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INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC CHINESE CHILDREN INTO
IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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JIA LIU

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Supervisor: Dr. Carmel Mulcahy

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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List of Acronyms

CSO	Central Statistics Office
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DE	Department of Education
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
EA	Equality Authority
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EU	European Union
ICI	Immigrant Council of Ireland
IILT	Integrate Ireland Language and Training
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
MEPRC	Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMI	Office of the Minister for Integration
PCSP	Primary Curriculum Support Program
PE	Physical Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SESE	Social Environmental and Scientific Education
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Abstract

Ireland has recently undergone a sharp increase in the rate of immigration. As more immigrants come to the country, Irish schools have to deal with increased diversity within the classroom, and with the associated problems of integrating children from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Chinese children represent a particularly large group within the school system and provide a strong case study for analysing the factors associated with integration and their potential for improving or hindering the integration process.

There are many significant differences between education in Ireland and in China, which can lead to a series of problems for ethnic Chinese children in Ireland. These include major differences in the educational environment and the approaches to education, differing curricula, language and culture, and perceived differences in parental expectations. A further key difference is the emphasis placed on religion and religious instruction in the majority of Irish schools as opposed to the broader moral education in Chinese schools.

This thesis examines the integration of Chinese children in Ireland, their difficulties and their individual experience in Irish primary schools. The research started in three Chinese weekend language schools, which have approximate 120 Chinese children in total. In the first instance, questionnaires had been sent to the parents. Language and cultural difference were identified as the main difficulties. Follow up interviews were conducted with parents, Chinese and Irish school principals, teachers and language support teachers. The main issues emerging from the Chinese perspective relate to educational environment, curriculum, English language, culture, social interaction and Chinese parental involvement. The main issue emerging from the Irish primary schools relates to the importance of Chinese parents participation and interaction with the schools.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Ireland's current level of immigration has been strongly influenced by its economic performance and it is a situation that is relatively new for Irish authorities. On the contrary, Ireland is a country which has a long history of emigration. People emigrated to other countries from Ireland for different reasons, such as to seek jobs or join family. This situation didn't change until the Irish economic boom in the 1990s. Between 1995 and 2000, the Irish GDP per capita grew two to three times faster than the average for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) (OECD, 2009). The fast economic growth brought unprecedented levels of prosperity and attracted an inflow of immigrants to the country. New peaks in Non-EU immigration rose dramatically from 2001 to 2004. By 2006, the Census indicated that non-Irish nationality had increased to ten per cent of the population, with immigrants originating from more than 188 different countries (CSO, 2008).

As more immigrants have come to the country, Irish schools have had to deal with increased diversity within the classroom, and with problems associated with integrating children from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Equality within the classroom environment has been the subject of much discussion (Deegan *et al.*, 2004; Smyth *et al.*, 2009; Darmody *et al.*, 2011), but this is certainly not the only issue facing the children of recent immigrants. Language differences, for example, present a major obstacle to integration (Wallen and Kelly-Holmes, 2006). Problems with social interaction of newcomers and parental involvement by immigrants in their children's education have also been identified by researchers (Smyth *et al.*, 2009; Devine, 2011).

This research focuses specifically on the issues arising from integrating Chinese children into Irish primary schools, an area which has not yet been studied in detail. Chinese culture differs substantially from Irish and European culture, and so the children of Chinese immigrants face a unique set of problems integrating into the Irish school system. The aim of this research is to identify those problems that particularly affect Chinese students, and examine ways in which these problems can be addressed.

1.2 Context of Study

This section will explore the context of the study in three settings, the EU context, the Irish national context and the researcher's personal context.

1.2.1 EU Context

In recent years, immigration policy, and in particular the integration of immigrants, has been a significant theme in European politics. *The Treaty of Amsterdam*, which came into

force in May 1999, with its emphasis on citizenship and the rights of individuals, marked the start of a move by the EU towards a more consistent policy on immigration, with the aim of preventing discrimination along ethnic or racial lines, and promoting integration and equality.

In the year 2000, the European Council stated that one of the objectives of EU in the subsequent ten years was to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Council, 2000a). An important step in achieving this objective is to address the issue of the integration of legal immigrants. In this context, education has repeatedly been highlighted as a key area where integration can occur. The European Council also declared that immigrants from countries outside of the EU, who are legally resident in a Member State and hold a long-term residency permit on EU territory, have the right to receive education (European Council, 1999, 2002).

The *Charter of Fundamental Rights* (European Council, 2000b), signed at the Nice European Council in December 2000, also asserted that:

Everyone has the right to education and to have access to vocational and continuing training.

This right includes the possibility to receive free compulsory education.

– Article 14, Right to Education

In order to promote integration of immigrants, the Education, Youth and Culture Council adopted three European benchmarks for education and training in 2003, with the goal that they be achieved by 2010:

- The average proportion of young people in the EU who leave school early should not exceed 10%.

- At least 85% of young people aged 22 in the EU should have completed upper secondary education;
- The percentage of young people in the EU who had achieved poor results in reading and writing should decrease by at least 20% compared to 2000.

- European Commission (2004, p. 13)

Trends in immigration to countries in the EU have changed remarkably during the last thirty years. In the period between 1985 and 2001, Luxembourg, Germany, Cyprus, and Iceland had experienced highest immigration flows corresponding to over 1.5% of their total population. They were followed by Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Norway, where annual immigration accounts for between 0.5% and 1.5% of the total population of the country (European Commission, 2004, p. 18). The next section will explore the migration situation in Ireland in more detail.

1.2.2 Irish National Context

Compared to other countries in the EU, immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon in Ireland (OMI, 2008). There has been dramatic immigration and social change in Ireland in the last two decades. From Figure 1.1 it can be seen that the overall population in Ireland has been increasing slowly since the mid-1990s. The population reached 4,172,013 in 2006, the highest in over one hundred and fifty years (CSO, 2006). In the year 2007, the immigrant population reached 109,500, the largest immigration population in Irish history. Irish society became more diverse with people coming from 188 countries. Of these, 82% came from ten countries: the UK, Poland, Lithuania, Nigeria, Latvia, US, China, Germany, Philippines and France (CSO, 2011), as shown in Figure 1.1.

However, the economy started to decline in Ireland in 2008 and continued in subsequent

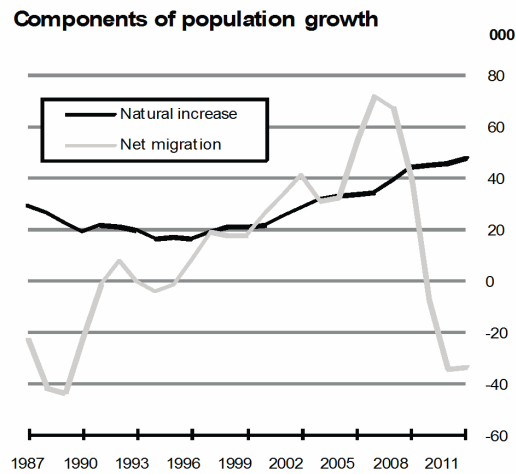


Figure 1.1: Components of population growth in Ireland. Source: CSO (2010).

years. This economic recession caused the immigrant population to drop dramatically to 30,800, with the net migration becoming negative by 34,500 by 2010, due to large numbers emigrating (CSO, 2010).

Although there has been a decline in the number of immigrants coming to Ireland in recent years, many still continue to live and work here (OECD, 2009). The number of such immigrants with children attending school in the state remains high. According to the Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2010), there are 8,874 children with Asian nationalities enrolled in mainstream primary schools, which is 1.8% of the total population in Irish primary schools. The census reported that there were a total of 2,996 ethnic Chinese children under 14 years old in Ireland on census night in 2011, and among these ethnic Chinese children, 580 were Chinese nationals (CSO, 2011). Table 1.1 shows the population of different ethnic background by age in Ireland.

With the substantial rise in the immigrant population in recent decades, Ireland has in place legislation prohibiting discrimination. The *Education Act, 1998* enshrines the right of all children to equality of access to and participation in education.

Age	Ethnicity						
	Irish	Irish Traveller	Other white	African	Other black	Chinese	Other Asian
0-4	288,199	4,676	28,308	8,442	997	1,095	8,865
5-9	264,915	3,905	20,933	11,233	1103	1,181	6,165
10-14	259,228	3,554	18,772	5,983	584	720	4,285
15-19	244,136	3,279	17,123	3,470	348	720	3,114

Table 1.1: Population by ethnic background and age in Ireland (2011). Source: CSO (2011).

The education system should be “accountable to students, their parents and the State for the education provided”, respect “the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society”, and engage in a “partnership between school, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff, the community served by the school and the State”

– *Education Act, 1998 as cited in DES and OMI 2010*

The *Schools and Equal Status Acts* states that “the inclusive school. . . is one that respects, values and accommodates diversity and seeks positive experiences, a sense of belonging and outcomes for all students” (DES and EA, 2005).

The first Irish national *Intercultural Education Strategy, 2011-2015* (2010), which was developed by the DES and the Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI), was launched in September 2010. This strategy aims not only to have an education that respects the diversity of the students, but also states that all education providers should be assisted with ensuring that inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment become the norm.

Religion is an important aspect for integration in Ireland. The Catholic Church has always played a significant role in the schools of Ireland. From Table 1.2 it can be seen that 89.65% of the primary schools in Ireland are under Catholic patronage. Educate Together is an organization which runs a growing number of multi-denominational schools in Ireland. They focus on inclusivity and child-centered learning. Since the Dalkey School Project

opened in 1978, the number of Educate Together schools has been growing fast, particularly in the last 10 years. By the year 2011, there were 58 Educate Schools in Ireland (DES, 2011).

Patron Body	Number of Schools	% of Total
Catholic	2,841	89.65
Church of Ireland	174	5.49
Presbyterian	17	0.54
Methodist	1	0.03
Jewish	1	0.03
Islamic	2	0.06
Quaker	1	0.03
John Scottus Educational Trust Ltd	1	0.03
Lifeways Ireland Ltd	2	0.06
An Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge Teo	57	1.80
Educate Together Ltd (national patron body)	44	1.39
Schools in Educate Together network with their own patron body	14	0.44
Vocational Education Committees	5	0.16
Minister for Education & Skill	9	0.29
Total	3,169	100%

Table 1.2: Number of primary schools by patron body (2010/11). Source: DES (2011).

