments illustrate, he recognises the importance of interpersonal connections and the advantages these connections bring. Paul has gained an understanding of how networks and relationships function in the organisation. As he explains, some groups have more advantages than others. The limits of an IAS network may be the limit of their influence, but also the quality of that network depends on the strength of the people they connect with, or their power to influence the core (Luo et al., 2016). Being an insider and having valuable connections does guarantee benefits to the career of an IAS. Paul comments that although the outward appearance of having an insider

relationship with an influential person may convey some prestige, the reality may be quite different. Despite having a close working relationship with the director, for example, Paul found himself being ignored, delayed and deceived.

> "I think he said during that [meeting] something to the effect of 'we must get you together sometime and sort that out' and then later on, of course nothing developed there. Later on, when I came back to work, it was again a situation of 'we must get you together and sort that out.' At which point I said, 'you know what, I'll make it easy for you. I'm stepping down anyway.' That never got resolved and because of the situation, because it was [a disagreement] that involved me and another member of staff and it wasn't something where we were directly line managed by anybody else, *I expected him to deal with it and he kind of ignored it*." (Paul P15)

Paul's situation illustrates how IAS can carry the burden of forgetting and moving on from the dispute, since to disagree would not be tolerated, causing potential loss to in-group members (Song et al., 2017, p. 455). Perhaps influenced by his understanding of the organisational culture, Paul decided to resign rather than confront the issue.

Participants have noticed apparent cronyism in the organisation, where trusted insiders and favourites have been treated preferentially and a tight in-group core appear to exclude out-group members. Some participants have commented on the importance of personal connections and secret keeping, Greg comments on the influence of 'favourites.'

> "… It seems that the current plays favourites. So, if you're not one of those favourites … and if you don't have his ear, and you might find your section cut, which doesn't inspire me to join that team." (Greg P9)

A common perception amongst the participants is that in-group members already have people in mind for important positions and promotions. Paul, for example, comments that even though both he and his manager were aware that an opaque process was developing, and that in-group members were subverting the process, they felt pressured to go along with the subterfuge and not resist. When promoting others, members of an in-group seem to be employing the same opaque mechanisms described by Li et al. (2019) to protect stable, persistent hierarchies and loyalties.

> "… I have been on one [interview] panel, appointing an MC [module convenor] … there was another candidate, who was the worst of the five candidates by some distance, in terms of performance and in the interview, and that's apparently what we're judging things on. One member of staff, who was on the panel, ardently argued for that person to be ranked as the second person, so that they would then be in line for something else. *And it was blatant*. And it was also well known that that person had a very close relationship with the candidate ... *But that's how it was working, you know. And it was it was blatant. And there was no kind of shame and there didn't seem to be anyway.* [he knew this practice was wrong but somehow tolerated] …. Well, the manager's response was the same as mine … no … we didn't agree with that. But the process meant that when we were ranking the people, because one member of the panel was pushing that person higher up - I think we probably did push that person up a little bit. Yeah. *I think that kind of thing goes on throughout.*" (Paul P15)

Paul indicates that he believes insider preference is ‘blatant’ and pervasive within the organisation. He describes how apparently powerful in-groups are handing out promotions to selected, preferred individuals. Claire identifies a similar situation that she attributes to national cultures.

> “Both the British and the Chinese are indirect. And both are, I feel, relying too much on cronyism … like the situation where the person who hadn't even applied for the job, got the position and the three people who had applied were summarily dismissed …” (Claire P14)

Exchanges such as those observed by both Claire and Paul between in-group members reveal favouritism and perhaps cronyism, in which both participants have described how in-group members are handpicking roles for each other. A tight inner core of in-group members appears to treat each other preferentially and exclude outsiders. Interestingly, for in-groups to thrive, it seems important to preach transparency when the opposite is being practiced, as Robert explains.

> “There does seem to be an inner core within the Language Centre [who] just seem to rotate around these positions. You can tell when, recently, there was a whole load of new positions that came up, and just informally you can tell that the people within this inner core were all jostling for position for which ones they were handpicking for themselves, which ones they wanted; but then *they would open it up for interview, because they had to look like they're transparent*. We certainly got the feeling that those positions were already decided.” (Robert P7)

Opaque reward and promotions processes have caused suspicion for the participants. In-group members appear to have better quality information than outsiders, who seem to be excluded from privileged information. Furthermore, the impression is that information about the promotion process is deliberately being kept ambiguous, with insiders seeming to be better informed about what counts towards promotion, and what does not. It might appear that participants are committing their time to promotions-worthy activities, that they might assume they are being promoted for, but in reality, these activities might not help towards their promotions plans. For some participants, it seems difficult to know which activities will lead to promotions and which will not. Paul notes that this opacity can lead to confusion and frustration, serving to empower an in-group, who seem to have inside knowledge about promotions-worthy activities.

> "Things are deliberately kept ambiguous, right; they're deliberately kept opaque, where you're not directly told 'this is not really worth doing.' But other people around you will say, 'Oh, no, I wouldn't do that. Because there's nothing in it.' But you're *not directly told that*. It's *hinted at* that 'Oh, this will be good on your PDR' [professional development review] or 'this will help you with your promotion.'" (Paul P15)

As Paul's comments illustrate, promotions processes can remain opaque while having the appearance of being transparent. Further hints and ambiguity exist around which activities can help promotions applications, or the pathway to insider status. Robert describes being invited to join the management team.

> "The position wasn't *offered* to me. But it was *hinted at* that [said clearly to clarify how the conversation went]. 'Oh, why don't you come and apply for one of these new

> management positions,' [he says, with a mock 'eyebrows raised' manager voice] 'we think you'd be a great addition to the management team.' Paraphrasing slightly, but that's pretty much exactly what was said. ... *They do have to appear transparent, but whether they already have people in mind for who they want in positions, I don't know. It seems like they do."* (Robert P7)

I ask Robert whether he thinks there's a trusted insider group and a distrusted outsider group. "Possibly," he says. Later in the interview, Robert comments that he overhears managers talk about staff as if they were "imbeciles," revealing a divide between an in-group and an out-group. Participants in this study express some incredulity about how some staff have been promoted more quickly than others, and suspicion seems rife. Oscar shares his understanding that some people have benefitted from their connections more than others, mirroring Nie and Lämsä (2015, p. 854)'s observation that in China, one's network connections are more consequential than any knowledge or skills.

> "It's not totally clear why some people have been promoted more quickly than others. I don't have access to people's CVs, and I haven't done meticulous investigation of the people that got promoted [versus] the people that didn't, like a cross comparison. So, I don't know the details of that. But my general impression, based on what I know about the people that did and didn't [get promoted], is that probably *some people were promoted quite quickly*, and others not so quickly. *It's slightly surprising sometimes* [clearly an understatement]." (Oscar P5)

Participants in this study have commented that insider opinions remain unopposed, lacking dissenting voices, matching Song et al. (2017, p. 456)'s explanation that prohibiting

employee voice serves to protect a powerful inside group. This observation leads to distrust, and Scott notices that inflexible attitudes trickle down from the top.

> "Recently, a lot of responses from the top level have been 'you're lucky to have a job' it seems like, 'and if you don't like that you can …' [he gestures as if to say 'you can get lost']. I imagine other places are like 'we require you to function as a university' rather than 'you're lucky to have a job here.' That's a strange attitude that seems to be coming down. And yeah, *I'm not a big fan of that*." (Scott P8)

Judging from the experiences other participants describe, I suggest it may be best to learn to adapt to these attitudes rather than trying to oppose the viewpoint of the in-group, since they will be accustomed to being beyond criticism (Song et al., 2017). Scott's instinct may be to oppose or resist authority, perhaps to seek a democratic solution; however, this contrarianism will not be effective in the Chinese cultural context.

MECHANISM 2: PRIORITISING THE NEEDS OF THE ORGANISATION

Theme 4: Wanting to help the organisation, not just individuals

Thomas seems certain about wanting to support the organisation that he works for, stating that he wants to 'help' the organisation, since he 'likes' it. In an earlier comment Thomas puts his success thus far down to the 'network' he has developed, being about 'individuals,' rather than any 'organisation.' Thomas' next comment may seem to contradict this viewpoint, however it reveals how his view of the organisation is of a social network, being about the 'social ties' developed within guanxi (Li, 2007).

> "I'm never worried about what position it is. I think if something more is needed, then it will come. I'm also perfectly fine to teach, maybe to be program director of one of the programmes, etc. And if something more is needed. If I like it, yes, sure, I'll do it. And of course, it helps the organization. I like this organization. I like to help it and I like also that it makes sense for the organization. But I'm not like 'oh I have to go back and look at the position'. I know, *we'll be fine*." (Thomas P12)

Thomas' final statement 'we'll be fine' seems to mask something he wanted to say but may have self-censored. Perhaps he wants to say that he wants to help the organisation and is prepared to align his activities to supporting the organisation, even if that means suspending any doubts he may have. Relying on the relational aspects of trustworthiness, rather as a Chinese member of staff might (Jukka et al., 2017). Being pragmatic about his situation, Thomas comments that the approach he takes might work well with this, or equally with another organisation. Believing that he should not be 'tied' to any single organisation, even if he enjoys working there.

