INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND MANAGERS: THE CHINESE IMMIGRANTS EXPERIENCES OF ACCULTURATION IN NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC SECTOR WORKPLACES

by

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

With the increase in globalisation and migration, the future workplace will become more culturally diverse. Significant literature points out that culturally diverse workplaces can create organisational conflict because of the workers' differences in cultural values, attitudes, and work styles. New Zealand, like other countries, has also faced the challenge of an increasingly diverse workforce. Although the associations between cultural diversity and conflict management styles in different countries have been widely discussed, the existing literature focuses more on comparison studies with participants who are from different countries. There is a lack of research investigating Chinese employees who live overseas and work in overseas organisations. Research on how young Chinese migrants cope with conflict in New Zealand organisations is scarce.

The purpose of this study is to explore Chinese migrant employees' preferences for styles of conflict management and the reasons they perceive these styles, as well as the influence of acculturation and ethnic identity orientation. The study argues that acculturation, the process of cultural change, is one of the factors that relates to the use and perceptions of different conflict management styles. This study explores how immigrants who have acculturated, learned and adopted their host society's cultural characteristics, perceived and faced conflict issues in the workplace. More particularly, this study investigates how the role of ethnic identity influences different conflict management styles.

A qualitative phenomenological method is employed in this study to obtain a deeper picture of conflict phenomena among Chinese migrant employees who have been through the process of acculturation. This method is useful for describing the lived experiences of conflict and acculturation. The data consisted of twenty one in-depth interviews with Chinese migrant employees from mainland China who work in twenty different New Zealand public sector organisations.

The findings of this study reveal that due to their acculturation experiences, interviewees have developed an integrated bicultural identity that is rooted in good feelings about being New Zealanders, accompanied by a positive sense of Chinese ethnic identity. They view their own identity as a combination of both New Zealand and Chinese identities. Depending on the situation and the nature of their interpersonal relationships, interviewees can switch between these two identities without a problematic struggle.

Based on the influence of this integrated bicultural identity, the study finds that young Chinese migrant employees prefer to use a combination of integrating and compromising conflict management styles. The tendency to use integrating conflict management is highly influenced by their adaptation to New Zealand cultural values and attitudes. Being New Zealanders gives these bicultural Chinese migrant employees confidence to confront and integrate conflict directly, and solve it in cooperative manner.

The findings also show that Chinese beliefs and values continue to be maintained. The principles of Confucianism are deeply rooted and included showing mutual respect,

avoiding embarrassment to other parties, controlling emotions or psychological impulses. Under the influence of being Chinese, young Chinese migrant employees incline towards compromising style depending on the circumstances. However, if integrating and compromising styles fail to resolve the conflict because the other party refuses harmony and escalates the conflict, young Chinese migrant employees would change their strategies by asking for third-party interventions and seeking for a sense of justice and fairness.

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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

Inspiration of This Thesis: My Personal Story

In New Zealand, there are three distinct Chinese migrant communities. The first

Chinese community comprises the generations left by the earliest Chinese sojourners

of gold miners who came in the 1860s from Canton in Southern China (Ip, 1995). The

second Chinese community results from New Zealand's 'points system' immigration

policy in the mid-1990s. This policy focuses on obtaining skilled migrants to meet the

labour demand in areas of skill shortage (Li, 2014). Applicants in the 'point system'

are approved for residency on the basis of their points awarded for key factors such as

age, employability, qualifications, work history, and english language skills. Thus, most

of migrants from the People's Republic of China who got accepted under the 'points

system' were well-educated, skilled, and urbanised professionals .

The third group of immigrants comprise former Chinese international students in New

Zealand who later became migrants once they completed their studies (Badkar &

Tuya, 2010; Li, 2014). These Chinese immigrants are more likely to have graduated

at a young age with at least a bachelor degree or higher qualification. After China

liberalised its international education market in 1999, New Zealand quickly become one

of the most attractive countries for Chinese students. Many students arrived in New

Zealand as teenagers and were able to obtain western education and advanced overseas

credentials. In 2003, the 'points system' was further modified again. It has encouraged

for international students to transit from study to work and residence in New Zealand (Li, 2014). I was one of those former international students who was benefiting from this policy change and choosing to migrate to New Zealand for a more pleasant lifestyle.

I came to New Zealand in the winter of 2002. At the time, I was a 17 year old teenager who had nearly completed high school education in China. Instead of seeing me suffer in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (which is a prerequisite examination for entrance into almost all higher education institutions at the undergraduate level in People's Republic of China), my mother decided to send me to New Zealand for a better educational opportunity. She called this arrangement "*Yang Cha Du*i", abroad resettlement similar with what she did when she was 16 years old during the Cultural Revolution in China. Back in time, she was an urbanised youth just like me who was sent to the mountainous areas and farming villages to learn from the workers and farmers there. Her resettlement experiences were difficult. Many of the rusticated youth remained in the countryside and did not return back to their native cities because of the restricted policy. My mother assumed that I was going to experience the same but I resettled in overseas instead. Like she expected, I have embarked on a new life course in New Zealand while I was far away from the shelter of my parents. I have chosen to live in New Zealand permanently and I have more freedom to be whoever I want to be.

Like many first-generation immigrants, my migrant experiences in the first few years were not easy. I had to adjust myself and respond to a whole new different culture.

The typical difficulties that often accompany international students such as linguistic problems, separation from family, and cultural shock affected me for almost two years. However, three years tertiary education in Victoria University of Wellington followed with nine years employment experiences resolved pressure and stress less and less. After obtaining New Zealand permanent residence, I felt even more confident and secure in this society. At the same time, my parents started to recognise the changes in me. Although my Chinese citizenship still remains, in my parents eyes I am not as 'Chinese' as I used to be . My mother even called me 'foreigner' each time I was back in China because she recognised that I have gained new perspectives of being away from home. She said I talked straight and I viewed things differently compared with traditional Chinese ways. I later learned at university this change is called "acculturation", a typical psychosocial change phenomenon that occurs to immigrants when we adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another culture through intercultural contact (Berry, 2003). I did not pay any attention to this change until I experienced my first conflict with my New Zealand manager in the workplace.

After acquiring permanent residency, I received a job offer and worked as a consultant in a New Zealand organisation. My main responsibilities were to help clients to find the services that meet their needs and offer the products in the company that might suit their needs. My manager was a Pakeha New Zealander who had worked for the company for nearly fifteen years. Her management style was quite aggressive and she had a very strong personality. Our working relationship was fine for the most part. She appreciated my hard work, and I respected her more sophisticated work experiences.

The only area of conflict was the way we treated Asian clients. Sometimes because

of the language barrier and cultural differences, my manager did not understand that

in business negotiations Asian clients will keep on saying "yes" instead of a straight

forward "no" to the offers. Some Chinese clients would agree to everything even when

they did not understand what was said. In order to get clear responses, I sometimes

approached those Asian clients by using their language instead of English if my

manager was not around. This approach delivered very good results but I attempted not

to use Chinese language in front of my manager because I thought she might feel that it

was impolite.

One day I spent quite an amount of time with a Chinese client who could not speak

fluent English. After the consultation, the client could not make an immediate decision

and decided to come back the next day. My manager was too busy. I did not get a

chance to update this information to her. The next morning when the Chinese client

came back, the client failed to let my manager know she had spoken to me yesterday.

So they restarted the consultation. When I appeared, the client started to chat with me in

Chinese and told me she would like this consultation finished quickly because she was

running out the time. I turned to my manager and explained to her that I had spoken to

this client yesterday. I would appreciate if she could let me handle this case because I

knew what the client needed already. Surprisingly, my manager insisted on carrying the

case. The client ignored her and chose to communicate with me in Chinese to move on

quickly. After the client left, my manager lost her temper. She criticised me for stealing

her client and making her feel invisible because I was speaking Chinese the whole time.

I said I am sorry but the client did not speak good English and she preferred to converse in Chinese. My manager disagreed and said the client was nodding and saying "yes yes" during the consultation and she understood what was said. I tried to explain this is typical Chinese communication, and the Chinese client would keep on saying yes in order to save face rather than indicating any understanding of what was being said. But my manager interrupted me and kept blaming me on her side of interpretation. I failed to tell my side of story. I felt she did not strive to foster fairness and equality in our conversation. I fought back and expressed my thoughts and emotion. Disagreement quickly raised to debate and dispute and neither of us chose to compromise.

The conflict finally resolved after we took a decision to cool down our emotions and went out for a coffee. My manager told me she was not expecting I would be so argumentative. She expected I would respect her authority, and preserve harmony. She admitted that she felt she was being challenged by the strong position I had adopted to defend myself. Later when I mentioned this conflict to my parents, they told me I should not raise my voice if I have a disagreement with my management. They said "if your boss thinks she is right then she is right. If she thinks she own this case then she own this case. It is not worth to argue with her to risk your career. As a Chinese, this conflict is really not a big deal."

After hearing the above feedback from my parents, I started to feel ambivalent and confused about myself. My parents expected me to keep Chinese Confucian value to be less competitive and confrontational in solving conflict with my manager. However,

after living in New Zealand for twelve years, I have adopted some New Zealand

thinkings and attitudes. I was educated in New Zealand and learned that everyone can

equally address their opinions in interactions regardless of status, rank, or position.

Deep down I do not agree that Chinese Confucianism should be used to resolve work

conflict in small power distance country like New Zealand. This direct conflict forced

me to realise that my acculturated experiences have affected my conflict management

styles. I was seeking a sense of justice in my conflict situation. I thought I had the

right to express different thinking. I chose to confront and address my disagreement

instead of yielding and compromising. But my confrontation, unexpectedly, became

the trigger of dispute between myself and manager who was a Pakeha New Zealander.

Since then, I have often wondered, as a Chinese immigrant, what is the appropriate

way to handle the conflict with host country managers? What would the other Chinese

migrant employees do if they face conflict in the workplace?

This curiosity has been the prime motivation for this thesis. After investigating a wide

range of literature, I found many studies have examined and compared the preferences

of conflict management in various contexts. Significant literature points out that cultural

diverse workplace creates the seedbed of conflict because of the workers' differences

in cultural values, attitudes, and work styles (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). However, the

existing literature of conflict management is often conducted from the cross-cultural

perspective and compared people from different cultures (Yuan, 2010). For example,

almost all the research which relates to Chinese conflict management collects their

samples from the People's Republic of China and these participants have lack overseas

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experiences. Studies of conflict interactions based on the migrant perspectives,

where first-generation Chinese employees interact with host country managers in an

organisational setting are rare.

In New Zealand context, research focusing on how acculturated Chinese migrants cope

with conflicts in New Zealand organisations is overlooked (McIntyre, 2008). Today in

New Zealand, approximately 13 percent of migrant Chinese employees work in various

New Zealand organisations. This proportion is expected to increase to approximately

15 percent by 2026 which will almost equal the Maori workforce (Badkar & Tuya,

2010). The Chinese workforce will continue play a critical part in New Zealand labour

market, and it is for this reason, I think this workforce warrants special attention.

In order to make the contribution and address the above gap, this thesis attempts to link

the existing concepts of conflict management with acculturation studies. This study

considers that the process of acculturation is one of the factors influences that relate to

the perception of different conflict management styles. My purpose of this study is to

find out how young migrant Chinese employees who live in New Zealand for a certain

period of times adopt different conflict management styles when they work in public

sector organisations. More specifically, this study looks at how the ethnic identity

aspect of Chinese immigrants acculturation shapes the way they act in, and experience

interpersonal conflicts.

The first section comprises a literature review of relevant concepts, such as conflict

management styles, cultural differences, and ethnic identity aspect of acculturation. In this section, I argue that ethnic identity is a critical perspective in conflict management, and especially bicultural identity shapes the ways of thinking and behaviour effects on conflict management styles.

The second section of methodology offers an opportunity to build my own experience and position with the experiences of my interviewees. I explain why a qualitative phenomenological interview-based methodology was used for collecting data. At the same time, I address why the similarities between these interviewees and myself as first-generation migrants from China that led to my interest in this research topic.

The rest of the sections in this thesis are the findings that emerged from analysis of the interview data, and the discussion of findings which draws together from the literature review. The results find that due to an integrated bicultural identity, participants prefer to use a combination of conflict management styles which contain with both New Zealand and Chinese cultural values and attitudes. The final section contains limitations, and recommendations for future study as well as my personal reflections on research findings.

CHAPTER 2-LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review brings together the perspectives of conflict management and acculturation studies together. The review of the literature on conflict management focuses on conflict, styles of conflict management and cultural influences on conflict management. Acculturation literature comprises the general information about existing acculturation studies, acculturation strategies and the concept of an ethnic identity approach to the bicultural integrated identity perspective. The chapter concludes by addressing gaps in the literature in relation to conflict management and the bicultural integrated identity aspect. This literature review explains why I believe integrated bicultural identity is the factor that relates to the use of, and the perception of different conflict management styles.

Conflict

Concepts of conflict between West and East

After starting to investigate a wide range of definitions, I realised that there is tremendous variance in conflict concepts without any generally accepted definitions. Personally, I found myself in a maze of 'conflict' discussions drawn from the literature. The existing literature focuses the term of "conflict" on more western-oriented conceptual framework. However, the Chinese concept of conflict is different from the western concept. If 'conflict' in English language refers to a series of disagreements

or arguments; incompatibility between opinions, and principles, there is no such word in Chinese can be translated into the same things (Lin, 2010; Rout & Omiko, 2007). When conflict occurs, individuals across cultures may react to the situation in different ways depending on their different interpretations (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Some of the literature argues that the concept of conflict should not be generalisable across the western perspective and the eastern perspective, because the antecedents and consequences of conflict are generally determined by different cultural contexts (Liu & Chen, 2002). This makes me wonder if I can comprehend the different perspectives together, I may view the idea of 'conflict' as a whole.

The term of "conflict" has a broad spectrum of meanings in the western literature. Some literature view conflict as a series of disagreement or incompatibility between opinions and principles (e.g. Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Some see it as interference or obstructive behaviour (Alper et al. 2000; Deutsch, 1973). Others view it as negative emotion like tension, anxiety, frustration and anger (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Jehn, 1994; Pondy, 1967; Thomas, 1992b). Furthermore, some authors believe that conflict is the perception of differences of interests among people (Thompson, 1998). This idea involves the beliefs of different social entities (i.e., individual, group, organisation, etc.) who perceive incompatible goals and interference from other in achieving those goals (Lewicki et at. 1997; Rahim, 2011; Tjosvold, 2006).

After reviewing a number of recent definitions of conflict, I started to shed light on my understanding of what conflict is. Various literature finds that although definitions of

conflict are not identical, they overlap with the following elements (Baron, 1990; Barki
& Hartwick, 2004; Rahim, 2011; Rout & Omiko, 2007; Tjosvold, 2006):

1. Conflict involves *beliefs* such as values and goals by each side, that the other
    will thwart;

2. Conflict is a *disagreement*, when parties think that a divergence of values, needs,
    interests, opinions, goals or objectives exists;

3. Conflict includes *opposing interests* or *incompatibility* between
    individuals;

4. Conflict is an *interferential action*, when one party interfere or oppose with other
    party's attainment of its own interests, objectives, and goals;

5. Conflict involves *negative emotions*, when incompatibilities, disagreements and
    interferences are strong.

According to the above elements, I have summarised conflict in the western literature
as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive disagreement and opposing
interests, incompatibility and the possibility of interference, and negative emotion from
others.

On the other hand, concept of conflict in Chinese is much richer than the above
definition. According to Yu (1997), the words such as *chongtu* (clash), *maodun*
(contradiction), *zhen zhi/zhen lun* (dispute), *fenqi* (difference), *wenti* (problem), and
bu tong yi jian (disagreement) are most frequently used by Chinese people to describe
conflict. For example, in Chinese *chongtu* (clash), *maodun* (contradiction) and *zhen*

zhi/zhen lun (dispute) mean intense fighting, contradictory struggle for interests, and a serious dispute. They all have a strong antagonistic connection and involve negative emotions in the Chinese interpretation of these words. The words *fenqi* (difference), *wenti* (problem), and *bu tong yi jian* (disagreement) are more neutral expressions and less stronger. They refer to mutually incompatible, mutually inconsistent, and disagreement on an issue or difference of opinion. But if the disagreement is strong, then the word will raise to *zhen zhi/zhen lun* (dispute), meaning arguing with an antagonistic connotation (Lin, 2010).

Traditionally, most Chinese perceive strong conflict as primarily negative and destructive (Yu, 1997). Strong conflict like *chongtu*, *maodun* and *zhen zhi/zhen lun* involves intense interpersonal dissonance (tension or antagonism) between two or more interdependent parties (Ting-Toomey, 1985; Yu, 1997). Strong conflict also contains the elements of disagreement and interference with the attainment of different goals (Nguyen & Yang, 2012). Strong conflict is considered as a negative force, harmful, and a phenomenon that should be avoided (Lin, 2010). Pure disagreement and opposing interests, incompatibility and the possibility of interference, fit into the definition of neutral conflict in a Chinese context. They may not interpreted as bad and destructive as strong conflict if there is no negative emotions and dissonance involved (Oetzel et al., 2006). In other words, in order for Chinese individuals to be aware of conflict, the western interpretation of conflict such as incompatibilities, disagreements, or differences must be serious enough to raise to negative emotions and disrupt the interpersonal relationship. Yu (1997) points out that the Chinese emphasise an ongoing relationship.

Chinese individuals may consider a situation as conflict if a tolerant or harmonious interaction can no longer be maintained. Keeping this aspect in mind, I started to examine the sources of conflict in the workplace.

Sources of conflict in the workplace

Individuals do not move suddenly from peaceful coexistence to conflict-ridden relationships. In order for conflict to occur, it has to arise from three components: cognition, behaviour and affection (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). According to Barki and Hartwick (2004), a cognitive component emphasises how and what people think, or on what goes on intellectually in a given situation. An individual's interpretation and perception of a situation depends on his or her's culture, beliefs, schemata, attitudes, values, perceptions and attributions (Rout & Omiko, 2007; Thomas, 1992a; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). In other words, the knowledge structure or schema people hold determines how they perceive and solve the situation. For example, disagreement corresponds to the cognitive aspect of the conflict (e.g. Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Thomas, 1992a). Cognitive theory of conflict assumes that disagreement is task-oriented and goal-oriented (Amason, 1996; Jehn 1997; Rout & Omiko, 2007; Zhang et al., 2014). Task-oriented disagreement arises from differences in judgments/perspectives/ideas/opinions about the tasks or issues being performed (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Jehn, 1997). Goal-oriented disagreement occurs when a preferred outcome or a desired end-state of two social entities is inconsistent (Berger, 2007; Rahim, 2011).

The behavioural component of conflict highlights "the behaviours of one party who interferes with or oppose other party's attainment of its own interests, objectives or goals" (Rout & Omiko, 2007, p.5). It is the behaviour that one party obstructs, negatively affects another party and makes another less effective (Alper et al. 2000; Wall & Callister, 1995). Such behaviours include debate, argumentation, competition, political maneuvering, back-stabbing, aggression, hostility and destruction (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Finally, affective states occur when two interacting social entities, while trying to solve a problem together, become aware that their feelings and emotions regarding some or all the issues are incompatible (Amason, 1996). In this case, feeling and negative emotions such as fear, jealousy, anger, anxiety, and frustration may occur (Pelled et al., 1999). Some literature also labels the affective category of conflict as relationship conflict (Jehn, 1997), affective conflict (Amason, 1996), and emotional conflict (Pelled et al., 1999).

The above literature suggests that conflict is a process that begins with different cognitions such as beliefs, task, values and goals (Thomas, 1992a). Then follows engaging in behaviours of interference when one party becomes aware that another party has negatively affected something which the original party is concerned about. When two parties misunderstand each other true position and believe that their situation is characterised by incompatibilities and interdependence (Pondy, 1967; Miller, 2012), conflict then occurs, and this may lead them adopt reciprocal actions such as pushing unfairness and retaliation or emotions (Baron, 1990).

In the workplace, conflict is one of the major organisational phenomena because organisations provide an interactive state and arena for different tasks, interests, beliefs, and values to occur (Rahim, 2011). In organisations, interpersonal conflict occurs between two or more organisational members of the same or different hierarchical levels (Rahim, 2011). Incompatibilities, disagreements, and differences begin with several antecedent conditions that lead to interpersonal conflict. According to Pondy (1967), interpersonal conflict occurs when organisational members compete for scarce resources, drive for autonomy, and divergence of subunit goals (Pondy, 1967). Most organisations have limited resources. As a result, conflict often arises over the distributions of such valued outcomes such as money, space, equipment, and personnel (Baron, 1990). Autonomy forms the basis of conflict when one party either seeks to exercise control over some activities that another party regards as his/her own province or seeks to insulate itself from such control (Pondy, 1967). Goal divergence is the source of conflict when two parties who must cooperate on some joint activities are unable to reach a consensus on a concerted action (Baron, 1990).