1.2.3 Researcher Context

The researcher has received her primary, secondary and third level education in China, where she qualified as a secondary school Chinese language and literature teacher, before coming to Ireland. She then spent four years doing an honours degree course in St. Nicholas Montessori College, Dublin, Ireland to learn Montessori pedagogy. Meanwhile, she did 250 hours teaching practice each year in some Irish Montessori schools and an Irish national primary school. During the years 2006 and 2007, she worked as a full-time assistant teacher in a Catholic Montessori primary school. All of these studies and teaching experience give the researcher an insight into the difference and similarities of Irish and Chinese primary schools.

As a part of the Chinese community in Ireland, the researcher started to teach children Chinese language in a weekend Chinese language school in 2007. There she got to know a large number of ethnic Chinese children, parents, teachers, principals and their stories. There the parents often commented on the relaxed learning atmosphere in Irish schools, cultural differences, language and social difficulties that their children encountered. This caught the researcher's interests and led her to do research that focuses on ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question is as follows:

How well do the ethnic Chinese children integrate into Irish primary schools?

The main research question then can be divided into more specific questions:

1. What are the main challenges facing the integration of ethnic Chinese children into Irish primary schools?
2. How do Irish primary schools facilitate the integration needs of ethnic Chinese children?
3. What is the role of Chinese language and culture in the life of ethnic Chinese children in Ireland?
4. What is the role of Chinese parental involvement in the process of their children's integration in Irish primary schools?

These key questions drive this study and the aim in finding answers is to offer useful insights into the difficulties faced in the integration of Chinese children's in Irish primary schools and into how Irish schools facilitate their needs in the integration process.

The answers to these questions may provide insight into how best to address the integration issues faced by ethnic Chinese children in primary education in Ireland. As such, the Chinese community in Ireland may benefit through increased knowledge of the process of integration involved in schooling at primary level, and from the opportunity which was provided to give voice to the parents, Chinese and Irish educational professionals in the research process. The research also aims to provide evidence of current practice in relation to integration into Irish primary schools and a holistic approach to the identification of best practice through qualitative dialogue with the Irish education community.

1.4 Methodology

The research draws from both qualitative and quantitative approaches, though the main focus of this research is qualitative. Qualitative research is one of the two main research philosophies in social sciences. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to understand social phenomena through the compilation of statistics and other quantitative measures, qualitative research is generally conducted with smaller groups and deals with more subjective data, obtained by methods such as observation, interviews, and other forms of interaction to form an understanding of such phenomena. A case study approach was selected for this research. According to Creswell, case study is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a case or multiple cases over time, through detailed and in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998).

The data collection techniques employed by the researcher are questionnaires and semi-

structured interviews. The research was focused on parents of children at primary level within the Chinese community in Dublin, Irish and Chinese school principals, class teachers, English language support teachers in at least 20 schools, mainly in the Dublin region, and children attending these schools.

In the first instance the researcher tried to achieve a general picture of the current situation through the use of questionnaires distributed to 120 Chinese parents in the three identified Chinese weekend language schools. An analysis of the emergent data determined the key questions that formed the interview schedules with an identified group of children, parents and schools.

While the children are initially identified through these Chinese schools, they are also members of Irish school communities throughout Dublin. They attend regular Primary schools in Dublin and the surrounding areas and attend the Chinese Language Schools at the weekend. Their progress at mainstream schools is then examined through the parents, the principals and teachers within these schools.

1.5 Outline of the Study

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature. It focuses on intercultural education and integration in Irish primary schools, English language acquisition of newcomers and immigrant parental involvement. Chapter 3 presents a comparison of the Irish and Chinese primary school and their curricula to provide context. The introduction to the Chinese primary school system and the Chinese curriculum aims to give an Irish reader a good picture of what Chinese primary education is like, which is important in understanding the situation facing Chinese children in Irish primary schools. Chapter 4 focuses on the methodology of the research, introducing the Case Study approach and explaining how the research was

conducted and how the data was analysed in detail. Chapter 5 presents the key findings which emerged from the data on Chinese children's integration into Irish primary schools as evidenced by a range of stakeholders including children, parents, teachers and school principals. Chapter 6 provides discussion of the findings of the study and examines them within theoretical frameworks. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions of the study and provides recommendations for parents and schools, and also for the wider educational research community.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter gives a general overview of the research by introducing the recent immigrant situation in Ireland, the context of the study, the research questions, the main methodology and the outline of the research. The following chapter will present a number of aspects of literature.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will give a critical review of a range of relevant literature that underpins this research process. First of all, what is a literature review? Hart defines it as below:

The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.

– Hart (1998, p. 13)

A literature review allows the researcher to build on existing theoretical and empirical knowledge on specific issues, so that the researcher will have a good understanding of the topic s/he is investigating. The literature review in this chapter aims to outline the existing knowledge that is relevant to this study and to identify the information most relevant

to this research. The literature themes were formed from the research questions and the context within which the findings of this research are applicable. These themes included studies focused on the development of intercultural education in Ireland, the integration of immigrant children in Irish schools, English language acquisition of newcomer students, and immigrant parental involvement.

2.2 Culture and Intercultural Education in Ireland

Culture is a contested concept, and it has been interpreted in numerous ways by different scholars. Some intercultural communication theorists believe that culture encompasses the learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviours of human groups (Gudykunst, 2004; Lustig and Koester, 2006). Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, p. 181) described culture as “Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action”. This set of collective understandings give people from a certain cultural group the references as to how to adapt to a specific environment, how to behave predictably and acceptably, and how to make sense of their world.

However, Kramsch (2002, p. 277) argued that this kind of definition of culture is neglecting its “fluid, changing and conflictual” nature. Moon (2008, p. 17) also argued that, in the “unproblematically shared” culture, individual voices had been ignored, as there are also differences within national boundaries, ethnic groups, genders and races. In the age of globalization, a group of people from the same culture may share certain similarities, but it is necessary to be aware that each person is an individual, and researchers should not lock

people into categories.

As outlined in the last chapter, Irish society has become increasingly culturally diverse in the last decade, as a result of large-scale immigration which started to appear in Ireland in the mid-1990s, due to the economic growth of the Irish “Celtic Tiger”. This change signaled Ireland’s transition from a mono-cultural to a multicultural society (Bryan, 2009, p. 301). It has been suggested that Catholicism and “whiteness” has been a key component of how the majority ethnic group have viewed themselves in Ireland for a long time, and that the recent presence of non-Catholic and non-white minority ethnic groups poses a threat to this radicalized sense of identity (Connolly, 2006).

In response to issues of cultural diversity and racism in schools, the Irish Education Act (1998) stated that education in Ireland should ensure that it “respect the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership”. In 2005, the Department of Education and Skills and the Equality Authority (EA) launched *Schools and the Equal Status Acts*, which noted that an inclusive school is one that respects, values and accommodates diversity and seeks positive experiences, a sense of belonging and outcomes for all students (DES and EA, 2005, p. 1).

In the same year, the NCCA published *Intercultural Education in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers and School Management* to give a structured guideline to support all the members in a school community. In the *Guidelines*, the NCCA state that intercultural education is a synthesis of the learning from multicultural and anti-racist education approaches. It is necessary to identify the difference between the two concepts of multicultural and intercultural education first. Multicultural education claims that all cultural traditions are equally good and it aims to acknowledge and respect cultural diversity (Portera, 2011, p. 18), but there is not necessarily interaction between the cultures (NCCA, 2005b, p. 3). Intercultural education only began to take root in some English-speaking countries, such as Canada, the United States and Australia, in recent years (Gundara, 2000). It not only acknowledges the

different cultures people come from, but also emphasises that people should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other (NCCA, 2005b, p. 3). The approach taken to cultural diversity in Ireland is intercultural education (ibid., p. 3).

Intercultural education is a dynamic concept and refers to evolving relations between cultural groups (UNESCO, 2006, p. 17). Leclercq (2003, p. 9) pointed out that it is “the set of processes through which relations between different cultures are constructed”, and it aims “to enable groups and individuals who belong to such cultures within a single society or geopolitical entity to forge links based on equity and mutual respect”. UNESCO (2005) defined intercultural education as “the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect”. The NCCA defines the concept intercultural education in the *Guidelines* as an “Education that respects, celebrates, and recognises the normality of diversity in all aspects of human life, promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and provides the values upon which equality is built” (NCCA, 2005b, p. 169).

The *Guidelines* are designed to “help to prevent racism” and to assist schools to enable the students “to respect and celebrate diversity, to promote equality and to challenge unfair discrimination” (NCCA, 2005b). It tries to “mediate and adapt the existing curricula to reflect the emergence of a more culturally diverse society in Ireland” (DJELR, 2005, p. 110). It not only supports the school planning and policy development within the Irish primary schools, but also supports teachers to develop a more inclusive classroom environment, and explains how to integrate intercultural education in different subject curricula in greater detail.

The Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration also responded to the changing shape of Irish society and published the *Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015* in 2010. To ensure the successful development of intercultural ethos and practice in Irish schools, ten key components have been identified based on the findings of the research and consultations carried out in recent years. These ten key components

are leadership, mainstreaming of education provision, rights and responsibilities, high aspirations and expectations, enhancing the quality of teaching, knowledge of language(s) of instruction, partnership and engagement, effective communication, data collection and research, and actions, monitoring and evaluation (DES and OMI, 2010, p. 44). These components are designed for all education providers, students and members in both host and migrant communities to ensure that an intercultural learning environment can prevail (*ibid.*, p. 55).

Intercultural education has also faced some criticism, from several directions. However, as Allmen notes, these criticisms are more often associated with a misunderstanding of what intercultural education is or with pitfalls of specific implementations than they are with the general notion of intercultural education. As Allmen (2011, p. 36) points out, it is important to note that “intercultural education is not the education of migrants”. The welfare and education of migrants are certainly important, but more important is to improve the quality of relationships between the migrant and host population (or any group of people and others). He also notes that one of the criticisms of intercultural education is concern over the risk of stigmatization. Too much emphasis on the differences of the migrant children may not have a good effect on the children. However, he argues that this is not a necessary outcome and suggests ways to combat it. In particular, he suggests that such stigmatization is facilitated by an over-reliance on teaching aids rather than concentration on the core goals of intercultural education, and proposes the use of distancing techniques to allow students to engage without fear of embarrassment.

One of the outcomes of a good intercultural practice in education is that inclusion and integration within the school becomes the norm. The next section will explore the issue of the integration in schools in Ireland in more detail.