> "I also don't have any expectations, I just expect when I deliver good results, that it will go by itself. Also, as I noted, organizations sometimes work rationally, sometimes irrationally. It's not only based on your results, *it's also based on your network,* whatever. So, there are many factors and it's up to you to manage. Also, in that sense, I'm very rational that if it doesn't work out in this organization, then I'll go to another organization. In the world there is not only [this organisation], that works for so many organizations. Of course, I like the organization where I work. But I also I realize that this organization should never capture me. In giving expectations and

> getting frustration, because if it reaches that level then I've been here too long." (Thomas P12)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered the experiences of IAS working in a Chinese IJVU at the social level. I have identified the key mechanisms that characterise their experiences. Since the organisation is strongly influenced by the social drives of Chinese guanxi where members of the organisation show loyalty, support and commitment to members of an in-group (Barbalet, 2019; Hui & Graen, 1997; Takeuchi et al., 2020), the dominant mechanism in this chapter has been loyalty towards insiders. Through loyalty towards other insiders, some IAS appear to have progressed towards insider status within the organisation, adapting to its dominant social norms. Progress towards eventual inclusion within an in-group appears to require this loyalty. In-group loyalty and the reciprocal exchange of favours may result in perceived trustworthiness, rewarded by a privileged access to information, for example about which activities might result in a successful promotion application. Some IAS have become skilled at prioritising the needs of the organisation, proving to be an effective social mechanism for joining and building social capital within an in-group. IAS in this study appear to progress towards in-group status within the organisation through adapting to its dominant social norms. I shall now move on to a discussion of the experiences of IAS at the individual level of a stratified reality (Bhaskar, 2009).

Chapter 6: Individual Level

'In our world everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself.' (Leo Tolstoy, 1900)

Introduction

International Academic Staff (IAS) - much like other employees - may have unwritten expectations about their workplaces, leading to the formation of a Psychological Contract (PC) (Guest, 1998). Since an employer may not be aware of this PC, it being unwritten and existing purely in the mind of the employee (Conway & Pekcan, 2019), Psychological Contract Breach (PCB) may follow (Guest, 1998). When experiencing this PCB, some IAS may adapt better than others. This chapter will explore the extent to which individuals adapt to PCB. Given that many participants in this study have commented that their expectations have been frequently unmet, this chapter contains many examples of PCB. Perera et al. (2018) argue that expatriates who view incidents of PCB as a normal aspect of their working lives overseas (i.e. positively) may find themselves better equipped, emotionally and cognitively, to deal with challenging work situations. In this chapter, I shall explore the mechanisms and processes at the individual level, considering intrapersonal and psychological mechanisms. I shall analyse individual, intrapersonal, and psychological levels by considering the erosion of interpersonal trust, feeling powerless about insider groups, feeling disappointment and betrayal. Finally, I shall outline how some IAS have learned to adapt.

Explanatory mechanisms

In this chapter I shall discuss the underlying mechanisms identified via a Critical Grounded Theory analysis of the data (Kempster & Parry, 2014), referring to Pawson and Tilley (2004)'s *Context* (C), *Mechanism* (M) and *Outcomes* (O) structure. I have identified the dominant mechanism at the individual level for the participants in the case-study organisation is a *PC breach due to perceived unfairness and betrayal* in connection with cultural differences, in which they expect that their leaders should demonstrate fair and equitable practices, particularly in connection with promotions. This key mechanism can be divided into the following mechanisms:

Mechanism 1: breach of trust

Mechanism 2: self-management

MECHANISM 1: BREACH OF TRUST

Theme 1: The erosion of interpersonal trust

Participants in this study have described the importance of interpersonal trust. Moreover, when this trust has been eroded they have expressed the emotional impacts this breach of trust has had on them. Some participants have reported that perceived unfairness or favouritism can lead to a deterioration of trust towards managers and the in-groups they perceive. IAS describe how apparently broken promises and a short-term attitude towards the employee relationship can erode trust, perhaps similar to the short termism of the transactional contract described by Hamilton and von Treuer (2012), being connected with

intentions to leave (p. 478). Strong relationships may be built between in-group members (Li et al., 2019) and those relationships may be viewed as either fair or unfair. Adam, for example, comments on hearing rumours about the preferential treatment of an in-group member.

> "This comes back to expectations. I'm not sure I had the expectation that the processes would be transparent. I don't think they are transparent at all, especially promotions, remuneration. For example, if you hear rumours that somebody has been employed on a great contract, and their kids are going to the top school and whatever, when you've been told that doesn't happen. *That breaks trust between staff and the university*." (P16 Adam)

Participants in this study have expressed feeling tricked or misled, or that promises have been broken. These feelings of injustice lead to distrust, with some IAS feeling that they have been tricked, that their efforts are not rewarded in the way they expected, leading to PCB (Guest, 1998). Adam's comment, for example, highlights a disconnect between his expectations about fairness and the actual benefits practices he perceives. Adam's perception of breach of trust may be connected to the tacit understanding that every member of staff should be equally rewarded, which is arguably unrealistic.

In-group knowledge appears to help some IAS learn which responsibilities are rewarded and which are not. Paul says that he hears rumours about which activities are promotions-worthy and which are not, but that an inside group have access to this valuable knowledge about which only snippets of information leak out. If Paul were correct, then being an insider would help IAS learn about these promotions-worthy activities and insiders

would always have an information advantage. Jane describes having insider responsibilities without the benefits Paul predicts.

> "I've given up beating my head against a brick wall now. I'm on the academic board, you know, the highest board in the land. I know the movers and shakers and it's even worse because the movers and shakers promise but they don't deliver. So, you think, 'where can you go now?' [she asks herself] Nowhere. *You can't trust anybody*." (P1 Jane)

Jane comments on being unable to trust senior leadership, a common perception amongst IAS in this study, expressing dissatisfaction with a perceived lack of trust. Her trust towards management appears to have deteriorated.

> "I have very little trust in the organization. Because … you can't trust a verbal contract, you can't trust what's being told to you in a meeting, there are no minutes of some of the meetings ... there are promises made for someone to do something about it, but I don't believe they were ever done." (P1 Jane)

Jane's concept of trust here is contractual, being based on a Western view of trustworthiness, being about formal, depersonalised measures such as relating to 'integrity and promise-keeping,' as Jukka et al. (2017, p. 489) has described. In the Chinese context, however, trustworthiness is based on benevolence, positive affect, personalised communication and commitment, rooted in 'respect and reciprocity' (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 490). If Jane's understanding of trustworthiness is built on the western concept of trust, then

it is not surprising she is experiencing a breach of PC. Greg describes how his manager has made himself unpopular for being too truthful.

> "When I was a manager, I could trust what [my director] said to me. Because one on one, he would tell me … honestly, I would trust what he said to me. Now, he wasn't overwhelmingly popular for some of this, because he would tell somebody exactly what he thought, and that itself has damaging effects on morale." (P9 Greg)

For Greg, the perceived trustworthiness of his manager is essential. By contrast, Greg comments that his current manager does not inspire trust.

> "The current director, I have no trust at all in anything he tells me. That leads to doubt and it leads to conversations in corridors about what he said: 'What did he say to you?' 'What did he say to you?' [he mimics asking different people the same question]." (P9 Greg)

Greg's viewpoint seems to equate trustworthiness with truthful communications, being more interested in the keeping of promises than in the 'respect and reciprocity' preferred by the Chinese (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 482). Scott also perceives Psychological Contract Breach (Guest, 1998) in his interactions with senior management, noticing that senior leaders appear to demonstrate an authoritarian relationship with staff, perhaps being unaware that this is not his preferred style.

> "Communications from the top-level down are that 'you're lucky to have a job.' I think it's very recent that it's happening. There was a thing about promotion. Maybe

> I'm paraphrasing, summarizing, but a couple of communications recently have been along the lines of, 'if you don't like it, you can leave'. I've noticed that a couple of times and *it's very short term [thinking]*." (P8 Scott)

Scott perceives an authoritarian approach from the university leadership that he disapproves of. He describes a Psychological Contract Breach (PCB) between his expectations and the emergent relationship. As Kiefer and Antoni (2019) predict, Scott expresses disappointment, anger, upset and a sense of betrayal.

> "I feel like they're saying, 'You're not secure', you know, 'you're lucky to have [a job here].' I don't think that's a very good feeling to come down from management. We all understand that we're here by the grace of Jesus, but … I don't think that should be something - even if it's something they feel - it shouldn't be something that should be transferred. Because you just create a bad work environment if that sort of thing is happening. This is very recent for me, I've noticed that over the promotion period, like '*You should be doing excellent [work] to even consider having the temerity to apply*'." (P8 Scott)

It is difficult to predict the impacts and consequences of this sense of PCB expressed by Scott, but possibly he is now less willing to exert effort and less willing to volunteer, as Sturges et al. (2005) observe. Another participant, Robert, seems less willing to volunteer as a consequence of perceived PCB, commenting that if he were to become a manager, knowing what he does, it might seem false, and he might lose respect from his friends. Greg also has doubts about joining the management team, after a disappointing performance review.

> "Who's to say that when I'm a manager, he doesn't undermine the role that I do. I have a few ideas, but they won't necessarily be universally agreeable. If I was to do the job, as he suggested, would he then undercut that *by allowing things to go?*" (P9 Greg)

Participants in this study who have experienced PCB have expressed a loss of trust, reduced commitment and a sense of resentment (Conway & Briner, 2005), as illustrated by the comments of Greg and Scott. Furthermore, some IAS feel that their leaders do not treat them with the appropriate respect.