Thomas (1992a) discusses that under certain antecedent conditions, one party may become aware that another party has negatively affected something which the original party is concerned about. There are at least three main elements that underpin conflict, based on the types of concerns which are at stake for the party: goal incompatibility, judgments different because of incompatible goals, and normative standards (Thomas, 1992a). For instance, members' concerns for satisfying personal needs, achieving delegated responsibilities, or competing for scarce resources as Pondy (1967) discusses

above, can contribute to goal conflicts (Kozan, 1997). Normative standards centre on a party's evaluation of another party's behaviour in terms of expectations of how the other should behave (Thomas, 1992a). These expectations may involve various kinds of standards regarding proper behaviour: for example, notion of equity (Vecchio, 1984), or justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and observance of status hierarchies (Thomas, 1992a).

 For me, the above discussions emphasise the point that at the heart of any interpersonal conflict are opposing issues. In the workplace, there are myriad of different attitudes, values, and behaviours for which opposing issues may develop, especially in a culturally diverse workplace (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). When people work with other colleagues who come from contrastive cultures and backgrounds, it is very likely that they will tell themselves "that person is different from me." Thus, cross-cultural studies believe that conflict is a culturally grounded concept due to the challenge of an increasing diverse workforce (Kim et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2007; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991).

Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) argue that individuals coming from two contrastive cultural communities bring with them different value assumptions, expectations, verbal and nonverbal habits, and interaction scripts that influence the conflict process. Cultural misunderstanding or misattribution of the causes of observable behaviours can influence the interaction process, and conflict can easily arise as a result (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Since the intercultural nature is a key in

interpersonal conflict, it is important to discuss cultural patterns in conflict.

Cultural patterns in conflict

Many conflict researchers assert that culture is vital in moulding people's values, attitudes, and cognitions of conflict (e.g. Leung & Tjosvold, 1998; Kozan, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1985). For example, Leung and Bond (2004) argue that values have an evaluative component to conflict. They determine that something is either good or bad, whereas beliefs and cognitions incorporate information about antecedents and consequences as well as the "causes and cures of psychological problems" (p. 131). Beliefs and cognitions are the things people perceive and know. These beliefs and cognitions are learned through experiences and socialisation, and the context in which an individual develops (Bond et al., 2004). A specific cultural context provides the setting in which individuals view the consequences of specific actions or attitudes and formulate their understanding of the world and how contingencies operate (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006).

In order to understand differences and similarities in the assumptions and behaviours in conflicts across cultures, significant research highlights three cultural dimensions which are major obstacles to intercultural encounters (Hofstede, 2001; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Tinsley & Brett, 2001; Triandis et al., 1994). These three cultural dimensions are individualism-collectivism, power distance, and low/high-context communication.

Individualism-Collectivism

This dimensional treatment of culture is best exemplified in the empirical works of

Hofstede (1980, 2001). According to Hofstede (2001), *individualism* refers to the

broad value tendencies of people in culture to emphasise individual identity over group

identity and individual rights over group obligations. It is associated with justifying

inner beliefs and unilateral self-assertion, and competition based on these (Triandis et

al., 1994). By comparison, *collectivism* refers to the broad value tendencies of people

in a culture to emphasize the group identity over the individual identity and ingroup-

oriented concerns over individual wants and desires (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

People in collectivist culture are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups that continue

throughout a lifetime to protect in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1997).

In the workplace, individualistic values emphasise the importance of pursuing personal

goals, autonomy, and independence (Cai & Fink, 2002). Ting-Toomey and Oetzel

(2001, p.31) argue that "individualism is expressed in interpersonal conflict through

the strong assertion of personal opinions, the revealing of personal emotions, and

personal accountability for any conflict problem and mistake." On the other hand,

collectivistic values emphasise the importance of group harmony, fitting in, and

relational interdependence. Collectivism tends to be more willing to give priority to

the representation of collective opinions or ideas (Triandis, 1995). When working

in a group, collectivistic individuals are more likely to restrain personal emotional

expressions and hold group accountability for the protection of ingroup members

(Trubisky et al., 1991).

Power distance

Another cultural dimension of difference is power distance (Hofstede, 1991). Small power distance emphasises individual credibility and expertise, democratic decision-making processes, equal rights and relations, and equitable rewards and punishments based on performance (Hofstede, 1991; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Large power distance refers to broad value tendencies of people in "a culture to emphasise status-based credibility and experience, benevolent autocratic decision-making processes, asymmetrical role-based relations, and rewards and punishments based on age, rank, status, title, and seniority" (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001, p. 31).

New Zealand is considered as a low power distance country (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001) classifies that individualists who in low power distance work situations value egalitarianism so that hierarchies are not particularly respected. People in small power distance work situations are freer to display negative emotions to social superiors without fear of repercussion (Porter & Samovar, 1998). However, people from collective societies such as China are sensitive to hierarchies, and authority figures, whilst protecting group ties (Triandis, 1998, cited in Brew & Cairns, 2004a).

In small power distance work situations, subordinates expect to be consulted, and the ideal boss is a resourceful democrat (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). By comparison, in large power distance work situations, the power of an organisation is centralised at the

upper-management level (Brew & Cairns, 2004a). Subordinates expect to be told what

to do, and the ideal boss plays the benevolent autocratic role. Interpersonal conflicts

often arise between members who ascribe different meanings to the twin concepts

of respect and power (Hofstede, 1991). Small power distance members respect

self-empowered individuals who actively seek solutions to the conflict problem and

encourage individual resourcefulness to solve the problem (Kozan, 1997). On the other

hand, large power distance members respect individuals who are well connected in their

networks and are able to find the proper people in the proper channels to resolve the

conflict (Triandis et al., 1994).

Low/high-context communication

The notion of "high-context" in collectivism and "low-context" in individualism

communication is proposed by Hall (1976). According to Hall (1976, as cited in Ting-

Toomey, 1999), in low-context communication, people tend to express intention or

meaning through explicit verbal message. It refers to a communication pattern of direct

verbal mode, straight talk, and sender-oriented value (Hofstede, 2001). In other words,

low-context communication is confrontational and uses logic-deductive thinking and

explicit codes of speech (Brew & Cairns, 2004b). The speaker is expected to construct

a clear, persuasive message that the listener can decode easily (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Moreover, Porter and Samovar (1998) point out that in low-context cultures, people

tend to express emotional information through facial expressions, tone of voice and

body movements. Because the listener or interpreter of the the message is expected to

infer accurately the explicit intent of the verbal message, and to observe the non-verbal

immediacy (Kim et al., 1996).

By contrast, high-context communication refers to indirect verbal mode and ambiguous talk (Hall, 1976). It emphasises conveying intention or meaning through the contexts and situational knowledge resulting in the use of implicit references (Brew & Cairns, 2004b; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Such contexts include social roles, positions, situational and relational contexts which often frames the interaction (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). In high-context communication, an important purpose is to ensure that harmony is promoted and sustained among the participants. This refers to promoting social relationships and concern for others and requires an essential politeness and diplomacy (Brew & Cairns, 2004b).

In the conflict situations, it is common for members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures to misunderstand one another during communication (Ting-Toomey, 1997). For instance, low-context communication tends to deal with the conflict openly and honestly (Hofstede, 2001). Communication is viewed as satisfying when the conflict parties are willing to confront the conflict issues openly, and share their feelings honestly. A collectivist may use indirect message to hint at what they want or think. They typically employ verbal offence and defence to justify their position, clarify opinions and views, build up their individual credibility, express emotions, and raise objections or disagreements (Ting-Toomey, 1994, cited in McIntyre, 2008). On the other hand, collectivists view silence as desirable and requiring self-discipline (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Sometimes it will cause ambiguous for others to misunderstand. In an

individualistic culture, silence can be viewed with suspicion, an admission of guilty and incompetence in an individualistic culture (Ting-Toomey, 1994).

Furthermore, in the low-context communication, members of individualistic cultures are concerned with self-face maintenance for the purpose of asserting and defending the "I" identity (Kim et al., 1996). Collectivists view successful communication in the conflict as engaging in mutual face-saving and face-giving behaviours. On the contrary, in high-context communication, conflict is weighed against the threat that is incurred in the situation (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Members of collectivistic cultures are concerned with both self-face and other-face maintenance for the purpose of diffusing shame and embarrassment (Brew & Cairns, 2004a). Thus, in collectivistic cultures, conflict is perceived as threatening when the conflicting parties push for a discussion of substantive issues before properly managing face-related issues (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

To summarise, the above three cultural dimensions are the key to differing preferences between Easterners and Westerners when facing conflict situations. Many researchers believe that the three cultural dimensions above are the most influential factors in determining how people from different culture manage conflict (Doucet et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2007; Nguyen & Yang, 2012). Hofstede's cultural dimensions which show that New Zealand cultural values are highly individualistic, low in power distance, and relatively low in uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2004). The result is based on New Zealand cultural values of which Pakeha is the dominant culture. The existence of members from other sub-cultures such as Maori or Pacific Island groups is not

accounted for because they are highly collectivist orientation (Patterson, 1992).
Keeping this New Zealand cultural aspect in mind, the following section will only
focus on how dominated individualistic value and collectivistic value influence people's
preferences for certain conflict management styles.

Styles of handling conflict and culture influences

Most the research of conflict management are evident in the work of different
researchers such as Blake and Mouton (1964), Rahim (1983), Thomas (1976, 1992a),
Thomas and Kilmann (1974). Specially, Rahim (1983)'s work has the highest citation
in the research topics of cross-cultural workplace conflict and it incorporates well
with other existing literature (Ma et al., 2008). According to Rahim (1983, 2011),
interpersonal styles of conflict management fall into five categories: *dominating,
avoiding, obliging, compromising,* and *integrating* which illustrates the degree (high/
low) to which a person attempts to satisfy self-concern and concern for others by willing
to incorporate and support the other's goals or needs.

Dominating style emphasises high concern for self and low concern for others, and this
is competing. This style has been identified with win-lose orientation or which forcing
behaviour to win one's position. A dominating or competing style goes all out to win
his or her objective and, as a result, often ignores the needs and expectations of the other
party. Dominating may mean standing up for one's rights and defending a position
that the party believes to be correct (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). For example, a
dominating supervisor is likely to use his or her position and power to impose his or her

will on the subordinates and command their obedience (Thomas, 1992a).

Avoiding style involves a low concern for self and others. An avoiding person fails to satisfy his or her own concern as well as the concern of the other party. This style is useful when the issue is trivial or where the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict (Thomas, 1992a). This style is often characterised as an unconcerned attitude toward the issues or parties involved in conflict (Rahim, 2011). Such a person may refuse to acknowledge in public that there is a conflict that should be dealt with (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Obliging style is useful when a party believes that he or she may be wrong or the issue is much more important to the other party. It is also useful when a party is willing to give up something in exchange for getting something from the other party in the future. There is an element of self-sacrifice in this style (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). It may take the form of selfless generosity, charity, or obedience to another party's order (Rahim, 2011).

Compromising is intermediate concern for oneself and others. It involves sharing whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). It is useful when the goals of the conflicting parties are mutually exclusive or when both parties are equally powerful. However, this style is inappropriate for dealing with complex problems needing a problem-solving approach. Unfortunately, very often management practitioners use this style to deal with complex

problems and, as result, fail to formulate effective, long-term solutions (Rahim, 2011).

This style also may be inappropriate if a party is more powerful than another and

believes that his or her position is right (Kim et al., 2007).

The *integrating* style reflects high concern for self and others (Rahim, 1983; Kim et al.,

2007). It involves exchange of information and examination of differences to reach

a solution acceptable to both parties in substantive conflict negotiation (Ting-Toomey

et al. 1991; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Rahim (2011) suggests that this style has two

distinctive elements: confrontation and problem solving. Confrontation involves open

communication, clearing up misunderstandings, and analysing the underlying causes

of conflict. This is a prerequisite for problem solving, which involves identification of,

and solution to, the real problems to provide maximum satisfaction of concerns of both

parties (Rahim, 2011). This is useful for effectively dealing with complex problems

when a synthesis of ideas is needed to come up with a better solution to a problem

(Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). It is also useful in utilising the skills, information,

and other resources possessed by different parties to define or redefine a problem. It

formulates effective alternative solutions when commitment is needed from parties for

effective implementation of a solution (Rahim, 2011).

If the parties cannot manage conflict themselves, they will seek for *third-party*

mediation (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Wall & Callister, 1995). Third-party

mediation involves using an outsider to mediate the conflict. Third party mediation

considers gathering information to make substantive and fair decisions. It makes sure

that the disputant parties treat each other respectfully with the goal of maintaining and restoring harmony within the enduring relationship (Conlon & Meyer, 2004).

Cultural influences on conflict management styles

Ting-Toomey (1999) believes that the three cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism*,* power distance and low-high communication influence people's preferences of conflict management styles. According to Ting-Toomey (1999), the members from individualistic, low power distance and low-context communication tend to prefer confrontational approaches. For individualists, conflict is functional and should deal with substantive and relational behaviour. Collaborative approaches such as open and honest discussion of conflict issues result in a win-win situation. In contrast, for collectivists, conflict is dysfunctional (Ting-Toomey, 1999). It is a distressing and destructive force that can damage the relationships and should be handled discreetly and subtly. Thus, collectivists prefer a subtle negotiation to preserve pride and face maintenance (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Most previous research is consistent with Ting-Toomey's arguments, especially in cross-cultural perspective of conflict management. For example, some literature finds that Americans (high in individualism) tend to use a higher degree of dominating style and solution-driven style, whereas Chinese participants (high in collectivism) use a higher degree of obliging and avoiding strategies (Leung, 1987; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991).

However, in recent years some intercultural perspective studies which examine

interaction between people from different cultures, have challenged the above

conclusion. For instance, Liu and Chen (2000) surveyed 82 Chinese employees who

experienced interacting with foreigners from four large joint ventures in China. They

find that Chinese managers and employees tend to use an integrating strategy to face a

conflict directly and examine possible solutions. They also prefer direct confrontation

strategies like a dominating style that leads to persistent argument frequently than a non-

confrontation strategy like avoiding and compromising styles.

Kim et al. (2007) also find that Koreans and Chinese are more likely to foster an an

integrating style rather than an avoiding style. They prefer to investigate the problem

with another party and find the solution acceptable to both of the parties. Chen et al.

(2005) notice the practical nature of Chinese as a whole which might drive people to

try to find a "win-win" resolution to a conflict situation. They posit that people may

seek the rule of reciprocity, they believe that conflicting parties should show mutual

responsibilities in social interactions. Thus, when a direct conflict occurs between

Chinese employees and their supervisors, Chinese subordinates report preferring to use

the style of integration. Recent research suggests that Chinese people, especially young

Chinese people who have been exposed to Western cultures, are more likely to choose

problem solving and integration as a conflict management strategy (Cheung & Chuah,

1999).

Last but not least, Hwang (2000) suggest that Chinese workers might resolve a

conflict with a peer directly (e.g. via negotiation), and the optimal strategy choices

(e.g. compromising; fighting; asking for third-party mediation) are contingent on both

conflict parties' motives. Especially in collectivistic cultures, third party roles are

significant for two interrelated reasons. First, disputes are seen as a problem of the

collectivity, i.e, the group, organisation or community, rather than a problem concerning

the two parties alone (Wall & Blum, 1991). The privacy concern of individualist

cultures is not as strong a force in collectivistic cultures. Second, intermediaries help

maintain harmony through face saving (Leung, 1987). According to Ting-Toomey et al.

(1991), members of collectivistic cultures are concerned not only with "saving face",

but also with "giving face".

In summary, a cross-cultural perspective of conflict management concludes that when

in conflict Chinese people are more likely to use avoiding and obliging styles. In U.S.

literature, obliging and avoiding conflict styles often take on Western slant of being

negatively disengaged (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). But if based in a collectivistic

context, collectivists do not perceived obliging and avoiding conflict styles as negative.

Typically, these two styles are employed to maintain mutual-face interests and relational

network interests (Ting-Toomey, 1988). On the other hand, intercultural perspective

studies contradict cross-cultural perspective, they argue that Chinese people do not

really have preferences of certain conflict management style. They may choose to

enact either or several conflict management strategies to resolve a conflict according

to different circumstances (Hwang, 1997; Yu, 1997). These literature supports Rahim

(1985)'s claim that the appropriate use of conflict management styles is situational

based. Chinese employees who have been exposed to Western cultures and work

in multinational organisations in China, are more likely to take several factors into consideration when deal with conflict, among them stakes, power, relationships, situations, and possible consequences (Yuan, 2010).

In the literature, scholars have often treated Chinese culture as traditional Chinese culture including Confucianism, collectivism and high power distance (Doucet et al., 2009; Lin, 2010). Especially, when referring collective cultures, the most popular perspective is Chinese Confucianism (Leung et al., 2002; Lin, 2010). Past research found that these Confucian values contributed to the use of non-confrontational strategies of conflict management such as avoidance and accommodation (Hwang, 1997; Morris et al., 1998; Tse et al., 1994). However, Leung et al. (2002) argue that the existing literature may be inadequate in describing the meaning of Confucianism in terms of conflict management.

Chinese Confucianism comprises of two key principles: the hierarchical relationship among people and harmony (Chen & Chung, 1994; Chen & Starosta, 1997; Leung et al., 2002). In a hierarchical relationship, juniors are required to owe their seniors respect and obedience, and seniors owe their juniors consideration and protection (Chen & Chung, 1994). In other words, in Confucianism, if the seniors with higher status are considered to be more knowledgeable in the process of problem solving and conflict management (Chen & Starosta, 1997). In this circumstance, compromising from juniors shows high concern instead of low concern for both themselves and others and should not treated as conflict avoidance (Leung et al. 2002; Yuan, 2010).

When referring the value of harmony in Confucianism, some scholars emphasise

that harmony is maintaining a harmonious relationship (Hwang, 1997). When one is

conflicting with someone else within his or his social network, the first thing one has to

learn is forbearance. This leads to give up one's personal goal as yielding and avoiding

for a prior-consideration of promoting social order (Kim, 1994; Kim et al., 2007).

However, Leung et al. (2002) point out that in Confucian philosophy, harmony is in

fact subordinate to higher-level goals of benevolence and righteousness. Obedience

and conformity at the expense of benevolence and righteousness has repeatedly been

denigrated as avoiding disagreement and confrontation in conflict management (Leung

et al., 2002). Thus, the classical Confucianism is not the root of the conflict avoidance

in the existing western-oriented conflict management framework.

Furthermore, there is also an important difference in the use of third-party mediation

between the individualistic cultures and the collectivistic culture (Ting-Toomey,

1994). In Western cultures, conflict parties typically seek help with an impartial third-

party mediator for seeking a sense of fairness. They prefer a professional mediator to

arbitrate the conflict situation. On the other hand, for the collectivistic cultures, like

Chinese culture, conflict is usually diffused through using third-party intermediaries. If

the third party mediation needs to proceed, the Chinese people prefer seeking the help

from respected person or someone who is related to both parties (Ting-Toomey, 1994).

Overall, all the theories of conflict management I reviewed above indicate that culture

is a key in resulting interpersonal conflict and influence conflict management styles

in various ways. However, none of the research of cross-cultural perspectives and

intercultural perspectives really move across cultural boundaries. The existing literature

focuses more on comparison studies of different cultures such as China with other

nations, or different conflict handling styles when two cultures interact each other in

joint-ventures and multi-national organisations. All the Chinese participants in the

previous literature were based in the People's Republic of China and lack of participants

have overseas experiences. Those Chinese employees who live overseas and work in

overseas organisations are ignored in conflict management studies. There is a paucity

of research addressing the critical role of acculturation (culture adaptation) and its effect

on conflict management styles (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

In migration studies, people living in other cultures for a certain period of time need

to adapt their behaviours to be able to carry on activities and survive in the new

culture (Kim, 2001). During the process of cultural adaptation or acculturation, new

ways of thinking, feeling and acting often occur (Sam & Berry, 2006). Particularly,

bicultural individuals living at the intersection between different cultures somehow

must coordinate competing individualistic and collectivistic expectations. It has

been suggested that the key to such coordination is the acculturation of affective and

cognitive skills from both cultural backgrounds, allowing flexible response in conflict

solutions (Eng & Kuiken, 2006). These studies claim that the process of acculturation

is a potential influence that may be related to the use and the perception of different

styles of conflict management. Since this study examines how young migrant Chinese

employees handle with conflicts in New Zealand organisations, the area of acculturation cannot be overlooked.

Acculturation

To understand how Chinese immigrants acculturate, and why acculturation has the potential to influence conflict management styles, I focus on three broad traditions of acculturation research. One tradition is the view of acculturation, as a broad concept referring to the changes of culture that take place during intercultural contact (Berry & Sam, 1997). A second tradition is the study of ethnic identity among immigrants (Liebkind, 2006; Phinney, 1990). Ethnic identity can be thought of as an aspect of acculturation that focuses on immigrants' sense of self and how this sense of self relates to their own group as a subgroup of the host society (Phinney, 1990). A third tradition is the study of how ethnic identity influences the frame of bicultural identity. I believe when I combine these studies, I can observe their independent and interactive roles in the experience of Chinese immigrant youth in New Zealand.   At the same time, I can investigate how the way these youths orient themselves to the cultures influence how they handle interpersonal conflicts.