2.3 Integration in Schools in Ireland

The meaning of integration can vary between different countries and over different times. It is often based on the interest, values, assumptions and perspectives of specific groups involved in the migration process (Favell, 1998; Castles *et al.*, 2002). Baubock (1994) has noted that the concept of integration does not have a universally agreed upon definition, and that many conflicting interpretations exist. In some cases multiculturalism is viewed as a facet of integration, while in others integration is seen as conflicting with multiculturalism and assimilation of migrants (Feldman *et al.*, 2008, p. 3). In the *Diversity: National Action Plan Against Racism*, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) of Ireland argued that integration is a two way process that involves effort from both the newcomers and the host population. It defined integration as “a two way process that places duties and obligations on both cultural and ethnic minorities and the State to create a more inclusive society” (DJELR, 2005, p. 38).

How, then, can the integration of immigrant children be measured? The report of Eurydice (2004), *Integrating Immigrant Children into School in Europe*, explored how government and schools help immigrant students to integrate into schools (pre-primary and compulsory education) in 32 countries in Europe. It explored different measures of how schools support the immigrant children’s integration in two different areas: administrative formalities support and learning support (as seen in the Table 2.1).

In the administrative formalities support, there are five types of measures of how schools help with the integration of immigrant parents: written information about the school system, provision of interpreters, special resource persons/councils, additional meetings specifically for immigrant families and information about pre-primary education. In pre-primary and compulsory education in Ireland, the previous three supports have existed, but not the latter two (Eurydice, 2004, p. 37). In Ireland, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS, 2008) produced

the booklet *Your Child and Schools in Ireland*, which has been printed in seven languages (including Chinese) to help immigrant parents to know general information of the primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. It also explains what the parents can do if they encounter problems with attendance, communicating with the school, bullying, discipline, special needs and finances.

The learning support that European education systems offer to immigrant children can be divided into three categories: language support, educational support and reduction of class sizes. The main language support that most European countries (including Ireland) use are intensive teaching of the language of instruction, in which students receive the target language tuition individually or in small groups during normal school hours (Eurydice, 2004, p. 44). In six countries in the EU, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Finland, Sweden and Norway, language tuition can be also taught in the mother tongue/language of the immigrant children (ibid., p. 46). Educational support aims at addressing “the learning needs of immigrant pupils in certain areas of the curriculum” (ibid., p. 44). This kind of support can be found in fourteen countries in the EU at the moment, though not in Ireland (ibid., p. 46). In general, language support is a key factor in the successful integration of immigrants whose native language is not English. The next section will explore in more detail the issue of language support of immigrant children.

2.4 English Language Acquisition of Newcomer Students

Language efficiency is essential for the newcomers, for whom English is a foreign language, for both academic progress and social integration. Many studies have found that language is the most commonly cited factor associated with settling-in difficulties that immigrant children whose first language is not English encounter in Irish schools (see Keogh and Whyte, 2003; Devine *et al.*, 2004; Smyth *et al.*, 2009). Cummins (1996) pointed out that

Support Type	Measures	Ireland	
Administrative Formalities Support	Written information about the school system	Exists	
	Provision of interpreters	Exists	
	Special resource persons/councils	Exists	
	Additional meetings specifically for immigrant families		
	Information about pre-primary education		
Learning Support	Language Support	Intensive teaching of the language of instruction	Exists
		Introduction to the language of instruction at pre-primary level	
		Bilingual tuition (in the mother language of instruction)	
	Educational Support	Additional support for learning	
		Adaptation of assessment	
	Smaller class sizes/ special norms governing the composition of classes		

Table 2.1: Types of support offered to immigrant children in pre-primary and full-time compulsory education in the Republic of Ireland. Source: Eurydice (2004, p. 37, p. 46).

the identities of the newcomer students are often devalued in school when they speak their first language and are made to feel embarrassed about their cultural background. However, much research indicated that being bilingual will bring higher academic achievement, self-esteem, and social adjustment for students.

In response to this, the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* (1990) stipulates that “the teaching of their mother tongue and culture” should be facilitated (cited in UNESCO 2006, p. 23). The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) (Feldman *et al.*, 2008, p. 37) also stresses the importance of English and children’s first language.

The ICI believes it is time to initiate a debate on linguistic diversity and on the positive effects of such diversity if it is well managed. Language is a core element in the expression and preservation of cultural identity. The ICI welcomes and supports a policy of encouraging migrants to learn English as the *lingua franca* and second official language of the country, provided the means for acquiring an adequate knowledge of the language are made avail-

able. However, there also needs to be a recognition and positive validation of multilingualism, including the special place of the Irish language, in all sectors of life including the work-place and the community.

– Feldman *et al.* (2008, p. 37)

To help the newcomers, in 2006, the Irish NCCA published guidelines for all primary school teachers to provide support for English as an additional language teaching in schools. In 2008, *Primary Schools English Language Assessment Kits* were developed by Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) and were sent to all schools. This kit not only provides the initial interview assessment to examine the English level of the newcomer students, but also provides follow-on tests to assist the students' further learning.

The role of language support teachers is very important. According to IILT (2006, p. 5) the teachers need to “promote the pupil’s development of English language proficiency so that he or she can gradually gain access to the curriculum, ultimately achieving the same educational opportunities as English-speaking peers”. On the other hand, the language support teacher is “an invaluable resource for mediating activities to contribute to intercultural understanding” (IILT, 2003, p. 13).

In the 2001/2002 school year, there were 262 English language support teacher posts allocated to both primary and post-primary schools in Ireland (OMI, 2008, p. 59). This number had risen to 2,192 in 2008/2009, and of these 1,632 were full-time language support teachers in primary schools (OECD, 2009, p. 40). Under rules introduced in 2007, Irish schools could have one full-time language support equivalent/post for 14-27 English as an Additional Language (EAL) students, two for 28-41 students, three for 42-64 students and four for 65-90 students (OECD, 2009, p. 39). Any primary school that had fewer than 14 EAL students receives a grant to purchase such support (*ibid.*, p. 40).

However, in 2009, the number of language support teacher was reduced. Due to government

budget cuts in October 2008, the DES issued *Circular 0015/2009* which resulted in changes to the teacher allocation ratio and a reduction in English language teaching provision (DES, 2009). The circular declared that schools can have one full-time language support teacher if they have 14-30 EAL students, and two language support teachers if they have 31-90 EAL students (ibid., p. 4). This means that, in 2007, if there were 90 EAL students in a school, four language support teacher posts could have been applied for. However, in 2009, for the same amount of students, only two posts were available. The result of this change is that each language support teacher has had more students and more intensive work. In 2012, the language support in Irish secondary schools was further eroded when DES issued *Circular 0009/2012* which directed post-primary schools to merge special learning support and language support into a single allocation process (DES, 2012a).

In addition, there are many further challenges facing the language support teachers. Little (2001, p. 3) claimed that language support teachers have limited time for each EAL student, and that the dynamics of the classroom are such that they can negatively impact certain aspects of language acquisition. Devine (2005, p. 58) noted that in primary schools, class teachers and those who are appointed to language support roles were critical about lack of appropriate training in this area, and some of the teachers have to use skills acquired for the teaching of Irish to help them. Facing these challenges, the IILT launched *Up and Away: A Resource Book for English Language Support in Primary School* in 2006 (IILT, 2006). This resource book is aimed at facilitating the training of language support teachers, introducing the language support programme, and providing resources for language support teachers and pupils, for example by giving specific classroom activities.

2.5 Social Interaction of Immigrant Children

Research indicates that language difficulties not only have profound implication for newcomer students' academic progress, but also for their social integration (Smyth *et al.*, 2009, p. 78). One common assumption of sociolinguistic is that language displays social identity and membership (Schiffrin, 1996). Language use and social identity cannot be considered in isolation, and the link between them has been stressed by many researchers (Giroux, 1992; Gee, 1996; Lippi-Green, 1997; Hall, 1996). Lippi-Green (1997, p. 5) stated that language is the "most salient way we have of establishing and advertising our social identities". As such, newcomers from non-English speaking countries stand out against of a background of native-English speakers. Thus they may experience social integration difficulties stemming from group identity issues independent of any communications difficulties.

Aside from the language factor, different cultural background and cultural isolation are other reasons that social interaction is difficult for immigrant children. Many immigrant families have limited opportunities to socialize with the mainstream culture (Coelho, 1994, p. 307). It is found that children at school often socialize within their own culture group and the older they are the more evident this is (Kagan, 1986).

Coelho (1994) pointed out that "it is especially difficult for newcomers to integrate socially when they don't speak English, don't know the schoolyard games, don't know the rituals and symbols of the peer culture, and may even prefer not to be noticed at all for the first few months". She also commented on the fact that immigrants rarely receive invitations from the people from the host culture as "the social structure" of the environment "provides insufficient opportunities for different groups to get to know each other and recognize commonalties" (*ibid.*).

Immigrant students in Ireland have been reported to exhibit difficulty with social interaction.

In the survey of 1200 Irish primary school principals conducted by Smyth *et al.* (2009, p. 84), 19% of them reported that nearly all or more than half of the newcomer students experience difficulties in social interaction with their peers. This rate rose to 26% among the principals of post-primary schools. Many Irish school teachers felt that limited English language makes it more difficult for newcomer students to develop friendship with Irish students. Many schools use “buddies” or student mentors to help the immigrant children to make friends (*ibid.*, p. 79). Such systems can help ease difficulties in social integration, but as will be discussed in the next section, parental involvement and cultural differences also play important roles in the child’s integration.

2.6 Parental Involvement and Cultural Differences

Parental involvement in their child’s education starts from the birth of the child. Under the Constitution of Ireland (1937), parents are considered to be the primary educators of their children. They are not only responsible for the child’s physical needs, but also for providing a learning environment, to co-operate with and support the school and fulfill their special role in their child’s development (DES, 1995, p. 9).

So if the importance of parental involvement is obvious, then what different forms of parental involvement with the formal education system are there? The most well-known model of parental involvement is Epstein (1995, p. 704)’s “Framework of Parental Involvement”, which clearly identifies six types parental involvement in schools, such as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. She also highlighted the challenges for these parents’ involvement types and redefined some of the terms.

The first type of parental involvement is parenting. It means that the school helps parents to

create supportive environments for children. For example, the school can give suggestions for home conditions that support students' learning, organize parental education or other courses to train parents, give family support programmes to assist families with health and nutrition information and so on. One of the challenges for this is to enable parents to share the information of their culture and background with the school.

The second type, communication, means to establish two-way exchanges about school programmes and students' progress between parents and the school. A practical example of this is parents' participation in parent-teacher meetings, attendance at school organized events, and efficient teacher-parent communication via phone or written note, and clear information from the school on all policies and programs. For parents who don't speak English very well, communication between school and them can be a challenge. In this kind of situation, the translation of school information and a translator at the parent-teacher meetings to assist the parents is necessary.

