The sense of belonging in the paradox of unity in diversity

a case study of Han Chinese university students

Author: Kimberley Goebel
s1255622
MA Asian Studies (Chinese Studies)

Supervisor: Dr. Limin Teh

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Abstract

China consists of an enormous geo-body, with different geographical, cultural, and linguistic differences. Hence, many differences exist within its population, which consists of fifty-five minorities and the Han majority. Although the state creates space for the acknowledgement of internal differences, it also continuously emphasizes China's unity. This has led to a paradox of unity in diversity. Prior research on cultural diversity within China has mainly focused on minority nationalities, giving less attention to the Han as they are often deemed 'invisible'. This research will however focus on the Han as it aims to answer the question: "How do Han students identify themselves in the paradox of unity in diversity?" by examining what the sense of belonging of students from Shandong University is built on. The data will show that self-identification of the students is simultaneously vertically and horizontally related, depending on the role of the 'Other': identities exist in tandem with each other, while they can also gain preference. Furthermore, through the constant emphasis on 'national' and 'hometown' identities —one representing unity, the other diversity— it becomes evident that the paradox of unity in diversity is an integral part of the students' self-identification.

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Introduction

In 2017 I started my exchange year in China as a part of my master's program at Shandong university, in Jinan. During my stay I noticed the many banners and posters with slogans propagating good moral behavior, as well as the similarities between them in different parts of China. These messages are widely distributed in public places such as parks, public squares, buses, and streets, forming a medium through which the state spreads official cultural and national discourse (Zygadlo, 2017). Among the messages, those of unity and solidarity are common. One night, when I was walking around downtown Jinan, one particular poster caught my eye. It was a red poster with a drawing of an umbrella on it. Under the umbrella the characters 有国才有家 (*you guo cai you jia)* were printed, which can be translated as "If you have a country, you have a home". It alludes to the idea that the many people constituting the population of China form a 'home' together. This message represents the ideology of the Chinese state to create a harmonious society of equity, in which diverse cultural identities fit into the overarching national identity of the Chinese nation (Zhao & Postiglione, 2010). But what does 'home' mean to the population of a country of which under the umbrella of collectivity, a diversity of culture exists? What is one's sense of belonging built on?

China consists of an enormous geo-body, with different geographical, cultural, and linguistic differences. Hence, many differences exist within the Chinese population. The state currently recognizes fifty-six different nationalities, or *minzu.* Fifty-five of these nationalities are ethnic minorities, also called minority nationalities. The Han population is the single majority and officially constitutes 91, 5% of the Chinese population (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, p.3). Following the idea of the above-mentioned harmonious society, this has resulted in the odd calculus of 55+1=1, in the words of Mullaney (in Leibold, 2016, p. 426). With fifty-five minorities there is great cultural diversity within the minority population. However, great diversity exists within the Han majority as well. The Han consist of many distinct linguistic and cultural features, and have always been a diverse group (Soontiens, 2007; Tapp, 2012, p.152). As Elliott (2012) argues, the definition of Han has always been unstable and had been established in ancient China through different processes of 'othering'. This process resulted in continuous changes within the Han group, and a hybridization of cultures. Thus, both the minority nationalities and Han majority encompass multi-faceted cultures. As mentioned before, the state emphasizes the idea of a collective unity. Yet, majority and minority categories still play a large role in the formation of China's national identity. This has resulted in the paradox of creating a space for ethnic diversity, while on the other hand, squeezing this space by strongly emphasizing national unity. This system of unity in diversity can be called *duoyuan yi ti juge* 多元一体格局, coined by professor Fei Xiaotong (Leibold, 2010b; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010).

Research on China's internal diversity has predominantly focused on the minority population. This research will however focus on the Han as it aims to answer the question: "How do Han students identify themselves in the paradox of unity in diversity?" Firstly, the literature review will discuss the presence of this paradox throughout China's history, followed by present attitudes towards the paradox, and existent literature on Han identity. Secondly, the methodology of this research will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the results of this research.

Chapter one will discuss the students' Han and Chinese identity, while placing identity-formation into the framework of both the nation/nationality dichotomy, and the native/foreign dichotomy. While 'the local' appears briefly in chapter one, chapter two will go more in depth and discuss identity in the local/non-local dichotomy by examining hometown identities. Specifically place-based linguistic differences, or *fangyan* 方言, will be discussed. Joniak-Lüthi (2015, p.11) argues home place is unspecific

and flexible. It can be inherited, but also be places of work and school. The interviewees of this research likewise attached different meanings to 'home', but mostly mentioned it in terms of the place one grew up in. Therefore, in the following chapters 'hometown' is understood as one's home from provincial level down. Chapter three will discuss the importance the students attached to the preservation of traditional culture both on a local and national level, using national celebrations as an example. Chapter four will discuss the attachment to one's hometown and its influence on inter-student bonding on campus. Lastly, there will be some concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

The unity in diversity paradox

Multiculturalist systems such as China's can pose problems because it can be difficult to form an equilibrium between diversity on the one hand, and an overarching identity for the whole population on the other hand (Zhao & Postiglione, 2010). This has become evident throughout Chinese history. The state's paradoxical attitude of unity in diversity has been the result of different categorization processes of China's population, while continuously reestablishing majority/minority distinctions. In premodern China the population was often divided into the central people (*zhongtu*) and barbarians (*siyi*), and distinctions were made between "culture" and "wildness" (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, p.29). However, those who did not belong to the cultural ecumene of the central people, could transcend the boundaries by adapting themselves to the culture of the center, which was grounded in Confucian rites. (Chun, 1996; Duara in Whiting, 1997; Leibold, 2010b; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010). There was thus a tension between ideologies of political communities: one exclusive, the other inclusive (Leibold, 2010b, p.10). 'The center' was likewise an unstable term, as those who were initially regarded as barbarians, often became the center with the rise and fall of dynastic reigns. Chinese premodern history thus marked an ongoing process of absorption and exclusion; a process of sinicization and amalgamation (Xu in Mullaney, 2012, p.12). This process is also referred to as the snow-ball effect of sinicization (Mullaney, 2012; Harell, 1995). Elliott (2012, p.190) argues that during the process of Han formation in premodern China the 'Other' played a critical role, and has remained important. The Han category as political identifier originates from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) (Elliott, 2012, p. 180), but has referred to different groups of people in premodern China. In the fourth century the meaning of the term started to shift from a dynastic name to an ethnonym. However, during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) the term was first used as an empire wide identifier as northern and southern regions were separated before (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, p.21).

The formation of a shared national identity first became important during the modern era of Chinese history, as China faced serious threats from foreign powers in the nineteenth century (Leibold, 2012). To strengthen its power and counter these threats, an identity of national unity was deemed necessary. Therefore, republican China (1912-1949) promulgated a unified country, dubbed *zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 (Carlson & Costa, 2016; Leibold, 2016). There was, however, disagreement among the Han leaders about how national identity should be formed. Despite the premise of creating unity, the concept of *zhonghua minzu* was built on the idea of a community in which the whole population would accommodate to the Han majority. The Han was regarded as the most advanced, and therefore an example to be followed on the path to development (Soontiens, 2007). The Kuomintang, the Chinese

Nationalist Party, forged a myth of common ancestry connections between the Han and the minority population (Hasmath, 2009). Subsequently, to curb extremism of the Han dominance (Bulag, 2012), Sun Yat-sen's idea of China as a nation of five races (*wu zhong gonghe*)— consisting of Han, Manchu, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015; Leibold, 2010a; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010)—was promulgated. There was thus a shift in the attitude towards the Other: from culturalism in premodern China to racialized nationalism in modern China (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, p.22). China's Communist Party supported a different concept which did not demand accommodation of minority groups (Carlson & Costa, 2016; Bulag, 2012; Leibold, 2010a; Leibold, 2016). Minorities were given a prominent place in political thinking (Bulag, 2012, p.96). Although the concepts differed from one another, they were both likely to be part of a strategic plan to unite groups against common enemies, such as Japan, rather than originating out of true sentiments of unity (Bulag, 2012, p.101). This demonstrates the political objectives of national identity-formation during that time.

In the 1950s, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the *minzu* identification project was started to establish a congressional system with representation for every *minzu* (Mullaney, 2010). During this project researchers collected data about ethnic minorities throughout the country (Leibold 2010a; Cornet, 2009; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010) and produced a blueprint of categories which would since then be used by the state for the formation of a 'unified multinational country' (Mullaney, 2010, p.325). The categorization method of the project was based on Stalin's four criteria of nationality, which consisted of common language, territory, economic mode of production, and psychology based in common culture (Carson & Costa, 2016; Hasmath, 2009; Leibold, 2010b; Zhou, 2004b; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010). However, the researchers realized that it was not an easy task to define different categories within the great diversity of minorities. The initial census based on self-registration resulted into four-hundred minority categories (Mullaney, 2010). After some adjustments, the number of categories was eventually narrowed down to fifty-five in 1979, the current number of officially acknowledged minorities (Carlson & Costa, 2016; Fan, 2016; Leibold, 2016). Definitions of *minzu* categories remain contested as the data can change over time. Some groups have yet to be defined, and definitions are sometimes off (Hasmath, 2009; Carlson & Costa, 2016).