Acculturation studies

The term of "acculturation" is first recognised by cross-cultural psychology and used in discussions about immigrants and refugees. The first formal definition of acculturation is introduced by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits in 1936. They define acculturation as "those phenomena, which result when groups of individuals having different cultures

come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural

patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield et al., 1936, p.149, cited in Sam & Berry,

2006, p.11). Berry (1997, 2005) further develops this definition, and proposes that

"acculturation is a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as

a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members

(Berry, 2005, p. 698)."

The primary concept of acculturation is change. According to Berry (2005), cultural

change in acculturation is a change in a person who has primary learning in one

culture and has taken on another culture's characteristics. Psychological change

involves affective, behavioural, and cognitive acculturation (Ward, 2001). The

affective perspective emphasises the emotional aspects of acculturation and focuses on

psychological well-being and life satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions (Berry

& Sam, 2010). The cornerstone idea of affective acculturation is when immigrants

face challenges like stress or life changes, the way to deal with these challenges is

psychological adaptation such as sense of well-being and self-esteem (Ward et al.,

2001). For example, positive interactions with members of the host culture are likely

to improve immigrants' feelings of well-being and satisfaction if they feel accepted by

others (Berry & Sam, 2010).

Behavioural acculturation is concerned with the acquisition of the culture-specific

behavioural skills such as the language to "fit into" a specific cultural milieu (Masgoret

& Ward, 2006). Specifically, the cultural learning entails gaining an understanding in

intercultural communication styles, including its verbal and nonverbal components, as well as rules, conventions, and norms (Berry & Sam, 2010). Cognitive acculturation refers to intergroup dynamics and attachments to one's cultural heritage and to the new receiving culture (Schwartz et al., 2014). It is concerned with how people perceive and think about themselves and others in the face of intercultural encounters (Berry & Sam, 2010). This acculturation determines how well immigrants adapt by comparing with non-acculturating members of their own ethnic group and the members of the host society.

When immigrants enter into an acculturation situation, two issues they must face. The first issue is culture adaptation. It refers to the degree to which immigrants are willing to adapt to the dominant culture of a host society (Berry, 1997). The second issue is cultural maintenance. It is the degree to which immigrants want to maintain their own ethnic culture in the host society. Based on these two dimensions, the simultaneous participation and maintenance of the two cultures lead to four different outcomes which Berry calls "acculturation strategies".

The four acculturation strategies consist of two components: attitudes and behaviours that are exhibited in day-to-day intercultural encounters (Berry, 2006). When immigrants do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and aim at complete absorption into the host culture, the assimilation strategy is defined. In contrast, when immigrants place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then they are adopting the separation alternative.

When there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, and having daily interactions with other groups, integration is the option. Finally, when immigrants lose their original culture without establishing ties with the new culture, marginalisation will occur (Berry, 2006).

For the first-generation immigrants, integration is the most adaptive attitude over separation, marginalisation and assimilation because changes of culture completely is unlikely (Liebkind, 2006). Ward and Lin (2005) point out that the more different the culture of origin is, the more difficult it is for the individual to assimilate, especially for first-generation immigrants. An integration attitude exemplifies a strong and simultaneously self-identification with both host community and ethnic cultures. It is positively correlated with a high level of self-esteem and it is associated with having the most receptive and positive attitudes toward psychological well-being (Pinney et al., 2001).

Numerous acculturation studies in New Zealand support above claim and find that recent Chinese immigrants prefer to maintain their original culture while adopting the New Zealand culture (Eyou et al., 2000; Ho, 1995; Leong, 2005; Ward & Lin, 2005; Ward, 2010). For example, Eyou et al. (2000) and Leong (2005)'s research with adolescent and adults indicate that Chinese immigrants identify with integration attitude, have better psychological adjustment and they are generally satisfied with life in New Zealand. In order to understand why and how a certain ethnic group identifies with and behaves as integration attitude, we must examine how immigrants groups relate to

the host society (Berry & Sam, 2010; Ward et al., 2001). Ethnic identity is the crucial

perspective to concerned with. It explains who we perceive are similar to, or different

from us, and helps address a sense of self by immigrants (Phinney, 1990).

Ethnic identity

In acculturation studies, ethnic identity is about changes in self-identification. It

has been treated as feelings of belongingness and commitment, as a sense of shared

values and attitudes, and as attitudes towards one's own group and host group

(Liebkind, 2006). The sense of self will guide individual's interpersonal perceptions

and behaviours when interact with other people. There are two degrees to identify

ethnic identity. Ethnic identity can be either secure and strong or undeveloped and

weak (Bourhis et al., 1997). An individual who retains a strong ethnic identity

while also identifying with the new society is considered to have an integrated (or

bicultural) identity (Phinney et al., 2001). One who has a strong ethnic identity but

does not identify with the new culture has a separated identity, whereas one who

gives up an ethnic identity and identifies only with the new culture has an assimilated

identity (Phinney et al., 2001). The individual who identifies with neither above has a

marginalised identity.

In order to determine an individual's ethnic identity degree, Phinney (1990) suggests

three components for measurement: self-image (self-identification of oneself as a

member of an ethnocultural group); sense of belonging (commitment and attachment),

and adaptation (a sense of shared values and attitudes). This measurement is the most

popular measure of ethnic identity within various ethnic groups (Schwartz et al., 2014).

Self-image refers to the ethnic label that one uses for oneself (Ward et al., 2001). It is a part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his or her knowledge of his or her membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership (Liebkind, 2006). Originally drawing from social identity theory, self-image is about how people process information about their own group (in-group) and about other groups (out-group), including how people categorise one another, and how people identify with these categories (Berry & Sam, 2010). Scholars Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that individuals need to belong to a group in order to secure a firm sense of wellbeing. Humans have the tendency to put others and themselves into categories, and this helps them to associate and identify with certain groups and not others (Hogg, 1996). Moreover, humans compare the group they belong to with others, and there is a tendency to have a favourable bias toward seeing positive qualities of the group to which we belong, thereby boosting our self-image (Berry & Sam, 2010).

According to Phinney (1992), measurement of self-image can be done with open-ended questions to elicit a spontaneous statement of one's chosen ethnic label, and close-ended questions that require choice of an ethnic group for oneself. This procedure allows for the identification of ethnically mixed individuals who may identify with one group, and it can also help clarify a respondent's specific background (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

A sense of belonging means having a sense of being part of the wider community; accepting people's identity and individuality, while also recognising that people can belong to and identify with many groups (Ward, 2010). In other words, sense of belonging refers to positive feelings toward one's group. This proposed measure emphasises ethnic pride, feeling good about one's background, and being happy with host group membership, as well as feelings of belonging and attachment to the host group (Phinney, 1992). For example, a positive sense of belonging includes pleasure, satisfaction, contentment and pride in one's own group. At the same time, a feeling of acceptance is also used for positive sense of belonging (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Acceptance of being minority determines whether the experience of exclusion, contrast, and separateness from other host group members exist (Phinney, 1992).

Adaptation includes psychological well-being, functional interactions with hosts and the acceptance of appropriate attitudes and values (Ward et al., 2001). According to Ward et al. (2001), for the assessment of intercultural adaptation, there are three abilities needed to be achieved: (1) ability to manage psychological stress, (2) ability to communicate effectively, and (3) ability to establish interpersonal relationships. Ability to manage psychological stress is reflected in work by Ward's (2001) psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. Good psychological adaptation is an adjustment base predominantly on affective responses, refers to feelings of well-being and satisfaction during cross-cultural transitions (Ward et al., 2001). Good sociocultural adaptation is predicted by cultural knowledge, degree of contact, and positive intergroup attitudes (Berry, 2006). Both aspects are predicted by the successful pursuit of the integration

acculturation strategy, and by minimal cultural distance (Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward, 1996, cited in Berry, 2006).

The ability to communicate effectively and ability to establish interpersonal relationships involves ethical behaviours such as language proficiency, eating the food, and associating with social interactions with members of one's own ethnic group and with members of the larger society (Phinney et al., 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007). Knowledge and use of an ethnic language, in particular, have been considered key indicators of acculturation (Phinney et al., 2006). According to Phinney et al. (2006), learning the language of the country of settlement is one of the major tasks of immigrants. For first generation immigrants, learning the host language and retaining their original ethnic language is likely to be preferred. Social interaction is a part of the acculturation process as immigrants extend their contacts within the larger society (Phinney et al., 2006). It is about the degree of participation in the host community. Masgoret and Ward (2006) argue that the development of language fluency and other communication competencies and the development of interpersonal relationships with members of the receiving community contribute to effective communication, and positive social relations. Language proficiency and social interaction underpin effective intercultural relations, and increased contact with the members of the host culture reciprocally reinforces and improves communication skills. Immigrants who have these skills will be aware of value differences, and have behavioural strategies to deal with the differences (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

An examination of ethnic identity in terms of its dimensions and components parts

provides a framework for comparing it with specific types of group identity. Significant

studies suggest that an integrated identity (bicultural identity) is the most adaptive

identity of immigrants, especially young and first-generation immigrants (Phinney et al.,

2006). Attachment to bicultural identity has been associated positively with outcomes

of healthy psychological well-being.

Cross-cultural literature argues that ethnic identity is a factor which influences

the choice of conflict management styles (Posthuma, 2011; Ting-Toomey et al.,

2000). Posthuma (2011) explains that conflict styles are learned within the primary

socialization of an individual's cultural groups such as nationality and ethnicity. Ethnic

identity is essential to shape individual's cognition, emotions and behaviours when

interact with other groups of people (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). In cross-cultural

studies, individualism-collectivism is often employed to explain ethnic differences.

For example, Triandis (1995) points out that if individuals who identify themselves

primarily as individualists, they would tend to identify with the values and norms of

the individualistic culture. For individuals who subscribe to collectivistic Asian values,

they tend to have collectivistic-oriented practices such as the moral philosophy of

Confucianism will guide their behaviours (Triandis, 1995). Individuals can possess dual

cultural identities and engage in active cultural frame switching, tending to engage with

the values and norms of both individualism and collectivism (Benet-Martínez et al.,

2002).

Ting-Toomey et al.'s (2000) research of four US ethnic groups found that ethnic identity has strong effects on conflict styles. They found that individuals who have integrated identities (bicultural identities) tend to use more integrating and compromising styles than individuals with weak ethnic identities such as assimilated and marginalised identities. This study offers insight into the relationships among ethnic identity and conflict styles. Especially, bicultural identity which can play a role in conflict style preferences (Oetzel, 1998).

Bicultural identity

With the increase in globalisation and migration, it is common for individuals to have multiple cultural backgrounds and live in ethnically diverse environments. In acculturation studies, individuals who adopt the integration strategy incline toward biculturalism. They endorse both their culture of origin and the receiving culture from host society (Berry & Sam, 1997). For immigrants, the culture of origin is embedded in the ethnic traditions, norms, and practices with which they were raised (Chen et al., 2008). This contrasts with the receiving culture which is heavily influenced by cultural systems such as values, beliefs, and institutions of host cultural groups. In cases where immigrants are adapting to one of these cultural systems in the course of their education and employment (Chen et al., 2008), views and practices to which an immigrant has been exposed during his or her life influence the choice of being bicultural.

These individuals identify with both cultures and think of themselves as bicultural, they are highly aware of the discrepancies between the mainstream and ethnic cultures

(Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). Benet-Martínez et al. (2002) point out that some

bicultural individuals are better able than others at reconciling and integrating their

two cultural streams. They call it a "compatible bicultural identity". Those bicultural

individuals who develop a compatible bicultural identity do not perceive the mainstream

and ethnic cultures as being mutually exclusive, oppositional, and conflicting. They

integrate both cultures in their everyday lives, show behavioural competency in both

cultures, and switch their behaviours depending on the cultural demands of the situation

(Birman, 1994, as cited in Benet-Martínez et al., 2002).

On the other hand, some bicultural individuals see the discrepancies of two cultures as

a source of internal conflict (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). As a result, these individuals

keep the two cultural identities dissociated and report that it is easier to be either or

mainstream but hard to be both at the same time.   These bicultural individuals claim to

be oppositional cultural identity (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). In order to investigate

bicultural individuals' perceptions of compatible and oppositional identities, and how

much these identities intersect and overlap, Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) use the

term *bicultural identity integration* to describe these perceptions.

Bicultural identity integration (BII) captures the degree to which " biculturals

perceive their mainstream and ethnic cultural identities as compatible and integrated

vs. oppositional and difficult to integrate" (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002, p.9). BII

encompasses two different and psychometrically independent components: (1) cultural

distance (versus overlap), a degree of dissociation and compartmentalisation versus

overlap perceived between the two cultures orientations (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). For example, saying "I see myself as a Chinese in the USA" versus "I am a Chinese American" (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007); (2) cultural conflict (versus harmony), the degree of tension and clash versus harmony perceived between the two culture (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Such phrases like "I feel trapped between the two cultures' versus "I do not see conflict between the Chinese and American ways of doing things" interpret the degree of cultural conflict (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010). Cultural distance is predicted by having a close-minded disposition, lower levels of cultural competence particularly with regard to the mainstream culture, experiencing strains in the linguistic domain like being self-conscious about one's accent, and living in a community that is not culturally diverse (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010). Cultural conflict is predicted by having a neurotic disposition, or experiencing discrimination.

Recent studies on BII often elucidate the relationships between BII and behavioural, cognitive and other psychological variables (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2014). For example, Chen et al. (2008) find that high BII individuals report more favourable adjustment such as self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms compared to those low BII individuals. Moreover, Benet-Martínez et al. (2002)'s experimental study suggest that individuals high in BII who perceived their cultural identities as compatible better respond to cultural cues than those low in BII. For instance, compatible identity Chinese participants make more external attributions (a characteristically Asian behaviour) after being exposed to Chinese primes such as Chinese iconic pictures. At

the same time, they also make more internal attributions (a characteristically Western behaviour) after being exposed to American primes. In low BII individuals, they appears to be some confusion regarding which cultural stream to activate in a given situation.

Overall, according to the above literature, bicultural integrated ethnic identity can be viewed as a framework that emphasises an individual's orientation towards issues of original cultural identity maintenance and host country's cultural identity maintenance. Individuals who have strong bicultural integrated identity would tend to engage in both individualistic-oriented practices and collectivistic-oriented practices.

Bicultural integrated identity and conflict management-Addressing a Theoretical Gap

From the above literature review, the previous studies clearly indicate that culture plays a significant role in conflict management. According to these studies, members who subscribe to individualistic values tend to use direct modes of conflict management, such as integrating, compromising and dominating styles (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991, Ting-Toomey et al., 2000). Comparatively, members who subscribe to collectivistic values tend to use indirect modes of conflict management such as obliging and avoiding styles (Doucet et al., 2009; Nguyen & Yang, 2012). Especially, the empirical work of Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) and Trubisky et al. (1991) find that the philosophy of Confucianism guides Chinese individuals' interpersonal behaviours and practices. They argue that Confucianism emphasises harmonious interpersonal relationships and the

concept of respect authority. Thus, these individuals who value Confucianism tend

to use obliging and avoiding conflict management than European and Americans in

dealing with conflict situation.

Though, acculturation studies I have reviewed provides strong support for the idea

that acculturating individuals such as immigrants can successfully integrate in a

host country culture while remaining involved with the original culture. Especially,

bicultural integrated individuals who have strong ethnic identity will maintain a positive

psychological well-being and endorse a mix of both individualistic and collectivistic

value patterns (Toomey et al. 2013). However, previous research has overlooked the

issue of how individuals who have been exposed to and internalise both collectivistic

and individualistic cultures resolve interpersonal conflict (Kim-Jo et al., 2010; Ting-

Toomey et al., 2000). Kim-Jo et al. (2010)'s research on Korean Americans indicate

that these individuals cross two different ways of handling conflicts, resulting in a

conflict management style that is somewhat collectivistic and somewhat individualistic.

They can simply adopt both a collectivistic and an individualistic conflict management

style. Furthermore, Ting-Toomey et al. (2000)'s study of four U.S. ethnic groups (i.e.,

European Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans)

also support that ethnic identity plays a critical role of conflict management. These

findings should not go unnoticed but they do not provide strong evidence and

any interpretation of why these ethnic groups have certain preferences of conflict

management due to quantitative research methods. Therefore, I believe it is worthy of

continued exploration.

In the New Zealand context, there is little research work on bicultural integrated attitudes toward young Chinese immigrants (Ward, 2010). Since the 1990s, China has emerged as the major contributor of migration flows into New Zealand. Specially, those young skilled migrants who enter New Zealand as the international students and some subsequently become residents, have given rise to outcomes of acculturation (Bedford & Ho, 2006). New Zealand, like other Western countries, has faced the challenge of increasingly diverse workforce. Focusing on how young Chinese immigrant employees resolve interpersonal conflict with their immediate managers is critical to reflect work diversity management in New Zealand.

According to Ting-Toomey et al. (2000), to understand the differences and similarities in conflict management across different ethnic groups, it is necessary first to have a perspective to explain why and how a certain ethnic groups are different and similar. They argue that the value dimensions of individualism and collectivism are pervasive that guide individuals' behaviours and practices during interactions with others. Based on the individualism-collectivism cultural patterns and integrated bicultural ethnic identity aspects, this study aims to examine the conflict management styles of young Chinese immigrant employees in New Zealand public sector organisations, as well as explore how bicultural integrated ethnic identity influence the preferences of different conflict management styles. The main research question is:

How does the ethnic identity aspect of Chinese migrants acculturation shape the way they experience conflict in NZ public sector organisations?

CHAPTER 3-METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes and explains one of the critical parts of my research: the methodology. According to Hennink et al. (2010), methodology not only tells the readers the process of research, but also involves reflecting on the influence of the researcher on the research process. It is characterised as inductive and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and the interpretation of the study findings (Creswell, 2013; Hennink et al., 2010). In accordance with these positions, I first discuss the research methods and the philosophical assumptions I adopt before going on to explain the subsequent research methodology include data collection, my own reflective stance, and data analysis.

Qualitative or Quantitative?

When faced with the decision of adopting which research methods to deploy, I let the topic and goals of my research dictate the decision. The purpose of this study is to investigate how does the ethnic identity aspect of Chinese migrants acculturation shape the way they experience conflict in New Zealand public sector organisations. My research goal aims to identify conflict issues from the perspective of Chinese migrant participants who have been through the process of acculturation, and to identity how their experiences of conflict management in the workplace are shaped by the acculturation of their lives, especially their ethnic identity. To achieve this goal, I need to understand their experience of conflict management, and their experience

of acculturation, to identify their ethnic identity. At the same time, I need a research method which allows for reflexivity like my personal reflections and own interpretation on the research process. Due to these concerns, this research study seems to fit more appropriate under the interpretive and qualitative approach.

According to Deacon et al. (1999, p.6), the central concern of qualitative research "is not with establishing relations of cause and effect, but with exploring the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals." Qualitative research is often characterised as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). It is typically used for providing an in-depth understanding of research issues such as people's beliefs and behaviour; and for identifying the cultural norms of a culture (Hennink et al., 2010). My research question are based on the assumption that the acculturation of Chinese migrant employees' ethnic identity is a cultural factor that influences their choices of conflict management in New Zealand workplaces. Therefore, qualitative research is most suitable for addressing my 'how' question above to describe acculturation experiences and ethnic identity behaviours of Chinese immigrants.

Qualitative research calls on "inductive as well as deductive logic, appreciates subjectivities, accepts multiple perspectives and realities, recognises the power of research on both participants and researchers" (O'Leary, 2010, p.113). It offers me a unique opportunity to build social bridges with the world of my interviewees. It is the

similarities between these interviewees and myself as first generation migrants from the same country. At the same time, the shared conflict experiences that occur between the interviewees and myself will give a sense of subjective reality to the concept of conflict management. As a migrant researcher, I think of myself as someone who can provide an insider view of the notion of acculturation ethnic identity of migration, a perspective that may not be available to those without the experience of living in two very different cultures. This positionality provides the advantage of an in-depth understanding as how certain ethnic identity influences conflict experiences of interviewees.

Furthermore, many previous studies on conflict management are predominantly quantitative, whereby scholars would rely on statistics to explore conflict styles used by people from different cultures (Chen et al., 2000; Yuan, 2010). These cross-cultural and intercultural perspective studies focuses on quantifying the preferences of different conflict management styles across broad populations such as countries between countries. They rely on theories and hypothesis testing to find the certain conflict management styles. However, the results produced by previous research are too abstract with general issues without exploring participants' contexts and stories. They fail to describe why and how such styles were used by specific cultural phenomena occurring due to the large sample populations. In contrast, qualitative research is good at managing data without destroying complexity and context (Hennink et al., 2010). My decision to introduce ethnic identity perspective into the conflict management arena, provides in depth of information by 'mining' each participant deeply for their experiences will fill the limitation and gap of existing quantitative research. To make

this contribution, utilising a qualitative research is appropriate.