The third type is volunteering. This is the recruitment and organization of parents to help and support the school. This may involve parents volunteering to help teachers, administrators, students and other parents. Epstein redefines the term "volunteer" as anyone who supports school and children' learning in any way and in any places, such as school, home and community.

The fourth type, learning at home, is where the school provides information and ideas to parents about how to help students with their homework or other curriculum related materials. An example of this could be that the school provides information for parents on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade, and how parents can assist with their children's homework. Epstein argued that "homework" doesn't only mean the work prescribed by the teacher, but also includes interactive activities shared with other members of the home or community. She also emphasises that it is very important to link the schoolwork to real life.

The fifth type is decision making. The school should include parents in school decision-making and have parent representatives. One challenge for this type of involvement can be including parent leaders or representatives from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and other groups in the school.

The sixth type is collaborating with community. This means school identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, such as information on community health, cultural and social support, and community activities that are related to learning skills. This classification of parental involvement provides a useful background to the present research, which will identify types of parental involvement most used by Chinese parents, as their different cultural background shapes their involvement.

Culture is always seen as a vital source for developing an understanding of minority schooling (Erickson, 1993). One aspect of this is that differences in culture can lead to differences in the level of parental involvement. Culture not only affects the children's social and intellectual development, but also the transformation of the parents' attitude and values toward education, learning and career aspirations (DES, 2000). Much research has been conducted on the effect of differences in culture to parental involvement in education. Bourdieu (1974, p. 34) pointed out that the form of parental involvement depends on the cultural capital of the family. Devine (2011, p. 109) claimed that Irish teacher's judgment about migrant students is based on their own understanding of what constitutes "an ideal type of pupil", and further that their notion of "good parenting" is coloured by their own background. While the understanding of these terms may be similar within western societies, many Asian cultures have significantly different understandings of these roles.

The influence of Confucius is prominent in the Chinese educational system, and one of its lasting impacts has been to place significant emphasis on respect for the authority and expertise of the teacher. As a result, many Chinese parents consider teachers as the profes-

sional authority in school education and they are less inclined to feel that they are entitled to be partners of teachers in the development of their children's schooling experiences in school. However, at home, most of Chinese parents are very much involved with their children's education. Many studies (see Wang, 2001; Luo, 2001; Wang, 2006) have indicated that most Chinese parents are willing to spend time with their children or to prioritize their education.

For a long time, the main form of communication between parents and schools in Chinese schools has been parent-teacher meetings which are held by the school. Different from those in Irish schools, the parent-teacher meetings in Chinese school normally take the form of one teacher talking to all the parents at once. The aim of these meetings is to report the students' performance in the school and to clarify the school's expectations of parents. Meanwhile, the parents can also provide feedback to teachers on students' education (Liu, 1999, p. 54). However, Huang (2001, p. 25) argued that communication between Chinese parents and schools tends to be one-dimensional and only focused on the academic aspect of students' life. In recent years, other forms of communication between parents and schools have been organized by the government, such as parents' school. Liu (1999, p. 55) noted that in recent years, a large number of parents' schools have been established in China. These parents' schools emphasize the importance of home education, offer basic knowledge and skills that parents require for home education and help parents to solve problems that they encountered in the course of their children's education. There are two forms that these parents' schools generally take. The first is where parents physically attend class in the school, while the second are resource sites on the Internet. According to *China Education Daily* (31st Aug 2007), there were over 430,000 parents' schools of the first kind in China by the year 2007.

Chinese parents also tend to have very high expectations of their children's education and are willing to make financial investments and personal sacrifices to support it (Li, 2006, p. 191). In Chao (1996)'s study of parents' role, which compared 48 immigrant Chinese

mothers in the US and 50 European-American mothers, he claimed that Chinese mothers conveyed “(a) a great degree of value on education, (b) the high investment and sacrifice they feel they need to offer, (c) the more direct intervention approach to their children’s schooling and learning, and (d) a belief that they can play a significant role in the school success of their children”. In contrast, the European-American mothers showed a negation of the importance of academics, and instead put more emphasis on the importance of social development and expressed a concern of their children’s self-esteem development (ibid.).

2.7 Conclusion

In general, this chapter outlined a number of aspects of the literature, which include the development of intercultural education in Ireland, the integration of immigrant children in Irish schools, English language acquisition of newcomer students, the social interaction of immigrant children and immigrant parental involvement. This literature constitutes the background against which the present study takes place, constituting the current body of knowledge relating to the issues faced by immigrant children within the Irish education system. Thus far, however, little research has specifically concerned the issues faced by Chinese children entering primary school in Ireland. The next chapter will focus on the comparison of the primary schools and their curricula in Ireland and China.

Chapter 3

Irish and Chinese Primary Schools and Their Curricula

3.1 Introduction

We live in a time when humanity, science and technology are developing at a tremendous pace, requiring people to acquire more skills to promote the development of society. As a result, education is attracting more and more attention from governments in each country. This is especially true of primary education, the cradle of talents and skills, which is one of the main objects of reform. This chapter provides a general introduction to Irish and Chinese primary schools and sets the context for the research study on the experience of primary education for Chinese children in Ireland. It is important to introduce Chinese primary schools here, because some of the ethnic Chinese children involved in this research have had at least a years experience of education in Chinese schools before they came to Ireland, and all of the ethnic Chinese parents interviewed had their primary school education in China. It is important also to highlight that some of the children in the research may

indeed at a later point re-enter the Chinese education system. Thus the perceived differences between the Chinese and Irish education system need to be explored fully in order to gain an insight into some of the issues that emerge later in the research process.

3.2 Overview of Irish and Chinese Education

3.2.1 Irish Primary Schools

In Ireland, the objective of the education system is “inclusive, high quality education for all students” (OECD, 2009). According to the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), education from the age of six to sixteen is compulsory and parents are required to ensure that their children attend a recognised school or receive a certain minimum level of education.

The Irish education system includes primary, secondary and higher education. Primary education usually spans 8 years. Children usually start school at 4 years of age and finish at the age of 12 (As shown in the Table 3.1). By September 2012, there were some 3300 primary schools in Ireland, and currently about 10% of the students in these schools have immigrant backgrounds (DES, 2012b).

Schools in Ireland are funded by the Department of Education and Skills, established by “patron bodies”, and managed by local boards of management. According to the Department of Education and Skills, nearly 90% of primary schools are under the patronage of the Catholic Church, and over 2% of primary schools are operated by multi-denominational/inter-denominational patron bodies (DES, 2011).

A typical day in an Irish primary school may be as follows. The students start morning classes around 9am, and finish at 2:30pm. There are two breaks in the middle. One is usu-

Education Stages		Years	Age
Primary Education		Junior Infants class	4
		Senior Infants class	5
		Year 1-6	6-12
Secondary Education	Junior cycle	Year 1-3	13-15
	Senior cycle	Year 4 (Transition Year*)	16
		Year 5-6	17-18
Higher Education		Varies	Over 18

Table 3.1: Overview of Irish educational stages. *Transition Year, the 4th year in the secondary education in Ireland, is a special feature of the Irish education system. According to NCCA, during Transition Year, students can gain a wide range of educational experiences without the pressure of examination, for example to have work experience, or to learn different subjects which interest the student.

ally 15 minutes, and the other around half an hour. The students in Junior and Senior infant class may finish school a bit earlier in some schools. Irish primary schools are required to have 183 school days in each year (Eurydice, 2012).

3.2.2 Chinese Primary Schools

Chinese schools are state-run through the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MEPRC). Since the *Compulsory Education Law* of China in 1986, China has introduced nine years of compulsory education, comprising of six years in primary school and three years in junior secondary school (as shown in Table 3.2). Students in China start primary education at the age of 6 and finish at the age of 12. By 2010, there were a total of 290,597 primary schools in the People's Republic of China, with an enrollment of 101,353,616 students. The enrolment rate of primary schools had reached 99.7% (MEPRC, 2010).

As a contrast to Ireland, the school day in Chinese primary schools is much longer. For a typical school day in a Chinese primary the students start school at 7:30am and finish at 4:30pm. There are four classes in the morning and three classes in the afternoon and each

Education Stages	Years	Age
Primary Education	Years 1-6*	6-12
Junior Secondary Education	Years 1-3*	13-15
Senior Secondary Education or Vocational School Education	Years 1-3	16-18
Higher education	Varies	Over 18

Table 3.2: Overview of Chinese educational stages. *In some areas in China, children spend 5 years in primary school and 4 years in junior secondary school.

class lasts from 40 to 45 minutes. There are 10 minutes break between every class and there is a slightly longer break after the second class in the morning, when all the students gather in the playground to do morning exercise together. The morning class normally finishes at 11:30am and the afternoon class do not start until 1:30pm (or 2:30pm, it depends on the season of the year), so the students have time to go home to have lunch and take a nap before they start the afternoon class.

Curriculum always plays an important role in education in any country. It is at the heart of education and the tool for achieving educational goals. It also highlights the attitude a government has towards education, where its priorities lie and the emphasis that is placed on particular learning outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to know about the curricula of the two countries so that we can understand their educational product, the students, better. The following section introduces the Irish and Chinese primary school curricula and compares them from different angles.

3.3 Irish and Chinese Primary School Curricula

3.3.1 Irish Primary School Curricula

The establishment of the National School system in Ireland can be traced back to British rule in the 19th century. To this day, the *Stanley Letter* of 1831 remains the legal basis for

the system, although some of its ideals have been eroded. The Stanley letter set forth that primary school education in Ireland should be free, and that children of all religions should be taught together in the same school. However, pressure from various churches to educate children of different denominations separately has led to the current situation where religious patronage is widespread in Ireland. Nonetheless, despite the prominence of the Catholic Church as patron body to the majority of Irish National Schools, a ‘Catholic-first’ admission policy is prohibited under the provisions of the Stanley letter. It is against this backdrop that the integration of children from non-Christian backgrounds must be considered. While the various patron bodies are responsible for religious education, the main curriculum is set by the state, and is common across all schools.

In recent years, there have been two major revisions of primary school curriculum in Ireland. These can be found in: *Curriculum Na Bunscoile* (1971) and Primary School Curriculum (1999).

Curriculum Na Bunscoile was launched in 1971. It aimed to “enable the child to live a full life as a child”, and “to equip the child to avail himself of further education so that he may go on to live a full and useful life as an adult in society” (DE, 1971a, p. 12). This curriculum indicated that all children are complex human beings with physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs and potentials; it also emphasised that each child is an individual, and that he or she should be provided with all kinds of opportunities towards fulfillment which will enable them to achieve their full potential. Therefore, educators should cater for the full development of each child and should aim to meet the needs of children of widely varying abilities and cultural backgrounds (DE, 1971b, p. 13).

