

**Reflections on my research:
'Researcher reflexivity when
interviewing interculturally'**

**Dr. David Roxburgh,
School of Education,
University of Strathclyde**

Aims for today's session

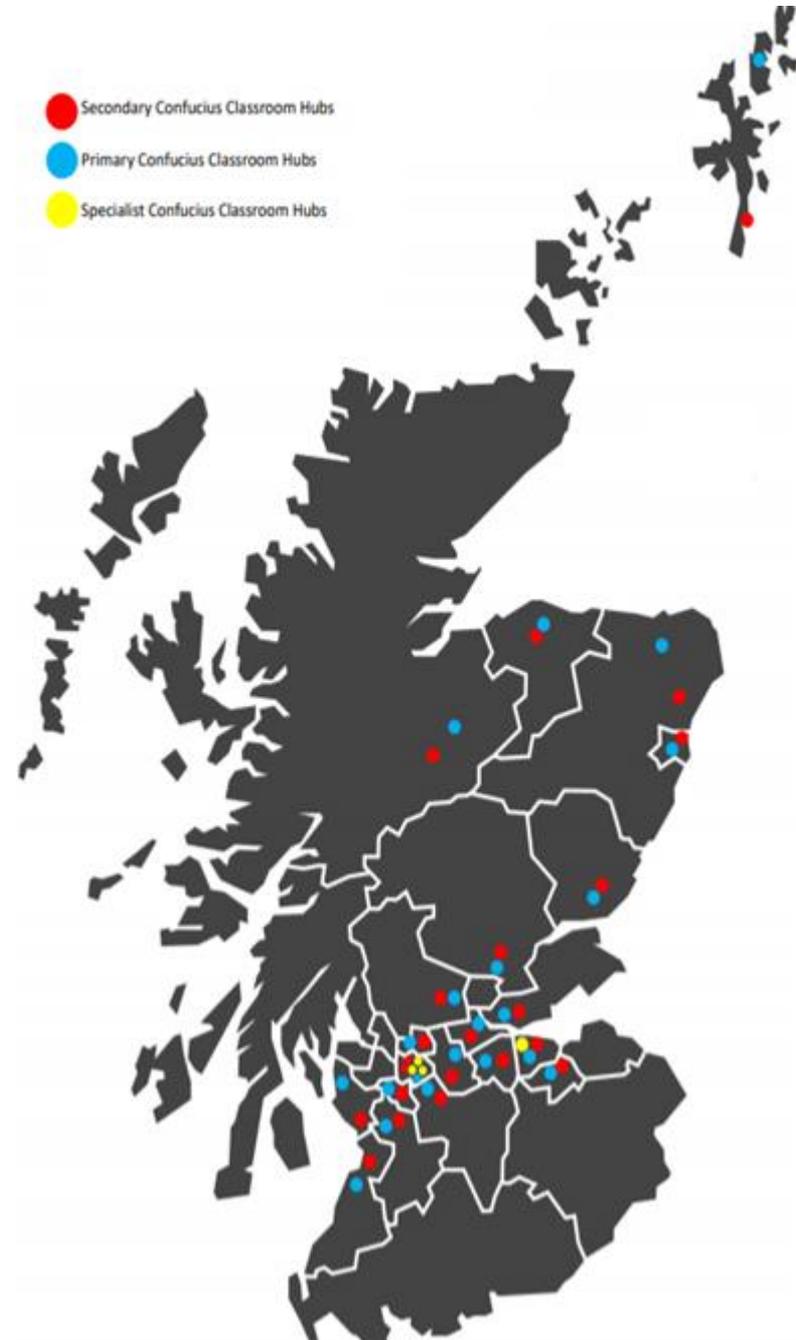
1. Introduce my research into the promotion of Chinese language and Culture (CLC) in Scottish Schools.
2. In taking one aspect of this, consider issues of researcher reflexivity when interviewing interculturally.
3. Give examples of some of the challenges faced in trying to be a reflexive interviewer.
4. Exemplify some potential solutions to these challenges.

Lessons learned?

1. The relationship between Self and Other is a reflexive dynamic that cannot be ignored and requires the researcher to recognise their own preconceptions and misconceptions around those from other cultures.
2. At the outset, recognise the ways in which previous experiences may have acted positively or negatively on the researcher's on-going thinking and in the study's design
3. The relational dynamics with different participant groups is complex and requires a lot of thought prior to data collection, which should not be taken for granted. How can both groups come together in the 'middle'?
4. In the absence of the researcher's own competence in the language of participants, those acting on his/ her behalf must also be suitably immersed in the cultural and professional background of the research. When well chosen, this adds another dimension to the interaction of the researcher with the data collected.