Through the *minzu* identification project, a space for minority rights, and preservation of traditional culture was created. As a result, preferential treatment policies for minorities were established (Fan, 2016; Leibold, 2010b). However, inter-ethnic equality was not established, since a social hierarchy scale consisting of primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist, was applied to the categorized minorities (Fan, 2016). The Han was placed on top of this hierarchy, while minorities were represented as backward (Fan, 2016; Bai, 2016). The Chinese state thus went from a fraternity of nationalities to privileging the Han majority (Carslon & Costa, 2009, p.421). Inter-ethic equality remained weak during the rest of Mao Zedong's reign. During the Great Leap Forward (1953-1958) the state's confidence in its power to control grew. As a result, tolerance of diversity was overshadowed by a greater emphasis on uniformity. Consequently, the Cultural Revolution (1960-1972) marked extreme assimilation of minorities (Blachford, 2004). The Han was continuously regarded as the advanced group, needing to educate their "minority brothers" and share "the great Han civilization" with them (Blachford, 2004, p.108), an idea that still exists in modern-day China (Agniezka, 2015; Fan, 2016). After the Mao era, the state's attitude towards the national question (*minzu wenti*) became more tolerant again with China's opening-up policies (Guo, 2004).

This brief recounting of China's history of its attitude towards the national question shows that concepts of multiculturalism differed through time. The state's attitude was continuously located

between promulgation of Han dominance, and equality among all *minzu*. However, majority/minority distinctions remained clear despite of the ideology of an overarching national identity. A dual image in which ethnic minorities were presented as the 'Other' to denote pluralism, and 'us' to denote unity came to be the core of the state's attitude towards the national question (Zhao & Postiglione, 2010, p.323).

The power of categorization

The *minzu* identification project is an example of technology of power in Foucauldian terms, as Keyes argues (in Tapp, 2012, p.151). In other words, the state is argued to create categories, and give them formal definition and institutional expression. This enables the state to exert power over categories (Bulag, 2012). As a result of the *minzu* identification project, *minzu* categories have become a reality that has had great influence on the lives of the Chinese population. However, the categorization processes were not grounded in objective facts. Yet, they become real, and are taken for granted, only because people believe in them (Halley, Eshleman & Vijaya; 2010; Tapp, 2012). As Harrel (in Tapp, 2012, p. 155) expressed: "an artificial identity is not less real than an artificial lake". The state, as an authority representing the whole population, can exert an enormous influence on the population through cultural discourse on shared culture, ideas, and values set up by the authorities (Chun, 1996, p.115). This is also evident in the state's attitude towards the national question. The formation of fifty-six nationalities divided minorities in unnatural ways, and concealed diversity among the Han (Tapp, 2012, p.153). The *minzu* categories were empty from the start, but filled with meaning through specific political, social and economic processes, which turned them into a meaningful social reality (Kanbur, Rajaram & Varshney, 2011, p.147; Tapp, 2012, p.148). This is both true for minority groups, as for the Han group (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). As representations provide service to politics (Hasmath, 2009), these contrasting representations of minorities as both equal and backward members of the Chinese nation, can thus be understood to have been part of a system that supported the state's political objective of creating national unity while sustaining state control. The reason why the state attaches great importance to sustaining the sense of unity, can be explained by the state's notion of national unity as a stable foundation for socio-economic developments. One of the biggest threats to this stable foundation is internal conflict (Liu, 2015).

Current diversity in unity representations

Current attitudes towards China's national question exude the same kind of paradox as mentioned above, and are prevalent in representations of China towards the international, as well as the domestic realm (Leibold, 2010b). As the state exerts influence on representations, they are less about ethnic minorities per se, but rather reflect the state's ideological messages (Yu in Fan, 2016, p.2092). In these representations of diversity, minorities are often portrayed with stereotypical characteristics, such as singing and dancing skills, traditional dress, and in some cases, they are feminized or sexualized (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015; Fan, 2016; Zhao and Postiglione, 2010). At the same time, their commonality with the Han is often emphasized, whether in museums, theme parks, television programs or films (Fan, 2016, p. 2100). Diversity is thus not a prohibited theme, but the representation of diversity is selective and ought to support harmony and unity (Fan, 2016; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010). These standardized representations and stereotypes are for instance present in China's ethnic tourism industry. Theme parks are built around the visual beauty of a location and the skills of local villagers. However, aspects of local culture are often fabricated. Diversity among minorities in dialects, songs, clothing and architecture is ignored,

which leads to standardized representations that are not entirely true to local traditions (Cornet, 2009; Ganito, 2009; Oakes; 2000). Unlike the developed coastal areas in the East of China, these theme parks are represented as exhibiting a 'Chineseness' that has been lost in the coastal areas (Oakes, 2000, p.675). Local cultures are emphasized as ancient, unique and attractive, and have become commercialized and commodified (Ganito, 2009). In these imagined traditional spaces, the local population also take on the role of "living fossils" (Oakes, 2000, p.681). This has created a mixture of fabricated culture that is showcased to the tourists, and realistic and private culture that is intimate, respectively termed front and back regions (Goffman in Ganito, 2009, p.206). Although tourism has provided some benefits such as improved infrastructure and economic development by modernizing the villages, at the same time villagers lose their influence over them because of government interference, while traditions are being destroyed (Cornet, 2009; Ganito, 2009). However, sometimes locals also actively exoticize themselves to gain economic success (Bai, 2015).

An example of how diversity is showcased during international events, is the 2008 Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing. During the Olympic games, minorities played a prominent role both in the performances of the opening show, and in the general promotion of the Olympics. Shops sold minority-related merchandise and booklets with information about them. During the performances of the opening ceremony, people also wore minority dress. At the same time, a common Chinese identity was showcased by incorporating well-known symbols into the performances, such as the characters for harmony (和) (Chen, Colapinto & Luo, 2012, p.191) and peach blossoms, which represent openness, harmony and peace (Leibold, 2010b, p.24). An example of stereotypical representations during national events, is CCTV's Spring Festival Gala (*chunjie lianhuan wanhui*), which is aired every year during Spring Festival. During the gala different minority cultures, as well as regional cultures, are represented through singing and dancing performances by people wearing traditional clothing (Liu, 2015). However, minority and Han representations are also placed on the same stage together, performing songs that express harmony and unity. Through these performances, ethnic equality and unity within China are continuously claimed and confirmed (Liu, An & Zhu, 2015, p.615). Representations of minority culture and their unity with the Han thus appear in both national and international events. These events cater to the creation of a national consciousness, as they emphasize a shared language, ethnicity and history (Chun, 1996). However, by simultaneously showcasing both a unified and culturally diverse China, it becomes hard to un-see the differences. The paradox thus remains evident.

Economic inequalities and remaining stereotypes

Through these stereotypical representations of minorities, an image is created of them as traditional, unique, interesting, but also somewhat backward. The idea of minorities being relatively less advanced than the Han is further connected to economic development in China. For example, there is a huge income gap between the Han and minority population (Gustafsson and Yang, 2017). Discrepancies in economic development are not based on ethnicity, but are rather connected to regional inequalities and urban/rural distinctions (Sautman, 2014; Vasantkumar, 2012). Yet, ethnicity and economic circumstances have become inextricably linked in prejudices about minorities (Sautman, 2014). Before the 2000s, China's eastern regions were prioritized for economic development, but successful economic development from the eastern areas did not trickle down to the western areas of China, leaving a huge development gap (Han & Paik, 2017). Generally, the Han are more advantaged than the minority population as they happen to predominantly reside in the developed eastern regions of the country

(Vedom & Cao, 2009). Those who reside in these areas therefore also have better socio-economic statuses (Vedom & Cao, 2009). In contrast, China's western regions, which are less conveniently accessible, happen to be predominantly populated by minorities (Vedom & Cao, 2009).

The state believes that economic development can protect territorial integrity, political stability and inter-ethnic peace (Han & Paik, 2017) and has therefore focused on narrowing discrepancies between the regions. The state has attempted to improve the well-being of the minorities by stimulating economic development in rural areas of the western regions (Han & Paik, 2017). It has implemented preferential treatment policies for the minority population, including easier access to education through tuition waivers, added points on university entrance exams, increased placement opportunities in nationality universities, as well as preferential policies for employment, tax, political representation and family planning (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015; Fan, 2016; Gustafsson and Yang, 2017; Hasmath, 2009; Leibold, 2010a; Leibold, 2010b; Sautman, 2014; Zhao and Postiglione, 2010). Furthermore, there are autonomous areas in Guangxi, Inner-Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet and Xinjiang, as well as autonomous counties and prefectures (Han & Paik, 2017).

Despite these policies, minorities' socio-economic statuses still lag behind. Studies have shown that this can be attributed to the fact that state's policies are implemented unequally among minority categories depending on the state's confidence in its political influence on specific areas (Han & Paik, 2017). Furthermore, specific cultural norms which can impede mobilization, such as gender-roles, marital status and children can influence effectiveness of implementations. The lack of social connections and limited language skills, which would mean higher psychological and social-cultural costs, likewise play a role (Han & Paik, 2017; Hasmath, 2009; Gustafsson & Yang, 2015; Vedom & Cao, 2009). Furthermore, minority attitudes towards government intervention can influence susceptibility towards top-down intervention (Han & Paik, 2017). There has also been a lack of minority self-representation as minority associations are often affiliated with the state, while local ethnic associations are not officially approved (Sautman, 2014). Autonomous minority areas also often only mean nominal autonomy, not real power (Han & Paik, 2017).

Moreover, Discrimination against minorities still exist as they are sometimes regarded as backward, or violent (Hasmath, 2009). Xinjiang and Tibet separatist movements of the past are examples that form violence-based prejudices. Therefore, despite the fact that the state tolerates forms of self-expression that do not incite separatist ideas and collective action, minorities are cautious of their actions. They sometimes prefer to support the state to avoid conflicts. (Fan, 2016; Sautman, 2014).