In 1990, the review body of the *Curriculum Na Bunscoile* published the *Quinlan Report*. The report constituted a detailed appraisal of the 1971 curriculum and provided the basis for the redesign and restructuring of the new curriculum (NCCA, 1999b, p. 2). Later the new Primary School Curriculum was developed by National Council for Curriculum and

Assessment (NCCA) and launched in 1999. It was built upon the previous curriculum. As the previous Minister for Education and Skills Micheal Martin TD said, “It encompasses the philosophical thrust of *Curaclam Na Bunscoile* (1971) and the *Education Act*, 1998. The curriculum incorporates current educational thinking and the most effective pedagogical practice. It represents a process of revision that is both evolutionary and developmental” (NCCA, 1999b, p. vi).

Like *Curaclam Na Bunscoile*, the Primary School Curriculum (1999) is child-centered. Since all children are different, it allows the curriculum to be delivered in a manner that meets individual needs and contributes to the fuller development of each individual. In other words, it seeks to celebrate the uniqueness of each child and to nurture the child in all dimensions—spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical (NCCA, 1999b, p. 6).

The curriculum points out that the general aims of primary education is, “to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realize his or her potential as a unique individual; to enable the child to develop as a social being through loving and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society; and to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning” (NCCA, 1999b, p. 7). To achieve these three general primary education aims, the curriculum includes more specific aims and general objectives to specify the importance of the ability to learn independently, to think critically, to develop spiritual, moral and religious values, to develop literacy and numeracy skills, and to develop a respect for cultural difference (NCCA, 1999b, p. 34).

In light of the increasingly multicultural nature of Irish society, this curriculum (1999) especially stressed that one of the responsibilities of the curriculum is to promote tolerance and respect for pluralism and ensure equality of opportunity for all children. Children coming from a diversity of cultural, religious, ethnic backgrounds should all be equally respected and recognised (ibid.: 28).

The curriculum is presented in seven curriculum areas comprising of twelve subjects. These are Language (English and Irish), Mathematics, Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) (History, Geography and Science), Arts Education (Visual Arts, Drama, Music), Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Religious Education (NCCA, 1999b, p. 2).

It is interesting to note that under the current Irish Government, a greater emphasis has been placed on literacy and numeracy. In July 2011, the DES launched *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life – the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*. One of the targets which has been set and to be achieved by 2020 is:

At primary, increasing the number of children performing at Level 3 or above (the highest levels) in the national assessments of reading and mathematics by 5 percentage points; reducing the percentage performing at or below the lowest level (Level1) by 5 percentage points.

– DES (2011)

In 2011, DES introduced standardised tests of reading and mathematics for students in 2nd, 4th and 6th class in primary schools. The schools are required to report the findings to the parents and the Department of Education and Skills after the test and develop and implement their own improvement plan (DES, 2011).

3.3.2 Chinese Primary School Curricula

Confucianism is the most influential philosophy in Chinese education. Confucius (551-479B.C.) was one of the great philosophers, educationists, and theorists in China. The main idea of Confucianism is “benevolence” (Chinese term is *ren*), which is also the core

of Confucius moral education thought. In one of the Confucian classics, *The Analects*, the word for benevolence (*ren*) appears 109 times, illustrating the important position of benevolence in Confucian ideology. What then does benevolence mean exactly? Simply stated, benevolence is to love all men and all beings in the world. This ideology is based on moral metaphysics, it emphasises the main aim of education is to cultivate moral human beings.

Confucius advocated that students should be treated equally without discrimination. Many of Confucius's students came from very poor families. They received the same treatment, however, as other richer students. Confucius was the first person to look for equal educational opportunities for everyone in Chinese educational history.

Confucius believes that the main aim of education is to create the “complete man” (*Cheng Ren*), who should possess knowledge, benevolence, bravery, and also skills in varied talents, rites and ritual music. In other words, students should be educated from a range of different aspects and perspectives and all their potentials should be fully developed.

A high value has always been placed on education in China and curriculum always plays a central role in the educational system. The Chinese term for curriculum is *ke cheng*, and first appeared in Chinese history in the first Century (Zhang and Zhong, 2003, p. 254). One of the most famous Confucian philosophers in the Tang Dynasty (648-907A.D.), Kong Yingda, explained Confucius's philosophy in his representative book *Understanding the Five Confucian Classics*. He wrote,

It is the moral person
Who plans, supervises, and upholds the curriculum (*ke cheng*)
That is legitimate.

– Kong Yingda as cited in Zhang and Zhong (2003, p. 254)

Compared to the development of Irish curriculum, the development of modern Chinese curriculum has followed a very uneven road. Knowing the history of Chinese curriculum development gives a better understanding of Chinese education today. Broadly speaking, modern Chinese curriculum development has experienced four periods: rise, stagnation, resurgence and revitalization.

3.3.2.1 The Rise of Chinese Curriculum

During the first half of 20th Century, the situation of Chinese society was one of turbulence and unrest. After constant invasion by Western countries, people lived with difficulties and hardship. Saving the nation and the people became the main social and historical mission of Chinese people. In 1912, a revolution led by Sun Zhong Shan overthrew the Qing Dynasty, the last feudal dynasty. The feudal autocratic governance which controlled China for more than 2000 years was finished and the Democratic Republic was established. This is an extraordinary milestone in Chinese history. The same year, the new government launched the *Primary School Act* and the *Primary School Rules and Curriculum*, unified the educational system, and removed the Chinese Classics subject in primary school (Chinese Curriculum Research Institute, 2003, p. 1). During this period, Chinese education was greatly influenced by American democratic educational ideology. In 1923, the government drew up the *New Educational System Curriculum Outline*, a very important revolution in Chinese curriculum history. It advocated democracy and science, emphasised child-centred curriculum and respect of individual development. This outline stated that the new school system would be “6-3-3”, which means children will spend 6 years in primary school, 3 years in junior secondary school and another 3 years in senior secondary school. This system has remained up to today in China (Chinese Curriculum Research Institute, 2003, p. 1).

3.3.2.2 The Stagnation of Chinese Curriculum

In 1949, The People's Republic of China was established; a new socialist nation was born. As a superstructure, education was greatly affected by political and economic factors. Especially in a highly centralized society, politics controls education. Reforms of education were intertwined with the shifting political policies. "Education has been used as an instrument for the inculcation of new values and beliefs of a new socialist revolutionary society" (Wang, 1999, p. 333).

Between the years 1949 and 1957, Chinese curriculum development was greatly influenced by the Soviet Union (Wang, 2004, p. 7). In December of 1949, the first *National Education Conference* was held. The conference determined that education in new China would learn from the educational experience of the Soviet Union (Chinese Curriculum Research Institute, 2003, p. 2). From then on, schools all over China started movements of learning from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's educational experts were sent to China to provide help and advice, and a large amount of Soviet Union curriculum documents were translated into Chinese, such as teaching plans, syllabuses and textbooks. Just like other reforms, curriculum reform had very strong political overtones and placed heavy emphasis on ideological value formation during that specific period in China (Wang, 2004, p. 7).

With the deterioration of the relationship between the Soviet Union and China in 1958, criticism towards the Soviet Union swept across China, and the field of education was not an exception. The curriculum which had been influenced by the Soviet Union was totally repudiated for political reasons. An educational revolution started. Chinese education entered an important period of exploration of socialist educational theory, associated with the conditions in China.

Then the ten year Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) started. It brought huge devastation to Chinese education, and erased all the achievements of the previous 17 years (Wang, 2004, p.

12). The reform of curriculum entered a phase of confusion. This phase was characterised by criticism of teachers, old textbooks and curricula; and decentralisation of the authority of curriculum organization down to local government and schools, which could compile their own teaching plan, syllabus and textbooks. The main teaching content during the period was to learn from the instructions of the central government, *Mao Zedong's Quotation* (known as the little red book) and other Mao Zedong Works (Huang, 1999, p. 23). Social class conflict was the main topic of the curriculum. The only subjects left at that time were Chinese, Arithmetic and Labour. School teaching time could be taken over by political activities and productive labour at anytime, and science subjects almost disappeared (Wang, 2004, p. 13). All schools and universities were closed for at least two years from 1966 to 1968 because of the disruption caused by the students' participation in the Cultural Revolution (Wang, 1999, p. 336).

3.3.2.3 The Resurgence of Chinese Curriculum

At the end of 1976, the Culture Revolution finished. Entrance examinations for universities were restored in 1977 and the education system started to recover. Curriculum development started a resurgence during 1978 and 1989 (Zhang and Zhong, 2003, p. 263). All of the Chinese parents who had been interviewed in the process of this research had studied under this version of curriculum, when they were in primary school themselves.

At the National Educational Work Conference (1978), Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping outlined China's new educational policy, which was formulated to meet the needs of modernization, "We must fill out the courses in primary and secondary schools with advanced scientific knowledge" (Deng, 1994). He emphasised that the curriculum content must be upgraded and the examination system must be reinstated, and school discipline must be tightened, and emphasis placed on students' moral, intellectual and physical levels. Education in Chinese primary school in this period became more conventional and academically

oriented. (Wang, 1999, p. 338).

The *Instructional Plan for Full-time Students at Primary Schools and Junior Secondary Schools in Compulsory Education (Draft)* was drawn up in 1988. It dictated that the nine years compulsory education include two forms: six years primary school and three years junior secondary school or five years primary school and four years junior secondary school. It also listed the nine subjects at primary level: Moral Education, Chinese, Mathematics, Nature, Society, Physical Education, Music, Visual Art and Labour (Shi, 2000).

After the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government reclaimed the authority for the compilation of curriculum and textbooks and also founded the Textbooks Editorial Board. The content of the textbooks changed from political contexts in the Culture Revolution to the scientific knowledge, suited to the programme of modernization (Chinese Curriculum Research Institute, 2003). Deng Xiaoping said in 1977, “The key is textbooks. Textbooks should not only reflect the advanced level of modern scientific development, but also must fit into realistic Chinese situations” (Deng, 1994). According to Wang (2004), the reform of curriculum textbooks at the time was a milestone.

Firstly, the National Education Committee started to implement the “one guideline, many textbooks” reform plan in order to adapt to differing needs of localities and different level of economic and cultural development. Secondly, the first authoritative organization for the examination of textbooks was established—National Committee for the Examination of Textbooks in primary and secondary schools. This symbolized that the system of textbooks production changed from a government centralization system to a system of examination.