However, without understanding certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions as the fundamental foundation, it is impossible to implement an explicit qualitative research. Qualitative research is a type of research that encompasses a number of philosophical orientations and approaches (Merriam, 2009). I think it is helpful to address my philosophical position which is the philosophy of phenomenology and why it suits for my study.

Phenomenology/theoretical underpinnings

Phenomenology, from my view, concerns reality with lived experiences. As suggested by Merriam (2009), the philosophy of phenomenology focuses on exploring individual's experiences and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness. Phenomenology captures how people experience a certain phenomenon, how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others (Creswell, 2013). The aim of phenomenology is to explore and gain a deeper understanding of how participants are making sense of their personal world through everyday experiences (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), this type of research is based on:

"the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analysed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon" (p.106).

The above definition suggests that depicting the essence or a lived experience by distinguishing its features is central to phenomenology. For me, this type of research is particularly well suited to exploring my topic of how the ethnic identity aspects of acculturation shape the way Chinese migrants experience conflict. The theoretical perspective on acculturation determines that acculturation is a common phenomenon in the experiences of immigrants (Berry, 1997). It refers to the changes individuals undergo as they move from their society of origin to a society of settlement. In the ethnic identity aspect of acculturation as I defined early, acculturation occurs through the reflection of oneself and others by individuals in the face of intercultural contacts. Integrated and bicultural individuals can successfully internalise and be competent in a new culture while remaining involved with the original ethnic culture (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). If conflict is embedded in intercultural contact with one another, such cultural factor like ethnic identity will influence different conflict management style preference (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). In my opinion, both acculturation and conflict management are pervasive, dynamic, vast and complex phenomenon that are experienced somewhat differently by each individual. For this study, expanding the experiences of conflict management through acculturation perspective is an essential theme. Thus, using the phenomenological method to depict my theme is reasonable.

To get my essential theme, the phenomenological interview which I conduct needs a clear logic of analysis with an active role by myself in the process. For this reason, the logic of abduction is adopted. According to Reichertz (2007, p.219), abduction consists

of "assembling and discovering, on the basis of an interpretation of collected data, such combination of features for which there is no appropriate explanation or rule in the stock of knowledge that exists." The concept of abduction combines elements of both hermeneutics and phenomenology (Smith & Eatough, 2007). Hermeneutic describes research as oriented toward interpret the participants' perceptions of phenomenon and make sense the meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). The process of phenomenology gives access to the participant's experience and defines features of experience by the reflection of researcher's own conceptions (Creswell, 2013; Smith & Eatough, 2007). My idea is to 'abduct' a possible explanation of Chinese immigrants acculturation aspects for what has been interpreted, then inductively test its validity by checking whether the ethnic identity aspect occurs in other segments such as conflict management data. Abductive approach also allows me to reflect my own experiences to make sense of other participant's world through a process of interpretation. Smith and Eatough (2007) describe this process as a double hermeneutic. In one sense the research is like the participant, drawing on mental faculties they share (Smith & Eatough, 2007). At the same time, the researcher is different to the participant, always engaging in second order sense-making of someone else's experience (Creswell, 2013). Once I had this logic in mind, I started to consider the criteria of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of acculturation and conflict.

Sample Frame and Reflective Stance

The method of phenomenological research consists of multiple in-depth interviews. Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals

who have all experienced the phenomenon are ideal. In order to conduct the desired analysis, the sample frame has to be criterion-based to enable detailed exploration (Merriam, 2009). My aim of this study was to investigate how the ethnic identity aspects of acculturation impact young Chinese migrants experience interpersonal conflict. The target population was set to meet the following criteria, the participants were invited to this study if they:

- were a first generation Chinese immigrant

- had lived in New Zealand longer than 10 years

- were aged between 30-45

- worked in New Zealand public sector organisations

The above criteria shaped and reflected my own standpoint and values into this research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the subjective position of the researcher has potential influence on data collection and the interpretation of the study findings. This 'reflexivity' allows researchers to be introspective and alter and refine their research as they learn more about the participants (Merriam, 2009). Similar to the criteria, I am also a Chinese immigrant who left China 12 years ago for seeking better educational opportunity in New Zealand. On my personal level, I share the same acculturation experiences and an insider's view as a Chinese immigrant who work in New Zealand organisation. Because of the commonalities and same cultural backgrounds, I have an understanding of the acculturation and conflict experiences of the individuals who I planned to interview. More importantly, sharing a minority status in New Zealand, would gain a trust from the interviewees and made them more comfortable with opening

up and sharing their intimate experiences. However, I also have an outside perspective

as I interviewed the Chinese immigrants from New Zealand public sector organisations

who have different work experiences than myself. Before the interviews began, I

emphasised to myself that the participants are the experts of their lives and that is my

privilege to hear their stories. It allowed me to be more open-minded when interpreting

different perspectival results.

Developing an Interview Schedule

My qualitative research method was utilised to provide insight into how acculturated

Chinese immigrants construct ethnic identity meaning in conflict management

situations. A semi-structured interview guide enabled probing into each acculturated

stories and conflict management patterns of the Chinese/New Zealander individuals.

Previous conflict management and acculturation studies focus more on quantitative

research. Thus, I decided to construct the interview schedule which would suit to

my purposes (see Appendix 1 for the interview schedule). The interview schedule

addressed five key areas: acculturation experiences of interviewees, conflict issues

between themselves and the managers, conflict management styles, how the acculturated

ethnic identity shape the way interviewees experience conflicts, and finally, interviewees

general thoughts on the improvement of the relationships between themselves and their

managers.

I felt it would be quite inappropriate to start with the questions of interpersonal conflict

in the workplace first. The first section was to gain the basic information needed to

understand participants acculturated situations as Chinese immigrants in New Zealand before moving on to conflict experiences. My open-ended questions such as "how do you feel like being a Chinese immigrant", "Do you see yourself as a New Zealander, Chinese or both?" were served to identify ethnic identity and explore how interviewees perceive themselves and others in the face of intercultural contacts. Other open-ended questions like 'why', 'how', 'what' and 'in what way' were also used to see further clarification and understanding upon the interviewees' respondents.

The second section of the interview schedule served two purposes. One was to find the work side of the relationships between Chinese employees and their managers. This included how the interviewees view their managers in terms of their personality and their management styles. The second purpose aimed to determine the conflict issues between Chinese migrant employees and their managers in the workplaces. Instead of describing what was interpersonal conflict before the interviews, I asked each interviewee to define the word of conflict mean to them in the workplaces. This proved to be a very successful technique. I gained a comprehensive view of conflict definition through interviewees' perspectives by comparing their definitions with the existing literature. After that, the interviewees could share some stories of conflict between themselves and managers. According to Hennink et al. (2011), the word of 'story' gives the interviewees freedom to express a great amount of detail about conflict issues through narrative descriptions. I found this narrative approach made it easy for interviewees to recall conflict experiences without being defensive.

The third section addressed the conflict management styles of Chinese employees and their managers. This section also worked as a supplement of second section. Some interviewees might reveal how they and their managers solve the conflicts. The third section aimed to investigate more conflict management styles if they did not come to the fore in second section. At same time, some questions made a concerted effort to probe for more comparisons between the interviewees and their managers in terms of conflict handling.

The fourth section tried to tie in conflict management with acculturated social identity. In order to examine how acculturation experiences might be affected the choice of conflict handling, the questions designed to seek the awareness of self improvement and self image in conflict management situations. In this section, the most critical question was to ask the interviewees how the social identity about themselves in the first section shape the way they experience conflicts in the organisations. This question provided a direct picture of how acculturated social identity and conflict management might be related.

The final section closed up the whole interviews. It allowed the interviewees to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of themselves and their management in the work-related relationship. This aim of this section was to investigate how the interviewees prevent interpersonal conflict in the workplaces.

Participant Recruitment

Once I defined my population, constructed a sample frame, and determined appropriate sample size, it is time to adopt a strategy for gathering my sample. My potential participants have very specific characteristics as I defined above, thus I need an efficient method of recruitment particularly suitable for identifying those characteristics. At the same time, the appropriate and potential participants have to be easily accessible. In my situation as a Chinese migrant myself, the most effective way was to start from my personal network and recruit several participants like friends and acquaintances who fitted my research criteria first. In order to keep the process private and confidential, I used WeChat which is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service that connects only friends and families. This service is very popular in Chinese community. It provides text messaging, hold-to-talk voice messaging, broadcasting messaging, sharing of photographs and files, as well as exchanging contacts by referring others in the network. In my WeChat list, six people were invited and all responded immediately to participate . By using WeChat, I could provide a brief description verbally of the research project and send more detailed information of the Participant Information Sheet at the same time without meeting these people in person.

For the rest of the participants, they are like hidden populations and difficult to access without further recommendations, credibility and trustworthiness. In order to make the sample numbers grow, adopting a snowball strategy to recruitment more participants was necessary. According to Hennink et al. (2011), snowball recruitment is a method

of recruitment particularly suitable for identifying study participants with very specific

characteristics who may be difficult to identify with other recruitment methods. It

involves asking a study participant or a key informant whether they know anyone else

in the community who meets the study criteria, and asking them to refer this person

to the researcher (Hennink et al., 2011). An advantage of this method is that potential

participants are potentially linked to the study by a familiar, trusted person who can

describe the interview process and alleviate any concerns. My key informant was a

friend who used to work in New Zealand public sectors. After a brief discussion of my

topic, he referred my study information to eleven people in his personal network who

met my criteria through e-mailing. I was then approached with them individually by

emails to ask for the interview permissions. Fortunately, out of the eleven, six were

happy to participate. Three said simply that they could not afford the time, whereas two

persons felt uncomfortable to talk about the research topic. After interviewing several

participants, four of them then referred their contacts to me by WeChat and the numbers

started to roll like a snowball.

At the end, 21 participants were recruited include 11 males and 10 females. The gender

split was able to get a range of different perspectives from different sub-group and to

make the findings more authentic (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Two came from Auckland,

and the rest of 19 were all based in Wellington. All the interviews conducted were done

face-to-face according to the preference of the interviewees. All of them preferred to

meet either within their organisations meeting rooms, coffee shops, university meeting

room or their private residences. After I distributed the information sheet, each

interviewee was gently reminded that they had the opportunity to ask questions and the interview would be recorded. All the interviewees said that they felt comfortable in the presence of a recorder. Later all the records transcribed verbatim by myself.

The average times of interviews took from 30 minute to 1 hour long. Seven interviews lasted an hour, and another seven were around 40 to 50 minutes. The rest interviews lasted approximately from 30 to 35 minutes.

The Characteristics of the interviewees

Table 1: The description of participants

Pseudonym	Region of origin	Gender	Age	Years in NZ	Arrived Age	Occupation
P1	East China	F	31	12 yrs	19	E-marketing coordinate
P2	East China	M	30	12 yrs	18	Service Division Manager
P3	East China	M	30	12 yrs	18	Senior Business Analyst
P4	East China	F	31	13 yrs	18	Supervisor
P5	Southwest China	F	31	11 yrs	20	Assistant Accountant
P6	Northern China	F	33	12 yrs	21	Analyst
P7	South China	F	30	16 yrs	14	Teacher
P8	Northwest China	F	30	11 yrs	19	Office Manager
P9	East China	F	33	14 yrs	19	Officer
P10	East China	F	41	12 yrs	29	Representative
P11	East China	M	30	13 yrs	17	Data Analyst
P12	Central China	F	31	11 yrs	20	Finance Officer

P13	North China	M	32	10 yrs	22	Environmental Technical Officer
P14	East China	M	31	13 yrs	18	Accounting Finance
P15	North China	M	30	12 yrs	18	Dealer/Analyst
P16	Central China	M	30	12 yrs	18	Accountant
P17	Northern China	M	30	13 yrs	17	Project Analyst
P18	East China	M	32	11 yrs	21	Applications Specialist
P19	Northeast China	M	37	13 yrs	24	Project Manager
P20	East China	M	30	12 yrs	18	Principal Analyst
P21	North China	F	40	13 yrs	26	Support Officer

Initially, I had hoped to conduct interviews with Chinese employees who were 30 years old to 35 years old in the New Zealand public sector organisations. My plan was to keep the age groups not too broad in order to compare the similarities and differences. A focus age group would help me to gain a detailed understanding of how a certain phenomenon like acculturation and ethnic identity affected on conflict management. When I recruited the participants through my personal contacts, I approached the individuals from 30 to 35 years old and migrant Chinese employees who work in New Zealand public sectors. However, after the snowball sampling started to roll, I found that the age criteria need be relaxed to those individuals under 40 years old to obtain a suitable amount of data.

At the end of the data collection, 21 participants were participated who worked in 20

different public sector organisations in Wellington and Auckland. The average age of participants was 30 with the oldest being 41. The description of each participant is outlined in Table 1.

All the interviewees were originally from 20 different cities in People's Republic of China. They all arrived at New Zealand to study during a time from 2000 to 2004, then chose to stay and work here. 18 interviewees first came to New Zealand around the ages of 16 to 21, except three were older than 24 years old. They highlighted the advantages of choosing New Zealand as an overseas study destination included safety, good weather, less expensive fees and living costs compared with other English speaking countries like America, Australia, Canada and the UK. All the interviewees had tertiary education experiences in the universities such as the University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology, the University of Waikato, Victoria University of Wellington and Massey University. The average educational levels of the participants were Bachelor degrees include accounting, commerce and finance, education, engineering, information technology/system, and tourism. Two of 21 completed honours degrees, 3 finished postgraduate diplomas, and 2 had master degrees.

All the participants had been in New Zealand between 10 to 14 years and were first generation immigrants. Four of them were citizens of New Zealand. The rest 17 interviewees felt that permanent residency had given them enough rights to work and access all the facilities and social services in New Zealand. The participants also

described the other main reason to keep permanent resident status was having freedom to travel back China anytime without visa concerns.

During the interviews, English language was the only medium used. All the participants include the researcher myself speak Mandarin as a mother tongue. However, before the interviews started, I asked each participant if English can be a preferred medium to preserve accuracy in research questions and interpretations of research findings. All the interviewees had very good conversational level of English and only 2 added a couple of Mandarin words when they felt some ideas need to be fully expressed.

Data Analysis

Interviewing 21 participants produced a large amount of primary data. My original planning was to adopt an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to process my data. IPA investigates and illuminates lived experience using careful and systematic procedures (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It emphasises the interpretative features of analysis. It is concerned with identity and a sense of self, a focus on participants meaning making and interpretation, and an attention to boil feeling within a lived experience (Eastough & Smith, 2008). However, after few readings, I found that IPA studies are commonly based on samples of 10 or fewer (King, 2004). It attempts to analyse single cases in greater depth and explore the defining features of experience and themes before integrating a full set of cases (King, 2004; Smith & Eatough, 2007). Using IPA to process data will be very time-consuming.

Similar to IPA, template analysis also identifies conceptual themes across cases and develops them into constituent themes. But template analysis is less time-consuming by using priori codes to balance between different cases and process 20 to 30 cases in common (King, 2004). Thus, I chose to utilise 'template analysis'.

King (2004) describes the definition as follows:

Template analysis does not describe a single, clearly delineated method; it refers rather to a varied but related group of techniques for thematically organising and analysing textual data. The essence of template analysis is that the researcher produces a list of codes ('temple') representing themes identified in their textual data. Some of these will usually be defined a priori, but they will be modified and added to as the researcher reads and interprets the texts. The template is organised in a way which represents the relationships between themes, as defined by the researcher, most commonly involving a hierarchical structure (p. 256).

According to King (2004), the template approach involves coding a large volume of text so that segments about an identified topic can be assembled in one place to complete the interpretative process. It starts with some predefined codes intended to help guide analysis. The first issue I needed to consider was how extensive the initial template should be. King (2004) suggests that if we start with too many predefined codes, then the template might blinker analysis and prevent exploration of more pertinent issues. On the other hand, too few codes may lead to an overwhelming mass of rich and complex data. My approach and starting point was creating some open headings from

the interview schedule. These headings served as the initial template.

My initial template consisted of five highest-order codes which I developed from five sections of my interview schedule, subdivided into one, two or three levels of lower-order codes. These highest-order codes included 'Characteristics of participants', 'Acculturation', 'Conflict management', 'Ethnic identity acculturation influence conflict handling' and 'Possible improvement with manager'. Especially the extent of sub-division with the second, third and fourth highest-order codes covered the centre issues of the study.

King (2004) suggests that once the initial template is constructed, the researcher must work systematically through the full set of transcripts, identifying sections of text which are relevant to the research's aims, and making them with one or more appropriate codes from the initial template. Those highest-order codes then subdivided into one, two or three levels of lower-order codes. After the first interview, I coded the transcripts under the existing headings and added new headings as themes emerged. I then used the emerging template as a base for analysis for the rest of the interviews.

After revising the template by the deletion of 'Possible improvement with manager' and change higher-order classification, the final template consisted of four highest-order codes which emerged from the data (see Appendix 4). The first level-one code was 'Acculturation Experience' which related to specific acculturation experiences with participants. It comprised two level-two codes such as 'Psychological Well-being' and

'Integrated Bicultural Identity'.

'Conflict' was the second level-one code, and encompassed key issue of conflict and conflict management for the study. Four main themes of level-two codes were generated and indexed references to conflict definition, sources of conflict, characteristics of Chinese employees, and conflict management styles. Six level-three codes specified particular substantial amount of interview data to support level-two codes.

Finally, 'Ethnic identity in conflict management' was the third level-one code. This area was direct relevance to the study's aims, therefore each level-two code has more finely-grained analysis and the inclusion of three levels of coding on the final template. In total, four level-two codes and six level-three codes were emerged. All the themes from the above level-one codes would then go on to represent a subsection of my finding section.

CHAPTER 4-FINDINGS

Introduction

The following findings are grouped into three major parts: Acculturation experience,

conflict, and the role of ethnic identity in conflict management. Each part has

a number of sub-sections. The first part presents acculturation experiences of

Chinese immigrants. These findings examine attitudes and behaviours, the degrees

of acculturation of the interviewees and integrated ethnic identity. The aim of this

section is to establish a thorough picture of the interviewees' acculturation strategy

and their perceptions of themselves and the members of the host society. The second

section illustrates the definitions of conflict and sources of the conflict. This section

investigates the conflict issues that the interviewees faced in their workplaces. The third

section answers the research question and describe how does the acculturation ethnic

identity shape the way the interviewees manage conflicts.

From the interview data, the first section found that acculturation was a common

phenomenon of interviewees. All the interviewees came in New Zealand with young

ages. They felt they have been accepted as part of New Zealand society. After at

least ten years' studies and work experiences, they claimed they have adjusted well

into the life of New Zealand. They have balanced well the differences between

national and heritage cultures in everyday life. All the interviewees chose to

combine both cultures and switch between them during interactions of daily work

and daily life. Integrated bicultural identity results were salient. The second section

found that cultural differences played big roles in the interpretation of conflict. The

maintenance of original Chinese cultural values and acculturated New Zealand

cultural values influenced the interviewees when they looked at the conflict issues

in the workplaces. The third section found that the integrated bicultural identities

have influenced the interviewees to adopt more New Zealand affective thinking,

behavioural and communication skills to manage conflicts. They preferred integrating

conflict management styles the most. At the same time, Chinese Confucian values

remained such as respect the others which sometimes influenced the interviewees to use

compromising styles to solve conflicts. Third party mediation style would only be used

if the conflict was intense. All main themes and subthemes from findings represent in

Table 2 and the following data explains these results in detail:

Table 2: Main themes and subthemes

MAIN THEME	Sub-Theme	Definition of Sub-Theme
ACCULTURATION	*1. Positive perceptions of New Zealanders*	Interviewees talk about the definition of 'Kiwi'. If the people have lived in New Zealand long enough, they should consider as part of Kiwi.
	2. Integrated ethnic identity	Interviewees consider their identity as "*a half and half*". A combination of both Chinese and New Zealand identity and blend together side-by-side.
CONFLICT	*3. Perceptions of conflict*	• Conflict is disagreement but has to be strong • Conflict is dysfunctional and negative • Simple disagreement is not considered conflict

	4. Sources of conflict	- Having different thinkings about a task - Having different approaches to a task - Misunderstanding lead to face threats	
INTEGRATED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	*5. Change from collectivism to individualism*	- Be open-minded thinking - Low-context communications: direct communication - Challenging authority	
	6. Maintenance of collectivistic values	- Emphasise on team values instead of self-value - Confucian values of mutual respecting and respect seniority and authority	
	7. The preferences of different conflict management styles	No evidence of avoiding and obliging styles. Integrating styles are the most popular approach, follow by compromising and third party mediation.	
	8.Combination conflict management styles	Interviewees believe Integrating and confrontation style are typical New Zealand style. Compromising style is soft-approach that Chinese may use the most. A combination of integrating and compromising is preferred depend on different scenario.	