> "I don't trust the organization to treat me as … a very important thing is that I'm just *treated as a human being - treated as an equal*, with a certain amount of respect. I don't really currently trust some of the individuals on the management team - or the management as a whole - to treat me and other members of staff with that level of respect." (P11 Elena)

IAS mention the importance small gestures of appreciation and recognition have on their motivation. Conversely, to be treated without respect can be demotivating, as Robert explains.

> "The way I hear certain managers talk about teachers as if they were imbeciles almost, like schoolchildren. Like [some] teachers talk about students in this awful way, *they put them into this 'out group'*. I've certainly had managers do that to adult teachers as well." (P7 Robert)

It is interesting that Robert's description of being treated without respect stands in contrast with the focus on respect, reciprocity and 'personalised benevolence' preferred in Chinese culture (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 492). Robert may have experienced being treated without respect by other IAS in leadership roles, whose behaviours towards other IAS do not match with the host culture.

MECHANISM 2: SELF-MANAGEMENT

Theme 2: Feeling powerless about in-groups

The perceived existence of in-groups in the organisation leads many IAS to experience powerlessness. Some participants in this study have reported that they lack a voice in the decision-making processes they perceive, common to Chinese guanxi (Song et al., 2017). Participants also feel that in-group members have influence over outsiders, having influence over the promotions processes and the privilege of access to insider information, also common to Chinese guanxi (Yang et al., 2009). Staff who have gained power and influence, being in the in-group, may choose to work with staff they are best attuned to, who they get along best with and with whom they have developed trust based on the Chinese relational measure of trustworthiness (Jukka et al., 2017). Furthermore, an in-group serves as a social filter for trustworthiness, or 'cocoon' (Luo et al., 2016), to protect inside members. Fiona describes how she perceives that this in-group operates in a way that seems unfair and somewhat dysfunctional.

> "I think there's a level of defensiveness about protecting the hierarchy, [they say] '*We need to keep our power, our ability to tell people what to do, the power to control everything*'." (P10 Fiona)

Fiona's comments appear to mirror Luo et al. (2016, p. 652)'s description of the 'cocoons' that serve to protect in-group members from a hostile environment, for preservation, since they must put their trust in their connections (the rule of man) in the absence of a reliable rule of law (Li et al., 2019, p. 5). Claire notices that the same people appear at every committee, perhaps the practice of having a fixed in-group streamlines the decision-making processes, but this creates resentment. Claire describes an early experience in the organisation.

> "I went up to introduce myself and said, 'Hi, I'm one of the new tutors and I just wanted to let you know that I've taught [this subject] … so I'm really hoping to be put [in one specific area]." They turned to me and said, 'We'll put you where we need you.' What kind of message was that? Just like, 'Fuck you,' you know, 'We will assess who you are and where we should put you.' *It was very dismissive*." (P14 Claire)

Claire may have felt that she lacked influence in this example and her ideas seem to have been dismissed without much consideration, leading to a feeling of powerlessness, consistent with Song et al. (2017)'s description of out-group members lacking a 'voice'. Jane also feels that she lacks influence and seems to have nobody to turn to about the perceived unfairness she experiences.

> "I can't rely on contracts. I can't even rely on letters. We have no union; we have no HR support. You just feel like you're at the whim of whatever happens to be going on this year and whoever's in charge. If you're lucky, you get [promoted] and if you don't, then you don't. You just [she pauses and seems upset], yeah, I've pretty much given up on promotion now." (P1 Jane)

Jane feels that she is powerless against the hierarchy of an in-group (Takeuchi et al., 2020) that she believes is unfair. This same hierarchy appears to benefit a select group, but not everyone. Having the right connections and developing relationships may help some insiders to gain insider benefits (Li et al., 2019). When applying for promotions, for example, participants in this study have commented that they notice insiders have better chances than outsiders. Those connected with influential people might appear to be better served by the promotions process and there is an understanding that some people are in line for a promotion, others are not, as Paul explains.

> "In the course of my time here, I've applied for very few things. That's possibly because I opened my eyes to how some things are done and the selection process for some of those roles. If you didn't already have an idea that you stood a good chance of getting it, or if you hadn't *already built up some kind of relationship* with the people who were dealing out those roles, then you hadn't already established a chance of getting the role anyway." (P15 Paul)

Having developed a relationship with influential people seems essential to Paul as he describes being invited to join insider groups, this is consistent with Chinese guanxi, since the development of trust is personalised and relational (Li, 2007, p. 439). Paul later describes

how he does not want to be seen as ‘one of those people’ with a drive for personal ambition. Thomas explains the importance he places the relationships he has with people in the organisation, rather than expecting the organisation to support him.

> “In an organization I don't expect much from my experience. I think it all comes down to the individuals we deal with. Of course, there are company cultures and organizational culture, I understand that. But in the end, it all boils down to the individuals.” (P12 Thomas)

Thomas comments on the importance of nurturing the right relationships, and his description seems consistent with Li et al. (2019, p. 5), and the importance of putting trust in the people we know. This knowledge seems to bear fruit for his career. Other participants in this study have had different experiences with many possible explanations for their lack of success. Their relationships and connections might not have been with the right in-group members, not having power or influence, or without mutually supportive relationships. Without these influential connections, some IAS have experienced disappointments, perhaps leading to disengagement. Lynne, for example, says she has given up on applying for promotion altogether.

> “Actually, for the last couple of years I have stopped applying. Because I think it's a waste of my time. I have stopped seeing my career as the way forward. Now, I think I am just doing a job.” (P3 Lynne)

Lynne is clearly upset and has expressed her sense of disengagement, mirroring the disengagement of staff who have experienced PC breach described by Sturges et al. (2005, p.

70). Thomas, on the other hand, has a different perspective on setbacks and rejection, revealing stark personality differences. He does not perceive being rejected for promotion as a failure. Not being upset - at least not for long - he describes how he bounced back from disappointment.

> "In the beginning, I didn't expect to be promoted. There were maybe one or two times when I thought, 'it's time'. However, I also understood how the situation was and again, it's not only based on rational [arguments] - looking at what you did - but *it's also about who you know*, etcetera. So, I knew that from that perspective my chances were a bit lower. *Was I upset after that? No*." (P12 Thomas)

Thomas explains that it was difficult to get promoted early on in his career because of his lack of connections. Tellingly, he comments that getting ahead is about 'who you know,' repeating the advice of Seligman (1999, p. 34) and Nie and Lämsä (2015, p. 854). Thomas takes the pragmatic view that despite what seems like an unfair decision it is 'who you know' that counts towards promotion chances; moreover, being prepared for this, he is able to cope with rejection since he has an explanation for it. Claire, on the other hand, explains the rejection she experiences in terms of seemingly unfair in-group relationships.

> "He came to my office and I soon became [upset]. That's when I said that she had been promoted because she [was in a relationship with him] and because I had heard from someone else that she had bragged about that. You know: her relationship with him. He apparently got really pissed off [with me] and [she] refused to talk to me ever since." (P14 Claire)

Claire explains her situation as the victim of an apparently unfair in-group relationship between two people. However, this explanation is only one side of a story that has several perspectives. For example, as Thomas explains, the ability to develop network connections with influential people is key to being promoted, especially in the Chinese context (Li et al., 2019). A perception of insider relationships and the mechanisms that help insiders to be promoted ahead of others does seem unfair, from the western perspective, but in the Chinese context, maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with in-group members is essential to joining such in-groups and thereby gaining protection (Barbalet, 2015) and social power (Li et al., 2019).

Theme 3: Feeling disappointed about the perceived injustice of the promotions process

Many participants in this study have reported that they feel disappointed, let down or betrayed, features of PCB (Kiefer & Antoni, 2019), citing experiences of unfairness, injustice and inequality, perceived dishonesty, untruths and breach of trust relating specifically to the promotions process in the organisation. Participants did not comment on converse experiences of fairness, truth and trust. It is apparent that these three features are important for the participants in this study, and that the absence of fairness, truth and trust is more impactful for some than for others. Some participants have taken a more positive approach by remaining persistent or taking a pragmatic approach. Others choose to focus on appreciating the opportunities available to them within the organisation, rather than focusing on the injustices they perceive. Jane, for example, has experienced rejection, apparent injustice and unfairness; she finds the promotion process difficult and says she is insulted by the rejection she has experienced.

> "The application process for promotion is exhausting … the things that need to be ticked off are ridiculous. I was very shocked to not get promoted. It was a year's worth of work, planning and everything. It was absolutely exhausting … people higher up already thought that I was at that level, people who have control over the process … when I saw that I didn't get promoted again, I was just completely gobsmacked. I was angry at the feedback, because it was quite insulting … I can't imagine ever doing that again." (P1 Jane)

The emotional impacts on Jane seem clear – she experiences rejection after the considerable work she has committed to writing an application for promotion and expresses that she has disengaged from the process. Her comment indicates that the 'people higher up' she refers to, with control over the promotions process, seem surprised that she has not already been promoted. In earlier comments during the interview, Jane describes the commitments she has made to the organisation and describes a perceived betrayal of trust (Kiefer & Antoni, 2019, p. 86), unfairness and a sense of dishonesty she experiences. Further changes to the targets for promotion mean that Jane now feels that promotion is out of her reach.

> "The promotion system has just changed and changed and changed. I got turned down from promotion twice. Now the promotion system has just gone way out of my league. There's no way I can even contemplate [getting promoted now]." (P1 Jane)

Jane's experiences highlight the deep feelings of betrayal (Kiefer & Antoni, 2019, p. 86) that can result from being rejected for promotion, as a PCB. Rejection has led Jane to decide to stop writing further applications and she is not the only participant to feel this way.