The Han/minority development discrepancy is not as great for all minorities and many differences exist between minority categories (Gustafsson and Yang, 2017; Hasmath, 2009). For instance, while the income gaps between the Han and the Zhuang and Miao are large, the Hui, Mongols, and Manchu are relatively urbanized and have smaller income gaps with the Han (Hasmath, 2009; Gustafsson & Yang, 2017; Vedom & Cao, 2009). The Korean minority sometimes also exceed the incomes of the Han population (Hasmath, 2009). Therefore, minorities should not be regarded as one entity (Gustafsson & Yang, 2015, p.8).

The other side of the binary: the Han

Scholars have argued that human beings define themselves in social identities that are constructed by comparisons between the in-group and the out-group (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016; Halley, Eshleman & Vijaya, 2010). Consequently, it leads to inclusion and exclusion of members (Soontiens,

2007) and creates a binary way of thinking in which one end becomes the norm (Halley, Eshleman & Vijaya, 2010). Likewise, the Han and minorities exist in a binary relationship, in which the Han are the norm, and minorities the Other contrasting the norm. The Han are in many ways the mirror image of the minorities (Zhao & Postiglione, 2010, p.331). This mirror image translates into different aspects of life. The Han are the majority group, their socio-economic status is relatively higher, stereotypical aspects of their cultural heritage are not as pronounced as those of the minority population (through dance, song, and dress for instance), nor do they experience discrimination based on these stereotypes. They seem to be on the other side of the spectrum. Whereas minorities become *visible* in the paradox of unity in diversity, the Han is some ways become *invisible*. They are normal and unmarked (Zhao & Postiglione, 2010, p.330).

This 'invisibility' of the Han is discussed by the field of Critical Han Studies, and shares characteristics with studies pertaining to dominant groups, such as Critical White Studies. In Critical White Studies, individuals are argued to be unconscious of their identity as white. They regard it as 'normal' or 'natural' and are not often challenged to think about what their identity means (Halley, Eshleman & Vijaya, 2010; Wekker, 2016). Whiteness has thus become invisible (Gallagher in Halley, Eshleman & Vijaya, 2010). Furthermore, as whiteness is regarded as normal, and lacking characteristics, not many efforts have been made to study it (Wekker, 2016). 'Han-ness' similarly has not often been the center of research. As Harrell has argues there is a 'thussness' about the Han identity (in Leibold, 2010a, p.542; Vasantkumar, 2012, p.238), which has resulted in the lack of analysis of it. Xie Jieshun argues that the Han are often looked at, but are largely unseen (in Leibold, 2010a, p.545). Tapp (2012) refers to the Han as the joker in the pack of fifty-six nationalities. He argues Han is an empty category which supports all visible categories through its own hidden dominance. Peng Yongjie has added that the Han are not a distinct group as they have formed a collective identity of all groups (Leibold, 2010a, p.549). Indeed, as Tapp (2012, p.161) mentions, the Han can have the same function as the Kihn of Vietnam, the Burmans of Burma, the Malays of Malaysia, and the Thais of Thailand. They constitute the majority in a country with diverse ethnic groups, but are regarded as representing the whole population. 'Han-ness' is thus sometimes regarded as synonymous to Chinese-ness (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015).

Joniak-Lüthi (2015) has conducted research on the internal fragmentations of the Han category. She argues that the Han possess many different identities, which come into play when interacting with specific Others. These different identities can shift between emotionality and instrumentalization depending on the advantageousness of an identity (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, p.76). Furthermore, she argues that the Han *minzu* identity, and the non-*minzu* internal Han identities work on entirely different scales of interaction (p.15). Not only do they work with different Others—one being minority nationalities, the other Han individuals—there is a difference in rigidity. She argues that as *minzu* categories have been established and promoted by the state, the Han category is therefore stiffened (p.42). It has been continuously reinforced and reproduced. On the *minzu* scale of interaction, categories are thus understood in either-or terms, they are exclusive (p.15). Acquisition of Han markers by other nationalities does not influence their minority status. This is not the same for non-*minzu* Han identities which are fragmented, fluid, and can overlap each other (p.136). As Joniak-Lüthi elaborates, they are not built on either-or terms such as nationalities, but rather on networks and relations (p.138). She also emphasizes the influence of the state on the rigidity of nationality categories, arguing that identity-making is built on a three-way interplay consisting of a group that considers itself distinct, groups from which this group distinguishes itself, and the state which establishes categories (p.131). In comparison to Critical Han Studies, which discusses the invisibility of the Han majority group, Joniak-Lüthi's research

(2015) has focused more on how the different internal identities of the Han population emerge. Although in this research the Han's invisibility will be briefly discussed in the first chapter, just like Joniak-Lüthi's work, it will mainly focus on identification processes of the Han individuals.

Methodology

Research question

To answer the question of how Han students identify themselves in the paradox of unity and diversity, I conducted research on Han students' sense of belonging. How do they define 'home', and their connection to it?

As discussed above, the Han identity is often regarded as 'invisible' within the unity/diversity paradox. Therefore, not much research has been conducted on their identity. Furthermore, although the state's attitude towards the Han category has been discussed, not much attention has been given to how the Han are personally involved with their Identity. This is important as the sense of belonging does not only demonstrate the relation between the state and its citizens, but can also be related to one's well-being, and can determine social and psychological functioning (Geng, Zhou & Hu, 2012; Gifford & Scannell, 2017). In the campus environment, the sense of belonging is argued to be essential of a successful university career (Chao & Min, p.157). University campuses in China are not only places of education, but also settings of the students' daily lives (Xu, de Bakker, Strijker & Wu, 2014). Furthermore, campuses are loci of cultural and ethnic diversity, providing opportunities for social engagement between different people (Min & Chao, 2010). Therefore, the campus is an ideal location to study identity formation within cultural diversity.

Sample

Interviewees consisted of students from Shandong university in Jinan. They were found through one of my teachers from Shandong university, who also taught Chinese students, and through personal contacts. I conducted interviews with twenty students between the age of eighteen and twenty-six. The students were majoring in different fields, such as Chinese in International Education, Physics, and Communication. Although the students all studied at Shandong University in Jinan, many of them did not originate from Jinan. Some students originated from other cities in Shandong, such as Dongying, Qingdao, and Yantai, while other students came from more remote places outside of Shandong. Such students originated from provinces such as Liaoning, Anhui, Jiangsu, Fujian, and Sichuan. The populations of some of these locations are predominantly Han, such as Shandong and Anhui, while other locations such as Sichuan also have a relative dense minority population. Although in some locations there is not much diversity in the sense of nationalities, there is much diversity in other aspects, such as language, architecture, and religion.

Data collection

I conducted research in the form of semi-structured interviews and open-question questionnaires (identical to the interview question list). The duration of the interviews ranged from thirty minutes to approximately one hour per person and were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Although questionnaires were also part of this research, most of the data was collected through face-to-face interviews. I chose this qualitative research method as the sense of belonging is very personal. Using interviews allowed me to interact more directly with the students to gain a deeper understanding of their opinions. As mentioned above, the role of the Other in self-identification plays a significant role. On that note, it is also important to keep in mind that my role as a foreign student, a foreign Other, arguably has influenced the interviewees' responses during this close interaction. However, my influence on their responses is difficult to gauge.

The interviews were conducted with the guidance of a question list which can be found in Appendix A (p.33). The questions are divided into five sections. The first section is related to general background information of the interviewees. It includes information about their hometown to establish whether they grew up in a distinct multicultural environment with ethnic minority influences or regional cultures (*diyu wenhua*). The second section relates to their life on the campus of Shandong university in Jinan. As the interviewees did not originate from Jinan, the questions of this section particularly touched upon their experience of living in a different environment, as well as living together with people of different cultural backgrounds. In this section the local Jinan residents and fellow students were introduced as the Other opposed to the Us-group of the interviewees. The third section relates to the interviewees' experience with travelling in China. Questions about their interest in gaining knowledge of China were also included in this section. In the fourth section a general view of China from foreigner's point of view was discussed. This section was mostly centered on the interviewees' opinion of these views, introducing foreigners as the Other. Lastly, the fifth section relates to the students' interpretation of categories such as 'Chinese' and 'Han' in the situation of unity and diversity. This section also includes questions relating to how they view their own identities and the importance they attach to them.

Chapter one
The weak Han-identity

1.1 Nation above nationality

The majority of students living on the campus of Shandong university comprised of people of Han nationality. Ethnic minority students were less prevalent on campus, and most of the interviewees mentioned they have not gotten acquainted with many of them during their stay in Jinan, nor outside of Jinan. This is likely because the majority of the interviewees originated from locations with less dense minority populations, or have not visited places with dense minority populations before. Although the students formally identified as Han, informally, this was not the case.

This was most noticeable through their attitudes towards the Han identity opposed to the Chinese identity. Many of the interviewees initially expressed they identified with both identities. This is understandable, since formally they have the dual identity as Chinese citizens and the Han *minzu* identity. The Han identity is for example formally noted on one's identification card which citizens above the age of sixteen are all required to carry (Keane, 2006). Some students emphasized that the Han are a part of China which consists of fifty-six nationalities. Therefore, the Han, or any other nationality for that part, are inextricably linked to China. This argues that China and its different nationalities are not mutually exclusive. However, when asked which they were more inclined to identify with, all students preferred the Chinese identity over the Han identity. In general, there were two reasons for why the Chinese identity was preferred. One reason was that they believed emphasis on the Han could be associated with discrimination. Han ethno-centrism still exists in China as some argue the Han are the racial backbone of the country, and discriminate against minorities (Leibold, 2010b). This challenges the state's idea of multiculturalism (Leibold, 2010a). The students seemed to reject this idea of Han ethno-centrism. One student expressed:

> "I think that the notion of 'Han' is narrower than 'Chinese'…If I'd say I was Han, it would feel like I'm excluding ethnic minorities. But if I'd say I was Chinese, it would feel like Han and ethnic minorities form one family together."