Context for my research

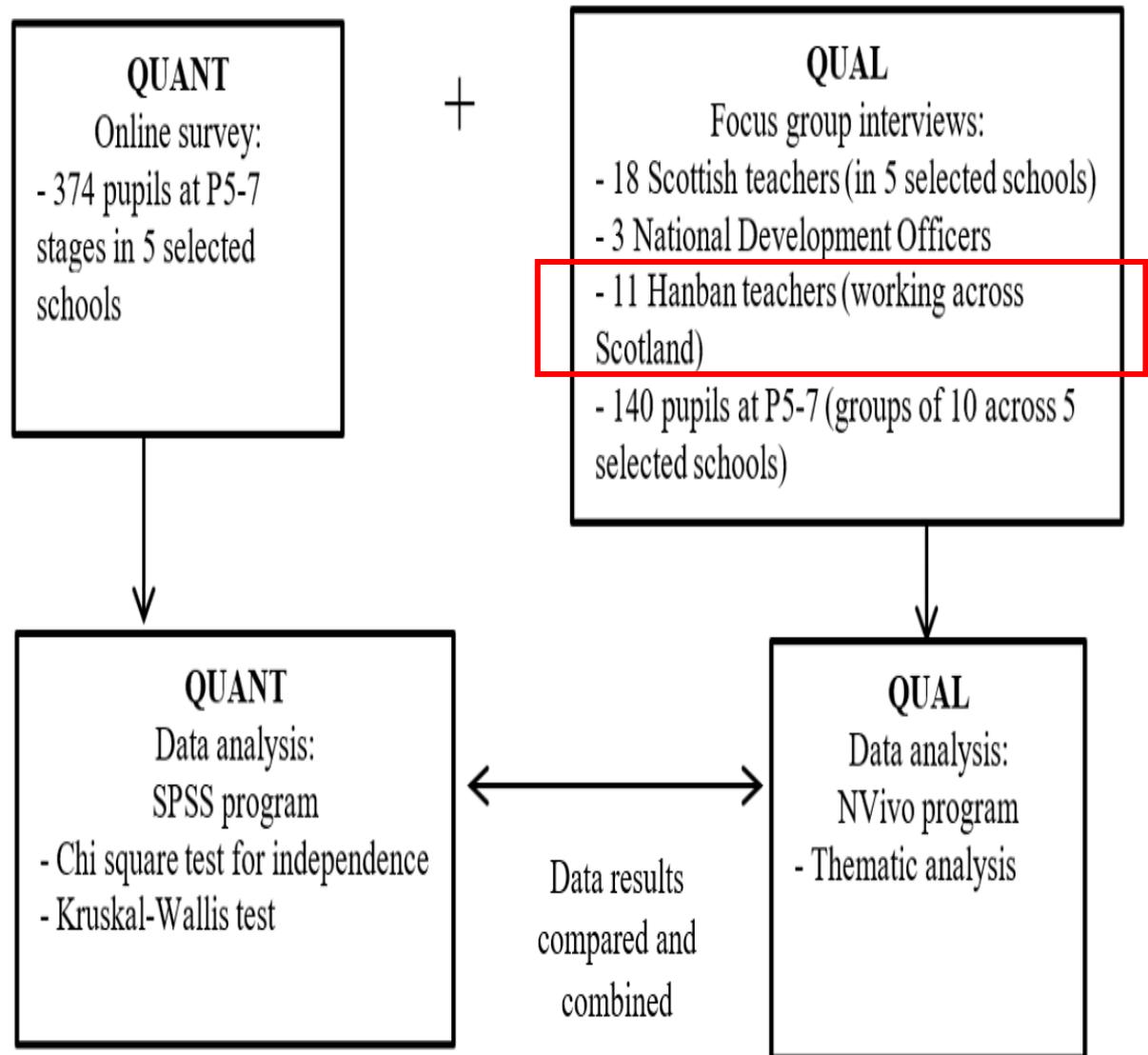
- 1+2 policy All pupils to learn a second language from age 5-15 with a third language introduced from age 9 onwards.
- There are 43 Confucius Classrooms in 21 out of 32 local authorities
- Hanban teachers come from partnership universities in Tianjin for 1-2 years to support teaching of CLC in primary and secondary schools
- Jointly funded by Scottish Government and the Hanban organisation (now its successor 'Centre for Language Education and Cooperation')



Mixed methods research design

Question themes

1. Pupils' classroom experiences of CLC.
2. How Chinese culture is construed by Scottish and Chinese teachers delivering CLC
3. The impact of CLC in shaping pupils' attitudes towards different cultures across Primaries 5- 7 (ages 9- 11)



What is reflexivity?