Claire also describes her strong feelings about feeling rejected after an unsuccessful promotion application.

> "… the biggest one was that I didn't get the management position in the [department], because the person in charge decided that he needed to have his friend on the management team, for whatever reason - to pack it full of people who supported him. Not only did he do that, but then he bragged about it to other people in front of me, which I just think is absolutely cruel and evil. So that that sent me into a tailspin for a couple of years, months. I felt humiliated." (Claire, P14)

Claire's comments indicate a strong sense of self-worth attached to her job, the importance of this promotion for her sense of self-esteem and a sense of devastation for Claire upon an unexpected and disappointing result. Her self-worth seems strongly connected to this promotion and she has evidently committed a great deal of energy to it. The rejection leads to a greater sense of disappointment for her than it might to other staff. Claire has placed a great deal of importance on this promotion to management, and she feels there has been a breach of trust, as Conway and Briner (2005, p. 64) predict.

> "[They interview people] just to get people's hopes up and to get ideas from them, to get every little morsel of use out of these people before [they] just fucking throw them back out." (Claire, P14)

Claire's words express a deep frustration and bitterness about a perceived breach of trust, perhaps alluding to the 'integrity' and 'promise keeping' so important to IAS, but less important in the Chinese cultural context (Jukka et al., 2017, p. 489). Claire is deeply

disappointed, and her language reveals strong feelings of betrayal (Kiefer & Antoni, 2019). Claire complains about the apparent unfairness she has experienced after having been given greater responsibilities than her colleagues.

> "When I applied for promotion and I did not get it, I was really, really pissed off. I specifically felt that it was very unfair, because two people [junior to me] had got promoted. I couldn't believe that the fact that I had to do more administrative work than they had ... they had had more time to finish [a teaching certificate] or something like that, while I was off doing [a role with greater responsibility], that just seemed ridiculous to me." (Claire, P14)

Thomas seems to have a different approach, and describes feeling initially disappointed, but apparently managing his emotional response.

> "When you get the feedback, you feel 'shit.' But there's not much more. I think momentarily shit at that moment. Then I call my wife and we laugh about it, and it's gone." (P12 Thomas)

Thomas seems to have distanced himself from the initial sense of disappointment. Not talking directly about his personal feelings, Thomas may have hidden away his initial feelings, seeming to be able to manage the disappointment and feelings of betrayal with the help of his spouse. Thomas seems able to reframe the experience as a step on the journey to his eventual promotion, rather than a failure. Thomas manages to reframe negative setbacks on his career journey by making a conscious decision to manage his thinking.

> "Work brings you happiness ... but I can also be perfectly happy doing nothing for a while … I try not to let my career determine my happiness." (P12 Thomas)

Perhaps Thomas has attained a level of comfort to allow him the freedom to see work in this way. But also he has gained a sense of control over events, a self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Thomas appears immune to the ups and downs of the promotions process. Self-management seems to be a key factor in overcoming PCB and setbacks at work for some participants. For example, Paul has learned that he can eventually succeed through continued persistence.

> "It was a cumulative kind of thing where the first time I applied for promotion, I didn't get it, but I got pretty close … Then I didn't apply for another two years. I got close the first time, and then had done two more years work. So, I think I tried to put the director and whoever else was making the decision in as tough a position as possible, by saying: 'This is how close I got previously and this is how much I've done since then, so are you really gonna turn me down again?'." (P15 Paul)

Paul seems to have become adept at playing the insider game, by approaching the director with an apparent ultimatum.

Theme 4: The importance of being adaptable to change

Being willing and able to adapt to the changing needs of the organisation appears to be beneficial to some of the participants in this study, since they have commented on the importance of being flexible to change. Exploiting and developing a network may help to

reveal opportunities but it also appears to be important to cultivate emotional resilience to setbacks, since as Solinger et al. (2016) find, recovery from PCB can be explained by the emotional impact of that breach (p. 508). Cognitive and emotional strength appear to be valuable when responding to PCB and it seems essential to have career options rather than being focused on one single opportunity, as is the case with some IAS who feel they have no further career opportunities. When career options are limited within the organisation, IAS may have no choice but to develop viable alternatives outside the organisation.

When facing setbacks, Thomas has learned to manage his thinking and to be constructive in his approach. He has learned cognitive skills to adjust his expectations and manage his emotional responses, his self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Even though he likes to have his efforts acknowledged by being promoted, he claims this recognition does not define his personal wellbeing. When agreeing to take on more responsibilities, he first asks whether it can add value to the organisation and secondly whether the task will be "fun."

> "I take care of myself; I'm not naïve. Thinking that the organization takes care of you is a little bit naïve, in my opinion. Because an organization is an organization in that sense, it won't take care of you; *individuals will take care of you, or they will take care of you if it also brings them further*. It can be that you support what they need to do, or they can do things easier [with your support]. I look at it more pragmatically." (P12 Thomas)

Thomas argues for depersonalising the relationship between the employee and the broader organisation, focusing instead on interpersonal relationships and an exchange of favours between individuals. He says that he likes to contribute towards "something good," but also to be independent and make the right decisions for his personal well-being, whether

those decisions are good for his career or not. Thomas seems able to prioritise the regulation of his emotions.

Thomas seems to benefit from volunteering, being flexible and adaptive to the changing needs of the organisation. He has turned his understanding of the needs of the organisation to his advantage. Thomas says that he takes on roles that he says he is unprepared, being willing to adapt to the changing needs of the organisation.

> "I've dealt with both [types] in my [current] role and more often as a manager. Both of these [types of] people. They say, 'That's not my job, why should I do that?' That was never my attitude. If I work somewhere, I work there because I like to work there. This clock watching or something, that's not something I tend to do. I'm not looking whether something is within scope or out of scope; if it needs to be done for some reason, then I'll do it. And if it takes a bit longer, fine." (P12 Thomas)

Other participants have commented they volunteer but are not rewarded, indicating that some are better rewarded for volunteering than others. Volunteering without receiving a reward for it might seem unfair, since it might be assumed (perhaps incorrectly) that the organisation ought to fairly reward all efforts equally. Thomas explains that it is more important to exploit interpersonal connections.

> "Organizations sometimes work rationally, sometimes irrationally. It's not only based on your results; it's also based on your network. There are many factors and it's up to you to manage. I am very rational, so if it doesn't work out in this organization, then I'll go to another organization." (P12 Thomas)

Thomas indicates that staff in the organisation should learn how to develop and exploit a network. Claire has also learned to exploit her social network, benefiting from favourable insider mechanisms.

> "Luckily, I had a friend who was [in the department]. He knew that two professors were leaving in the summer. Because it's so difficult to get people hired here, the suggestion was made that I [apply for a job] and that's how I got over here." (Claire, P14)

Claire's more positive experience through a personal connection illustrates the importance of understanding how to exploit the benefits of the 'sentimental' and 'instrumental' nature of relationship networks within a Chinese organisation (Li et al., 2019); this demonstrates that Claire has learned how the culture operates. Claire had previously believed she had few options and had taken the only route to promotions she was aware of, the formal route. When Claire decided to exploit a personal connection, her fortunes changed. Other IAS may not have learned the crucial importance of developing mutually supportive networks. Paul has decided that he has a better future elsewhere.

> "I don't have any really strong ambitions about where my career is going [here]. So, it's not as if I feel like I need to become a manager - because that's the next step in my career; quite the opposite. In fact, I think I'm coming towards the end of my career in this field. That has nothing to do with anything that's happened here. I'd already decided that before I came here. I [had already] decided this was going to be my last job in teaching." (P15 Paul)

Paul has made the decision to take his career in a different direction, perhaps thereby reducing his stress levels.

> "I've realized that I can't continue doing this for much longer and definitely not for the rest of my working life, I want to do something else. So, in a way I don't have that real drive to push through the crap here. I feel like I can step back now." (P15 Paul)

Being focused on a career outside the organisation, Paul seems less concerned about the injustices he perceives. No longer being committed to his career development in this organisation, perhaps Paul will not experience further breach of contract, since he will not expect future returns on his efforts within the organisation. Having disengaged, Paul has avoided further disappointments including breach of trust or betrayal. Greg has also made the decision to adapt to a possible future outside the organisation. This option has become more urgent for him because he cannot afford to send his children to one of the local international schools. Without a children's education allowance, he will have to find a teaching job at one of the local international schools where the education of his children will be fully funded. To apply for this new job, Greg knows that he has to first gain a teaching qualification. This forward planning is a very practical and pragmatic approach, one that serves the IAS in the organisation well.

> "I am very practical. So, I went and got a qualification which could allow me to work in an international school: the PGCE. I'm getting this qualification. It's something I enjoy doing; I enjoy studying. But I still viewed it very much as a long-term thing, [I thought] I might use it maybe three or four years later. Whereas now, actually I want

> to use it pretty soon. Maybe even next year. There's no difference [leaving] this year to going [in] three years' time." (Greg, P9)

Greg's approach shows that being proactive about the changing environment is essential for him, and other IAS, to survive. Preparing himself for changing circumstances by retraining to teach at an international school will solve a pressing concern for his family, that is the education of his children.