Others emphasized the unity of the Chinese population while rejecting Han ethno-centrism:

> "Every nationality is Chinese. I think that our cultural identification is the same. Therefore, I identify myself as Chinese (*zhonghua minzu*)."

Another student expressed that they preferred the word 'Chinese' above 'Han':

> "I wouldn't like 'Han' to represent the Chinese population. This is because there are a lot of different nationalities in China. It could be possible that if you would talk about the Han, it would

> be associated with discrimination. People might think: 'ah, don't tell me you think there are only Han in China'…I prefer 'Chinese' (*zhongguo ren*). There's this feeling of belonging to a country…that I'm a member of the Chinese population (*zhongguo de yi fenzi*)."

These comments show that the students regarded different nationalities as possessing a shared belonging to the Chinese nationality. This is consistent with the idea that the Chinese identity is often regarded as an egalitarian identity, which veils the fragmentations within China (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015, p.9).

The other reason for their inclination to the Chinese identity, was that students were not strongly conscious of their Han identity, but were more conscious of being Chinese. This weak Han-consciousness was contrasted to the stronger identity-consciousness of ethnic minorities. One student expressed:

> "I don't think Han are similar to ethnic minorities in that way…I don't feel like I should pay attention to my own nationality [Han], that I should emphasize my nationality. A lot of minority nationalities might express which specific nationality they belong to, that they should unite, that they should preserve their characteristics…Because there is a large amount of us [Han], it seems like we don't have a strong consciousness, there's no feeling of 'I'm Han, I have to develop the Han nationality'. There's more of an 'I am Chinese' type of feeling."

This weak consciousness of the Han identity was further supported by the students' responses to the question whether they could recall any moments in which they have felt a strong sense of Han identity. Many interviewees expressed that they have never had such an experience before. Only a few responded that when clear contrasts were made between majority and minority nationalities, such as through anecdotes of Han and minority clashes in ancient China, clear visual differences in dress, or preferential minority treatment, such as additional points on school examinations for minorities, they would become aware of their Han identity. The few students that did mention having experienced strong feelings of Han identity thus did not associate them with Han identity on its own, but with clear contrasts between the Han and minority identities. Minority/majority contrasts were, however, not common in every-day life, which is why students expressed they did not actively think about them.

Two other mentioned reasons for this weak consciousness seemed to contrast each other. On the one hand, students expressed there is a lack of prominent Han characteristics. For example, the students associated minority nationalities with having distinct traditional dress or distinct festivals. However, many students could not point out what made the Han culture distinctive, what particularly belonged to the Han. On the other hand, *Hanhua* 汉化, or 'Hanification'—the phenomenon of minority culture being exposed to Han influence through acculturation (Castro Campus, 2014; Xu, 2012) —was mentioned. The students expressed that many ethnic minorities have already become "like the Han". For example, two students from Liaoning province in the Northeast of China expressed that many of the Manchu nationality that reside there have lost distinct cultural characteristics and influence on the environment. They have become indistinguishable from the Han. Another student talked about two people of Tujia minority descent they met before. The student explained that both could not speak their "own" Tujia language, but only spoke Mandarin Chinese. They did not celebrate any distinct Tujia festivals either. Furthermore, they would tell other people they were "fake" Tujia. The *Hanhua*

phenomenon has indeed influenced ethnic minorities in some ways. For instance, through the popularization of standardized Mandarin Chinese (*Putonghua*), western clothes, and houses made of concrete (Castro Campus, 2014). When reading these comments about *Hanhua,* one must not forget they originated from Han students. They are thus not representative of the minority population as minorities might view their identity differently. However, these comments do exemplify how some Han students regard minorities. The reason of Hanification seems to be contrasting the above reason of Han indistinctiveness, as one alludes to Han culture prevalence, and the other to Han culture absence. However, when aspects of minority culture become less prevalent, this means the mainstream culture of the Han becomes more pervasive. Consequently, when the Han, the mainstream, becomes even more mainstream, this could make them more 'invisible' as they become more common.

The students sometimes struggled with their answers. They acknowledged that they have not given these questions much thought before, and that questions like these were uncommon. One student expressed:

> "I always think that the Han nationality does not normally appear in our lives...Actually, the sense of belonging (*guishugan*) is stronger for minority nationalities. They are always being emphasized by other people. But we [Han] won't be mentioned…and the same goes for our own impression of the Han nationality."

This comment shows that Han individuals themselves do not often engage in highlighting the Han nationality. In the above comment this is contrasted with the minority nationalities whose identity is claimed to be relatively more emphasized. Another student expressed:

> "I think that if you would say you were Chinese in China, people would just assume you were Han."

Comments like these show that the Han are not only regarded as the norm, but also function as representations of China. The following comment likewise exemplifies this attitude:

> "If you see a person who is an ethnic minority, we'll realize that we're Han. But normally you don't really see them [ethnic minorities] in our surroundings since there's a smaller amount of them. I think that because of this we naturally think everyone is Han."

According to this comment, the automatic response towards people is to identify them as the norm, and unconsciously this means Han.

In contrast to the difficulty in recognizing characteristics of the Han, the students had less difficulty describing what made them Chinese. Table 1.1 (Appendix B, p.38) shows the different responses and their frequency. The responses illustrate that both collective activities experienced in China (festivals, flag raising, entrance exams), as well as representations of China towards the international realm (interaction foreigners, performances and competitions, politics) are recognized as

constituting the Chinese identity. Table 1.2 and 1.3 (Appendix B, p.38 and p.39) show the connotations made with the terms 'Han' and 'Chinese' respectively, as responses to the question "What do you think of when you hear the word 'Han'/'China'?" When comparing the two tables it becomes evident that the amount of associations connected to 'Chinese' far exceeded the amount connected to 'Han'. This supports the fact that the students felt a weaker connection to their Han identity, as stronger consciousness might suggest less difficulty in recognizing the ties with one's identity. Interestingly, in Joniak-Lüthi's (2015) data, characteristics such as "advanced", "long history and culture", and "*Putonghua*" (standard Mandarin Chinese) were regarded as Han markers, while the interviewees of this research connected them to the Chinese identity. This could mean the students thought these characteristics also belonged to the Han, as they expressed 'Chinese' includes 'Han', but felt less inclined to emphasize them as markers specific to the Han. It is unclear whether this was related to the above-mentioned negative connotations of discrimination or natural associations made with the terms.

Interestingly, despite being able to describe what made them Chinese, it was harder for the interviewees to recall moments of strong Chinese consciousness. Although these concepts are close in meaning, their definitions differ. The former relates to mundane characteristics that appear in every-day life, while the latter refers to specific moments in life in which Chinese identity becomes strongly evident. According to many, they had difficulty responding to the latter question, since they have never been abroad before, or do not often interact with foreigners. Strong feelings of Chinese consciousness thus seem to call for an evident Other which contrast the Chinese Us-group. Just like the above-mentioned conflicting comments about the pervasiveness of the Han and the absence of Han characteristics, the lack of a clearly contrasting foreign Other, has resulted into a sense of homogeneity without distinct group characteristics. This can therefore explain the lack of Chinese consciousness on a daily-basis. However, lack of strong Chinese consciousness differs from weak Han consciousness as most students explicitly expressed they identify stronger as Chinese than Han, and were able to connect their Chinese identity to many characteristics. The Chinese identity is thus more evident in every-day life than the Han identity.

The above section has shown that although the interviewees do identify with their Han background formally, informally they feel stronger connected to their Chinese identity. There was thus a strong sense of unity in the nation, but not necessarily in the nationality. In Joniak-Lüthi's research (2015) Han identity appeared to be obvious and vague, resulting into the identity being regarded as less significant. This is supported by the findings of this research as the students mentioned the pervasiveness of the Han, while pointing to the lack of distinct Han characteristics. This lack of consciousness also supports the idea of Han 'invisibility' discussed in the field of Critical Han Studies. The association of emphasis on the Han identity as discrimination towards minorities was another reason for their preference of the Chinese identity. The fact that neither 'Han' nor 'Chinese' was denied as a part of the students' identity, while the Chinese identity gained preference demonstrates how identities can be placed in hierarchical order according to the situation.

1.2 The local and the national within the nation

The students' stronger connection to their Chinese identity as opposed to their Han identity would suggest that the sense of national unity is strong among them. Although this is not necessarily false, when delving deeper into this sense of unity, the students did not move away from mentioning fragmentations. When asked about their attitude towards the unity/diversity circumstances of China,

almost the same number of students either responded they would choose to emphasize China as an integrated country or as a diverse country. Although they did not deny the existence of the other option, they expressed that one of the two options would be more appropriate. Those who chose to emphasize diversity mostly explained this was because of the size of China's geo-body resulting in many ethnic minorities, and regional cultures. For example, one student explained:

> "China is too big. There's no way to summarize or find a single representation…so I would say every place has its own distinctions…If one were to describe China, I'd say it's a complicated place. Just like America, there are a lot of differences within its population."

Interestingly, those who chose to emphasize China's integrated character were not able to explain clearly why they chose that option. Many expressed it simply made more sense to them, or gave them a stronger associative feeling. As one student explained this natural association:

> "Since we were small, we would emphasize China's unity and the idea that we should serve the country. There's this idea that the country should be emphasized. People are all citizens of this society. firstly, you are a person belonging to this country. Secondly you have your personal identity…In China we care a lot about group collectivity (*renqun guannian*)…when different parts become one collective entity, the individual parts also disappear."