Acculturation Experiences

P5. "Like everybody else. I feel like being a migrant is hard. You are away from your own home country, you start to build your own life in a new country. But once you get over the hard part, and start to believe you can live a better life, so every bad motion is gone. For me, I wake up every morning, look at the blue sky and hear the bird sing and drink the fresh water, I feel grateful. I think that's how I live."

P20. "I just don't see there is much of different at all. Because the whole thing is I am educated in here. So I came here quite young so quite easy to adapt to the culture and language. Yeah, so it's not like you finish your work quite established in overseas and then you come here you might find struggle. Because for students, it's quite easy to learn and to pick up things."

The above quote illustrates two common responses when the interviewees recalled their acculturation experiences during their settlement process in New Zealand. Some pointed out that being Chinese immigrants, it was hard at the beginning. They had to face these acculturation challenges such as life changes, stress and difficulty of entering the job market. The other interviewees felt good because the experiences of former Chinese international students to immigrants helped them well-adjusted into New Zealand society and culture. All of the interviewees eventually became acculturated and settled in New Zealand after at least ten years length of residency. They developed quite healthy psychological well-being. These psychological well-being emerged from

two key areas: positive perceptions of New Zealanders, and integrated/bicultural ethnic identity.

Positive perceptions of New Zealanders

In acculturation studies, immigrants' psychological well-being can be reflected from positive evaluation of host mainstream people (Schwartz et al., 2014). In acculturation studies, this psychological well-being examines immigrants' acculturation attitudes through psychological aspects. It reflects positive interactions with members of the host culture, feelings of accepting and life satisfaction. 'Kiwi' was the term all the interviewees used most readily when referring to Pakeha New Zealanders (or New Zealand Europeans), as well as to New Zealand society more generally. When the interviewees asked to describe the meanings of 'Kiwi', only one interviewee responded that Maori should include under the rubric 'Kiwi'. Due to the multicultural society of New Zealand, some interviewees believed if they lived in New Zealand long enough, they should consider themselves as a Kiwi:

P16. "Kiwi is someone at least living here more than half of their life. Originally I think someone was born here but now I think it is someone have been here longer enough. And they are Kiwi."

P7. "For me, if you are a Kiwi, first you have to have Kiwi accent, the sound, the pronunciation, you gonna be quite Kiwi. And the second thing is, you've been here long enough. It doesn't matter what nationality you originally from. Kiwi is really like

you've been here long enough. You hold Kiwi accent, then you are a Kiwi."

Besides the length of residency and language proficiency, some interviewees thought being a Kiwi also connected to open-mindedness, and professional behaviours. As well as the ways of lifestyle such as sport, environment and a relaxed attitude:

P8. "When I talk about Kiwi I think probably European, Maori, New Zealander soften countries. But the longer I live here I realise New Zealand is becoming more and more diverse. Kiwi means friendly people who are very passionate about sport. People who protect their environment. That's my idea of Kiwi."

P20. "I think Kiwis are very good with opening to other people you know because we are immigrant country. People are very technical are very professional you know."

P3. "Kiwis are just quite relax of lifestyle."

All the interviewees had more positive perceptions of New Zealanders. They commented that most people in New Zealand value diversity, accept and respect differences. They felt Pakeha attitudes toward immigrants were positive. The interviewees also claimed that they were less likely to perceive discrimination. They felt they live in a positive, equal status, and cooperative environment:

P1. *"People are much nicer. Especially, like a lot of Kiwis are very friendly to people.*

So you don't find discrimination or anything."

P13. "Doesn't really matter who you are, where you are from. They treat you the same. I'm thinking I have never been criticised or put in disadvantage to situation because I am Chinese. If you've got the talent, you can survive here, you can work, you can be part of this society here."

When I asked the question such as "**what are New Zealanders' reactions after they know your length of residency**?" More than half of the interviewees responded "*people would say: wow you are a Kiwi now*" or "*you've been here long enough, you are pretty much like a Kiwi now*".   The interviewees believed the length of stay not only had a direct correlation towards successful acculturation, but also helped them be accepted by the members of the host country. The definitions of Kiwis, according to the interviewees, also reflected that the members of New Zealand expect these immigrants have be well engaged in New Zealand life due to the long length of stay. Some interviewees felt they were now Kiwis. For example, three interviewees talked about language changes such as having "a Kiwi accent" that had made them like Kiwis. Another three interviewees said they felt emotionally connected to New Zealand when they traveled overseas. Other interviewees chose to describe themselves as New Zealanders because they felt they fitted into New Zealand environment and understood the New Zealand way of life and culture.

Integrated ethnic identity

When immigrants enter into an acculturation situation, they are faced "Who am I? To which group do I belong?" questions (Berry, 1997). Phinney (1992) suggests a close-ended question help to explore the immigrants' acculturation degrees and self-image. In order to find out how the interviewees identify themselves and relate to ethnic identity, I asked the following question:

Do you feel yourself more like New Zealander, Chinese or both?

During interviews a forceful and repeated thematic motif developed by interviewees when the question was asked. The majority of interviewees (13 out of 21) responded with a straight percentage of 50 Chinese and 50 New Zealanders they see themselves out of 100%. 4 interviewees felt they were 60% of New Zealander and 40% of Chinese. Another 4 interviewees responded not with a percentage but with explanations of how they attached to both identities. When asked to describe their identities, the interviewees tended to say "*I am a half and half*" or "*I am both*" or "*I am a Chinese who live in New Zealand*". These percentages and phrases reflected bicultural construction of integrated ethnic identity theme.

These bicultural interviewees seemed to view their own identity as a combination of both Chinese and New Zealand identities existing and blend together side-by-side. Some interviewees felt fairly comfortable to combine and switch between two cultures depend on the demands of the situation:

P13. "I was growing up in China for last 20 plus years, there is a Chinese core will never taking away from me. But outside that core I've got layer and layer of Kiwi culture around the core. I just put that around me like an apple, the core is Chinese but the major of apple is actually Kiwi. I act and talk like a Kiwi just because I've been exposed this Kiwi culture. I don't know how to blend everything. But if in front of a Kiwi, I just attempt to be a Kiwi. If in front of family especially my parents, my parents in law, I probably just be a Chinese. I'm still a good son and that's part of Chinese culture. I take care of my parents. I do what they ask me to do."

P15. "Probably both depend on where I am. If I am live here, I turn to think I am willing to adopt Kiwi culture style, I want to get involve, I want to be mixed in the local community. Sometimes I turn to thinking the Kiwi way rather than the Chinese way."

According to the interview data, all the interviewees preferred to maintain the Chinese culture and adopt the New Zealand culture. There were some degrees of cultural integrity maintained such as nationality, mother tongue, family life, and Chinese traditional cultural activities. Especially, most participants placed a high premium on group-oriented collectivistic values, such as taking care of family members and family obligations as a critical part of self. These strong Chinese culture maintenance derived from earlier education in China, since all the interviewees have grown up in China and been educated under the Chinese system from 0 to 20s years of age.

At the same time, due to the times and years they live in New Zealand, the interviewees had close interaction with New Zealand cultures such as food, life styles, communication styles, language, friendships, and etiquette. Most them believed they have integrated both New Zealand and Chinese cultures in their everyday lives, showed behavioural competency in both cultures. Some interviewees claimed they have adopted individualistic value patterns. The repeated individualistic value preferences that reoccured in the interviews included: freedom of making decisions, being independent and deferring to authority:

P1. *"When I am in China, I have to care about a lot of other people's thinking like my parents and other people. But in New Zealand, they give you more freedom on that. So you do care but you don't have to care that much. So you have the chance to be yourself and do whatever you like to do which is quite good for me."*

Most interviewees also claimed that they have recognised and accepted the differences, and have mixed both Chinese and New Zealand identities unconsciously together. Most importantly, these interviewees did not perceive their bicultural identities being mutually exclusive, oppositional, or conflicting. Depending on the situation and the nature of their intergroup-interpersonal relationships, they could manifest two identities at the same time and they noticed less identity struggles:

P6. *"I didn't have to do anything. Because it's been such long time, I just got blended together from time to time. I didn't even notice. I don't have the problem. I guess it's*

all mixed together, it just come out naturally."

P15."I turn to not try to mix up the thinking I suppose. If I am going back to China, I probably start to thinking back the Chinese way again. To friends, especially after a few drinks you feel like you become Chinese again. I don't think struggle is the word for me. Rather than struggle I will say accepting those two differences. I know where I am come from and also I've been living here for long time, I know the stories behind those two cultures, if I understand them I accept them rather than criticise them."

However, two participants having become aware of having a bicultural identity will raise a question of which group we belong to:

P19. "Sometimes when I talk to my friends in China, I am a New Zealander not a Chinese because I always disagree towards something they did or something they say. The value is different. So that's why I believe they treat me as a Kiwi rather than a Chinese. But when I deal with locals, they still believe my parents, my face still Asian, I still have a strong accent. And I still keep some of the Chinese components in my life. So they've seen me as a foreigner as well. It's like a bat. You don't belong to mine and you don't belong to they. It's hard really but I try to act or behave as a local as much as I can at least in the public place. But at home, I try to pass on their Chinese culture to my next generation. So I still use a lot of Chinese values to educate my kids."

All of the above quotes reflected compatible perceptions of bicultural identity

integration. 19 out of 21 interviewees described they had compatible bicultural identity. These interviewees kept the New Zealand and Chinese cultural identity dissociated and reported that it was easy to maintain both. Because two identities have overlapped in their normal life without any conflict. Some interviewees indicated that when they exposed to Chinese environment such as their own family lives, they would respond to Chinese cultural values. If they have exposed to New Zealand environment like workplaces, they would appear to be more New Zealanders.

Conflict

Before recalling the interpersonal conflict experiences in the workplaces, the interviewees were asked to describe the information of their organisations and job descriptions. They were also asking to describe their managers include age, gender, and nationality. The participants responded extra information such as personality and management style. And then it followed by the question of how they describe their relationships with the managers. The purpose of these questions was to gain the information needed to understand how the participants perceive and think about their managers in the interactions of organisational context.

According to the data, all the participants worked in small-size team environment and they were all the only Chinese employees in the teams. 9 out of 21 managers were around the age of 50 years old. 8 managers were from age 40 to 45 years old. 3 were around 30 years old. Only one was over 60 years old. There were 14 male managers and 7 female managers. 15 managers were Pakeha (Kiwis), 2 were second generation

Asian managers, 2 were from Samoa, one was from UK and one was from Australia.

When describing their New Zealand managers, the positive perceptions were remained. Repeated words and phrases throughout interviews included: "*nice, good, caring, open-minded, and casual*". In terms of management style, the most frequent comments were "*soft, relax, flexible, look after, supportive, and sensitive*". Referring to the relationships with the managers, some of the interviewees used phrases like "*he or she is my friend*". A couple of the interviewees treated their managers as "*mentor*". Several interviewees did not prefer to have too much personal engagement with managers in the workplace in order to keep professional. Overall, the interviewees believed that they have achieved good relationships with managers and they believed their work has been acknowledged.

Perceptions of conflict

Instead of providing the definition of conflict, I asked each interviewee what interpersonal conflict is in the workplace. All participants revealed some common perceptions toward conflict.

Conflict is disagreement but has to be strong

Some participants viewed conflict is disagreement. They indicated that they would call the situation as a conflict when disagreement is mutually inconsistent and has strong correlation:

P3. "Conflict to me is about if you have a major disagreement and you can't reach

consistent agreements in very short time frame. And when you start to pull to different

direction, and that's what I call conflict. Doesn't have to be a shouting match, but it

might be people ask you to do certain things you refuse to do. That could be conflict."

P19. "I see conflict can be a disagreement up to a strong correlation. It can be work

level, it can be personal and individual level."

Conflict is dysfunctional and negative

Many participants believed that conflict leads to negative outcomes. It was

dysfunctional and would damage the relationships:

P15. "When I heard the word conflict, I will think the really really negative part which

I haven't got much experiences on that. Maybe I am lucky. But just my personal view

my understanding of conflict is you have a really big disagreement on certain things

between yourself and someone else, maybe the management."

Simple disagreement is not considered conflict

However, even though many interviewees perceived conflict as disagreement, some felt

that pure disagreements like different ways of doing things, different understanding, and

different opinions in the workplace did not constitute conflict. They pointed out that it

was very normal that people would disagree with the ways of how the work should be

carry out when they interacted. They felt that it was reasonable and legitimate to have a

disagreement. For example, some participants revealed the following thoughts:

P2. "I don't think we have conflicts, but sometimes we may have different understanding of things. But they are not conflicts, just different understanding. And it's quite common you have different understanding of things with people."

P14. "I think from my understanding, conflict is something between interpersonal, but I think the only conflict we have so far is something we can't really share the value or maybe a similar work. Maybe manager is thinking this way of doing things is faster, but I think I've been doing it for while so I know my process. Sometimes manager can't agree with my process. I think my process is better. But I think it's not conflict, it's just different way of doing things. I think conflict is much more meaning by personal or something more deeps."

According to the data, the main definition of conflict was "*disagreement*", then followed by "*different ways of thinking, different ways of doing job, and different opinions*". Only one participant thought conflict is "*misunderstanding*". The last quote from P14 above revealed the common interpretation of Chinese participants when they described the word 'conflict'. They extended the conflict situations in levels from strong to neutral. Most participants perceived conflict was negative and involved intense interpersonal dissonance between themselves and managers. For example, some findings such as "*big/negative disagreement*", "*can't reach to consistent agreement*", "*a strong correlation*" or "*involve personal*" were considered as strong conflicts if interviewees believed they could not maintain harmony between themselves and their

managers.

Most participants seemed to use Chinese perspective to interpret the word of 'conflict' in Chinese definition. They indicated that their conflict situations were neutral. When asked to give a definition of conflict, more than half of the participants' responses were "*I don't have any conflict with my manager*". Later they added that they had "*disagreement*", "*different ways of thinking*", "*different ways of doing job*", and "*different opinions*" with their managers but these situations could not be labelled as conflict. In Chinese words, different ways of thinking, different opinions, and different ways of doing jobs can be translated into one word as "bu tong yi jian", which is a very neutral and not too strong expression. For Chinese people, "bu tong yi jian" are easily resolvable. They may not consider it as conflict if they do not escalate to dispute. Thus, for most interviewees, their interpersonal conflicts existed only when disagreements were intense, escalating to dispute and involved negative emotions in the situations.

Sources of conflict in the workplace

In the workplaces, some participants pointed out that it was unlikely to have goal-oriented conflict caused by different preferred outcomes. They explained that in New Zealand public sector organisations, the optimised goals were often set up by the management levels before the job started or before each budget years. So the goals between the employees and the managers were almost the same. Thus, according to the results, the main themes of conflict were related to tasks, misunderstanding, as well as face threats. Among the task-related issues, two conflicts emerged: having different

thinking about a task and having different approaches to a task.

Having different thinking about a task

Some participants expressed that conflict emerged because differences of thinking about the task. As Chinese employees, sometimes they had different views and thinking compare with their New Zealand managers:

P1. "New Zealanders are very conservative, they are very protecting themselves. So they don't want to move too fast. That makes quite difficult for people who have ideas… We are Chinese, we are kind of Asian, we have this kind of Asian idea about things. They don't have the view we have. And they don't very see the value. And I got turn down for couple of times because of the reason."

Two interviewee described that Chinese and New Zealanders have different way of thinking, one participant said that "*Like Chinese say no matter what is the colour of the cat is, just catch the mouse is good cat. So it doesn't matter how I do it, as long as I done it and done it right, and should be ok. But I think Kiwi style is more like following the procedure and do it correctly but slowly, they don't only want the result, they are doing things step by step according to the rules.*"

According to this interviewee, conflict would be caused by different thinking of job efficiency in the workplace. Some interviewees described that Chinese thinking is doing job fast and efficiently even not really follow the policies. But the restricted

procedures in New Zealand public sector organisations made harder for the interviewees to be flexible to complete tasks in daily work performance.

Comparing with their managers and themselves, some interviewees commented that their managers were more conservative to certain jobs and procedures. When completed certain tasks, some interviewees tended to have different thinking by finishing the jobs in fast and efficient ways. They seemed to be result-driven and focused on outcomes and achievements. Some interviewees concentrated on meeting objectives, delivering to the required time, cost and quality, and held performance to be more important than procedures. In other hands, they noticed that New Zealander managers concentrated more on policies and procedures. Especially working in New Zealand public sector organisational context, when managers insisted on policies and processes, it made it harder for the interviewees to speed up the tasks, improve work efficiency and deliver expected results. Thus, according to the interviewees, sometimes the conflicts emerged when the interviewees had different views on tasks, and different settlements of timelines and deadlines with managers.

Having different approaches to a task

Some interviewees mentioned that sometimes the employees and the managers would have disagreement about the approach to accomplishing the tasks. The following interviewees had a disagreement with their managers regard to the process of doing a certain job:

P2. "My manager he is kind of process-driven. Process-driven means for example you know every workplace has certain work process you need to follow. In order to comprise something, you have to follow certain process, step by step, step one, two, three four five. He thinks we need to follow each step and then go on that. I approach a little bit different and I say it's depending on the scenario we have, I may skip some processes. There is no answer saying that every process should be follow because sometimes when you have some urgent scenarios, you may need to escape instead of following process. I won't say he is right or he is correct or he is wrong, I will say that it's just different approach."

P14. "I think the only conflict we have so far is something we can't really share the value on a similar work. My manager thinks this way do things, but I think I've been doing it for while so I know my process. Sometimes she can't agree my process. But I think my process is better. It's just different way of doing things."

One interviewee had a conflict with his manager when he drove to be autonomous to complete the tasks:

P13. "As Chinese, we work fast and we get everything done on time. What I want from my team leader is, you just tell me what I need to do for the year, and I am managing myself. For example, I have this 100 jobs to do for this year, ok, just give to me, and I'll plan myself. I might do more in some days and less in another days. But the manager disagreed with me and they don't like my idea. They want to keep the record on, they want to encourage the whole team to perform up to speed that means 10 jobs

each month. They know I am a good worker, I can keep up it's not a problem but not

everyone can do it. I don't like it. I want to manage myself in my own way."

According to the above quotes, the conflict of task-related issues is due to different

thinking and different approaches. The result-driven, fast and efficient attitudes seemed

to be a challenge when worked with the public sector managers who were process-

driven, expected standardised processes, and followed the certain rules and policies.

However, even though the interviewees were aware of these task-related conflicts, more

than half of the interviewees felt these conflicts were neutral and not too strong. They

felt that these conflicts were easily resolved by adjusting their thoughts after they had a

clear understanding of the processes and the reasons behind the process. None of them

chose to escalate the conflicts to disputes or argue with their managers even they had

different thinking and different approaches.

In comparison, four interviewees recalled their conflict experiences were negative and

destructive. Each of them ended up with situations of dispute and significant arguments.

These conflicts emerged with misunderstanding and face threats. Some episodes

became progressively greater after the interviewees and their New Zealand managers

perceived face threats and failed to evaluate and deal with conflicts objectively.

Misunderstanding lead to face threats

Three interviewees recalled the conflict they had with their New Zealand managers

occurred because of misunderstanding. One interviewee pointed out that there were

some misunderstandings when the New Zealand manager misinterpreted his behaviours. He believed his manager might have different beliefs and value differences leading to a misinterpretation of his job treatments and communications:

P19. "It was when I started my career, I was having a lack of understanding of how public sector run as business. A lack of understanding of political environment and political influence within the organisation. So I was still acting as I was working in a commercial industry. This conflict started with a tiny little things. The way I treated my work, the way I communicated with my team members, my team leader, the way I run my own schedule. He had some misunderstanding about what I try to treat, misunderstood the way I communicate certain information to my other team members or team leaders without going through him. He thought I was stabbing the back of him by doing things without his permission. It was kind of a cumulative process until he breaking up stage."

Researcher: Why you think misunderstanding was the main reason of this conflict?
P19. "Because we are using the foreign language in the workplace to communicate with the mainstream. And also we try to understand their behaviours their culture. We certainly use all our cultural background, and educational background to interpret how do they do things here. So certainly sometimes we misinterpret some of the behaviours, the way they act towards us. Sometimes we miss understood what exactly they try to do, try to express towards us. It's easily to take things personally rather than ok it's purely about work or about certain things."

According to the above interviewee, he communicated and processed information based on the set of values he holds. But his manager had different world-views and communication styles. As the interviewee explained, different ethnic groups would have different interpretation towards another party. Conflicts would easily result if the conflict parties misunderstand and misinterpret each other's attitudes and behaviours based on their own cultural judgements.

Another interviewee illustrated that her conflict party felt offended and face threats after she shared some opinions about the manager's work performance:

P7. "One day we talked about how to organise the environment in the learning environment. My supervisor she really loves bright colour, so she displayed all of the things on the wall, but when you walk in that environment you feel like it's overtop. So in a whole team discussion, I pointed it out I said 'it's too many words on the wall, and kids are more like visual learning so should we have more like in children's level and they can learn? And we can put part and part on, not everything at the same time.' Everyone agreed. After we went home, she texted me say I didn't respect her because she was the person put all those things up. She said 'you are not the boss, why we have to listen to you'. And I said it's only a suggestion. I didn't ask to be a final decision and I thought everyone agree with that and I just brought that up."