However, the aim of the curriculum tended to focus too much on knowledge and over emphasised individual subjects instead of integration. The content of curriculum was “difficult, complex, partial and old” and was not suited to the development of children’s interests (Cheng, 2002, p. 31). The implementation of the curriculum involved too much reciting and

mechanical training. All of these had the result that the children had strong basic knowledge and skills rather than innovation, problem-solving skills and self-learning abilities.

3.3.2.4 The Revitalization of Chinese Curriculum

In 2001, the Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China launched the *Elementary Education Curriculum Reform Guidelines*, which symbolized that Chinese Elementary Education Curriculum Reform had entered a new phase.

The term “*curriculum*” has been changed to the “*curriculum standard*” during this reform. According to the Guidelines, the main aim of the Chinese elementary Education Curriculum Reform in 2001 was that *education must be geared to modernization, the world and the future*” and emphasises that the general aim and the objectives should reflect the requirement of the times. The general aim of the Chinese new curriculum standard is:

To have students to have the spirit of patriotism, collectivism and the love for socialism, to inherit and carry forward the fine traditions and the revolutionary traditions of the Chinese nation; to have democracy and legal awareness and compliance with national laws and social morality; to gradually form a correct world outlook, of life and values; to have a sense of social responsibility and strive to serve the people; to have the initial spirit of innovation, practical ability, scientific and humanistic quality, and environmental awareness; to have the basic knowledge, skills and methods to adapt to life-long learning; to have a robust physique and good mental quality, and cultivate a healthy aesthetic taste and lifestyle, to become the new generation who has ideals, morals, culture and discipline.

– MEPRC (2001c)

The subjects in this curriculum reform also reflected considerable change. The lower grades (1st and 2nd years) of primary school subjects now include Moral and Life, Chinese, Mathematics, Physical Education, Arts Education (or Music and Visual Art), etc. The higher

grades (3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th year) of primary school subjects include Moral and Society, Chinese, Mathematics, Science, Foreign Language, Comprehensive Practice Activity, Physical Education and Arts Education (Music and Visual Art). The new subject, Comprehensive Practice Activity, is added as a required subject from the 3rd grade. Its content includes information technology education, research study, community service, social practice, labour and technology education. “It emphasises that through practice, students could improve their explorative and innovative consciousness, learn scientific research methods, develop the ability to apply the knowledge comprehensively, build close relationship between schools and society, and build student social responsibility.” (Zhong, 2001, p. 6).

The curriculum standard content combines nature, humanities and social science together and emphasises the relationship between textbook knowledge and society. The ideal being that students should not only learn the material, but also be able to use it to solve real problems in their daily life through having analytic abilities and problem solving skills.

Very different from the previous curriculum, this curriculum standard did not concentrate on the content of the textbooks, but on the aim and guiding ideology of the student’s knowledge and skills, methodology, emotional attitude and value (Cheng, 2002, p. 31). Chinese textbooks are based on the idea of the “one curriculum, many textbooks”. The State Textbooks Examination and Approval Committee has been established to ensure the quality of textbooks and other teaching materials in China. All textbooks for obligatory subjects taught in primary schools have to be examined and approved by the Committee before publication in terms of ideological content, suitability for children’s development at each level and adaptability to classroom instruction (Wang, 2004, p. 20).

Elementary education in China before put lots of emphasis on imparting knowledge. Because of the very high competition in the university entrance exam in China, pressure is applied when children are still in primary schools. The tasks of reciting text, huge amounts of exercises and frequent exams may cause children to lose interest in learning at a young

age. The function of the new primary school curriculum standard is to try to change the old tendency and draw much more attention to children's emotional development, the formation of the students' positive learning attitude, habits and values, and the mastery of learning methods, which are all much more important for primary school children than learning knowledge mechanically (MEPRC, 2001c). Compared to the previous curriculum reforms, the new curriculum standard function goes back to responding to children's developmental needs, increasing their interest in learning and shows new educational intent (Wang, 2004, p. 23).

For a long time, the children's learning style in China has been one of passively accepting knowledge from the teachers. The *Elementary Education Curriculum Standard Guideline* also points out that it should change the situation of students accepting knowledge passively, reciting, and doing training mechanically; teachers should advocate students' positive participation and love of exploration, and cultivate the abilities of gathering and processing information, knowledge acquisition, problem analysis and solving, communication and coordination (MEPRC, 2001c). To cultivate children's self-learning ability, children can participate in the setting of learning goals and evaluation criteria, and make their own study schedule, etc. Children are encouraged to develop a variety of learning strategies and students' inner motivation is also seen as a very important factor, as it develops children's positive emotion. During the procession of learning, students can self-regulate, and adjust their learning style from an acceptive learning approach to a research learning approach (Zhong, 2001, p. 260).

A good example of this would be the new curriculum subject, the Comprehensive Practice Activity, which aims to train students to self-learn, to be innovative and to develop practical abilities (MEPRC, 2001a). The structure of the Comprehensive Practice Activity class includes preparation, individual research, group coordination, presentation and evaluation. Firstly, according to the children's interests, the teacher sets a general topic. Then children pick out one area in which they are interested and can choose their own sub-topic. The topic

can be anything, such as pets, water, chess, the environment, photography, or learning about some computer software. Then the child makes a plan and sets goals and tasks for each period of time. Each project normally takes one or two school terms to finish. Secondly, the child starts to research by himself/herself. During this period, teachers give children tips about where to find research resources, how to gather and choose useful information, etc. The children are encouraged to have a project diary and do self-evaluation from time to time, such as, for instance, whether the research has actually progressed according to the steps of the original plan, what they had learned from their previous success or failure, and how they might improve their research methodology. Thirdly, the children form groups, share the information they have gathered, discuss the problems they have encountered and write their research report. This part is to train children in team work and coordination skills, in communication skills and in the ability to learn from each other. Lastly, children present their research results in front of the whole class, and both children and teachers evaluate the research result and the presentations (MEPRC, 2001a). This new course is also added to the post-primary school curriculum standard and its core content is research learning. This provides a great foundation for scientific research in universities in later stages.

However, the pressure of the Chinese entrance examination for universities is still on all the students, teachers and schools. It is still quite common for many students and teachers to value the traditional examination subjects, such as Mathematics and Chinese, much more than some of the new subjects, such as the Comprehensive Practice Activity (Wang, 2004, p. 29).

The curriculum reform also brought schools and teachers new challenges. The teachers need to be equipped with advanced pedagogical skills, a spirit of innovation and the ability to support practice. As every teacher only teaches one specific subject in Chinese primary schools, integrated lessons need the teachers to have knowledge of other subjects and to know how to relate knowledge from different subjects. The new subject Comprehensive Practice Activity requires that teachers have a good knowledge on information technology

education, research studies and community service. A great many of new teacher training courses aimed at primary and secondary schools have spread all over China. The teacher training colleges also adjusted and added some new courses to equip the teachers to meet the new challenge of educational reform in the 21st Century.

3.3.3 Comparison of Modern Irish and Chinese Curricula

As the two countries both have a long history and rich culture, there are many similarities but also many differences between Ireland and China, and this is reflected in their educational systems. From the perspective of curriculum reforms, if the Irish curriculum reform is evolutionary, then the Chinese curriculum reform is revolutionary. The Irish curriculum (1999) follows the child-centred educational ideology of the *Curaclam Na Bunscoile* (1971) and improved the previous curriculum in many different aspects. The Chinese curriculum standard (2001) altered the situation of putting too much emphasis on textbook knowledge, and started to put the children's need first to promote quality education. The following sections explore and compare the two curricula from different perspectives.

3.3.3.1 The Aims of the Two Curricula

In general terms, the current Irish and Chinese curricula share quite similar general aims and both aim to prepare students for the needs of the 21st Century. Both curricula try to cultivate the students' life-long learning ability and advanced thinking ability, such as the ability of analysis and problem-solving, which are also at the core of global educational development. They emphasise the children's life experience, while also pointing out that the child should develop as a social being, know how to co-operate with others, have an enhanced sense of social responsibility and be good citizens in society. They also both place emphasis on children's emotional attitudes and values development.

However, they have some differences as well. In the general aims of the Irish primary school curriculum, the child's lifelong development is placed first, and it stresses the child's individual potential. The Chinese curriculum standard puts the love of nation and socialism, and moral development in the primary position. It shows some socialist political overtones but the moral education is always the first thing the children should learn according to Chinese educational history, and this is influenced by Chinese culture and many thousands of years of tradition.

3.3.3.2 Subjects of Curricula

Generally speaking, most of the subjects of the two curricula are quite similar. As shown in the Table 3.3, the two curricula both have Language, Mathematics, Science, P.E., Drama, Music and Visual Art. There are, however, some differences in subjects. For example, the Irish curriculum contains Social, Personal and Health Education, Religion, History and Geography, and the Chinese curriculum standard has Moral and Life (or Moral and Society) and Comprehensive Practice Activity. However, although some subjects have very different names in the two countries' curricula, such as Social, Personal and Health Education, and Moral and Life (or Moral and Society), they can contain similar material to some degree. In the Chinese primary school, History and Geography are no longer listed as curriculum subjects, although they still can be integrated into teaching in other subjects (MEPRC, 2001c). As the educational scholar Cheng pointed out, compared to other countries in the world, the previous Chinese curriculum contained a high number of subjects which placed a heavy burden on children (Cheng, 2002, p. 168). The new curriculum standard reduces the number of subjects in the primary school and gives children more time to attend the integrated classes and activities. This is a significant step to promoting quality education.

Both of the curricula reflect the needs arising from rapid technological development in the 21st Century, especially information technology education. The new Chinese subject,

	Irish Primary School Curriculum	Chinese Primary School Curriculum
Similar subjects	Native Language(s) Mathematics Science Music Visual Art Drama Physical Education (PE)	
Different subjects	History Geography Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Religious Education	Foreign Language Comprehensive Practice Activity Moral Education

Table 3.3: Comparison of subjects in Irish and Chinese primary school curricula.

the Comprehensive Practice Activity, includes information technology education, research study, community service, social practice, and labour and skills education. The information technology education has been put in the first position. It is also been stressed in the Irish curriculum. The Irish NCCA developed the *Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Teachers*, and it was launched by the Department of Education and Skills in 2004 (NCCA, 2004). It is a cross curricular tool for planning and using ICT in curriculum and assessment.