The few that were able to explain their choices more concretely expressed that China is a tolerant country that regards people as equals, or connected their response to the Han majority, associating it with the most pervasive culture in China, and therefore, a sense of homogeneity.

Apart from the sixteen students who strictly chose to emphasize 'integrated' or 'diverse', there were four students who insisted neither of the two could be omitted. Some of them also expressed their answers depended on the identity of the person they would describe China to, namely Chinese or foreign. As one student remarked:

> "If the person would be Chinese they would have a deeper understanding of China. I would then be able to talk to them about deeper and detailed things. I could also talk to them about the characteristics of different places. If it's a foreigner you should first give them a general outline of China, a general understanding of the circumstances."

Here, the formation of the Us-group and the Other are understood in terms of native and foreign, connected to the distinctions between those who are knowledgeable about China and those who are not. A correct representation of China thus seemed to be important to the students. For some, representing China as a unity seemed to exceed emphasis on cultural diversity in importance, despite their acknowledgement of diversity. This was especially evident in their attitude towards the outside world. However, it also went the other way around. The way students choose to represent themselves can thus change according to whom they are representing themselves to. This demonstrates the important role of the Other, as it influences identity fluidity.

Chapter two
Hometown identities through language

2.1 Student perceptions of cultural diversity on campus

In the above chapter it became clear that the students were reluctant to emphasize the Han identity in connection to China's cultural diversity. Both unity and diversity were often highlighted as characteristics belonging to China, and many students acknowledged that they felt connected to both sides of the spectrum. This chapter will examine how the students defined this diversity more closely by discussing their hometown identities. As one student remarked:

> "If you interact with someone from the same country…there is an attachment to the culture of one big nationality (*da minzu wenhua*), not regional culture (*quyu wenhua*). So, we have a shared culture. But when it comes to the concept of 'home' (*jia de gainian*), regional culture, or the culture of our home (*jiali wenhua*), is more dominant."

This comment demonstrates that next to the importance attached to the Chinese identity, hometown identities are also thought to play a significant role. This became evident in discussions about the campus environment. On campus, interaction between Han and minorities was uncommon due to the smaller amount of minority students. Nevertheless, interviewees expressed that campus life meant living in a culturally diverse environment. Comments about cultural differences were also prevalent in the self-introductory parts of the interviews. For example, one student from Fujian described their hometown Quanzhou as follows:

> "It's a very classic example of a city in China which has a diverse culture. It's especially apparent in the mixing of religions…On the same street there could be an Islamic [mosque]. At the same time, next to it, a Christian church, and next to that, nearby, there is a Buddhist temple. Even closer to it, there's a Daoist temple. So, what makes Quanzhou special is that there are a lot of religions there, and they interact with each other peacefully."

There were also some interviewees who stated the opposite. They thought their hometown was rather bland cultural wise. One student from Jiangsu expressed:

> "I think that my cultural background doesn't have any distinct characteristics…we haven't preserved traditional cultures like others…we haven't preserved any local characteristics (*difang tese*)."

Among the interviewees there was thus a variety of students who regarded their hometown culture as diverse and distinct, while others did not. The bond to one's hometown is argued to be important because of emotional attachments, which are often stronger than attachments to one's nationality identity (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). This was also evident in the interviewees' responses. Distinctions between

the students were often regarded as embodiments of their hometowns. This will become evident in the paragraph below, which discusses the role of *fangyan*, place-based linguistic differences.

2.2 Fangyan as a marker of hometown identities

All interviewees expressed that the friends they met on campus originated from different places in China. However, despite of great cultural variety among their friends, the majority originated from Shandong province. This is probably related to the university acceptance slots which can differ depending on the province. Joniak-Lüthi's interviewees (2015) spoke about negative stereotypes based on one's origins. As she mentions, specific local identities can be preferred due to discrimination of other identities. Some of these negative stereotypes claimed Henanese are lazy, Hubeinese are cunning, and Shanghainese are shrewed (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). Discrimination is thus also prevalent among Han individuals. Although the interviewees of this research also spoke about stereotypes, they were mostly harmless and often debunked directly after being mentioned. For instance, some interviewees mentioned southerners showered more than northerners, and people from Sichuan have a "feisty" (*huola*) character as they often eat spicy food. The students expressed that although cultural differences existed between them, it did not lead to any communicational conflicts. Many students added that conflicts and exclusion were unlikely to happen as everyone belonged to the same generation, shared the same values, and were accepting towards each other. These responses do not prove the absence of inter-Han discrimination on campus. However, they do show that the interviewees experienced the campus as a welcoming place. Rather, many of them mentioned that they have had numerous amusing experiences based on cultural differences. Food and climate-based differences were often mentioned. However, *fangyan* seemed to be the most noticeable marker of difference.

As *fangyan* are sometimes mutually incomprehensible, they can be considered entirely different languages at times. This has led scholars to criticize the act of referring to *fangyan* as dialects (wiedenhof, 2012, p.1). In this research they will be referred to as *fangyan*. *Fangyan* are generally categorized in eight Sinitic topolect groups: Mandarin, Wu, Yue, Gan, Xiang, Hakka, northern Min, and southern Min (Blum, 2004; Wiedenhof, 2012). Some scholars argue there are even more groups (Blum, 2004). This shows the great diversity within local languages. Many students expressed that sometimes *fangyan* were so different from their own that they could not understand what other students were saying. This seemed to be the most evident when students talked to their family on the phone. Even some students originating from the same province, acknowledged they could not understand each other's *fangyan* well. One student from Yantai, Shandong province, expressed:

> "In our class there are about four people from Yantai. When I talked to them, I was thinking 'We are all from Yantai, why are their customs and *fangyan* different from mine?' Actually, Yantai is also a culturally diverse place."

The diversity of *fangyan* was also remarked by another student from Dongying, in Shandong province:

> "I think our *fangyan* culture is very diverse. Standardized Mandarin isn't very standard there, it has never been very standard (*biaozhun*). There are some farming villages that despite their

proximity still have different *fangyan*."

Other students made distinctions between the North and the South of China, commenting that Southerners do not differentiate the pronunciation of 'n' and 'l'. They were also said to have weak retroflex consonants, such as *zhi*, *chi*, and *shi*. These are normally associated with standardized Mandarin Chinese, which is based on northern dialects (Blum, 2004).

Differences in pronunciation were sometimes also the cause of amusing miscommunications. One student pointed out how miscommunication can highlight inter-student differences, as they recalled about their Sichuanese roommate:

> "One day she was yelling something about shoes. She was saying: 'Gosh! What about my children? Where did my children go?'. I was listening to her for a long time and said: 'You brought kids?! You're taking care of kids?!'"

This miscommunication was the result of the Sichuanese *fangyan* for 'shoes' (*xiezi* 鞋子) sounding like the word for 'children' (*haizi* 孩子) in *Putonghua*. Other students commented on colloquial habits in Jinan, such as the habit of respectfully addressing people as *laoshi* 老师, which can be translated as teacher, but carries the same meaning of, for instance, *shifu* 师傅 or *xiansheng* 先生 in Jinan. One student from Jiangsu recalled amusedly:

> "People from Jinan call each other *laoshi*, but people in my hometown don't have this habit. When I ordered food and the delivery man called me to say he had arrived, he called me *laoshi*. I was thinking: 'Why did he call me *laoshi*? I'm a student…I think it's weird to say *laoshi*…do I look that old?'"

Students also remarked that they would amusingly engage in imitating each other's pronunciation of Mandarin Chinese. Especially students from the Northeast or South of China were regarded as not having a standard accent (*bu biaozhun*), and thus interesting. The fact that most interviewees discussed their experience with southern accents the most is probably connected to the university being located in the North of China, as well as the fact that the majority of students originated from the North, making southern accents seem more distinct. Although the southern accent was most remarked upon in the student's stories, imitation also went in the other direction. Some students from the South noticed their hometown accent gradually became more "northern" while living on campus. *fangyan* thus seem to be at the center of inter-student distinctions, forming an important way of identifying the Self and the Other.

2.3 The fading of *fangyan* and the connection to home

Apart from the positive side of these linguistic differences, students also commented on the negative circumstances they are situated in. When discussing the preservation of traditions, some students remarked that they were concerned about the fading presence of *fangyan*. The students regarded

fangyan as the language of their home, since they spoke *fangyan* with their family or specifically in their hometown. Furthermore, they were more likely to speak *fangyan* with the older generation, such as their grandparents who do not speak *Putonghua* well. It was not common for them to speak *fangyan* outside their hometown at all. However, students expressed that increasingly less people speak *fangyan* in their hometown, or that *fangyan* have become less distinct, conforming to *Putonghua*. In the 1950s China implemented language reforms to change China into a modernized and industrialized nation-state, making reading and writing available to the majority of its population (Guo, 2004; Rohsenow, 2004; Zhou & Ross, 2004a). For this plan to be accomplished, a unified Chinese written and spoken language was created. As a result, Mandarin Chinese was adopted as the commonly spoken language (Guo, 2004). Initially the state regarded *fangyan* as a threat to national unity, security, and social construction, inconveniencing communication between people. However, the state later acknowledged the role of *fangyan* as the languages of one's family, necessary for conveying emotions. As extermination of *fangyan* was deemed impossible, the scope of use was limited instead. On formal and public occasions, such as broadcasts, education, and official business, *Putonghua* was ought to be the lingua franca (Guo, 2004). Although local languages have been tolerated, the language reforms have left an impact on the prevalence of both minority languages and *fangyan*. This impact was also evident in the students' comments.