Even though the above interviewee's main purpose was to share information, the other

party misunderstood that she was being criticised and held responsible for the mistake. Presumably, her manager might have felt that her 'self-face' was threatened. Conflict that emerged because of this concern also happened to another interviewee:

P19. "After my manager broke up the stage, he was having a conversation with me in front of other team members. I didn't like that. I started to roll this kind of conversation should take place in a personal in a one on one situation rather than just by in front of the others. I felt embarrassed. So I didn't respond it well. I wasn't really keep silent. After I heard his comments about my performances, so I broke up as well. That was the first conflict we had."

When misunderstanding and misinterpretation happens, firstly all of the interviewees chose to communicate with the managers directly and tried to clear up the misjudgements. One interviewee recalled he initial thought one-on-one unofficial conversation or more casually conversation would resolve conflict. However, the New Zealand managers insisted on escalating the conflict to the higher level after they felt they were being challenged:

P3. "My manager sent me an appointment for rehearsal but I declined. I told her I was completely confident in terms of doing what I am doing. I trained the staffs so I am sort of good at leading and doing presentations. But she was sort of be taking the back because she's been challenged a little bit. She found her mentor and she started to escalate a little bit, escalate I really mean is she started to talk to the middle level

manager and even higher manager. The conflict was actually last for about two or three weeks. I was not sure it's completely resolved but we had none of conversation between when it started and finished."

P19. "I tried to fix it because he was my boss. So I initial a one on one kind of conversation. And he insisted we should have HR people step in because a third party will kind of being a witness rather than just two of us…I felt 'ok since you want to play the game. Let's play'. He had HR people there and I took my friend from another government department as a support person. And just escalated and escalated. So from a kind of friendly conversation became anti each other, became a raven conversation, treated each other as an enemy."

The above episodes illustrated a whole process of how misunderstanding led to face threats and then turned to strong conflicts at the end. When the conflicts happened, all the interviewees tended to express their emotions and opinions directly to clear the misjudgements from the managers. But their direct confrontations led the managers to become defensive and competitive behaviour. Problem-solving attitudes turned to win-lose and against each other conflicts. They were intensified and exacerbated after one party refused to communicate further and chose to discuss the grievances with higher level managements. Two interviewees seemed to feel that they were being forced to escalate the problems to formal mediations because the managers moved quickly towards higher levels without concern the interviewees' positions.

According to the interview data, most interviewees had very strong group-oriented and co-operative attitudes. They treated their managers as parts of team members. Some interviewees explained if there was any conflict, the interviewees would appreciate to solve it "*in house*" without "*outsiders*" involvements. One interviewees particularly pointed out "*in the external meeting, the worst thing to do is blaming team member.*" He believed if the conflict was not too serious, they should exclude H.R. or higher level managers and resolve the conflict within the team. If the managers decided to take the conflicts to the higher levels without employees' concerns, it might lead them to switch from co-operative mode to competitive mode and a further intensification of conflict and a stronger conflict as the above interviewees described might occur.

The Role of Ethnic Identity in Conflict Management

Having provided a thorough picture of the nature of the interviewees' ethnic identities and the conflict issues in the workplace, I now turn to address my overarching research question:

"How does the ethnic identity aspect of Chinese migrants acculturation shape the way they experience conflict in NZ public sector organisations?"

According to the interview results, most Chinese interviewees (15 out of 21) used an integrating strategy to deal with conflict. Three interviewees preferred third-party mediation approach to resolve strong inconsistent conflicts. Two interviewees described they would use compromising strategy depending on different consequences if an integrating strategy did not work. There was no evidence of dominating conflict

management style. None of the interviewees agreed avoiding and obliging styles should be used. When asked the reasons why certain styles were chosen, the data reflected that acculturation changes influenced significantly on the preferences of conflict management. Bicultural integrated ethnic identity played a huge role.

In order to address the above results, four main themes emerged: changes from collectivism to individualism, maintenance of collectivistic values, the preferences of different conflict management styles, and bicultural integrated conflict management. Each theme contained several sub-themes which will be discussed.

Changes from collectivism to individualism

After working in New Zealand public sector organisations for a few years, all of the interviewees noticed some changes they have made in terms of conflict management. In order to express these changes, the interviewees made uninvited comparisons between Chinese ways and New Zealand ways when facing conflict issues. They claimed that unlike other Chinese, they tended to use more New Zealand ways to deal with conflicts such as open-minded thinking, low-context communications, and challenging authority.

Open-minded Thinking

Several interviewees admitted that interacted with New Zealand cultures have changed them to become more open-minded. They were more accepting and understanding of how people from different cultures behave and view things in different ways:

P1. "I realise a lot of thinking has kind of transferred from very traditional Chinese kind of way to a better way of open-minded thinking. The more you work with people, the more you talk with different people, you will start to realise how different you are, and how different they are."

P6. "I am quite open to the ideas, if that really makes sense, if that idea is a good idea, working reasonable. If you take things openly, things are easier."

Some interviewees suggested when conflict existed, being open-minded to accept different ideas, different attitudes, and different personalities was very important. They pointed out sometimes people might have different personalities or family issues that affected the work problems. Being open minded would help them to be more concerned about other people's perspectives and avoid taking conflict to personal levels.

Low-context Communications

In terms of communication, many interviewees thought unlike New Zealanders' "straight forward" communication style, Chinese tended to more "*indirect*", "*introvert*", and "*around and around*". However, many interviewees revealed that exposure to New Zealand culture lead them to become more direct, straightforward, and more willing to express their ideas in conflict situations. Some interviewees mentioned that their New Zealand managers would prefer their appreciation for direct and straightforward manner:

P20. "The Chinese way of communicate with people are very indirect. But Kiwi ways are quite straight forward. And I found that's very helpful especially when you attack some difficulties issues you don't wanna go around and around which you can get on the point straight away and very straight forward. So I like that, I communicate with people with that way and I found that's very effective."

Some interviewees said they attempted to learn the language, as well as the ways of communication. For example, two interviewees mentioned that a common thing Chinese people do was agree to everything. But they attempted to say "*no*" sometimes if they disagreed with other people's opinions or they did not understand what other people tried to say. Several interviewees pointed out changing language use and tone of voice would help to reduce misinterpretation and avoid potential conflicts. They felt if they used stronger words than the conflict situations actually deserved, this sometimes created unnecessary drama. Changing tones and words helped them to adjust to appropriate behaviours when they faced conflicts:

P13. "You can talk to the point but you don't have to be harsh, you can put in another way, maybe a funny way. It took a year for me to have those things. I was like that when I came to Wellington. My boss was like 'easy, what happen to you?' I was like 'ok, I am just talking'. 'You sound like you are angry.' 'No, I am not.' I think most of Chinese have that problem. Sometimes we are just too direct to the person you wanna talk to. These Kiwis they don't do that. They always asking you 'how are you'. They start the conversation which we don't do. It is something we need to do in my opinion.

You know if easy to the conversation not too straight to the point. Just give people a

buff to think about what you are trying to say."

P7. "It could be a culture influence. This is the culture when we talk mandarin, we talk

loud and people thought we are fighting. But we are not. When I express my feeling,

I really want to express it that makes people think like the tone is bit tougher and my

speech is very quick. When people speak tough and quick, people tend to think 'are you

ok, are you in the fighting mood or something'. But when you slow down, calm yourself

down, the tone is really important when you solve the problem. That's how I learned."

Furthermore, in terms of low-context communications, some other interviewees also

commented when interacted with New Zealanders, being honest was very critical. They

felt that open expression of mistakes was acceptable and reflected honesty when work in

New Zealand organisations. They thought New Zealand managers tended to value this

honest attitude:

P16. "This is the Kiwi style. Honest doing the work, everything reported even I have

done some mistakes. If you've made some mistakes, but always reported, and no one

will blame you about your mistake if you report it or causing any trouble. I think that's

probably Kiwi style of thinking. If I am in China, I will hide the mistake to avoid the

conflicts. I think that's the different."

Challenging Authority

Some interviewees described that due to the years and experiences they have in New Zealand organisations, they became more stronger and more self-reliant. In particular, the supportive environment gave the interviewees the strength to challenge authority and found their own positions in the conflict situations:

P5. *"I am tougher than before, and because I am now know and I believe there is someone I can talk to and someone I can go to if there is a conflict in the workplace. When you first arrive, you probably think you try to make friends with everyone, you try to be good. But now you've been working for ages, you know your rights. If you actually stand up for yourself, there is a fairness you can seek and help you can seek."*

P7. *"Before I was too soft. I was too scared, I was scare of the hierarchy of the organisation because she is my senior, she is older than me and she has more experiences, I have to respect her. But now I learned if I've been hired employee there, I have the same right with my manager to raise my point. So it's pretty Kiwi way to solve the problem I think. They are not scare of the higher authority."*

Maintenance of Collectivistic Values

According to the interview results, two interviewees reflected the maintenance of collectivistic values, such as concern about a we-identity, and emphasise on team values instead of self-value:

P6. "They may think this, and I may think differently. But at work is how you think together as a team. If you don't think about yourself all the time, and then you can work in the team environment. Otherwise, it is hard to work with other people if you always put yourself at first. People will know you are selfish, work with other is quite important."

P20."Every individual have different views, if you force on your interests not the whole team interests, you will see a great conflict."

More than half of the interviewees still maintained Chinese Confucian value such as respecting for managers' ideas and decisions. Some interviewees' respectfulness involved the acceptance and acknowledgement of the importance of their managers' beliefs. For example, some interviewees respected their New Zealand managers depend on their length of working in the company and their experiences. Two interviewees respected their managers as "*mentors*" because their managers always taught and guided them but did not force them to follow their lead. They explained that their managers were very good at what they were doing. In many situations, they found their managers' ways always worked better. Thus, they respected their managers' opinions very seriously. The other interviewees claimed that they were respected their managers based on their abilities and their ideas more than their ranks, titles or seniority. Only one participant promoted to keep the Chinese value of obedience because the manager's high position and avoidance of behaviours that would offend her manager.

The data also showed that most interviewees' maintenance of respectfulness were based on the level of mutual respect. They indicated that when they had disagreements of certain things, their managers always respected their views and showed acceptance of their reasonable ideas:

P4. "My manager she is a very reasonable. She listens to us and she makes the decisions based on what we think. She respects us very well. Thus we respect her back too."

P8. "It's about have the mutual respect and be censorial when you give advice or tell somebody what you really think. If you really make sure make the other party feel being respected and explained your opinion in really reasonable ways. You will reduce the risk of making somebody feel really embarrassed."

The Preferences of Different Conflict Management Styles

When recalling the conflict situations, the interviewees were using various conflict management styles. The analysis results revealed that integrating style such as constructive communication and collaboration was the most common preference. Third-party mediation was used only when the conflicts were intense, followed by compromising styles. Only one interviewee used a dominating style only once.

Integrating Style

Instead of using avoiding style, integrating style was often the first choice of the interviewees. This style reflects high concern for self and others (Rahim, 2011). It involves exchange of information and examination of differences to reach a solution acceptable to both parties in conflict substantive negotiation (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). This style has two distinctive elements: collaboration and problem solving. Collaboration involves open communication, clearing up misunderstanding, and analysing the underlying causes of conflict. Open communication is a prerequisite for problem solving, which involves identification of, and solution to, the real problems to provide maximum satisfaction of concerns of both parties (Rahim, 2011).

Most interviewees claimed that if they found any problem or became aware any potential conflict, they normally confronted to managers without hesitation. They felt if they hold the feelings and problems, the conflicts were never clear up:

P9. "If I have any problem, I don't hesitate to speak out, if I don't feel happy, I talk to my manager and never hold it. Because they never know. They will think you can handle it".

If there was any disagreement and different opinion due to miscommunication or misunderstanding, some interviewees mentioned they would try to create a mutual way of thinking. They were willing to exchange of information and examine of

differences in order to reach a solution acceptable to both parties for problem solving. The following interviewee offered an example of why focusing on process rather than outcome would help to reduce the conflict:

P19. "I try to explain myself more than the others. Tell my boss about my feeling. If she doesn't understand why I do certain things, I will tell her the reasons behind it rather than just tell her I did it. I always give some backgrounds around the decisions I made. Why I believe this is the right decision rather than tell her the outcome. So I am emphasis on the process more than just the outcome. I found that would help me to over ride or overcome some of the possibilities of misunderstood by other people in the workplace."

The integrating style also reflected through constructive communication. According to the interviewees, the New Zealand managers tended to have a regular casual coffee catch up or private meeting to understand about how Chinese employees look at things. The interviewees felt relaxed and less pressured to share their different opinions and ideas. Some interviewees agreed that a consensus of agreement would achieved after regular catch-up meeting between the employees and the managers. After the interviewees addressed their feelings directly to the managers and confronted the situation, led to understanding and appreciation of differences between two parties. Thus, they indicated this created the most effective communication way to avoid the conflicts:

P15. "Before we implement the idea, we normally get a full understanding. So if he is

not quite understanding, we will just communicate more. You know just break down to

details, demonstrate to whatever I am trying to achieve. So there is possibility to have

misunderstanding initially but before the final decision we normally get everything

clear. For myself I believe communication is the key thing, whenever you think there is

a problem yourself you need to let the management know. Otherwise it's just a problem

for yourself, not a problem for them right. So when I have something, I talk to him

quite a lot actually, doesn't matter anything. So by really good communication, you can

really eliminate lots of potential problems."

Some interviewees pointed out after working in New Zealand organisational

environment, they learned that more interactions with New Zealand managers would

avoid conflicts and increase trust levels. However, the integrating behaviours did not

generate by themselves. I found there were some conditions can influence this conflict

management preference. The first condition was the organisational environment.

According to the data, all the interviewees worked in small team environments. If it

was any conflict exist, it was easy to manage. One of the interviewee said working

in the small team, this encouraged open communication. Small teams could not

afford to have misunderstandings or exclude any team member so they try to include

everybody in the conversation to create mutual agreements. The second condition was

the management style. All the interviewees who used integrating style reflected the

integrating management approach of their New Zealand managers. Those managers

were less aggressive when solving conflict issues. They also attempted to investigate

issues to find alternatives that were acceptable to all parties. Therefore, the integrating style required the cooperation of both parties:

P16. "I think they are quite open mind, open style. If you have any disagreement, you can always talk to them. They are quite open to their employees, any disagreement and any other ideas they are quite open. Generally I believe Kiwis have good management style to deal with conflict. Because you are open and you are always willing to talk, so that's a good way to solve the problem other than just close and shut down your door and just say 'no I won't listen to you'. I think in this perspective, they are doing quite good."

Third Party Mediation

Some interviewees aware they had third party option available if the conflicts could not be solved between themselves. They said if the conflicts became intense, they would feel safe disclosing emotions to a professional expert such as human resource manager whom they believed was well trained to guide them in solving their crises. They also pointed out the organisations allow the employees to take their problems to grievances and seek for sense of justice and fairness. However, three of the other interviewees who had third party mediation experiences had different interpretations. Two recalled they were quite surprised when their managers took a move towards third party mediation. They said after the third party became involved, conflict got diffused and escalated, and did not get complete resolve. Especially, one interviewees recalled the parties moved away from a congenial relationship towards the goal of winning game and considered

each other as *"an enemy"* during the third party mediation. He felt tension and anxiety and formed a propensity to leave the organisation after perceiving retaliations from his manager.

On the other hand, another interviewee preferred her higher manager to be involved in the conflict. She felt it was good to have a third person who knew both parties and who was more neutral as an outsider. She felt the person would judge the conflicts not based on relationships but based on stories. Later when I asked her why third party mediation was her preference, she offered this explanation:

P7: "Sometimes when you, I don't know how to translate that "人微言轻" (ren wei yan qing), and then you will feel like I don't have as much as experience as my supervisor has in this industry. She may not listen to me. That's why I always involve my higher manager."

The word "*ren wei yan qing*" above was a Chinese idioms: the words of the lowly carry little weight. It means the status of a person is low, his or her words and opinion may be easily overlooked. She was aware the power distance between herself and the manager might be a barrier to solving the conflict. Having a third person in the middle would make sure her voice and opinion did not get ignored.

Compromising Style

Sometimes the interviewees gave up some of their interests and compromised in order

to reach mutually acceptable decisions. This style is intermediate concern for oneself and others. Some interviewees chose to compromise the managers due to the respect of their managers' long working experiences in the organisations. The other interviewees said sometimes the managers insisted their ideas when they had disagreements, so they chose to compromise and comply with authority. One interviewees particularly pointed out that compromising was a way to protect career development. He felt it was not worthwhile to have conflicts with managers. Another interviewee thought compromising was a less aggressive, soft and open-minded approach. He found New Zealanders were more appreciative of this approach:

P20: "I think it's just the culture you know. Sometimes if you are be a quite aggressive approach expressing your opinions. You find people are very defensive. It's not effective. People just back off because it's nature people don't wanna deal with conflict. If you do a soft approach, you know just be more open minded, not just say this is my opinion you go with my way. You are taking a lead way you like to compromise on some of the issues. With that mind, when I come to meetings I find that's more effective. It's more approachable to people. You don't get people so defensive can't deal with the issues."

However, for other interviewees, they assumed that the compromising style means low concern for oneself which represented weakness. In their interpretations, compromising did not mean give up some of the interests in order to reach a mutually acceptable decision as the Western literature suggest. For most interviewees, compromising style

was similar with avoiding style which was another typical Chinese conflict management style and should not be considered as first option:

P5: *"Compromise is not a good thing. You can negotiate. I will negotiate it but I will not compromise it. My recommendation is you gotta face the problem instead of compromising is the first option. Compromising never the first option, it can be one of the option when it's absolutely necessary, or necessary have to. But your option usually face it, and negotiated, communicating, and accommodate of both of your needs. But not just compromising it."*

P17: *"We just keep it open and friendly communicate with anyone who gets involved in this conflict. If you try to hide it, you just compromise yourself to other people without telling them. That makes things worse."*

Overall, according to the interviewees' interpretations, the integrating conflict management style seemed to be a more Pakeha way of handling conflicts. Especially, they treated the element of collaboration such as open communication as a typical individualistic style. Most interviewees commended that Chinese conflict management is "*more indirect and avoidant*" but Kiwi ways are "*straightforward and open-minded*". They appeared to adopt Kiwi ways completely and approach conflict directly through the use of integrating conflict management style. They were less likely to conform to traditional Chinese values such as respecting to high status and obedience. The only maintenance of the collectivistic value was respect if the others have reasonable ideas.

For most interviewees, third party mediation was an option for seeking a sense of fairness from individualistic value. However, it would only be used if the interviewees thought the conflict situations were intense. A couple of interviewees who used this approach indicated it would exacerbate the problems. Another interviewee who was aware of the power distance suggested third party mediation was an approach to make sure the opinions do not get overlooked.

The other interviewees tended to work harder incorporating self-interest and other-interest in managing conflict about substantive issues. They were more comfortable in using compromising conflict management style to resolve disagreements and keeping the principle of Chinese Confucianism such as respect for authority and others, and compromising to achieve a mutually acceptable agreement. However, this approach was using depend on different scenarios. If the managers insisted on the ideas and had more power, the interviewees would choose to compromise to avoid potential conflicts. But some interviewees said compromising was just an occasional style. They compromised first, and then provided enough justifications and enough reasons to convince the managers to make rational decisions.

Integrated Bicultural Conflict Management

Before finishing the interviews, the interviewees who described themselves as "*half and half*" identity asked to conclude how their bicultural integrated identity shaped the ways that they dealt with conflicts in the workplace. According to their self-identifications of "half and half" identity, I asked the following question. The purpose of this question

was to get an intuitive explanation from the interviewees' perspectives:

***Researcher: How do you feel being a half and half (bicultural integrated identity)
shape the way you manage conflict in the workplace?***

P3. *"When dealing with conflicts. My Kiwi identity will kick in more. Challenging and
also managing to express your disagreement. Not much Chinese part I guess. Because
the Chinese part is probably more sedimentary about conflict so in that situation I am
definitely Kiwi."*

P5. *"Being half of the Kiwi you know that New Zealand is a very fair country. You
know most of the things you don't have to compromise, if you know what to do with
it. Being a Chinese migrant gives you another way of thinking because that is gonna
be different. Because 9 out of 10 Chinese will choose to compromise, I believe this
nature of compromising will give me an opportunity to step back and think, whether I
am necessary need to. I believe if it is needed, I will. If I revalue the situation, if I have
to, if I think it is necessary, I believe I will. Like I said, this is a part of my negotiation.
My Chinese part will help me because I don't think it badly. So my half Chinese will
help me soften it, soften the side of me dealing with conflict. My Kiwi side makes me
stronger. It helps me to face the problem directly. It's a balance."*

P9. *"I am a half and half so I understand situations more and well enough because I
see things in the broader way. Being Chinese we work hard, I think that's good for our*

work. But when you are not happy with something, you need a Kiwi style like talking

to your manager straight, and don't hold it. They will understand. For me I am kind of

combination. Chinese style or Kiwi style, just choose the one that suit me."