3.3.3.3 Religious Education and Moral Education

One of the differences between the two curricula is how they develop children's spiritual and moral education. Ireland is a Catholic country and the Roman Catholic Church has had a great influence on education in Ireland for a long time. Since Ireland gained independence, the Church has played a major role in the running of Irish schools. When the state was founded in 1920s' the Catholic Church controlled a significant amount of educational

resources and the government of the day had neither the financial resources nor the political power necessary to challenge the Church's role. Further, there was significant pressure to re-establish Irish cultural identity after centuries of British rule, and the schools were perceived as an ideal place to foster Irish culture (Coolahan, 1981).

In the Irish curriculum, religious education is used as the vehicle to address the children's moral development, as well as the more obvious aspect of providing a means for children to learn about their religion and others within the school context. There is no Irish religious education curriculum set by the NCCA, but rather different church authorities, recognized by the Department of Education and Skills, set curricula (NCCA, 1999b). According to the Department of Education and Skills (as shown in Table 1.2), there were 89.65% of the primary schools in Ireland under Catholic patronage in the year 2010/2011.

China is a country with freedom of religious belief, and people can choose the religion they want to believe in. Religion, however, is not a part of the education system. So should schools teach religion? There has been a great deal of debate on this. Some religious educationalists (Elias, 1989) claim that religious faith is the best way to teach moral values; however, some prominent critics (Dawkins, 2006) have claimed that religious morality is outdated, dangerous and that children should not be put in a religious school before they can understand what religion is and make their own choice.

After the socialist government was established in 1949, people were educated to believe in Marxist scientific atheism and trust in modern science. In modern Chinese schools, moral education includes political and ideological education as well as topics more usually associated with moral education. The main task of moral education is to shape the students into citizens with love for the motherland, and to foster a social ethic, civilized behaviour and observation of laws (MEPRC, 2001d).

However, moral education in China has for a long time been politicized: children are taught

to love socialism, the mother nation, the Communist Party, collectivism, the school and other people, and not to mention personal needs (Wang, 2004, p. 29). Altruism, dedication and unconditional self-sacrifice have always been seen as the core of morality. Ye has pointed out, however, that “this kind of morality standard exhibits a lack of the basic respect to the reasonable individual benefit, therefore, it lacks a core of fairness, and can be difficult to carry out in modern society” (Ye, 2001, p. 74).

Facing these criticisms, after the education reform in 2001, the new moral curriculum standard put a greater emphasis on moral education and the establishment of the curriculum of practical life and humanity. The main curriculum for moral education in Chinese primary schools is Moral and Life (or Moral and Society). The aim of the Moral and Life Curriculum is “to cultivate children with good moral characters, good behavioural habits, and a love of life and exploration” (MEPRC, 2001b). When the children get to the higher grades, the aim of the moral education, Moral and Society, is “to promote students to form good moral characters and social development, to establish the foundation for students of knowing, participating and getting used to society, becoming a socialist citizen with love, responsibility, good behavioural habits and personality” (MEPRC, 2001b).

The essence of the moral education reform is to stress that children’s life experience is the root of moral education. The organization of the children’s curriculum standards should follow the children’s developmental need but not the adults’ logic, and it should be built on the children’s life experience. The moral curriculum standard also points out that the children are the main actors in their moral lives, and advocates that the best moral teaching is the combination of children’s self-construction and teachers’ directing (MEPRC, 2001b).

According to the curriculum standard of the Moral and Life and Moral and Society, the framework of the Chinese primary school moral curriculum standard content is based on the “three axes and four areas”. The three axes are Child and Self, Child and Society, and Child and Nature, which are all built on the child’s life. The four areas are to live safely and

healthily, live happily and positively, live with love and responsibility, and live creatively.

One of the Irish curriculum subjects, Social, Personal & Health Education, lists three strands: Myself, Myself and others, and Myself and the wider world, which is quite similar to the three axes in the Chinese moral education curriculum. The two subjects have some similarities, for example they both involve the children's health, personal and social development. However, the emphasis of Chinese moral education is to improve the children's moral development through the health, personal and social development elements. For instance, on the topic of Myself and Family for first and second classes, the Irish Social, Personal & Health Education curriculum stated that "The child should be enabled to identify and talk about those who live at home and recognise that homes and families can vary (personal names, sex, physical description, characteristics); recognise his/her role and place in the family unit and the contribution made by each member to the family; appreciate his/her own family and identify ways in which members of families can help, support and care for each other; and explore many of the things that are learned in families, both practical and otherwise" (NCCA, 1999c). The Chinese Moral and Life curriculum states the child should live with love and responsibility. The child should be enabled to love his/her parents, be polite to them, and try to help his/her parents to do housework; to like to help other people, especially older people and the people with special needs; the child should do things by him/herself within his/her own ability, and not have to depend on the parents (MEPRC, 2001b). A specific example is given below.

In the *Family's Love* in the Moral and Life textbook for the 6-7 years old children, it uses a few cartoon pictures to show some typical scenes which could happen in family life. For example, a mother is cooking for her child, the father looks after the child when s/he gets sick and the grandmother sends the child to school, etc. There is an exercise afterwards to let children discuss with each other where to find the love in each picture. It then shows a few more pictures from the other perspective, for instance, a father refuses to help his son with his work because he thinks his son can do it himself and a grandfather won't help

his grandson to lie to his father when the grandson broke a mug. There is another exercise for children to discuss whether this is love and why. The following lesson is about how to return the children's love to the families, such as in having good self-discipline, taking care of family members and helping the parents to do housework, like going to bed on time without been told to by the parents, doing a back massage for the grandparents, throwing out the bin bags, sweeping the floor, tidying the room and so on.

As can be seen in the preceding example, although the Social, Personal & Health Education and Moral and Life (or Moral and Society) have similar knowledge strands, they have different emphasis.

The paragraphs above briefly compared the general difference of moral education in the two countries. However, moral education is never a task just for schools, but needs the effort from everybody in the family and society. While it has been suggested that religion can improve people's morality, it is certainly not the only approach available.

3.3.3.4 Assessment

In Ireland, prior to the introduction of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971), the conclusion of primary school education was marked by a formal exam, known as the *Primary Certificate Examination* (1929 - 1967), however this form of formal assessment was removed by the introduction of the new curriculum. Despite the lack of formal examination, the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999) emphasises that assessment is an integral part of teaching and explains why it is so important to support children's learning (NCCA, 2005a). In Phase 1 of the *Primary Curriculum Review* (2005), teachers and parents gave feedback asking for more information about the assessment in primary schools. Afterwards, the document, *Assessment in Primary Schools (Draft)*, was launched in 2005. It describes the function of assessment in primary school as assessment of learning and assessment for learning, and

gives recommendations on developing a school policy on assessment (NCCA, 2005a). On the 28th of November 2007, *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum— Guidelines for Schools* was launched by the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, T.D. It took a closer look at the re-envisioning of assessment, classroom assessment methods, assessment for learning and assessment of learning, and school policy on assessment. The guideline lists the assessment methods as shown in the Figure 3.4, which clearly shows teachers the variety and grades of assessment for children.

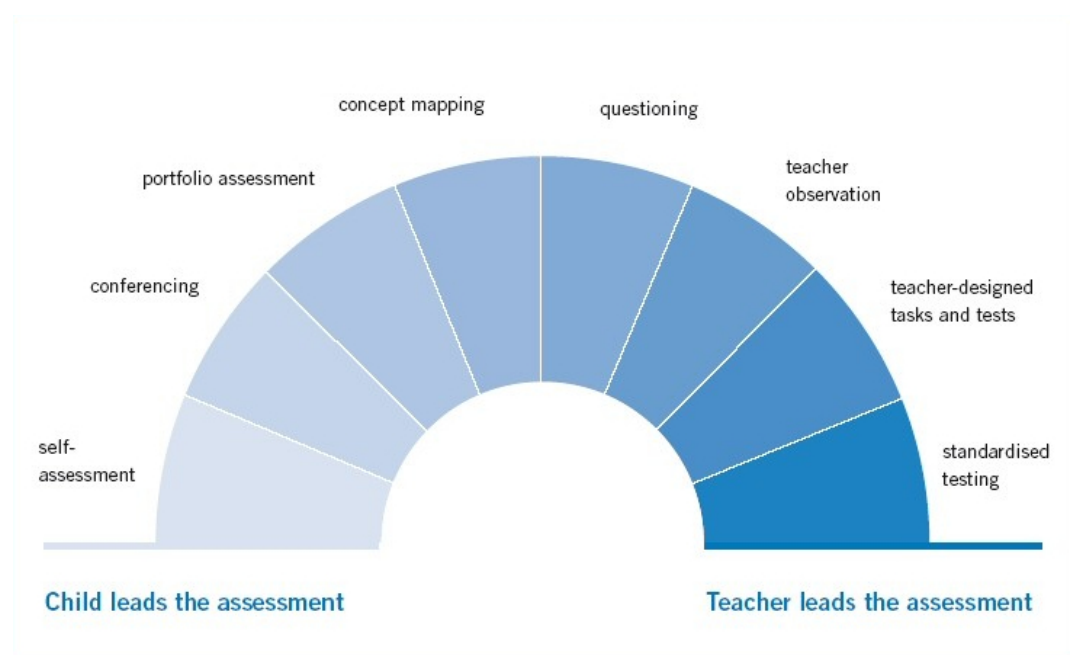


Figure 3.1: A continuum of assessment methods. Source: NCCA (2007, p. 13).

The Chinese primary school assessment used to have a lot of emphasis on questioning, teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, and standardised testing. Standardised testing, in particular, has played the main role in Chinese primary school assessment for decades. In the curriculum reform of 2001, it advocates the building of an assessment system which can improve children’s development from all dimensions. The Guideline suggests that assessment should not only concentrate on the student’s exam result, but needs to determine the children’s developing needs, to try to develop the children’s potential in all dimensions, to help students to know themselves and to build their confidence. The

Guideline stipulates that the primary school examination system should be reformed and perfected. For example, it suggests that students graduating from primary schools may go to the secondary school nearest their home without entrance examination. It also encourages the schools to organise their own graduation exams instead of having the traditional standard tests; emphasises that the exam content should build more connection to students' life experience and social reality; stresses the children's ability of problem analysis and problem solving in order to reduce the students' burden of examination; and stipulates that the teachers should give individual help according to different exam results of each student. One of the greatest steps of this curriculum assessment reform is that the Guideline stipulates that students' exam results are not allowed to be announced publicly and forbids ranking students by their exam results (MEPRC, 2001c).