Concerns about the fading of *fangyan* were regarded by the students as a fading connection to one's roots. As a student from Fujian commented about their Min *fangyan*:

> "I think it's [the fading of *fangyan*] a real pity because language embodies culture. If you don't speak this language, you won't be able to really understand the culture of our city. If people do not pass traditional culture to the next generation, the next generation will lose their roots. They will lose their sense of belonging (*guishugan*), their own hometown..."

Another student from Yantai remarked:

> "Actually, there's a very severe problem. A lot of *fangyan* are gradually disappearing because *Putonghua* is being popularized everywhere…I think *fangyan* also represents one's culture, so differences between local cultures are also gradually disappearing."

Furthermore, they added:

> "Actually, I think that the next generation should all learn *fangyan*. To be exposed to *fangyan* at all times might also be unrealistic since *Putonghua* is very important now, but they should still try to be in contact with their *fangyan* as much as possible. At school they use *Putonghua*, but when they go back home, there will be older people that speak *fangyan*…If they will only be able to speak *Putonghua*, they can't even understand one's own *fangyan*…If you hear *fangyan* you'll know people are from your place."

Fangyan is highlighted here as a way of recognizing 'home', as well as an understanding of 'home'. A student from Fujian also commented on *fangyan* and the feeling of home:

> "[When speaking *fangyan* and *Putonghua*] there are two different kinds of feelings. If I would speak Min it's definitely in my hometown…I'd feel specific emotions towards my hometown. But I think I don't feel any different about *Putonghua*…"

The above comments demonstrate that the use of *fangyan* leads to a different way of identification and can carry sentiments which *Putonghua* might not be able to incite. Here, a hierarchy of identities, based on intimacy, becomes visible. Congruent with official discourse on *fangyan* discussed above, the students commented that *fangyan* were languages spoken with family members, or people of their hometown. *Fangyan* thus hold emotional importance as they are regarded to embody one's hometown.

Chapter Three

The role of traditional culture in the connection to 'home'

3.1 Concerns of cultural preservation

Similar to *fangyan*, many students mentioned the importance of cultural preservation in sustaining one's identity and sense of belonging. As one student expressed:

> "It's our culture that connects us. Whether it's modern culture or traditional culture, both can make us realize we're Chinese, and that we have our sense of belonging (women ziji de guishugan)."

Another student expressed:

> "Culture holds people together. It's a part of the development and survival of a country. If you don't have this cultural background, you don't have a way to identify yourself. When you have the culture of these people, you feel like you belong to them."

They further added:

> "When you live in a country, you have a sense of mission, the responsibility to pass down the culture of this countries' people."

Cultural preservation was thus not solely mentioned as an important factor of sustaining a shared identity, but also as a morally correct action.

Many students expressed that they wished that traditional culture would become more prevalent. Some students mentioned many Chinese do not necessarily know much about traditions, as one student remarked:

> "You [foreign students] take classes about traditional [Chinese] culture, but to be honest, Chinese people don't actually understand traditional culture that well. For example: music, dress, and rites. We don't understand much about them. However, the problem of passing down traditional Chinese culture is on a national scale. We air a lot of programs about Chinese characters and proverbs to stimulate people to value traditional culture."

Some students also lamented that China's traditional culture was not given the same attention other countries were giving to their traditional culture. For instance, one student mentioned in relation to other East Asian countries:

> "In East Asia Japanese culture seems to be more popular and has more fans. Maybe it's because Japan places more importance on the protection and popularization of traditional culture. Chinese traditional culture is certainly not less abundant than Japanese [culture]. I hope there will be more people who'll put effort in popularizing China's traditional culture so that globally more people will understand its beauty."

Another student added:

> "…Korea has the hanbok…Japan has preserved the kimono. We [Chinese] have our own traditional dress…like Han dynasty dress or the *qipao*…, but we normally won't wear them…I think it's a shame. It's a shame that we have such strong self-acknowledgment, such interesting history, but a lot of us have abandoned it [traditional culture]. I hope we'll be able to develop our traditional culture better."

According to the students, there is a contradiction between people attaching importance to national traditional culture, while lacking knowledge about traditions. This was contrasted with other countries in East Asia, who were argued to put more effort in preservation and popularization of traditional culture. Furthermore, this call for a national traditional culture also contradicts the importance they attached to local cultures. One calls for national unity, while the other calls for the protection of diversity. This will become more evident in the next paragraph, as aspects of traditional culture, specifically national celebrations, were also mentioned as evident markers of inter-student distinctions.

3.2 National celebrations on local and national scale

National celebrations were, similar to *fangyan*, mentioned in connection to inter-student distinctions, as festival customs seemed to differ between hometowns. However, in contrast to *fangyan*, they did not only function as a distinct marker of hometown culture, but also as a part of a shared national culture. This demonstrates the multilateral values of identities discussed by Joniak-Lüthi (2015). Whereas *fangyan* were strictly mentioned in relation to one's hometown, national celebrations transcended realms of importance. These distinct festival customs were also mentioned in connection to differences between the North and the South. This often extended to food-related differences. For example, among the many food-related differences the students explained that during Spring Festival, in the North of China people would traditionally eat dumplings, while in the South people eat hotpot. Another difference was that during Dragon Boat Festival rice dumplings in the North are normally made with sweet fillings, while those in the south are savory and meat-filled. Other discrepancies between the North and the South were related to the lack of festival customs, as some students noticed the North lacked some of the Southern customs. One student from Fujian, in the South of China, recalled:

> "I asked my classmates about what kind of activities they have during Dragon Boat Festival. Classmates from Shandong said they eat rice dumplings and organize dragon boat races. These are standard answers. I said: 'nothing else?' 'nothing.' But in my hometown the elderly will also

> organize other activities according to customs, apart from eating rice dumplings…just like duck-catching."

They further added:

> "Activities like these are also on the brink of extinction. I think that the reason why my classmates from the North of China don't have these activities is because they haven't preserved them. I think that in the past they did have them."

A student from Jiangsu, which described Jiangsu as being located in the middle of China, commented:

> "I read a book before about southern [festival customs]. During the Dragon Boat Festival they organize dragon boat races and catch ducks. This [last] custom is also very foreign to me!...At most we fold rice dumplings, but my mother doesn't even know how to make them."

Although some students noticed the difference in cultural preservation from the South, however, local customs shared by some students from the South are also disappearing. The same student from Fujian expressed:

> "There's a difficult situation. I value the culture of my hometown, but a lot of young people don't care at all. It could be possible that as time passes by our Dragon Boat Festival will also change into just organizing boat races."

The same concerns were expressed about festival customs on a national scale. One student expressed about Spring Festival:

> "The opinions of young people could be less pronounced than those of the older generation…For example, every year China will air the Spring Festival Gala. Older people will watch it every year, because there's a ritualistic feeling attached to it, but nowadays a lot of young people choose not to watch the Gala."

They further added:

> "It could be that people think these activities are meaningless and are just holidays meant for resting. I don't think this is good at all. I hope we can preserve more of these customs."

As discussed above, students expressed their concerns towards the fading of traditional celebrations, as they were markers of one's 'home', both on a local scale—their hometown, as on a national scale—China as a whole. This thus exemplifies that belonging and identification are multilateral

as importance can be attached to ‘home’ on different scales. When discussing traditions on a national scale, local differences are ignored, but when discussing hometown traditions, they reappear, overshadowing national uniformity. The students’ sentiments towards cultural preservation thus seem to contrast each other, while on the other hand, they exist in tandem to each other.

Chapter four
Place attachment in the campus environment

4.1 The changing relevance of 'roots'

As discussed above, the students mainly distinguished themselves from other students on campus by their hometown culture. This was mostly based on linguistic aspects, and aspects of traditional culture, such as national celebrations. Their importance was said to lay in the fact that they were markers of 'home' on a local scale, thus illustrating the strong connection the students felt to their hometown identity. Scholars have argued that place and identity are inextricably linked to each other. Anton and Lawrence (2016) describe place identity as the process of a place becoming part of one's self-identity through the symbolic meanings attached to it. These meanings can be related to memories, shared social practices and cognitive maps, but also the people that share the same place (Joniak-Lüthi, 2015; Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016). Human interaction is thus of significant importance in the process of Identity-building (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016), and originating from the same place (*tongxiang guannian*) can play an important role in relationships between people (Lin Yutong in Joniak-Lüthi, 2015). Place identity can enhance the feeling of belonging (Anton & Lawrence, 2016), but as place attachment has implications on well-being and psychological state, separation from one's significant place can have a big impact on one's state-of-mind (Gifford & Scannell, 2017). As the students all left their hometown to live on the campus in Jinan, this chapter will discuss the impact of the connection to one's hometown on campus life.