The above quotes concluded the overall results of how bicultural integrated ethnic

identity affect conflict management. Most interviewees endorsed a mix of both

individualistic and collectivistic value patterns to deal with conflict issues. This fluid

combination of both Chinese and New Zealand Pakeha identity existed and morphed

side-by-side. Depend on the conflict situations and the nature of the conflict, the

interviewees could manifest one identity more strongly than others.

All the interviewees recalled they were aware of Chinese values such as showing

respect, group-oriented, and indirect communication. They commented that these

cultural values are "double edged swords" in terms of dealing with conflicts. Some

interviewees suggested Chinese values would help to ease up the conversations. One

interviewee particularly pointed out having the mutual respect and being aware of other

people's reactions when giving advices was very important. If the other party had this

mutual respect and understanding, the interviewees would try to be soft to express their

ideas and negotiate to achieve a mutual acceptance. Using Chinese cultural values

would make sure the other party felt they were being respected and helped them to

explain their opinions in the reasonable ways. It sometimes helped to reduce the risk of

having conflict. On the other hand, the interviewees felt using indirect communication

would make the others underestimate their behaviours, and believed they were not

confident to handle conflict situations. Working in New Zealand organisations, they

have learned and adapted to direct communication and confrontation as a way to clear

conflicts between themselves and the employers.

Many interviewees recalled comparing with they first arrived in New Zealand, they

were more confident with more experiences to deal with conflict if it happened at the

workplace. Having a bicultural identity, they could think differently, and look at both

sides of the understanding. With both cultural backgrounds, they could bring different

angles and much more deep thoughts than just using one single cultural background.

Sometimes they brought these different thinking to the table to help their teams and

managers understand the work from different perspectives. Most interviewees claimed

that the New Zealand managers would appreciate their different opinions. However,

if there was a problem, all of the interviewees knew where to get the support. Conflict

for them was about disagreement, and it was a very uncomfortable situation to be in.

They chose to face it instead of avoiding it. They thought if they stayed away from the

conflicts and be unsure about themselves, then there was no way they could manage the

conflicts. Thus, most interviewees had very strong bicultural integrated identity with

positive psychological well-being, and comfortable with who they were. This strong

bicultural integrated identity influenced them to use various strategies to deal with

conflict, switch between integrating, compromising and third-party mediation styles to

depending on different scenarios.

CHAPTER 5-DISCUSSION

Introduction

The findings that emerged in this study make several contributions to the literature.
First, these findings identify a clear dimension of acculturation strategy which is
adopted by young Chinese immigrants in New Zealand society. The results give further
weight to acculturation studies conceptualisation of integration strategy as a profile in a
pluralistic society like New Zealand. In addition, sources of conflict are influenced by
cultural patterns and conflict management styles such as integrating, compromising, and
third party mediation have been covered as preferences strategies for those acculturated
Chinese immigrants who are exposed to both collectivistic and individualistic cultures.
An integrating strategy was the most popular style to use when young Chinese
immigrants face conflict in the New Zealand public sector organisations. Finally, the
findings also contributed to the existing conflict management literature, and highlighted
that integrated bicultural identity is a relevant factor in relation to the preferences of
conflict management styles.

Acculturation and Integrated Bicultural Ethnic Identity

For many interviewees, acculturation change that occurred were seen as unconscious
process but necessary due to the earlier years of psychological adjustment in order to
fit into the new environment of New Zealand. All of the interviewees came in New
Zealand at a young age for the purpose of study. Some interviewees claimed they were
quickly adjusting themselves after they aware of challenges of life changes, language

barriers, and the stress of entering the job market. They tried to learn and adopt New

Zealand values, beliefs, and attitudes as well as ways of thinking and behaviours to

overcome the difficulties of daily lives. Such psychological adjustments helped the

interviewees facilitate a strong sense of wellbeing, positive appraisal of the situation and

general satisfaction with life (Ward et al., 2001). These findings were also consistent

with Phinney et al. (2006) and Berry et al. (2006)'s views that youth immigrants have

the strong ability of adaptation to engage in constructive interaction with a different

culture.

During the interviews, many interviewees pointed out a number of results that indicated

psychological adaptation, behavioural acculturation, and cognitive acculturation (Berry

& Sam, 2010; Ward, 2001). For example, positive perceptions of New Zealanders

and a strong sense of belongingness were discussed by the interviewees to predict

greater psychological adaptation (Ward et al., 2001). They expressed generally positive

attitudes towards other groups and a strong feeling of inclusion in New Zealand culture,

based on a view of New Zealand as a country characterised by diversity. Other results

such as developing language ability, and friendships with New Zealanders predicted

behavioural acculturation that helped the interviewees to fit into the host society.

Furthermore, the length of stay was discussed by the interviewees to indicate a factor of

cognitive acculturation. It helped the interviewees acquire, and increase self-confidence

and self-image when they perceive and think about themselves and others (Berry &

Sam, 2010). In particular, some interviewees suggested the length of stay helped to

develop culture-specific knowledge in the face of intercultural encounters.

The preferred acculturation strategy indicated by the interviewees in this study was integration strategy. There was no evidence to suggest that the interviewees simultaneously adopted other acculturation strategies such as assimilation, separation, and marginalisation. This result supported the existing studies' conceptualisation of integration as the most adaptive attitude (Liebkind, 2006; Ward & Lin, 2005). All the interviewees chose to preserve and maintain the Chinese heritage together with acquiring some characteristics of the New Zealand culture (Berry, 1997). According to the findings, this bicultural way of living included various ways of engaging in New Zealand lifestyles such as adaptation of a "*relaxing*" living attitude, food culture, language behaviour and etiquette. At the same time, the interviewees also claimed they have adopted New Zealand's thinkings of freedom of decision making and being independent. This change to fit into New Zealand society did not result in losing Chinese heritage culture. All of the interviewees still maintained Chinese cultural patterns such as taking care of family members, making decisions for the greater good of the family, and educating children with Chinese language.

According to Phinney (1990), acculturation strategy is a useful starting point for understanding variation in ethnic identity. An individual who retains a strong ethnic identity while also identifying with the host society is considered to have an integrated bicultural identity. The results of this study indicated that the interviewees fit into this bicultural identity category. The evidence not only emerged from the interviewees' sense of belonging and adaptation attitudes which I discuss above, but also from

interviewees' self-image identification (Berry & Sam, 2010; Ward et al., 2001). This self-image identification drew from the definition of the label "Kiwi" which reflected how the interviewees categorise other groups (Hogg, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and also from their self-identifications which determined how the interviewees identify their identities to the groups they belong (Phinney et al., 2001).

For the interviewees, the term "Kiwi" referred mainly Pakeha New Zealanders. Most of interviewees considered themselves as "Kiwis" because they "*have been here long enough*" and adapted to the New Zealand way of life. Besides the length of residence involved in becoming a Kiwi, some interviewees identified being a Kiwi also involved adaptations of Kiwi's affective pattern of "*friendly*", behavioural pattern of "*having Kiwi accent and speak like a Kiwi*" and cognitive pattern of "*open-mindedness and accepting of differences*". Most interviewees categorised themselves into these patterns and assumed these were positive attitudes of New Zealanders. They felt that their acculturation experiences had influenced them to adopt these attitudes and became a part of Kiwi.

In terms of self-identifications, almost all the interviewees commented of a "*half and half*" blended bicultural identity. This result was rooted in good feelings about being New Zealanders, accompanied by a positive sense of Chinese ethnicity. Being New Zealanders carried distinct advantages for these interviewees in their daily life and workplace. In daily life, they felt they could do "*whatever you want*," "*express feelings more*", "*have freedom*", and "*challenge others without feeling to bad*". In the

workplace, being half Kiwi, gave them a sense of inclusion in the organisations and felt

equitable share of other New Zealand colleagues. The interviewees who considered

themselves as a half and half identity, also believed they have both cultural backgrounds

and multi-linguistic language skills, and they could think from different angles and have

broader perspectives.

For most of interviewees, being bicultural was not seen as problematic. There was little

sense of conflict between two cultures. Many did not feel themselves struggling as if

caught between two cultures. They seemed to have a clear distinction between when to

be a Chinese and when to be a New Zealander. The results found that most interviewees

chose to switch between different cultural schemas, norms, and behaviours in response

to different contexts (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). In the workplace, they attempted

to adapt to, and perform New Zealand working behaviours in response to these

organisational contexts. In private life, when exposed to family environments, they

switch themselves to Chinese cultural patterns such as speaking Mandarin rather than

English at home, and maintaining collectivistic values of connection and duty to family.

These findings appeared to illustrate high bicultural integrated identity and compatible

bicultural identity which was identified by Benet-Martínez and Haritatos (2005) and

Benet-Martínez et al. (2002). Those interviewees did not perceive the New Zealand

mainstream and Chinese ethnic culture as being mutually exclusive, and conflicting

(Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010).

Overall, the results of acculturation and ethnic identity provided evidence of an integrated bicultural identity among the interviewees in the ways in which they identified with their Chinese ethnic culture, and with the adaptation of New Zealand culture. The results later revealed this preference of bicultural identity also influenced the interviewees when they perceived conflict, and managed conflict in the workplace.

Perceptions of Conflict

The term of "conflict" in the western literature is disagreement, incompatibility, interference with attainment of goals and interests, and negative emotion (Rahim, 2011; Rout & Omiko, 2007). The findings of this study indicated that the only definition appeared to be consonant with the western literature, was disagreement and negative emotion. There was no evidence of interference in the results. For the Chinese interviewees, pure disagreement without negative emotion was not sufficient to label a situation as conflictual. Considered by most interviewees, conflict was disagreement depending on its intensity. For most interviewees, conflict was disagreement caused by different ways of thinkings, different ways of doing tasks, and different understanding of things, but these differences tended to be easier to resolve. During the interviews, repeated phrases from interviewees were "*people are differen*t" and "*different people will have different views*". They commented they could not make people all have the same attitudes, beliefs, and thinking. Such differences were not of major concern. They thought it was not difficult to deal with conflict caused by such differences as long as they respected one another and tolerated those differences of views.

When interviewees heard the word of conflict, they tended to interpret it as negative

and destructive. They might use the Chinese terms such as *chongtu* (clash)*, maodun*

(contradiction) or *zhenlun* (dispute) to interpret the word. In cross-cultural study

literature, those Chinese terms of conflict have mostly negative consequences, such as

dispute, discomfort, and the breakdown of relationships (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Yu, 1997).

Those interviewees who claimed they had conflicts with their managers contained all

these consequences. For other interviewees, when they described the relationships

with managers, they tended to use "*we are fine*", "*we have good relationships*" and

"*we don't have conflict*" to indicate the harmonious relationships. For them, as long as

harmonious relationships did not disrupt, or involve disagreement should not be treated

as conflict. These results produced evidence that the Chinese perspective of conflict is

different from the western perspective. As Ting-Toomey (1997) suggests, for members

from collectivistic culture, conflict is purportedly dysfunctional and it is a distressing

and destructive force that can damage harmony of the members. Therefore, findings of

this study indicated that interviewees still maintained the collectivistic value when they

viewed conflict.

Sources of conflict in the workplace

The existing literature assumes that conflict such as disagreement drives from cognitive

aspects (Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Thomas, 1992a). In culturally diverse workplace,

employees from different cultural backgrounds have different cognitions regard to

beliefs, tasks, values, and goals (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Such differences cause

of conflict such as task-oriented disagreement and goal oriented disagreement (Rahim,

2011). Based on the findings, goal-oriented disagreement did not appear to be a source

of conflict. Most interviewees described that their jobs were mainly project-based

or case-based. The optimal goals and outcomes such as delivering good quality of

services always settled by higher management levels or whole teams in advance. Every

team member must co-operate on joint activities to reach a consensus. Goal-oriented

disagreement or goal divergence would be unlikely to occur.

For task-oriented disagreement, differences in thinking concerning a task, and

differences in approaches to a given task were common for interviewees. According

to the data, such disagreement was regarding organisation's' current procedures and

policies. Compared with the managers, most interviewees had different ideas, opinions

and approaches about the tasks being performed. They commented that these tasks

should be completed in a fast and efficient manner. They felt certain procedures

could be skipped for task completions. One interviewee particularly pointed out his

manager did not encourage freedom and independence when the employee was seeking

autonomy in scheduling his work. His manager later explained such autonomy might

cause the unbalanced performance for a whole team. Compared with interviewees, New

Zealand public sector managers preferred "*process-driven*", "*slowing down*", "*doing

steps by steps*", and "*keeping records*" as attitudes and behaviours to perform job tasks.

Most interviewees agreed these attitudes and behaviours are typical "K*iwi ways of doing

jobs*" in the public sector workplace.

When differences in viewpoints, opinions and ideas caused by divergent attitudes were identified by the interviewees, most interviewees tended to assimilate to "*Kiwi ways of doing jobs*". Assimilation refers to the process of accepting the cultural values of the larger society (Berry & Sam, 1997). The findings indicated most interviewees chose to assimilate and fit themselves into New Zealand's working attitudes and behaviours. Interviewees who experienced these task-oriented conflicts claimed these conflicts were no longer concerned after they developed better understanding of organisation's' policies, procedures and managers' viewpoints. They chose to adjust themselves and accept the New Zealand working values of doing tasks step by step. Only two interviewees claimed they still maintained the Chinese attitudes of fast and efficiency. One interviewee said he always challenged the immutable procedures with good reasons. If he found there was a better way of doing things, he challenged the others with good reasons. Another interviewee admitted she still had conflict in terms of Chinese working projects when her Chinese viewpoints did not meet with manager's viewpoints or the organisation's viewpoints. Because of some certain policies, most of the times she failed to bring her Chinese perspectives onto the table. However, for other interviewees, they did not emphasise too much Chinese viewpoints and maintained Chinese identity when faced with task-oriented conflict.

Misunderstanding was one of another source of conflict that emerged for interviewees who claimed they had major conflicts with their managers. As Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) point out, when people from different cultural backgrounds come into contact, cultural misunderstanding of the causes of observable behaviours can easily cause

conflict. Three interviewees stated that people with different languages and cultural

backgrounds have different views and interpretations that could lead misunderstanding

in conflict situations. According to the scenarios the interviewees discussed, all

these intense conflicts began with misinterpretation of different cognitions (Thomas,

1992a). Then were followed by engaging in behaviours of interference when the

managers believed the interviewees had negatively affected work values and beliefs that

managers concerned about. One of the interviewees recalled his manager' behaviours

of interference were overseeing his work too closely and spending an excessive amount

of time supervising a particular project and telling the interviewee exactly what to

do and how to do it. After that the interviewees expressed their disagreement and

unwillingness to follow the manager's ideas. The managers felt challenged and this led

them escalate the conflict to higher levels, and this was followed by some reciprocal

actions such as unfair punishments and retaliation to the interviewee (Baron, 1990).

In addition to misunderstanding, face threats were emerged from misunderstanding

scenarios. Interestingly, for all three face threat incidents, the parties who most

strongly felt the threats and represented conflict issue were the New Zealand

managers. According to the scenarios, the three New Zealand managers perceived

face threats after they interpreted the interviewees' behaviours were disregarding of

their work performance and suggestions. In return, one manager chose to disregard

the subordinate's face and brought the interviewee's mistakes in front of other team

members. One manager texted the subordinate with strong criticism to address the

feeling of being disrespected. Ting-Toomey (1988) points out in an individualist

context, people defend the "I" identity. Individualists are concerned to preserve the dignity and autonomy of self-face, whilst respecting the same for others, but feel under no obligation to enhance or engage with other face (Brew & Cairns, 2004a). In collectivist settings, the "I" identity is interlaced and networked with "other" identity. Such mutuality and reciprocity ensures obligation and concerned to save and protect both self and other face in order that inclusion and approval are preserved (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Comparing with the above literature, the findings indicated that New Zealand managers seemed to have high self-face concerns corresponding with their status and power and disregard subordinates' face. However, in contrast with Ting-Toomey's (1988) argument, the interviewees in this study also focused on self-face maintenance rather than supporting and concerning their managers' face. They did not choose to avoid disintegration of the relationship with managers and reticence in voicing opinion after they perceived conflict. This suggested the possibility that since most interviewees had exposure to New Zealand context, they seemed to value independence and egalitarianism as individualists, and became less aware of giving face to hierarchies. This finding suggests that acculturated Chinese individuals might no longer emphasise on other-face maintenance as those collectivists in the existing literature.

Furthermore, according to interviewees' scenarios, face threats might be a source of conflict emerged for both managers and employees. Even in small power distance cultures like New Zealand with less hierarchical distance between managers and

employees, managers still will feel face threats if they perceive ineffective way of challenge from employees (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). As one interviewee pointed out during the interview, no one would like face threat and be humiliated in public. In manager-employee conflict, by not threatening both face, will help to facilitate more effective way of solving the problem.

Integrated Bicultural Identity and conflict management

The existing literature suggests Chinese culture is collectivism, large power distance and high-context (Brew & Cairns, 2004b; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Triandis et al., 1994). For example, Chinese are likely to be more concerned about the group's needs, goals, and interests (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Immigrant subordinates from collectivist high power distance country are less open and more cautious with hierarchies (Brew & Cairns, 2004b). Chinese prefer high-context communication with indirect verbal mode and ambiguous talk (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Furthermore, the Confucian culture influence Chinese employees to use non-confrontational styles such as avoidance and accommodation (Hwang, 1997; Morris et al., 1998; Tse et al. 1994). However, contrasting with the above research, the results showed the integrated bicultural identity has changed the interviewees in an affective perspective of being open-minded thinking, behavioural perspective of adopting low-context communication and cognitive perspective of challenging authority when dealing with conflict situations. In other words, due to acculturation experiences in New Zealand, the interviewees have adopted and changed to some individualistic cultural values.

At the same time, consistent with collectivistic values, the study found that some interviewees still maintained strong in-group oriented values and emphasised the importance of group harmony and fitting in (Triandis, 1995). Under the influence of Confucianism, some interviewees showed the feeling of respect and reverence to their managers depend on a mutually respectful relationship (Chen & Starosta, 1997; Leung et al.,2002).

According to the existing conflict management studies, Chinese people are expected to avoid conflict to support relationships and contribute to relationship maintenance (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Tjosvold & Sun, 2002). Under the influence of Confucianism, avoiding conflict is important to maintain harmony within a group and both parties' face (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Sometimes Chinese employees' tendency to avoid conflict in an intercultural context can also be attributed to language barriers (Yuan, 2010). They may withdraw from a conflict situation if they do not have strong English skills to persuade their counterpart (Yuan, 2010). In task-oriented conflict situations, Chinese tend to use more obliging and avoiding conflict styles (Leung, 1987). Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) also suggest that Chinese are more aware of the status of conflict counterpart, they were likely to avoid directly confront or challenge the others if they have higher-status. However, contrast with the above literature, many interviewees in this study claimed avoidance is not an effective way to deal with conflict. During the interviews, avoiding and obliging conflict management styles did not appear to be strategies that the interviewees used.

The results showed that most interviewees believed an avoiding style is a typical

Chinese style which should not be encouraged. Consistent with most researches in the

West, some interviewees thought avoidance of conflict is motivated by low levels of

concern both for the relationship and for solving the problem (Rahim, 2011; Thomas,

1992a). They commented regular Chinese people do not want to confront the other

party and try to avoid direct communication. Unlike other Chinese people who were

more reserved and care about other's face, the interviewees in this study preferred

directly speak out what they think and aim for problem solving. They seemed to have

high-concern of oneself's right as individualists. They commented if they did not

confront managers and the conflict would not dissolve itself. If they kept silent when in

conflict, it would end up having negative feelings toward themselves. Another finding

showed that in most organisations the interviewees worked, open and honest discussion

about conflict was encouraged by New Zealand managers.

After direct confrontations, the problems would treat by managers with substantive and

rational attitudes. Usually the interviewees would get fair and satisfying results. In

individualistic cultures, people are expressed in conflict through the strong assertion of

personal opinions, the effectively display of personal emotions, and the importance of

personal accountability for individual rights (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). The above

results clearly indicated that due to exposure to New Zealand cultures, the interviewees

have adopted some individualistic values.

Same as avoiding style, obliging style was unlikely to be used by the interviewees. Some interviewees commented living in New Zealand has made them become "*tough*" and "*black and white thinking*". In some conflict situations, they would not give up their interest and position if they were not wrong. For example, if the other conflict counterpart used dominating conflict management and blamed the interviewees to take responsibilities, they would insisting on their own idea and challenging the others like authority to seek for sense of justice. They reported that after observing and learning from New Zealand conflict management styles, they became less obliging and changed to New Zealand culture of freedom of speech. Especially, this less obliging attitude was popular in those interviewees who have senior management positions and more power. Therefore, as Rahim (2011) discuss, if a party is not dealing conflict from a position of weakness, obliging style is less appropriate to use.