“The need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal.” **Berger (2015, p. 220)**

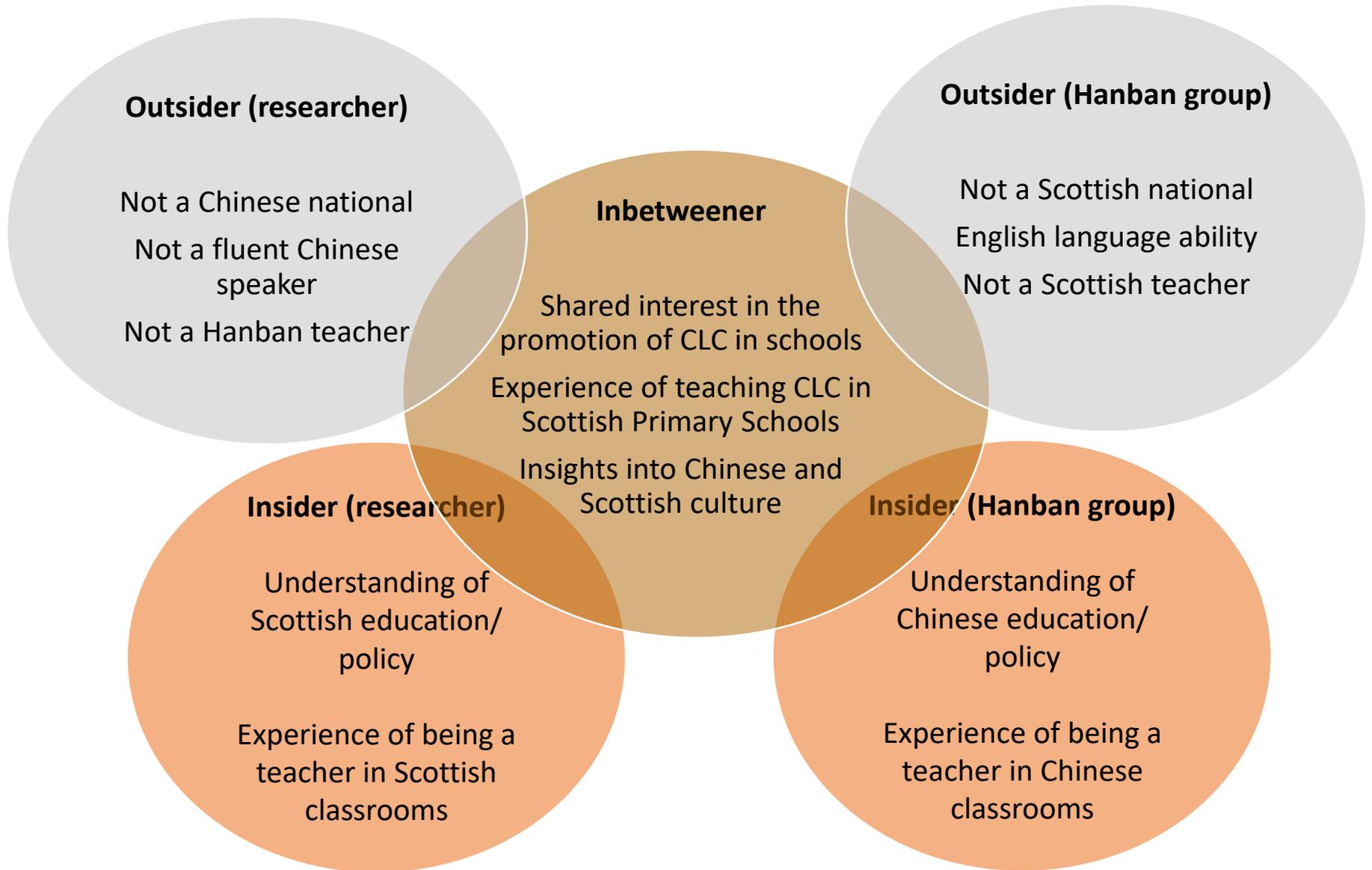
Positionality

This encourages the researcher to identify, analyse and understand their own worldview and how it has been shaped by biography, place and the positioning of self in the relation to the Other in order to understand what can be learned from such interactions. **Alvesson et al. (2008), Corlett and Mavin (2019)**

Intersubjectivity

The processes involved here encourage the researcher to look for ways of engaging in mutual meaning making with the various participants involved. These focus on the ‘situated, emergent and negotiated nature of the research encounter’ (p. 8) and how unconscious processes structure the relationship between the researcher and the participants. **Finlay and Gough (2008)**

Reflexive dynamics: researcher vs. participants



Issues of reflexivity arising from my study

- Attending to any **unconscious biases** round my own developing notions of culture in the design of interviews;
- My attempts at **narrowing the various positionalities** between myself and the Hanban groups;
- My reflections on **using cultural insiders as interviewers**; and
- **Gaining cultural insights into translation processes** and how these assisted my overall meaning making from the data.