During the interviews all students expressed that they valued the sense of belonging. Generally, they regarded the sense of belonging as a source of safety and comfort. According to the students it is a prerequisite to stability, stimulating personal development. The importance they attached to the sense of belonging was evident in the vocabulary they used. Proverbs such as *luo ye gui gen* 落叶归根 (returning back to one's home after residing elsewhere), *luo di sheng gen* 落地生根 (to put down roots), *an tu zhong qian* 安土重迁 (to be attached to one's native land and to not wish to leave it), and *shui tu bu fu* 水土不服 (being unable to become accustomed to a place away from home) were mentioned often to express the importance of having 'roots', or a place one belongs to. However, attachment to one's roots changed in intensity with situational change. For instance, this became clear when students discussed the future prospects of living abroad. Many expressed that they would not mind living abroad temporarily, but would eventually move back to China. However, despite returning back to China was regarded as the most ideal situation, they felt less inclined to remain in their hometown. Most students expressed that they would rather move to other cities, as they were thought to be more developed and provide better opportunities for them. Furthermore, some students wanted to experience living in a different environment. The hometown culture which they argued to be an integral part of their self-identification, thus seemed to be less important in the context of future plans, as many believed moving to other places would be beneficial for them. Similarly, this detachment from one's hometown became evident when discussing inter-student relations on campus. It did not mean that hometown culture became entirely unimportant on campus, nor in the discussion about future prospects. Rather, attachment to their hometown became less relevant.

4.2 Place attachment in inter-student bonding

There were mixed feelings among the students about whether they felt at home in Jinan, as well as whether they missed home. Those who expressed they felt home in Jinan connected it to campus life and fellow students, rather than to the city itself. Others who expressed that they felt at home in Jinan originated from Shandong. Their hometown was located relatively close to Jinan. As one student recalled:

> "I think I feel at home anywhere in Shandong. My mother told me before, as this is also my first time going to school outside of our hometown, going to school will be the same as here [hometown]. As long as you don't leave Shandong you'll always be home. I also think it's like that…I don't think I've ever missed home. Shandong is my home."

Some of these students from the North expressed southern students were more likely to miss home as their hometowns were located further away. Prior research has argued that proximity to home can give students stability, and space for gradual adjustment (Xu et.al, 2014). This might suggest students originating from more distant places would transition less smoothly. Indeed, some students from the South expressed they missed home a lot. Furthermore, when discussing life in Jinan or on campus, differences seemed to be more noticeable to them, which could be inferred from the abundance of different characteristics they mentioned. However, not feeling at home also depended on the person, and was not only limited to Southerners. Students who did not feel at home expressed it was because they have not remained long enough in Jinan to feel a strong connection to it or had difficulty getting used to the culture there. Feeling at home in Jinan and missing home were, however, not always inextricably linked. For example, some students mentioned that although they did not feel at home in Jinan, they did not miss home much because they were able to communicate with their family members often, for example through video chatting and calling. Technology thus plays a role in connecting the students to their hometown.

The role of technology in connecting students to their hometowns was also apparent in the existence of so called *laoxiang qun* 老乡群, or hometown groups. They are chat groups set up by students on mobile applications, such as WeChat or Tencent QQ, to connect those who originate from the same hometown. The groups organize activities on special occasions, such as during national celebrations, but also help fellow members when they encounter difficulties. In contrast to the students from Shandong, students from other places expressed there were not many people from the same hometown in their classes or dorms. However, both students from outside of Shandong and those from Shandong joined these *laoxiang qun*, irrespective of the distance to their hometown. Prior research has shown that students of the same hometown or background are more likely to establish social relationships together, as a continuity of hometown identity can be beneficial for adjusting to a new environment (Xu et al., 2014). Moreover, a connection in the new environment to one's home place, such as through cultural heritage, can be beneficial for adapting (Collins in Holton, 2014). Being involved in out-of-class activities on campus is also thought to help establish a sense of belonging (Chao & Min, 2010). Interestingly, despite some of the students expressed they missed home, none were actively engaged in the hometown groups. They remarked that although they joined the groups, they have never

or rarely joined the groups' activities. Instead, they preferred to spend time with their classmates and roommates. The data thus differs from prior findings. Shared hometowns did not seem to play an important role in the formation of inter-student bonds, even when one missed home. The students did not go out of their way to meet people from the same hometown. Many students indeed expressed explicitly that one's place of origin was not considered important in making acquaintances, despite the fact they were quick to point out hometown-based cultural differences between themselves. Rather, they expressed that living on campus meant they all shared the same experience as students moving to a new environment, making them equals. The influence of place attachment on the formation of bonds on campus was thus not necessarily connected to shared hometowns, nor to the city Jinan itself, but to life on campus. Hometown identities were, however, not ignored, but played a secondary role. Adaptivity of a place can thus establish multiple senses of belonging (Holton, 2014; Xu et al., 2014).

The above paragraphs exemplified how a kind of shared identity on campus overshadowed cultural distinctions, which at the same time become apparent in the relationships between students. Here again, a contradiction is found between the students' attitudes towards unity and diversity, albeit within the micro-realm of the campus. Furthermore, the students' comments demonstrate that identities can be pronounced in one situation, while they can also become less relevant when there is a shift of situation. Just as Xu et al. (2014) argue, place identity of the environmental past can be re-evaluated by place identity of the environmental present. In the situation of inter-student bonding on campus, this fluidity of identities was thus exemplified by the strong hometown identities shifting into a strong shared campus identity among the students.

Conclusion

This research aimed to examine how Han students identify themselves in China's paradox of unity in diversity. Chapter one discussed the students' connection to their Han identity, referring to the majority/minority dichotomy. It became evident that the interviewees identified as Han formally, but not informally. Weak attachment to the Han identity and a preference for the Chinese identity were related to the lack of distinct Han characteristics, and connotations of discrimination against minority nationalities. The Chinese identity was emphasized by the students as all-encompassing. However, when China's internal circumstances were discussed, it became unstable as opinions were divided between emphasis on unity or diversity. Nevertheless, none of the students denied the existence of either one of these sides. The identity of the Other was said to influence what image of China would be deemed a more appropriate representation. As became apparent, this was related to the native/foreign dichotomy. This chapter demonstrated the asymmetrical relationship between identities, as one gained preference over the other, depending on the circumstances.

Chapter two delved deeper into the diversity side of the unity/diversity binary. Hometown culture played a large role in inter-student distinctions. *Fangyan* was mentioned as one of the most evident markers and was often tied to distinctions between the North and the South of China. The students shared their amusing experiences with different *fangyan*, but also touched upon their concern towards their disappearing presence. Popularization of *Putonghua*, standardized Mandarin Chinese, was mentioned as one of the main reasons.

Chapter three discussed the importance of cultural preservation, while focusing specifically on national celebrations. Whereas chapter two discussed *fangyan* as a marker of hometown culture, in chapter three national celebrations were shown to be cultural markers functioning both on a local and national scale. This differs from *fangyan*, as they were strictly associated with hometowns. Distinctions between the North and the South became clear here as well as students referred to local differences in festival customs. The North was regarded as lacking specific customs the South still engaged in. However, this concern also applied to festival customs on a national scale. The fact that the students both called for the strengthening of national (unified) and local (diverse) traditional culture marked a contradiction in opinions, exemplifying the multilateral relation between identities.

Fangyan and national celebrations were both regarded by the students as markers of one's 'home', either understood as one's hometown, or China. Therefore, the disappearing connection to these markers, was lamented as a possible disappearance of one's connection to home.

Chapter four discussed the influence of one's hometown identity on inter-student bonding on campus. The data showed that attachment to one's hometown did not influence bonding significantly. Although interviewees attached importance to their hometowns, and were aware other students on campus shared the same hometown, they did not go out of their way to contact them. Rather, one's connection to the campus, as a place of shared student experiences, was regarded as more relevant in the formation of bonds. Place attachment to the campus thus replaced attachment to one's hometown in this situation. It did not mean a total detachment from one's hometown, but rather a change in relevance, demonstrating identity fluidity.

In conclusion, the sense of belonging of Han students in the paradox of a unified and diverse

China is built on different identities, which are both vertically and horizontally related. In other words, while both Chinese and hometown identities (also often defined in North/South terms) can exist in tandem with each other, at the same time, identities can gain preference depending on the circumstances, demonstrating the fluidity of identification. The definition of the Other plays an important role here. As discussed above, the Other can at times be part of the nation/nationality dichotomy, the native/foreign dichotomy, and also the local/non-local dichotomy. This shows similarities with Joniak-Lüthi's (2015) argument pertaining to the different scales of interaction.

What is important to note here, is that identity fluidity does not pose any problems for the students. This is apparent in their contradicting views towards unity and diversity. They considered both unity and diversity to be essential parts of the binary China consist of, while also placing one above the other at times. The data has also shown that in the direct personal experiences of the students, minority nationalities do not play a significant role. Although the students acknowledged diversity in minority/majority terms, diversity was mostly associated with hometown cultures, as students rarely interacted with ethnic minorities. Therefore, perhaps the absence of a *minzu* Other in the everyday-lives of the students did not only render the Han 'invisible', but to a certain extent, also minorities. Instead, national and hometown identities were mostly emphasized during the interviews.

Regardless of how diversity was understood, the different identities seemed to exist in a relationship in which the Chinese identity is the umbrella which at times is lifted, revealing China's multi-faceted cultures, while at other times the umbrella itself becomes the subject of focus. This continuous shift between identities did not mean a total detachment, but rather attachments of different intensities, at different times.