Among the results the interviewees discussed, integrating styles was predominantly associated with Chinese migrant employees. This style encourages problem-solving communication, opens, exchange of relevant information presumably lead to mutual beneficial solutions (Rahim, 2011). Previous research predict that people from an individualistic and low-context cultural background exhibit direct explicit verbal interaction (Hofstede, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Triandis et al., 1994). It leads to preferences of integrating styles of conflict management (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). On the other hand, people from a collectivistic and high-context cultural background like Chinese are more likely to communicate indirectly and have a higher degree of tolerance of ambiguity in communication (Yuan, 2009). They tend to control their

feelings and express them in a more subtle manner (Lin, 2010). Consistent with

individualistic communication predictions, the interviewees in this study indicated clear

evidences of individualistic patterns. As a result, as the interviewees mentioned, they

were willing to speak up and confront the problems to the others. They also highly

valued accuracy and clarity in communication, and express their opinions and emotions

directly (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). In contrast, indirect and tolerance of ambiguity

in communication was rated highly unfavourable by the interviewees. They commented

this communication style was not effective in solving problems and would led to more

misunderstandings.

According to the results, the factors of adaptation of "*open-minded thinking*",

"*straightforward communication*" and collaborative working attitude might contribute

to the use of integrating conflict management. Most interviewees commented that

New Zealanders are very open-minded. After observing this flexibility and willingness

to accept the new idea attitude, many interviewees preferred integrating style which

consisted of listening to the other party, expressing their own ideas, and showing respect

for others' viewpoints (Chen et al., 2005). Some interviewees pointed out creating a

mutual way of thinking by focusing on their own needs such as "*explain more than*

other others" as well as on the needs of others like "*put yourself in someone else's*

shoes" would help to find new and creative solutions to problems. This mutual way of

thinking reflected a high concern for both parties' goals and the rule of reciprocity as

integrating conflict management indicate (Chen et al., 2005; Rahim, 2011).

Adopting New Zealand's "*straightforward communication*" was emphasised significantly during the interviews. Consistent with the literature, the interviewees agreed that like individualistic and low-context communication value, New Zealanders tended to deal with conflict directly, openly and honestly (Ting- Toomey, 1999). They also stated explicitly that Chinese's indirect communication and language ambiguity such as "*yes actually means no*" would create significant organisational communication problems. Thus, most interviewees assumed that adopting open lines of communication would increase information seeking and sharing, and clear misunderstanding or misinterpretation during interaction with their New Zealand managers. The ethical behaviour such as language proficiency which is discussed in the ethnic identity literature, also contributes to the interviewees' preference of integrating style (Phinney et al., 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007). In acculturation studies, immigrants who have abilities to communicate effectively and language proficiency would aware of value differences and have behavioural strategies to deal with the differences (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). The strong communication skills the interviewees developed helped them to clear ambiguity, make effective judgements, meet the expectations of the other parties, and find solutions that integrate both parties' needs.

Another factor might influence the integrating style was the collaborative working attitude. According to the interviewees, most public sector organisations encouraged a collaborative working style which involved open discussion of the problems at regular meetings or one-one-one coffee catch ups. According to the results, each meeting was diplomatic solution-oriented and mainly related to cautious communication styles

(Brew & Cairns, 2004a). As the interviewees described, during the meetings, both

parties would listen carefully to each others thoughts and shared information willingly.

It aimed to clear any the misunderstandings, set optimal solutions, and create mutual

agreements. This working style was an attempt to work with the others in an effort

to find integrative solutions that would satisfy both sides (Liu & Chen, 2000). The

interviewees believed this collaboration and direct communication style lead to the

outcome of a harmonious relationship and task completions. It also led to strengthen

employer-subordinate relationships and solve problems (Brew & Cairns, 2004a).

Therefore, integrating conflict management style seemed favoured by both Chinese

employees and New Zealand managers.

In addition, although most interviewees were more likely to integrate the conflict, some

interviewees reported that they would compromise with the others to solve a conflict

dependent upon situations. According to the results, the interviewees who chose

compromising style were more likely to take several factors into consideration when

dealing with conflict. These factors included the needs of oneself such as protecting

careers and avoiding potential arguments with managers, and the needs of others such

as complying with authority and respecting others' decisions. In the existing literature,

compromising style focuses on the intermediation of conflict (Rahim, 2011). This

involves a give-and-take situation in which both parties give up something in order

to reach a consensus (Yuan, 2010). Some interviewees thought compromising was

appropriate for self-need when the managers were insisting on their own ideas. When

the interviewees could not persuade their New Zealand managers and they aware of

different ideas they could not collaborate to create a solution, they chose to compromise

to low the risks of having arguments with managers and therefore protecting their career

development.

On the other hands, the interviewees' concerning with others' needs by compromising

was closely related to Chinese Confucian perspectives of establishing a harmonious

atmosphere, and showing respect to seniority and authority (Chen & Starosta, 1997;

Nguyen & Yang, 2012). For example, as an interviewee said, "compromising is more

approachable to people, you don't get people so defensive they can't deal with the

issue". This supported Leung et al. (2002)'s claim that in Chinese Confucianism, a

sense of reasonable compromise is to maintain a harmonious relationship and a common

concern for other's morality. At the same time, the results showed that seniority and

authority still played an important role in some interviewees interaction and conflict

management. Under the influence of Confucianism, the interviewees would choose

to compromise and respect their managers if the persons have high credibilities such

as rich work experiences. In Confucian values, knowledge, and expertise can serve

as powerful tools in persuading the opponents (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Thus, during

the interviews, the interviewees chose compromising style, particularly when their

managers were older and considered to be more knowledgeable in the process of

problem solving.

Another interesting finding emerged from the results was the concept of compromising

conflict management. In the western literature, compromising style is characterised

as being no-win, no-lose. However, contrary to this definition, compromising might

reflect a low concern for oneself rather than a mutually acceptable decision in some

interviewees' interpretations. They seemed to view compromising negatively as

avoiding and considered it as a loss if they gave up their interests and positions.

In Chinese culture, compromising can be translated into the word of "*tuoxie*" in

Chinese. It contains the meaning of acknowledging partial agreement with a specific

viewpoint, and taking partial blame and yielding for an infraction (Nguyen & Yang,

2012). This style will be used by Chinese if the party believe that he or she may be

wrong and lead to a loss of interests that may be important to the party. It seemed

that some interviewees were using this Chinese definition to interpret the concept of

compromising style. This finding supported Liu and Chen (2002)'s argument that the

existing conflict management styles as defined and evidenced in the western literature

may not be inadequate in describing eastern conflict management behaviours.

For most interviewees, a third party approach would only be used if they believed they

have been treated unfairly in the conflict situation or the other party refused to preserve

the harmony. Some interviewees stated that if they could not solve the conflict, they

would escalate it to the upper level. If they thought they were right, they would talk

directly with Human Resources and let the professionals to judge the issue. Another

interviewee also stated that when he and his supervisor could not figure out a middle-

range solution, he would let the upper-level manager to know and make the decision.

In this case, he could gain moral support from third party by dealing with the conflict

directly.

The results indicated that some interviewees tended to rely on formal third-parties

like Human Resources or conflict mediators who contract with the organisations to

handle conflict like individualists suggest by Ting-Toomey (1999). Because of the high

concerns of self, those interviewees claimed they would not be tolerant in the conflict

situations if they did not be treated equally. They would call on formal third-party

to deal with conflict at a more serious organisational level if it needed. However, the

interviewees who had third party mediation experiences stated that this style should

be the last approach to consider. Two interviewees who had formal parties involved

in their conflicts led to exacerbating the problems and further damage in relationships.

And conflicts escalated to a win-lost game. The defeated manager displayed bitterness

among the employee. Only one interviewee recalled that her conflict always got

resolved by using informal third party like manager who know both of the parties and

trust by the parties. She believed having someone they can trust help them understand

and handle conflict in more cooperative manner instead of a win-lose manner.

Ting-Toomey (1999) notes that both individualists and collectivists rely on the third-

party help technique, but in different ways. In individualism, conflict parties typically

seek help with an impartial mediator. However, Rahim (2011) argues that if a third

party imposes a solution on the conflict parties, there is a possibility that a victor and

a vanquished will be created. This might explain why third party approach did not

work well for some interviewees. In collectivism, conflict is dysfunctional for the

organisation. A more appropriate and effective third party mediation for collectivists

would be letting an authoritative figure who is related to both parties or a respected person coordinate the conflict situations (Yuan, 2010). According to the literature, the maintenance of collectivistic culture might influence the interviewees to think that conflict is diffused through using third-party intermediaries. Thus, most interviewees preferred using integrating style first and then compromising if it is necessary.

Integrated bicultural conflict management: A combination of style

In general, the investigation of the interview data suggested that due to integrated bicultural identity, Chinese migrant employees had changed their behaviours, as well as their perceptions when dealing with conflict situations. For example, spending time in New Zealand culture did affect the ways Chinese migrant employees behaved, as well as their thought processes. Most of the reported behavioural changes involved greater synchronisation with the New Zealand cultural norms, which suggested some degree of acculturation of cultural adaptation such as the way of direct communication, challenging authority, and open-minded thinking. Most interviewees felt they were much more tough when dealing with conflict, used direct approaches, and were more willing to express their own opinions and feelings. They have become more self-confident, assertive, and honest, and having a sense of justice as those individualists (Nguyen & Yang, 2012). Adaptation of New Zealand identity mainly made them rely on more collaborative style and integrating conflict management style instead of avoiding and obliging conflict. They preferred discussing the conflicting issue with their managers to find a mutually satisfying solution.

Furthermore, at the end of their interviews, most interviewees provided some insightful

recommendations concerning how to interact with people from different cultural

backgrounds in conflict situations. The factors that the interviewees felt would lead to

successful conflict management that received the most attention were the ability to be

sensitive and the willingness to learn about other cultures. Some other factors, such as

controlling emotions, the tone of speaking and listening to other people, were mentioned

as well.

Although reporting New Zealand identity and cultural adaptation occurred, deeper

Chinese beliefs, values, and attitudes were more difficult to detect and to change. The

maintenances of Chinese culture reflected from perception of conflict definition and

the influence of Confucianism. For most interviewees, the term of conflict represented

intense degree of disagreement and clash. They perceived conflict in a negative light

and should be handled in proper behaviours. Under the influence of this Chinese

perspective, it might drive most interviewees to try to find a "win-win" solution to a

conflict situation (Kim et al., 2007) to avoid the conflict become intense. In Confucian

values, proper behaviour to handle conflict issues is to show mutual responsibilities

in social interactions (Nguyen & Yang, 2012). The behaviours of showing respect,

reverence to others and conformity were salient when the interviewees' managers were

older and more respect than themselves. At the same time, submission to authority

was still embedded in interviewees' conflict coping tendency (Chen & Starosta, 1997)

. When the interviewees were aware their managers had more power and control over

certain decisions, they would follow the leadership to preserve the harmony. Under

the influence of Confucian values, the interviewees would incline toward a style of compromising to achieve mutual acceptance of disagreement.   However, if mutual respecting failed because the other party did not have rational senses, refused to preserve the harmony, and escalated the conflict, the interviewees would change their strategies and asked for third-party intervention.

According to the above evidence, integrated bicultural identity has influenced most interviewees by using combinations of styles. Most interviewees recommended the blending of integrating style and compromising style would achieve optimum results for solving conflict. Chinese migrant employees' tendency to integrate conflict was highly influenced by the positive perceptions to New Zealand managers and organisational context. The interviewees asserted that being New Zealanders gave them confidence to confront the problem and solve it in a cooperative manner. Being Chinese in another half by using compromising style would allow them to show respect, avoid embarrassment to other party, and allow them to control/suppress their emotions or psychological impulse when they faced conflict issues.

CHAPTER 6-CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how the ethnic identity aspect of Chinese immigrants acculturation shaped the way they experience conflicts. The results illustrated that integrated bicultural ethnic identity influence the preferences of conflict management styles in different ways. More specifically, the adaptation of a New Zealand identity influenced Chinese migrant employees to use an integrating conflict management style more than dominating, avoiding and obliging styles. The maintenance of their Chinese identity influenced them to use compromising style or third party mediation.

However, this study has a few limitations. Firstly, the concept of acculturation and ethnic identity are such complex phenomenon. It was quite difficult to capture the essence of them by way of a few dimensions. Although in this study, Chinese migrant employees described combining their heritage and host cultures in a way that fit the concept of Berry's (1997, 2001) integration acculturation orientation and bicultural identification. But a lack of qualitative research of acculturation made it difficult for this study to explain reasons for variations that may be behind the interviewees' bicultural identification and link them to the preferences of conflict management.

Secondly, this study relied on self-reported data. The accuracy may be questionable as the interviewees may have filtered information before reporting it (Frey et al., 2000). As Frey et al. (2000) point out, it is understandable that what people recall may be

different from what actually happened. Even the interviewees were fluent in English, a second language nature would still influence the interviewees when they interpret the ideas and respond the questions. Furthermore, due to the participants chosen, the study could not reveal different angles behind the conflict stories that were provided by the interviewees. The study was only based on the perspectives of Chinese employees and the perspectives of New Zealand employees was not covered. New Zealand managers might have different ideas and interpretations when they perceive conflict with their Chinese employees.

Despite these limitations, findings of this study have important implications for cultural diversity workplaces and organisations in New Zealand. This study not only examined how Chinese immigrant employees reacted to conflicts in a workplace, but also explored the motivations and how ethnic identity influence for such behaviours. Detailed explanations from interviewees by using qualitative research method will help New Zealand managers better understand Chinese employees' assumptions and motivations in conflict situations. For instance, Chinese migrant employees may use different conflict management style according to different circumstances. Sometimes they prefer a cooperative strategy, and show some similarities as New Zealanders when deal with conflict issues. However, if the managers are less culturally sensitive in a workplace, the conflict may easily rise between the employees who still maintain strong original cultural patterns. Thus, it is important to avoiding amplifying cultural differences (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).

Based on findings of this study, I wish to suggest some directions for future research. First, more qualitative studies are needed to explore the diverse interpretations of conflict management styles, especially the younger generation Chinese who have been exposed to Western cultures. Findings of this study indicated that acculturation influences the preferences towards a conflict management strategy. The effects of cultural adaptation are an important perspective that relate to the use and the perception of different styles of conflict management. The future research needs to angle more to these Chinese who have overseas backgrounds or live in overseas context. Second, more studies should be done in an intercultural context so we can gain a better understanding of how people interact and react in a conflict when they are from a different cultural background. Intercultural conflict management study in New Zealand is rare and often overlooked. As a multi-cultural country, it would be beneficial to have more research to serve organisational and personal interests.

Finally, through this research, I started to understand the challenges my interviewees had faced when they live and work in the New Zealand environment. With their contributions, I understood that effective conflict management is important to the success of culturally diverse workplaces. I started to feel comfortable and confident in the future if I ever had to face any conflict situation in the workplace. I hope this study will help practitioners increase their understanding of conflict behaviour in an intercultural context, and thus be better prepared to manage conflict in ways that help them to contribute to a pleasant work environment.

At the same time, this study forced me to re-identify myself and constantly reminded me of my Chinese identity. For a while, I had been very ambivalent and confused about whether I should reveal my Chinese identity in the workplace. However, after completing this research, I now understand that my bicultural identity is an asset in managing conflict in the workplace, and it will continue to be as a significant part of how I identify myself in New Zealand society.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1-Interview Schedule

Section 1- Basic Questions

- First, please tell me something about your background:
(1)   Which city do you born in China?
(2)   How long have you been in New Zealand?
(3)   What sort of educational experiences you have in New Zealand?

Section 2-Acculturation and Ethnic Identity

- What made you choose to migrant to New Zealand?
- What are people's reaction once they know you live here for such long time?
- How do you feel to be a Chinese immigrant in New Zealand?
- Do you feel yourself more like New Zealander, Chinese or both?
- How do you blend two identities nicely together?
- Have you have any struggle between two identities?
- How do you feel having two identities at work?

Section 3-Conflict

- How did you end up work for your organisation?
- Please describe your work environment. (How many people in your team? What ethnicity?)
- What is your work and responsibility in your organisation?
- How long have you worked for your organisation?
- How do you describe your relationship with your direct manager?
- Describe your manager: age, ethnicity etc.
- How does your manager treat ethnic employees?
- What does the word of conflict mean to you?
- How would you describe the conflict between your manager and you?
- Please share some of the conflict stories.

Section 4-Conflict Management Styles

- Tell me some experiences of how you choose to manage the conflict?
- What way does your manager choose to manage the conflict?
- Did the problems get resolve?
- How do you feel about the solution?
- How do you compare yourself with your manager in terms of dealing with conflicts?
- How does your manager handle conflict with other non-Chinese colleague?
- Do you think there is any differences?

Section 5- Integrated bicultural identity and conflict management style

- Please tell me some successful conflict management tactics in your workplace. Any lesson you learned? Where and who you have learned this from?
- Did you try to use these successful ways to manage any problem? How did they work?
- Do you think yourself are better at managing conflicts now than you first arrived in the organisation?
- How do you feel being a half New Zealander and a half Chinese shape the way you look at conflict in the workplace?

Section 6-Closing questions

- How would you like to improve our relationships with your manager in the future?
- How would you like your manager to contribute to your work relationship?
- Please tell me any other workplace stories or experience that you think are relevant to this research.

Appendix 2-Research Participant Information Sheet

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
TE KURA TIAKI, WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO
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Participant Consent Form

Interpersonal conflict between employees and managers: The Chinese immigrants experiences of acculturation in New Zealand public sector workplaces

- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project before **August 1 2014** without providing reasons. If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant observation notes, tapes, and transcripts will be destroyed.

- I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use my name, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me and my organisation.

- I understand that the data I have provided will be used for the formation of a Masters thesis, and for formations of papers for submission to academic journals and academic conferences.

- I understand that, if this interview is audio recorded, the recording and transcripts of the interviews will be erased 3 years after the conclusion of the project.

Please indicate (by ticking the boxes below) which of the following apply:

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded.

Signed:

Name of participant:

Participant's contact details (if appropriate):

Date:

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Appendix 3-Research Participant Consent Form

Interpersonal conflict between employees and managers: The Chinese immigrants experiences of acculturation in New Zealand public sector workplaces

■ OVERVIEW

My name is Yi Wang and I am a student at Victoria University of Wellington. I am doing this research as part of my Master of management Studies. This research is designed to find out how young skilled Chinese immigrants who have a Chinese ethnic background and outside of China tertiary education experiences cope with interpersonal conflict between themselves and their managers in New Zealand public sector organisations. This research aims to investigate conflict issues Chinese immigrants meet and their relevant approaches for resolving conflicts when the managers and employees come from different cultural backgrounds. In order to understand young skilled immigrants' perspectives on their conflict management experiences, i would like to invite you to participant in this research. Your participation will contribute to help both Chinese minority employees and new Zealand majority managers to manage conflict effectively in cultural diversity workplace. This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Victoria University of Wellington.

■ HOW TO PARTICIPATE

If you agree to participate in this research, I will be undertaking interviews in person starting in June 2014. The interview would last approximately one hour, and would be arranged for a time and place that is convenient for your schedule. The interview could be conducted either in English or Mandarin. If you agree to participate in the research, but later change your mind, you have up until **Auguest 1 2014** to withdraw from the study.

■ PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY

Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary. Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in any written report produced as a result of this research, including possible publication in academic conferences and journals. With your permission, the interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder that will facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed (and translated, if necessary) by myself for analysis. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions or to terminate the interview at any time, without any negative consequences.

■ HOW TO PROCESS YOUR DATA

All material collected will be kept confidential for academic research purposes. The only persons having access to identifiable information will be myself and my research supervisor. The research will be submitted for marking to the School of Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library. Upon request, participants will receive an executive summary of the research results. The research report may be presented in the form of written report, formal paper, possible future conference presentation or article in an academic or professional journal. All data collected from participants will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation. If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the research, please contact the following details:

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Appendix 4- Final template

1 Acculturation

    1 Psychological well-being

        1 Positive perceptions of New Zealanders

    2 Integrated bicultural identity

2 Conflict

    1 Perceptions of conflict

        1 conflict is disagreement but has to be strong

        2 conflict is dysfunctional and negative

        3 simple disagreement is not considered conflict

    2 Sources of conflict in the workplace

        1 having different thinking about a task

        2 having different approaches to a task

        3 misunderstanding leaded to face threats

3 Ethnic identity in conflict management

    1 changes from collectivism to individualism

        1 Be open-minded thinking

        2 Low-context communications

        3 Challenging authority

    2 Maintenance of collectivistic values

    3 The preferences of different conflict management styles

        1 Integrating style

        2 Third party mediation

        3 Compromising

    4 Integrated bicultural conflict management

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