Theme 5: Paddle your own canoe

'Never sit down with a tear or a frown but paddle your own canoe' (Baden-Powell, 2015)

Thomas recognises the importance of developing skills that are recognisable in different organisations, to give himself freedom, having a place 'somewhere,' he is not content to sit and ruminate on his misfortunes, he is oriented to the future.

> "I like to get acknowledged, I like to get promoted, but it doesn't define my career nor my personal wellbeing. So, in that sense I'm pragmatic, I'm less pragmatic if it comes to a relationship with colleagues and students, etc, then, of course, I would like to do my utter best to contribute to something good, which I believe this university is. But throughout my career, without sounding arrogant in that sense, there's always a place for me somewhere, and they always ask me for something, so I'm not so worried about it as well."

Thomas' perspective may work for him, being apparently welcome in many organisations. Other IAS may find that they have fewer options and are therefore less optimistic about their chances outside the organisation. There may 'always be a place' for Thomas, somewhere; but whether this is true or merely wishful thinking cannot be known.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the experiences of IAS working in the case study organisation at the individual level. I have identified the key mechanisms that are characteristic of their experiences. Since the organisation is influenced by Chinese guanxi, and IAS, being non-Chinese, are influenced by cultural differences, therefore the key mechanism in this chapter has been PC breach due to perceived unfairness and betrayal (Kiefer & Antoni, 2019, p. 86) in connection with these cultural differences. IAS may initially have a strong need for perceived fairness and equity (Guest & Clinton, 2011, p. 101), in which they expect that their leaders should demonstrate fair and equitable practices, particularly in connection with promotions. Over time, this expectation for the perceived fair practices connected with the promotions process may lead to a breach of trust, a mechanism connected with upholding the Psychological Contract. IAS may also begin to realise that their initial expectations may have been unrealistic or naïve, leading to feelings of betrayal. Some IAS have sought to overcome the disappointments they experience through self-management. Being unable to change their external processes, they have sought to adapt to the changing needs of the organisation. This is the third and final level of analysis in the thesis. I shall now turn to a summary of the key findings and cross-cutting themes before the concluding chapter.

Chapter 7: Summary of Data Analysis

This case study of a single organisation provides a detailed analysis of the Psychological Contract (PC) in context. The findings of this thesis may be generalisable to other Chinese International Joint Venture Universities (IJVU), where the conclusions may be valuable for managers and International Academic Staff (IAS). My research questions are:

1. How have IAS experienced their PCs at the IJVU?
2. How has their PC changed during the period of their employment at the IJVU?
3. How have these experiences impacted upon on the IAS member?
4. How do IAS describe their responses to any perceived breaches/violations of their PCs

Summary of key findings.

The experiences of IAS within the organisation appear strongly influenced by Chinese guanxi at the cultural, social and individual levels. In Chinese guanxi, the power to influence and the access to valuable information resides within insider networks developed through mutually beneficial relationships. The PC of IAS changes throughout the period of their employment within the organisation, apparently impacted by several mechanisms. IAS respond to PC breach in differing ways but with a unifying theme: adaptation. The key mechanisms I have identified are: (1) adapting to Chinese guanxi; (2) loyalty to in-groups; and (3) breach of Psychological Contract.

1. **Adapting to Chinese guanxi**. At the cultural level, some IAS learn to fit in and adapt to insider norms and practices common to the local national culture, they learn to

develop and on occasion exploit their personal social networks and relationships; they adapt to guanxi.

2. **Loyalty to in-groups**. At the social level, some IAS learn to remain loyal towards other insiders, exchanging favours with influential connections and volunteering to develop their social capital; they learn to be loyal to insiders.
3. **Breach of Psychological Contract**. At the individual level, some IAS experience PC breach due to perceived unfairness and betrayal in connection with cultural differences; they experience PC breach.

Some IAS respond to these challenges with a combination of cultural adaptation, developing valuable social capital and self-management. Those IAS who thrive appear to do so because they are better adapted to nurturing mutually supportive networks.

Cross-cutting themes

The following themes cut across each of the three levels (culture, social and individual) not fitting conveniently into any single level. It is, therefore, most fitting to place them here within this summary, to recognise that not all themes can be categorised within a single level, but that some cross levels.

A: Gaining the power to influence.

IAS can feel powerless in China, lacking cultural capital compared to their experiences in the west. Developing valuable insider connections appears to be a mechanism to gain power to influence through access to better quality information.

B: Exchanging favours to develop trust.

The exchange of favours between insiders appears to be a social mechanism through which insiders develop the power to influence others. To some IAS this apparent cronyism leads some IAS to express feelings of distrust.

C: Privileged access to valuable information.

Some IAS comment on the need to have a voice but feel they are being shut out or ignored. Having privileged access to information, keeping secrets, and telling lies appears to be a mechanism through which insiders preserve the power to exclude outsiders.

D: Perceived unfairness towards outsiders.

The promotions process seems fairer to insiders than to others. A mechanism of perceived favouritism towards insider groups contributes to this perception of unfairness. Despite this perception of unfairness, some IAS comment that they manage to beat the system through continued persistence.

E: Developing mutually supportive connections.

Some IAS recognise the importance of developing relationship networks better than others and have benefitted from this understanding. Through the mechanism of developing their personal networks and mutually supportive relationships, some IAS have experienced the benefits of Chinese guanxi, perhaps without using the term.

F: Adaptation to the culture of the organisation.

Some IAS are more flexible, adaptable, and pragmatic than others. Through the mechanism of adaptation, they have learned to swim with the culture: rather than fighting the organisation, they volunteer.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

I began this project with the intention to gain clarity about an apparent opacity within one organisation, described by one employee as a "murkiness". Throughout the time I have been familiar with the organisation, employees have commented on a lack of candid communications, apparent unfairness, and allegedly "corrupt" practices. I now recognise that my investigations were limited at the start due to the substantial gaps in my understanding of Chinese national culture and to begin with it did not occur to me that I should read up on Chinese guanxi in order to understand the processes and mechanisms operating within the organisation. Initially, I embarked on this project with what I might describe as a purist GT methodological approach to investigating the PC breach experiences of employees within the organisation, simply asking questions about the experiences of IAS, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) have recommended. I had expected theory to emerge, as has been described. I was disappointed that despite identifying several themes, deeper theoretical explanations eluded me. I later realised that for my GT analysis method to produce an explanatory theoretical framework, it required an ontological framework, such as that found within Bhaskar's Critical Realism (CR). By combining CR with GT, as Kempster and Parry (2014) have done, I was able to propose underlying explanatory mechanisms for the phenomena I had observed in the data. I have since realised that the theories I have generated may relate to a broader range of organisations than the one I studied initially, including potentially many further Joint Venture Universities and partner organisations both internationally and in the UK (where two organisations will have differing organisational cultures). During this project I have described the mechanisms of Chinese guanxi relationship networks (including in-groups) and their power within the case study organisation, as well as the creative and destructive capacity of these mechanisms. In this concluding chapter, I shall reflect further upon how the

development of these theoretical explanations have shaped my understanding of the organisation; furthermore, I shall explain the implications for practice and theory. These reflections contribute to the wider discourse on Chinese IJVUs, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), and the study of organisations more broadly. I shall begin this conclusion with a discussion of the practical and theoretical implications, ending with plans to disseminate my findings to a wider audience. This thesis demonstrates the application of an innovative methodology, a Critical Realist meta-theoretical framework with a Grounded Theory methodology (Kempster & Parry, 2014). By applying this innovative approach, I have informed both the practice of academic leadership and the development of theory.

Practical and theoretical implications

Chapter 4: the Impacts of Culture.

At the cultural level, some IAS have learned to adapt to the norms and practices that are common to the national culture of China, as practiced within the IJVU organisation; these IAS have learned to adapt to Chinese guanxi, fitting in, they have learned to exploit and develop social networks and relationships – both features of Chinese guanxi. IAS in the organisation who have become successful have learned to adapt to the culture to help them with their careers. This need to adapt to the culture is clear from my findings, as is the impacts upon those who have not been able to adapt or who have chosen not to adapt.

The key underlying explanatory mechanism I have identified at the cultural level is *adaptation to Chinese guanxi*, in which IAS could experience either successful or unsuccessful adaptation to Chinese guanxi – being a cultural adaptation. This adaptation means adapting to insider norms and practice, as well as adapting to the dominant national

culture. Within this key cultural mechanism, I have identified a further two mechanisms: *adapting to insider norms and practices* and *adapting to the dominant culture.*

Implications for professional practice: IAS who adapt to these cultural practices will prosper, those who do not adapt will not. An understanding of this mechanism can inform the management of IAS in IJVU, to inform and educate IAS about the importance of adapting to the national culture within the organisation, specifically relating to the importance of in-groups within Chinese guanxi.

Theoretically, understandings of these underlying processes inform how we construct knowledge about the mechanisms of an organisation relating to the experiences of individuals. Specifically, this understanding provides a framework for a description of the impacts of cultural mechanisms upon PC breach.

Chapter 5: the Social-Interpersonal level.

At the social level, those IAS who have become more successful within the organisation have learned to cultivate loyalty towards insider groups, exchanging favours with connections they perceive to have influence and volunteering with the aim to develop valuable social capital. Successful IAS have learned to exploit these social mechanisms within the organisation, through effectively fitting in with in-group members to profit from the protections they offer in return. Some IAS will have learned how to benefit from insider mechanisms, conversely some may have chosen to reject the same social mechanisms.