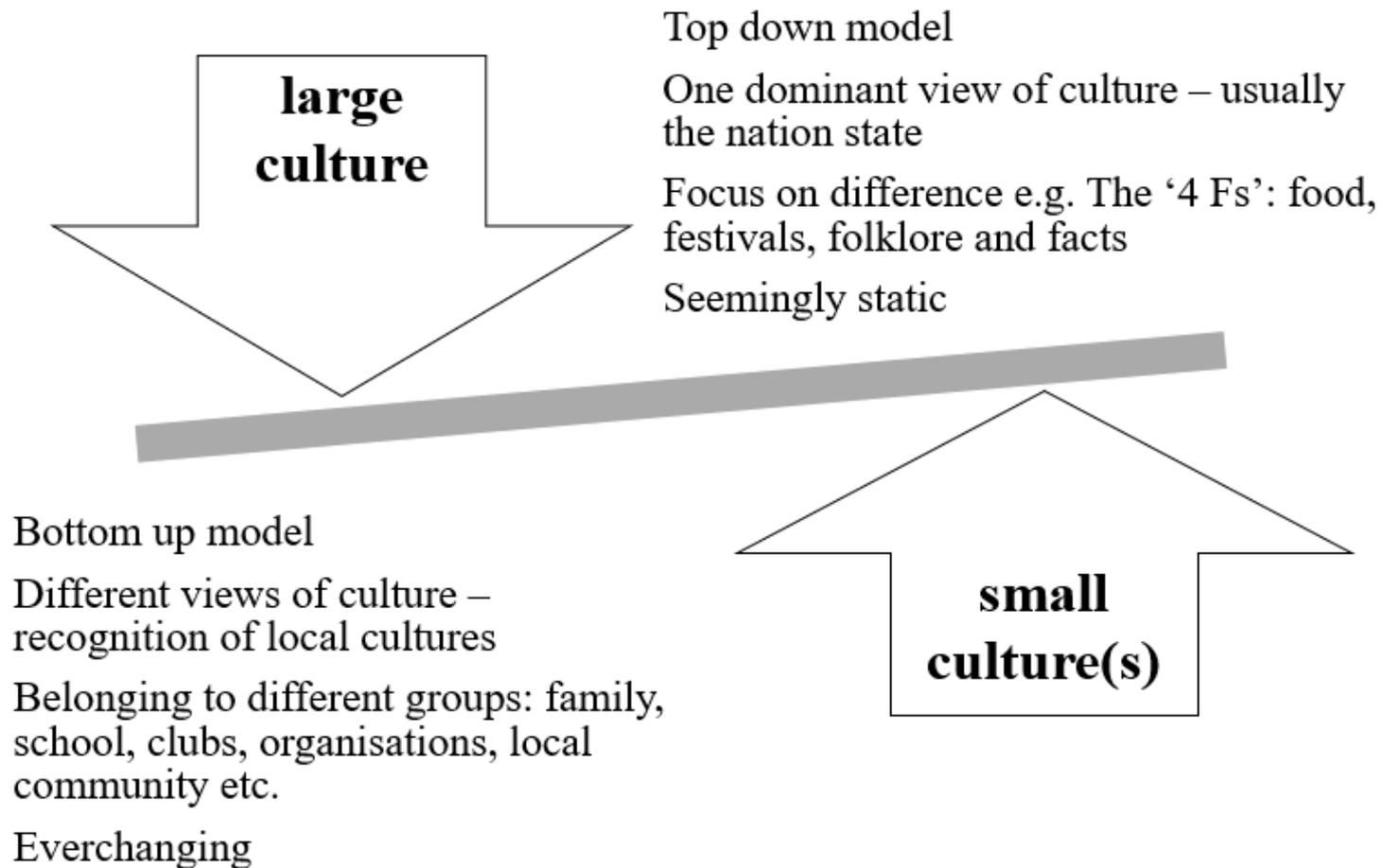
Ethical issues when interviewing interculturally

researcher-specific factors	interviewing skills, preparedness, knowledge of culture and environment, ability to establish rapport, communication skills and control of process
context-specific factors	location, time, cultural norms and ethical processes
participant- specific factors	level of anxiety, English proficiency, desire to please.