This research about the Han sense of belonging was conducted in Shandong university, and limited to Han students. Future research on the sense of belonging could therefore focus on other participant groups. For instance, for this research I chose to limit the group to students of Shandong university. Collecting data from groups based on other ages, occupations, and locations might provide different data which could result into interesting comparisons. Furthermore, the absence of strong Chinese consciousness was often attributed to the fact that the students have never lived abroad. Therefore, comparing the sense of belonging of Chinese exchange students with local students in China might lead to new findings. Lastly, my own position as a foreign exchange student in China might have influenced the attitudes of the interviewees. Some students acknowledged their representation of China could differ depending on the Other. This might be applicable to their responses in this research as well, as I could have been regarded as the foreign Other. Although it is hard to determine whether my position as a foreigner was of any influence, it must not be ignored. It would be interesting to see whether interviewers of different identities would have an impact on the interviewees' responses.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

1) **Interviewee background information**

-how old are you?
你几岁？
-what do you study?
你的专业是什么？
-What is your cultural background?
你有什么文化背景 (汉族，少数民族, 其他)？
-Where were you born?
你是在哪里出生的？
-Have you always lived there?
你是不是一直都住在那边？
- (if applicable) Where did you move to?
你以后般到了什么地方？
-Are they/ Is it a multi-cultural place(s)?
那边是不是算文化多元化的地方？

2) **Life in Jinan**

-How long have you lived in Jinan?
你在济南住了多久？
-How did you end up in Shandong, Jinan?
你是怎么打算来到济南？
-Have you been in Jinan before?
你来过济南吗？
-Did you have any expectations of Jinan before you arrived?
你来济南之前对济南有没有一些期望？
-Is it very different from where you lived before?
是不是跟你之前住的地方很不一样？
-how would you describe Jinan now that you live here?
你住在济南了，现在会怎么描述这个地方？
-Is it a culturally diverse place? Please elaborate?
你是不是觉得是个文化多元化的地方？
- Have you gotten any habits while living in Jinan? Please elaborate?
你到现在有没有养出来了一些住在济南的习惯？请你具体地说明。
-Do you feel at home here? Please elaborate?

你觉得这边有归属感吗？请你具体地说明。

-Where do your friends that you met here come from?

你在这里认识的朋友来自哪里？

-Do your friends come from different cultural?

你的朋友是不是有不同的文化背景？

-What are the differences between you and those you know of different cultural/ethnic backgrounds?

你有没有发现你和你不同民族/不同文化背景的朋友有明显的差别？

- Have there been times of misunderstandings or conflicts because of difference in culture? Can you specify?

你跟这些朋友接触的时候有没有因为不同的文化背景而发生过冲突？请具体地说明。

- Have there been funny moments because of difference in culture? Can you specify?

你跟这些朋友交流的时候，有没有因为文化背景发生过好玩/好笑的事情？请具体地说明。

-Are there many people here that come from your hometown?

这边有没有很多来自你的家乡的人？

-Are you often in contact with them?

你常常跟他们接触吗？

-Do you miss home? Please elaborate?

你是不是想念你的家乡？请具体地说明。

3) **Knowledge of China**

-Have you travelled before in China?

你之前有没有在中国别的地旅游过？

-What places have you travelled to?

你在中国什么地方旅游过？

-Wat places would you like to visit?

你希望可以到什么地方旅游？

-How did it feel to travel in China?

你在中国旅游有什么感受？

-Do you think it is important to travel in China as a Chinese?

你是不是觉得作为一个中国人在中国旅游很重要？

-Are you interested in learning more about China?

你对多了解中国感兴趣吗？

-What would you like to learn more about?

你想要多了解中国的什么方面？

4) **Foreigner's view of China**

-Do you know any foreigners?
你认识了外国人吗？
-Have they shared their impression of China with you?
他们有没有跟你分享过他们对中国的印象？
-What are their conceptions of China?
他们是怎么看中国？
-Do you agree with their opinions of China? Please elaborate.
你同意他们对中国的看法吗？请你具体地说明。
-How do their conceptions make you feel?
他们对中国的看法给你什么样的感觉？
-Are there any conceptions in general that make you upset?
他们有没有提出一些让你不开心的看法？
-Are there any conceptions in general that make you proud of China or yourself?
有没有一些让你对作为一个中国人感到骄傲的看法？
-What would you like foreigners to know about China?
你希望外国人可以多了解中国的什么方面？

5) **Categories of Han and Chinese**

-How would you label someone as Chinese?
你会怎么形容一个中国人？
-What makes you Chinese?
怎么事情让你很 '中国'？
-Would you say you are engaged in your own culture (e.g. Chinese/hometown)? Please elaborate?
你觉得你常常跟你自己的文化 (中国的/家乡的) 接触吗？请你具体地说明。
-Do you find it important to remain engaged in your own culture?
你是不是觉得常常跟你自己的文化接触很重要？
-Do you find it important to pass your culture on to the next generations? Please elaborate.
你是不是觉得把文化遗传给后代很重要？请你具体地说明。
-Can you name a few things that make you proud/discontent about China?
你可不可以跟我说一些让你为中国感到骄傲/不满意的事情？
-What does the term 'Chinese' (中国) make you think of?
'中国' 这个词让你联想到什么？
-What does the term 'Han' make you think of?
'汉' 这个字让你来你想到什么？
-Do you identify more as Chinese or Han? Please elaborate.
你会把自己定性为中国人还是汉族人？为什么？
-Have you ever experienced a strong feeling of being Chinese? Please elaborate.
你有没有感受到过自己特别是一个中国人？ 请你具体地说明。

- Have you ever experienced a strong feeling of being Han? Please elaborate.
你有没有感受到过自己特别是一个汉族人？ 请你具体地说明。
-Are you planning to remain in China?
你打算一直留在中国吗？
- If you are planning to remain in China, would you stay in your hometown or go somewhere else?
如果你打算一直留在中国，你想留在你的家乡还是去别的地方？
-(if applicable) Where do you want to move to? Why?
你想要搬到什么地方？为什么？
-If you were to describe China, would you choose to emphasize China as an integrated country or as a diverse country?
如果你要描述中国，你会选择强调它的整体性还是它的多元性？
-If you were to describe the Han, would you choose to emphasize them as an integrated group or a diverse group?
如果你要描述中国，你会选择强调它的整体性还是它的多元性？
-Where do you feel most at home?
你的归属感在那里最强？
-Do you find it important to feel at home somewhere?
你是不是觉得有归属感很重要？
-What do you think about when hearing these words? '*huaxia*', '*zhonguo ren*', '*han*', '*huaren*'? How does their meaning differ from each other?
'华夏'、'中国人'、 '汉' 和 '华人'让你联想到什么？它们分别是什么意思？

Appendix B

Tables

Table 1.1
What makes you Chinese?

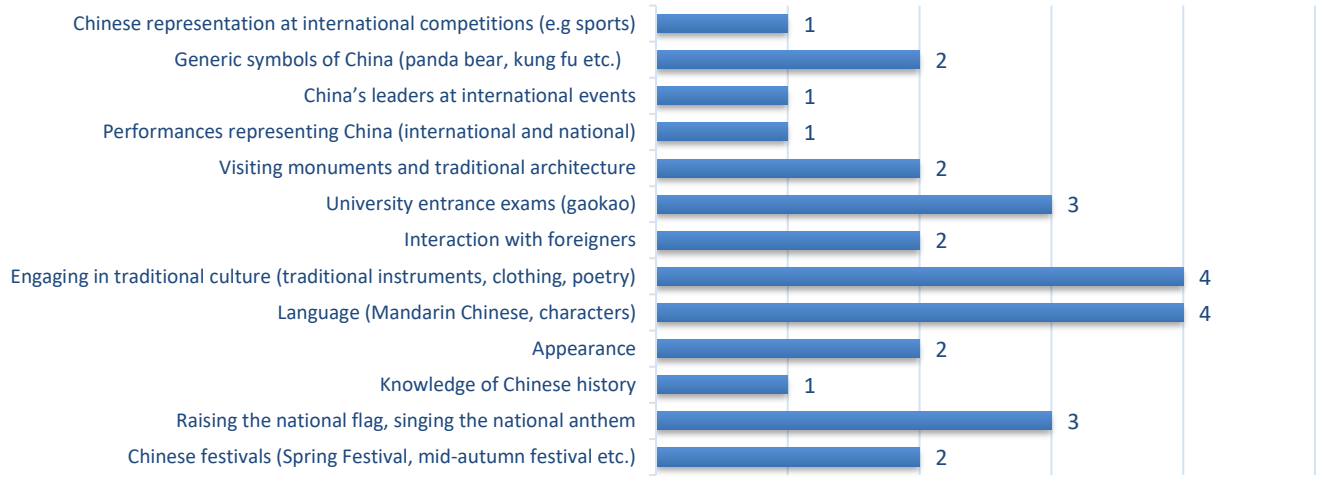

Table 1.2
What does the word 'Han' make you think of?

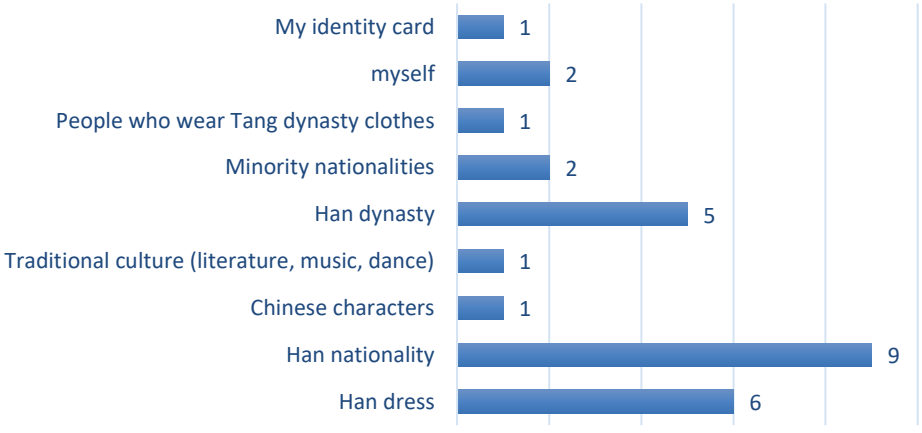

Table 1.3
What does the word 'China' make you think of?