The key underlying explanatory mechanism I have identified at the social level is *loyalty towards insiders*. Through such loyalty, IAS can experience either positive or negative outcomes for their social status. This loyalty mechanism can be subdivided into *loyalty towards other insiders* and *prioritising the needs of the organisation*.

Implications for professional practice: IAS who recognise the importance of loyalty towards insiders may reach an enhanced social status within the organisation, those who don't may suffer a decline in their social status. Developing an understanding of these social mechanisms can inform managers about the importance of social mechanisms and processes within a Chinese IJVU, about the importance of insider loyalties. These insider loyalties may be seen as beneficial, or counterproductive, but given the context of Chinese national culture they are a necessary part of understanding the mechanisms of the organisation.

Theoretically, understanding how these social loyalty processes and underlying mechanism operate within the organisation can help to describe the experiences of IAS as well as to develop a conceptual framework for these experiences.

Chapter 6: the Individual Level.

At the individual level, some IAS have experienced Psychological Contract Breach (PCB) due to the perceived unfairness and betrayal they perceive in connection with cultural and social differences. These IAS experience PCB as a response to not being able to adapt or fit in with the culture of the organisation. Those IAS who have experienced better outcomes have managed to thrive within the culture despite the differences they experience, learning to manage or adapt to those potential disappointments effectively. This need to fit in is evident from my findings, moreover it is clear that there are negative impacts on the PCs of those IAS who have not adapted so well.

The key underlying explanatory mechanism at the individual level is *PC breach due to perceived unfairness and betrayal,* an experience that is influenced within the organisation through the social and cultural levels of reality, explained in chapters 4 and 5. Some IAS may adapt better than others, and those who are better adapted to a life in China may not

experience PCB, being better emotionally equipped to deal with disappointment. This mechanism is further divided into *breach of trust* and *self-management*.

Implications for professional practice: IAS who are better adapted to the social and cultural reality of working in a Chinese IJVU may experience less PCB than those who have not adapted, culturally. Experiences of powerlessness, betrayal and disappointment may depend on this adaptation, through their emotional and cognitive preparation (how they are mentally equipped for these disappointments). An understanding of this mechanism can help to inform managers and IAS about the processes and mechanisms of PCB within an IJVU and the importance of understanding and preparing for these PC breaches before they occur. This preparation may help managers to spot early who has not adapted, and to design training to optimise cultural adaptation to prevent PCB.

Theoretically, it may help to develop a model of these adaptive mechanisms. Understanding the mechanisms of PCB in an IJVU organisation through this Critical Realist model informs our understanding of PCB more generally.

Chapter 7: Cross-cutting themes

It is important to note that several themes cut across the three strata I have identified within the CR framework. These themes have explanatory power that crosses each of the layers of a realist ontological framework; they are:

A. gaining the power to influence through insider connections,
B. the exchange of favours to develop trust,
C. gaining privileged access to valuable information,
D. the perceived unfairness towards outsiders,

E. developing mutually supportive connections, and

F. adaptation to the culture of the organisation.

These cross-cutting themes may serve as a handy guide or modus operandi for IAS, in addition to the key mechanisms for each level, as they work within a Chinese IJVU. This playbook may serve to help future IAS plan their approach to working within a Chinese IJVU organisation, so that they can thrive, develop opportunities for their careers and avoid the disappointment associated with PCB. Although each layer may be considered in isolation, realistically individuals cannot separate individual experience from social interactions and the cultural context, therefore cross-cutting themes will have strong explanatory power within the organisation, having an influence that spans across multiple strata of reality (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016).

Broader implications of these findings

This research has broader implications beyond the case study organisation to further UK higher education partnerships and Joint Ventures with Chinese universities. In this thesis I have focused on the experiences of IAS who are trying to adapt to the challenges of working in a foreign culture, some are apparently more successful than others at this adaptation. Those IAS who thrive have responded to these challenges by adapting to the host culture, developing valuable social capital and self-management strategies; furthermore, they appear to thrive because they have developed mutually supportive networks.

This thesis provides new insights into how Chinese guanxi is experienced by IAS in a Chinese IJVU. It provides fresh in-depth qualitative perspectives into the mechanisms of PCB at the cultural, social, and individual level within the context of a Chinese IJVU.

Moreover, this thesis makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms of cultural adaptation more broadly.

Contributions to practice

It is important for researchers to consider the potential end-user within their research conversations. For example, Bartunek and Rynes (2010) have argued that researchers must think about how their work contributes to society, including providing practical guidance that workers can apply to their working lives. This thesis is no different. Bartunek and Rynes (2010) suggest the following ways that management research may benefit practice: by increasing awareness about an important issue, providing the potential for training, a learning opportunity, a potential for redesign and restructure, implications for selection and recruitment, and potential impacts on productivity and satisfaction (p. 105). Being a former IAS myself, I have first-hand experience of drawing from the findings of this thesis for my personal benefit. I have found the ideas useful when developing my career, for explaining and framing the pitfalls, and the importance of remaining loyal to insiders. IAS may use the cross-cutting themes listed in Chapter 7 as a form of modus operandi, or playbook, to guide their behaviours in an International Joint Venture (IJV) organisation. In the following section I have outlined the potential implications of my research as a learning opportunity, guidance for strategy and for the impacts on the individuals concerned.

Implications for practice 1: a learning opportunity

It will be beneficial for IJV organisations to raise awareness amongst IAS of the important issue of cultural adaptation. This recommendation corresponds to the cross-cutting

theme '*adaptation to the culture of the organisation.'* Adaptation to a new culture requires conscious effort, but this effort may be rewarded with an enhanced professional effectiveness. The findings of this thesis may inform Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, such as induction and training, where cultural adaptation should be an essential component.

Implications for practice 2: potential for redesign and restructure

The findings of this thesis may prove beneficial for Human Resource Management (HRM) strategy, with specific implications for the selection and recruitment of International Academic Staff (IAS). These IAS should be selected based on having the appropriate adaptive competencies. Specifically, they should have the ability to understand the processes and mechanisms of preferential insider treatment, such as those found in the similar practices of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). Cultural practices found in a Chinese IJVU may mirror those of the LMX approach, being influenced by the Chinese cultural context (Chinese guanxi). This understanding corresponds to the cross-cutting themes '*gaining the power to influence through insider connections*,' '*gaining privileged access to valuable information*,' and '*the perceived unfairness towards outsiders*.' According to the findings of this thesis, selecting those IAS who already have an understanding for these mechanisms will be a more effective approach.

Implications for practice 3: impacts on individuals

It may be beneficial for IAS to appreciate the importance of the cross-cutting themes '*the exchange of favours to develop trust,*' and '*developing mutually supportive connections*.' IAS may thrive in the IJVU context when they have a good understanding of the importance

of mutually supportive connections and the exchange of favours. Indeed, without this understanding, working in a Chinese IJV organisation may prove challenging.

Theoretical implications for empirical research

By applying GT techniques informed by CR I have demonstrated how it is possible to draw out the underlying explanatory mechanisms of Chinese guanxi within a Chinese IJVU. These mechanisms operate at multiple levels, having cultural origins with effects at the social and individual levels.

Pure GT has been criticised for lacking an ontological framework (Hoddy, 2019), however with this thesis I have demonstrated a contemporary approach to GT, including an abductive approach to theory development (Kempster & Parry, 2014), which has revealed the value of this study towards developing an understanding of the impacts that Chinese guanxi has upon IAS within the IJVU context in China, psychologically, with consequences for the organisation.

This study focused on the three layers of reality that were most evident from the analysis, being the cultural, social and individual, however further studies might consider the further seven levels suggested by Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016, p. 56), including the *macro-level* (which I interpret to include *political* considerations since Bhaskar refers to this as 'understanding the functioning of whole levels of society') and the *sub-individual, psychological level* (including Freudian unconscious motives). Although political and unconscious considerations were both conspicuous in their absence from the discussions I had with the participants in this study, I believe both politics and psychology are highly relevant within the context and that both topics were not discussed due to the understandable

fears around voicing comments openly that could cause harm to the participants while living and working in China (Perry, 2020).

Contribution to universal well-being

Aristotle once claimed that the aim of a good life could be described as 'living well,' what he termed *eudaimonia* (Charles, 2015, chpt 3). For the good life, Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) argue our aims as human beings are oriented towards what they describes as 'universal flourishing' and 'self-realisation' (p. 20). If the goal of human life is to 'flourish,' Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016, chpt 6.7) ask, then which mechanisms will lead us to this flourishing, and what is the logic or dynamic that will take us there? We cannot flourish, Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) argue, in a social context characterised by 'master-slave-type relations of domination and alienation' (p. 137), therefore to flourish in a good or *eudaimonistic* society, we must have the freedom to 'do otherwise' (referred to as agentive freedom - the freedom to disagree). The Critical Realist (CR) approach is said to contribute to this 'freedom dialectic' (p. 134) in which the free flourishing of each individual should be an outcome of the research, including the freedom to disagree (the dialectic of *agency*) and freedom of speech (the dialectic of *discourse*). In this way, CR investigation allows for universal self-realisation, being emancipatory and directed at self-realisation. With this thesis I have demonstrated the same emancipatory approach, listening to my participants with the aim to highlight and expose relationships that oppose these fundamentally important freedoms of *agency* and *discourse*.