Birks, M. J., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2007). Breaching the wall: Interviewing people from other cultures. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 18(2), 150-156.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659606298617>

1. Potential researcher biases in interview design



1. Potential researcher biases in interview design

What do you feel are the important aspects of Chinese culture that pupils should be made aware of? Why do you feel this?

您觉得汉语老师应该给学生们接触或者解释中国文化哪一些方面？您为什么觉得那些方面比较重要？

What sort of cultural content have your pupils experienced as part of their programme of learning?

您提供学生们的课程包括什么关于文化的内容？

What view of China and Chinese people do you feel the pupils in your class currently have?

您的学生们目前对中国及中国人的看法是什么？

2. Narrowing issues of positionality

Srivastava (2006) identifies a key challenge for fieldworkers that this researcher was able to relate to in this study, the need to find commonality that stressed shared connections and positions to work round the 'binaries' that existed to create a research relationship where the power dynamics were better balanced.

Srivastava offers one potential way forward by exploring the notion of an 'exchange of currencies' where the researcher is looking for data from participants who are in a position to offer their experiences and willing to do so. However, this process is dependent upon,

“a medium of exchange to achieve temporary shared positionalities between researcher and participant to mediate relations of power and, ultimately, ease the exchange” (p. 211).

2. Narrowing issues of positionality

Potential issue	Ways to work round this
Context-specific factors raised earlier by Birks et al. (2007).	Engaging in a shared professional space
Srivastava (2006) discusses the role of her own culture in shaping perspectives on herself and how others engaged with her, seeing her both as an insider and outsider in this respect, which again required negotiating a middle ground	Seeing culture from shared insider and outsider perspectives
Stening and Zhang (2007) highlight the roles of hierarchy in how Chinese people may choose to relate to each other, particularly in educational contexts.	Recognising shared identities as teacher educators

3. Using cultural insiders as interviewers

“If researchers are working monolingually, then the data would only tell a half-truth. Thus, the demands of researching multilingually are rewarded in the richness of insights generated” (Holmes et al., 2013 p. 294)

Srivastava (2006) discusses the challenges faced in translating data when trying to capture and maintain meaning from one language to another. She emphasises that procedures must allow researchers to stay true to the voice of those they are claiming to represent, however at each level of drafting, it became clear to her that meaning was potentially being lost. Srivastava adopted an approach which she refers to as ‘conceptual equivalence’ that depended upon both cultural awareness and a full understanding of the contextual background in which the interviews were based.

3. Using cultural insiders as interviewers

From English to Chinese

What factors might account for pupils' positive or negative reactions to their learning of Chinese language and culture?
如果学生们有正面或者负面的反应，哪一些因素可以解释这些反应？

How / where have pupils in your classes developed their views on China and Chinese people?
您的学生们对中国及中国人的看法是怎么产生的？该看法是哪里来的？

3. Using cultural insiders as interviewers

From Chinese to English

Hanban teachers were asked to reflect on some of the similarities and differences of Chinese and Scottish culture.

When drinking, Scottish people are enjoying the taste of the drink, rather than the social situation.

In Scotland, tea is a social occasion to talk and drink. Tea culture in China in daily life can be this and also an individual activity, a symbol of a healthy lifestyle. Wider drinking culture here often seems the opposite.

In China, drinking culture values the human at the centre, the person comes first and drinking second. In Scotland, people value the alcohol itself more than the person.

Lessons learned?

1. The relationship between Self and Other is a reflexive dynamic that cannot be ignored and requires the researcher to recognise their own preconceptions and misconceptions around those from other cultures.
2. At the outset, recognise the ways in which previous experiences may have acted positively or negatively on the researcher's on-going thinking and in the study's design
3. The relational dynamics with different participant groups is complex and requires a lot of thought prior to data collection, which should not be taken for granted. How can both groups come together in the 'middle'?
4. In the absence of the researcher's own competence in the language of participants, those acting on his/ her behalf must also be suitably immersed in the cultural and professional background of the research. When well chosen, this adds another dimension to the interaction of the researcher with the data collected.

Selected references

- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1468794112468475>
- Birks, M. J., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2007). Breaching the wall: Interviewing people from other cultures. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 18(2), 150-156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043659606298617>
- Holmes, P., Fay, R., Andrews, J., & Attia, M. (2013). Researching multilingually: New theoretical and methodological directions. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 23(3), 285-299.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12038>
- Srivastava, P. (2006). Reconciling Multiple Researcher Positionalities and Languages in International Research. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 1(3), 210–222.
<https://doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2006.1.3.210>