This fresh approach offered by CR acts as a distinct counterpoint to what Bhaskar and Hartwig (2016) describe as the 'woeful inadequacies' (p. 165) offered by positivistic naturalist accounts of human experience, which lack the intentional agency (i.e. silencing the

voices) of the participants and romanticising the scientific objective stance towards human experience. The outcome of this naturalistic worldview has thus far been that the 'self' has remained entirely unknowable in positivist research (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016). I hope that with my thesis I have demonstrated the possibilities of exploring the real nature of the relationships between individuals and organisations without dampening the value of the experiences of individuals with what has been described as the unnecessary 'philosophical rubbish' often associated with naturalistic social research (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 2).

Pathways for future research

Limitations identified within this thesis can also be perceived as opportunities for further research. For example, it may prove valuable to compare emergent theoretical concepts identified from data in differing contexts as part of a 'constant' comparative method (Pettigrew, 2000, p. 257) within further Chinese IJVUs. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, there were 1,230 Joint Ventures offering higher education in China in 2020 (http://en.moe.gov.cn), therefore there will be plenty of potential candidates for a follow up study. There may also be suitable candidate IJVUs available for study in other countries, for example in the United Arab Emirates. These IJVUs in other countries will have different cultural influences, bringing different impacts to the PC experiences of IAS. Further research could investigate the potential breach of PC in these different organisations.

A weakness of my approach may be the selection of participants based on their specific backgrounds and experiences, for example I may have inadvertently selected those IAS who were already in tune with my perspectives, being those IAS with more than three years of experience, therefore they may have had time to align with similar views. Another approach could be taken in future to select alternative groups. The majority of the participants

selected for this study will have been aware of the risks of participating whilst living and working in China, where academia acquiesces to political compliance in exchange for the benefits conferred upon it by the state and where 'peer surveillance and pressure' is embedded within a 'professional oversight hierarchy' (Perry, 2020, p. 10). This means IAS will be aware of the surveillance mechanisms targeted upon them by both their colleagues and students from a hierarchy that serves the state not the university. These political risks will for certain have had a deep restraining influence on participants' willingness to reveal their true thoughts, being not free to express themselves without potentially serious consequences for their career and life.

It may be difficult to repeat a study such as this and it may be difficult to persuade further IAS to participate, given the risks for both researcher and the researched within a university in China (Perry, 2020). In Chinese tradition the scholar should serve the state, thus Chinese universities differ from those in liberal democracies, where academics have considerable freedoms. Chinese universities are expected to contribute to national success, first and foremost, and the power and wealth of Chinese academics seems contradictory to the western view of the university as a hub for liberal democratic thinking (Perry, 2020). Researchers in China may be well advised to continue to seek to avoid the risks of Critical Realist approaches by pursuing only less risky, naturalistic approaches, which seek to safely control (rather than liberate) the voices of the participants.

Finally, these findings could be applied to higher education in the UK. Given the growth of partnership universities in the UK, the methodology and findings of this thesis may also be applied to higher education partnerships in the UK.

Dissemination of research findings

I plan to present my findings at conferences in the UK and overseas. I also plan to publish articles in journals of education and organisation studies, psychology, ethnography, as well as to write potential book chapters. Sharing my findings at conferences is perhaps the quickest way to reach a larger audience of people with an interest in international education.

This thesis will contribute to the wider dialogue relating to Chinese IJVUs, the Psychological Contract of IAS, as well as to the growing examples of how a Critical Realist Grounded Theory may be applied in case study organisations.

Conclusion

IAS may find the way of doing things in a Chinese IJVU organisation rather foreign to them, where western contrarianism can conflict with the centuries-old practices of Chinese guanxi and the importance of *fitting in*. The cultural and social mechanisms in operation within the organization may surprise them. Furthermore, recent years have proven to be problematic for IAS in China, both politically and socially, where academic freedoms are being eroded and universities are becoming more subject to the ideological control of the state (Burnay & Pils, 2022). This may further encourage the wish to fit in and not be seen as contrarian.

I embarked upon this doctoral thesis with what I somewhat innocently considered to be a harmless investigation into why people experienced what they described as an opaque culture within the IJVU. I realised only more recently that an investigation such as this may prove to be highly risky, considering that the university is subject to the will of the state and Chinese universities are very far from liberal contexts within which to conduct research (Owen, 2020). Perhaps because of my newly found appreciation for these risks, I feel especially privileged to have been entrusted with the personal experiences and stories of the

participants who have chosen to take part in my study. Their contributions have helped me to develop theories about the underlying adaptive mechanisms within the case study organisation.

I hope that this thesis has contributed towards the broader goal of the 'good society' proposed within Bhaskar and Hartwig's contention for the value of CR, including the desire for freedom and to improve people's lives (2016, p. 134). If we first appreciate that the participants in this study cannot flourish within social relationships that resemble 'master and slave,' then the self-realisation and emancipation found within the CR ontology applied within this project has been worthwhile. Providing insights into the mechanism through which the participants perceive apparently corrupt or oppressive structures informs the reader about how to fashion the opposite: liberating structures which lead to the emancipation of future IAS. Since the ultimate aim and value of CR is 'universal flourishing' or *eudaimonia* and 'universal human emancipation,' then I hope that this study has contributed some way towards this emancipation (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016, p. 138). A CR investigation seeks to reveal the yearning and striving of its participants, thereby to liberate those who experience oppressions everywhere.

This thesis has revealed the uncensored experiences of the IAS in the case study organisation, perhaps inconveniently revealing corrupt practices and cronyism. Nevertheless, these insider mechanisms are an inescapable reality for those whose careers and livelihoods depend on an acquiescence to the power of the Chinese state, who must put aside any contrarian instincts and the liberal ideal of the democratising nature of the university (Owen, 2020). They should instead realise the power of the university as a tool of the state, where the state controls the nature of inquiry and where knowledge creation itself is imbued with non-liberal values. To be employed by such a university means accepting the necessity of being complicit with the ultimate insider group.

49564 words

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The informed consent process requires that prospective participants are provided with as much information as possible about a research project in order that they, and / or their legal guardians / advocates, can make an informed decision about whether or not they want to take part in the project.

1. **Title of Study**

Psychological Contracts at an International Joint Venture University in China.

2. **Version Number and Date**

Version 1; 20th December 2018

3. **Invitation Paragraph**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends and relatives if you wish. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. Thank you for reading.

4. **What is the purpose of the study?**

International Academic Staff (IAS) are key to the provision of international higher education at [IJVU]. Retaining these IAS is essential; however, their changing needs and expectations may not be fully understood. Many needs and expectations may not be known to the employer, and form part of a 'psychological contract' (Rousseau, 1989). It is proposed to explore the experiences of IAS within [IJVU] by conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews and following a grounded theory approach. It is hoped that through the findings of

this study we may inform strategy and policy at the university, contributing to an understanding of the attraction, wellbeing and retention of IAS at [IJVU] and similar universities.

5. Why have I been chosen to take part?

Overall, between 10-15 participants will be selected. You have been approached because you are an international member of academic staff at [IJVU], with three years or more experience of working within the organisation. Further IAS with three years or more experience will be invited to participate in this study.

6. Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation and without incurring a disadvantage. If you wish to withdraw please do so by writing an email to me (richard.galletly@...). It is important to mention that this study is not connected with my professional role (Senior Teaching Fellow at Business School).

7. What will happen if I take part?

In this study, a single, semi-structured, face-to-face interview will be conducted to gain insights into your experiences as an international member of academic staff at [IJVU]. In this study, I am interested in the beliefs and mental models you have about the 'terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement' between yourself and your employer, referred to as the 'Psychological Contract'. I am also interested in exploring their experiences you have, to better understand the formation, retention, and revision of this Psychological Contract. To achieve this, I would like to record a 60-minute interview with you, using an MP3 recorder; the contents of the interview will later be transcribed, and after transcription, the original recordings will be deleted. I am the sole researcher for this project and will conduct the interviews myself.

8. Expenses and/or payments

No expenses or payments are anticipated for these interviews.

9. Are there any risks in taking part?

The central identified risk for participants is in relation to ensuring confidentiality and anonymity amongst a small group of potential participants (international academic staff) drawn from what can only be a small group of potential International Joint Venture Universities (IJVU) and second in relation ensuring that participants do not experience stress (above that associated with normal life) when, for example, exploring breaches of Psychological Contracts as part of the interview process.

Given that the study covers non-sensitive topics, already present in published reports, the risks to participants is considered low. Risks will be mitigated through treating your comments anonymously, furthermore any identifying information about you will be treated confidentially. However, to comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) about the storage of personal data, you have the right to access any personal data that is stored about you (BERA, 2011, p. 8). Names will not be used, but a code for participants will be recorded for each interview (WUSTL, 2011); in addition, each MP3 file is identifiable by date.

Transcripts of the interview recording will be provided for you to check for accuracy. You may also read through the findings of the final report to confirm that you cannot be recognised from any direct quotes. If you wish the final report to be sent to you for checking, please provide an email address on the 'Participant Consent Form', so that I can email a copy to you. If, after a 10-day period no comment is received, I shall assume that you have confirmed the content to be suitable for publication.

10. Are there any benefits in taking part?

Through uncovering the narratives you and other international academic staff have in relation to your perceived Psychological Contracts with your employer [IJVU], this study will gain a more in depth understanding into your experiences. These understandings will inform

university policies and strategies and benefit the attraction, wellbeing and retention of international academic staff. Both parties should benefit (participants and the organisation) from this study despite the risks you may face by sharing information about your Psychological Contract with the organisation and government.

11. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know by contacting Richard Galletly and I will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to me with then you should contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Sub- Committee on ethics@.... When contacting the Research Ethics Sub-Committee administrators, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make. You may also contact the University of Liverpool's Research Participant Advocate, USA number 001-612-312-1210, or email address liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com. Furthermore, should you need support from a counsellor, staff mental health services are covered by the university's health insurance. 'Staff one stop' can help with the reimbursement of these services.

12. Will my participation be kept confidential?

Recordings made with an MP3 recorder will be securely stored in a locked case in the researcher's office. Voice recordings will be transcribed by the researcher, and once these transcriptions are complete, the original recordings will be deleted. Written transcripts will be immediately anonymised and stored on a USB data stick, also securely stored in a locked case in the researcher's office. The researcher's office is locked and accessible only with a key-card. Any identifying information about participants (i.e. yourself) will be treated confidentially, names will not be used, but a code will be created for each participant. Questions will be designed to prevent harm to participants, and no identifying information

will be included in any quoted statements you might make in future published reports. Care will be taken to ensure that you will not be inadvertently identified by the comments you make when these comments are later included in a written report. Furthermore, you may read through the final written report to ensure that you are confident you cannot be recognised from any comments you make.

13. What will happen to the results of the study?

Findings are to be published in a doctoral thesis and possible further research publications. These publications will be accessible to students and researchers with access to academic resources. Your name and role will not be mentioned in the published report, and the organisation will be referred to using a pseudonym only. Despite these measures, it is possible that the organisation might be identified by a process of elimination by a reader who is familiar with the Higher Education sector in China, or by searching the internet for my name and identifying our employer.

14. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You may withdraw at any time, without explanation. Results up to the time you choose to withdraw may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that all data be destroyed, and no further use be made of them.

15. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have further questions, please contact the principal researcher, **Richard Galletly** …., Richard.galletly@...., Office …., South Campus of [IJVU], address.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Psychological Contracts at an International Joint Venture University in China.

Researcher(s): Richard Galletly

	Please initial box
1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 20th December, 2018 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	☐
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.	☐
4. The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy.	☐
5. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.	☐
6. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

_____ _____ _____

Participant Name Date signature

_____ _____ _____

Researcher Date Signature

Principal Investigator:

Name, Richard Galletly

Work Address …… China

Work Telephone …….

Work Email…. Richard.galletly@....

Version 1; December 2018

APPENDIX C: UoL ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

Dear Richard Galletly			
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.			
Sub-Committee:		EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)	
Review type:		Expedited	
PI:		Richard Galletly (supervised by Rowena Senior)	
	School:	Lifelong Learning	
Title:		Psychological Contracts at an International Joint Venture University in China	
First Reviewer:		Dr. Kalman Winston	
Second Reviewer:		Dr. Ellen Boeren	
Other members of the Committee		Dr Lucilla Costa	
Date of Approval:		13/4/2019	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:			
Conditions			
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.	

2	Recommended	I suggest you send out the invitation email to all 79 potential participants, and then proceed with your purposive sampling among the respondents.

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Kind regards,

Kalman Winston	Lucilla Crosta
EdD. VPREC committee member	Chair, EdD. VPREC

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear colleague,

As you may know, I am currently undertaking doctoral research sponsored by the University of Liverpool. As part of this research project, I am writing to invite you to take part in a study looking at the beliefs and mental models you have about the 'terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement' between yourself and your employer, referred to as the 'Psychological Contract'. I am interested in exploring your experiences to better understand the formation, retention, and revision of this Psychological Contract.

I aim to explore the experiences of International Academic Staff at [IJVU] by conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews and following a grounded theory approach. The interview would last about 1 hour, to be arranged at a time and place of your convenience. I would like to extend an invitation for you to participate. Before considering whether to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out, and what it will involve. Please read the attached participant information sheet (PIS), and consent form. If anything is unclear, or you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

All information I collect from you will be kept private and confidential. You will be given a pseudonym, and identifiable information will never be used in a publication or presentation. I will not pass on your details to any organisation or company. This is personal research for academic purposes. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed with your consent. The interviews will be anonymised at the time of analysis so that your confidentiality can be ensured. After the interview, I may contact you at a later date to clarify certain points or invite you to check the accuracy of your transcribed comments. Participation in this research

is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time or to not answer questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

This project has ethical approval from the Research Ethics Subcommittee (RESC), reference 18-03-15 (20 February, 2019).

If, after reading the participant information sheet, you feel that you are interested in participating, could you please reply to me so that we can arrange a possible time for the interview?

If you would like to discuss the project with me prior to deciding, or for any other reason, I can be contacted by email at [email] or by telephone on …..

Thank you for considering this request,

Best regards,

Richard Galletly

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction and context setting statement. *(5 mins)*

"I am studying for a Doctorate in Education from the University of Liverpool. As part of the research stage of this doctorate, I am investigating how the psychological contract is experienced by international academic staff here at [IJVU]."

"I would like to ask you about your experiences of what is called the 'psychological contract.' The psychological contract is a work-based form of social contract, in which an individual has beliefs about the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the employee and her employer. A psychological contract exists when one party believes that a promise of future returns has been made, a contribution has been given and an obligation has been created to provide future benefits (in exchange).

Both employee and employer may have differing understandings of this psychological contract since neither party may be aware of the other's agenda. Consequently, the psychological contract is not like a legal contract; in fact, it is not disclosed, and only exists 'in the eye of the beholder.'

The contents of this psychological contract will include the employee's contributions: for example, their skills and knowledge, concern for quality and flexibility.

In return, the employer has obligations, like (for example) fairness in selection and appraisal, meeting the needs of the employee's family, recognition (for contributions), a safe environment, equitable pay, fair and consistent benefits, and job security."

Research questions.

RQ1 *'How have IAS experienced their PCs at the IJVU?'*

RQ2 *'How has their PC changed during the period of their employment at the IJVU?'*

RQ3 *'How have these experiences impacted upon on the IAS member?'*

RQ4 '*How do IAS describe their responses to any perceived breaches or violations of their PCs?'*

Note*: If a participant brings up a topic that appears to be important to the investigation, the researcher will allow the participant space within the interview to explore this/these avenues. Initial questions must be considered provisional and may be adapted as the interview develops. Questioning will 'go with' the participants, rather than lead them to established theoretical conclusions.*

General questions *(5 mins)*

1. Could you perhaps begin by telling me a little about your background? What did you do before you joined the university? [the researcher will comment on this story]
2. I'd like to understand your situation better. Could you tell me something about your current role at the university - for example, your responsibilities and the career path you've taken so far? [the researcher will also comment]

Expectations *(what and why) (10 mins)*

3. Can I ask what you perceived to be the unwritten promises[1] made by the organisation when you started here? Why were those promises important to you?

[1] E.g. training, feedback on performance, fair treatment, attractive benefits package, equal opportunities for promotion, transparent processes.

4. Can you tell me what you perceive to be the unwritten (implicit) promises[2] you offer to the organisation in return? [for example, volunteering, skills development, working extra hours, following policies and procedures] Why do you think the promises that you have fulfilled are important to the organization?
5. Can you tell me in which ways you think that the organisation has (or hasn't) fulfilled the unwritten promises (or obligations) that were owed to you? [follow up questions are optional] If it hasn't, why do you think that is the case? Why is that important to you?

Experiential elements *(what, why and how) (10 mins)*

6. Can you tell me about the experiences you have had relating to *trust* in the organisation? [go with the conversation, follow up questions are optional] Why is this issue important to you? How did these experiences impact upon you?
7. Can I ask what experiences you have of being trusted by the organisation? Why do you perceive that it is important to be trusted? How does this perception impact on you, personally?
8. How (in which ways) do you perceive there to be equal (or unequal) treatment for different employees within the organization? [the researcher will 'go with' the conversation, follow up questions are optional] How are people treated differently? Why do you think these differences exist? How do these differences impact upon you?

Changes/breaches/matches and mismatches *(what, why and how) (10 mins)*

[2] E.g. volunteering, doing tasks outside your job description, developing new skills, working extra hours, following company policies and procedures.

9. I'd like to focus on your experiences of a change/ [breach/ violation/ or mismatch] in the unwritten promises as you perceive them. You've said [mentioned] _____ [3]. Can I ask if you would tell me more about this incident/ [experience/situation] - could you perhaps describe a specific example [or case]? [the researcher will 'go with' the conversation, follow up questions are optional] Why is this specific example important to you? How does this incident affect you?

Impacts/emotional effects *(what, why and how) (10 mins)*

10. We've talked about _____ [4] and the importance of the experience, why it was important to you. If it's okay, I'd like to explore the impact this change has had on you, personally [emotionally]. Can I ask what your reaction has been to this change [breach/ violation/ mismatch][5]? [the researcher will 'go with' the conversation, follow up questions are optional] How do you feel about that[6]? How has this impacted on you? Why is it important for you?
11. Is there anything further you'd like to say (about anything we've discussed today)?

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[3] The researcher selects a story from his notes that the participant has revealed earlier and paraphrases this story. The story should reveal changes, breaches, violations or mismatches in the unwritten promises between the organization and the participant, but this assessment does not have to be stated explicitly by the researcher.

[4] the researcher summarises the experience of the participant, relating to a change, breach, violation or mismatch the participant has experienced

[5] E.g. changes, breaches, violations or mismatches in the unwritten promises between the organization and the participant.

[6] E.g. feelings of isolation, beliefs about incompetency, reframing, changes in reciprocity.