3.3.3.5 Teaching and Learning Styles

In our globalizing world, more and more countries pay great attention to teaching and learning styles, and Ireland and China are not an exception. The Irish curriculum pointed out that education should answer the child's need, the child is the centre of education, and the teacher's role is as the instructor. The teachers should teach in an open and interactive manner, and the ways in which the students learn should be independent, explorative and co-operative (NCCA, 1999b). It is believed that high quality education enables children to realise their potential as individuals and to live their lives to the fullest capacity of development.

Compared with the previous curriculum *Curaclam Na Bunscoile* (1971), child-centred education is not a new concept for the Irish Curriculum (1999). However, Dr. John Coolahan, professor of education at NUI Maynooth, pointed out that one of the significant ways that the revised curriculum differs from *Curaclam Na Bunscoile* is that "Teachers, rather than department inspectors, have played the central role in its development" (Healy, 1999). The

Secretary of the Department of Education and Science, John Dennehy, confirmed that the curriculum drew heavily on the expertise of practicing teachers. All Irish teachers participated in a national programme of in-service training for the curriculum. The Primary Curriculum Support Program (PCSP) provides teachers with curriculum support.

One of the greatest improvements of the Chinese curriculum standard (2001) is the change of teaching and learning styles. The *Elementary Education Curriculum Standard Guideline* states that it should change the situation of students accepting knowledge passively, rote learning, and doing training mechanically; teachers should advocate students' positive participation, love of exploration and cultivate the abilities of gathering and processing information, knowledge acquisition, problem analysis and problem solving, communication and coordination (MEPRC, 2001c).

Before the curriculum reform (2001), the Chinese teaching method tended to be the knowledge-centred, curriculum-centred and teacher-centred, and tended to emphasise teachers' teaching instead of students' learning (Wang, 2004, p. 23). The structure of a typical Chinese class in primary school at the time was that the teacher taught the textbook according to the curriculum, listed the key knowledge on the blackboard, then the students took down the notes and did exercises afterward. The main teaching methods were lecturing, explanation and questioning. The children's main learning methods were centred on listening to the teacher and doing the exercises. Sometimes the students had to recite large amounts of text and do a lot of exercises in order to pass the exams. These kinds of teaching methods normally have a very high expectation of students' achievement, provide children with a great amount of knowledge, and give children a solid knowledge foundation. However, its disadvantages are easy to see as well. The atmosphere in the classroom is usually full of tension, students are normally pushed to learn and can easily lose the initiative and interest in learning (Cheng, 2002, p. 35).

The Chinese curriculum standard (2001) has tried to change the situation of placing too

much emphasis on teachers' knowledge inculcation, to cultivate student's active learning ability, and to enhance the connection between the curriculum content and modern society, technology development and students' daily life. A great amount of teacher training has been carried out to train educators to answer the children's need, to use variety of teaching methods, such as students discussion, group work, project work, using teaching materials which give children different sensorial stimulation, and so on (MEPRC, 2001c).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has briefly introduced the Irish and Chinese primary schools, their curricula and compared the two curricula in different aspects. Generally speaking, the Irish curriculum advocates child-centred education while the Chinese curriculum advocates quality of education. The two curricula both emphasise the importance of the children's interests, connection between the children's daily life and textbooks, love of exploration, ability of analysis, problem solving and life-long learning, and the responsibilities of being a social being. However, because of the influence of differing philosophical views, cultural backgrounds and national conditions, there are also lots of differences between the two curricula. The differences are manifested most profoundly in the differing approaches to moral education. There are merits to each approach, however in the future each educational system could learn lessons from the other.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In approaching any research problem it is first necessary to determine a suitable research methodology with which to address the questions the study seeks to answer. This is particularly important in social science where there exist a number of prominent research methodologies, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. While it is, of course, important to choose a methodology capable of answering the core research questions, it should also be borne in mind that the choice of research methodology also affects the nature of these answers and the conclusions that can be drawn. Interviews, for example, can provide very different insights than census data. This chapter focuses on research methodology and aims to explain the choice of a case study approach involving multiple participants as the basis for the current study.

In the area of social science, qualitative and quantitative research are the main families of research strategies. They are based on different philosophical foundations and have differ-

ent methodologies and research objectives. The debate over qualitative versus quantitative research has lasted for half a century, and increasingly moved towards questions of research practice such as the appropriateness of each approach. This chapter begins with a discussion of research paradigms, comparing positivism and interpretivism, followed by a discussion on quantitative and qualitative research, and an explanation of the motivation for choosing a case study approach to this research. It also examines the research design of the study from different aspects, such as sampling, data gathering, data analysis, ethical factors, reliability and validity of the research.

4.2 Philosophical Underpinning

In talking about the philosophical background of social science research, a few paradigms have to be mentioned. The concept of a “paradigm” was first introduced into the history and sociology of science by Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962. A paradigm is seen as a theoretical framework, “a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world” (Patton, 1978, p. 203). It is “a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 22).

Guba (1990, p. 20) explained that paradigms can be viewed through three philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. In starting from an ontological assumption, questions about “realism” need to be answered, for example, questions about the form and nature of reality, about how things really are and how things really work. From an epistemological stance, what these paradigms are looking for is “the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known”. In other words, how does the knower know the would-be known? Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that the answer to this question is constrained by the answer to the previous ontological question, as

it is important to know whether this relationship between the knower and would-be known really exist. From a methodology stance, the questions that need to be asked are through what kind of methods can the researcher go about finding out what ever s/he believes can be known? The answer to this question can also be constrained by the answers to the ontological and epistemological questions as differences between these two perspectives may cause different views of the methods (ibid., p. 108).

There are many theoretical paradigms in social science, such as positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, constructivism and so on. In the following sections, two main paradigms, positivism and interpretivism, will be discussed.

4.2.1 The Positivist Paradigm

Positivism is often called the scientific paradigm. It is “based on the rationalistic, empiricist philosophy that originated with Aristotle, Francis Bacon, John Locke, August Comte, and Emmanuel Kant” (Mertens, 2005, p. 8). It is based on the belief that there is a reality that exists quite apart from our own perception of it, which can be understood and follows general laws. It seeks to uncover the “true” nature of reality and how it “truly” works with the ultimate aim being to predict and control natural phenomena (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 22). This realist ontology of the positivist leads to an objectivist epistemology. The inquirer and the inquired object are assumed to be independent entities, and the inquirer can study the object without influencing it or being influenced by it (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The methodology of positivism tends to be experimental and manipulative. It is often described as “logical empiricism”, which is characterized by observation and measurement carried out in experimental contexts and in order to test hypotheses and increase control (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 23).

Quantitative research in social science is broadly associated with the positivist philosophy.

According to Bryman (1988), as positivism is based on a scientific approach to research, it uses highly structured research methodologies, such as social surveys, experiments, official statistics and “structured” observation.

Despite the fact that the positivist tradition has held a dominant position in science research for a long time, there has been a lot of challenges to and critiques of positivism in recent decades. Kuhn (1962, cited in Maykut and Morehouse 1994, p. 9) raised the point that the positivist paradigm can no longer answer the needs of all areas of research, “some new bits of information which have been verified by the methods of the science but which do not fit into the prevailing paradigms” (ibid., p. 9). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also explained the shift in research methods within the history of science with more detail in their book *Naturalistic Inquiry*. One of their strongest points is that positivism is deficient because it ignores the human respondents’ “humanness”, which has not only ethical but also validity implications (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 27).

4.2.2 The Interpretivist Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm grew out of the philosophy of phenomenology and hermeneutics that originated from Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). Interpretivism, the opposite to positivism, holds that social reality is significantly socially constructed. “The recognition that subjective meanings play a crucial role in social actions. It aims to reveal interpretations and meanings” (Walliman, 2006, p. 15). It rejects the primacy of scientific realism, claiming that “‘reality’ resides neither with an objective external world nor with the subjective mind of the knower, but within dynamic transactions between the two” (Barone, 1992, p. 31). Walliman (2006, p. 20) claimed that social science researchers are “inextricably bound into the human situation which s/he is studying” rather than just observing phenomena from outside the system, which is normally what natural science researchers do.

The qualitative research methods in social science have arisen from the interpretivism philosophy. These methods include participant observation, intensive interviewing, and focus groups that are designed to capture social life as participants experience it, rather than fitting it into categories predetermined by the researcher (Schutt, 2004, p. 15). Qualitative research data is treated mostly as written or spoken words, or observations which do not have a direct numerical interpretation (ibid., p. 15).

In order to present a clear comparison between positivist and interpretivist paradigms, a comparison originally produced by Cohen and Mannion (1994, p. 10-11) is shown in Table 4.1.

Dimensions of Comparisons	Positivist	Interpretivist
Philosophical basis	The world exists and is knowable as it really is. Organizations are real entities with a life of their own.	The world exists but different people construe it in very different ways. Organizations are invented social reality.
The role of social science	Discovering the universal laws of society and human conduct within it.	Discovering how different people interpret the world in which they live.
Methods of understanding	Identifying conditions or relationships which permit the collectivity to exist. Conceiving what these conditions and relationships are.	Interpretation of the subjective meanings which individuals place upon their action. Discovering the subjective rules for such action.
Methodology	Abstraction of reality, especially through mathematical models and quantitative analysis.	The representation of reality for purposes of comparison. Analysis of language and meaning.

Table 4.1: Comparison between positivist and interpretivist approaches. Source: Cohen and Mannion (1994, p. 10-11).

The next section will give a more detailed explanation of the methodology approaches of the positivist and interpretivist paradigms; quantitative and qualitative research; and how the researcher adopts these approaches for this study.

4.3 Quantitative and Qualitative Research

It is always very important for a researcher to choose the right methodological approach for any study. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches are rooted in different philosophical paradigms with different ontological and epistemological assumptions. Both qualitative and quantitative research represents a useful means of classifying different methods of social research. Although there is a lot of debate over the strengths and weaknesses of these two kinds of research, there are also a large number of publications addressing their relationship, combination and integration. In the researcher's view, social science is a very diverse area, and so needs to use a mixed quantitative and qualitative research methods (survey and interview) in order to gain further development. However, qualitative research methods are still the main strategy applied in this research.

Creswell (1994, p. 4) describes quantitative research as “the traditional, the positivist, the experimental, or the empiricist paradigm”. It is a “formal, objective, systematic process in which numerical data is used to obtain information about the world” (Burns and Grove, 2005, p. 23). In quantitative research, the methods used include surveys, experiments, and “structured” observation that records variation in social life in terms of categories that vary in amount.

However, there has been a great amount of criticism leveled against quantitative research from qualitative researchers. The first main criticism is the issue that we have mentioned in previous positivist paradigm section, that it ignores the effect of people interpreting the world around them, turning a blind eye to the difference between society and the natural world. Secondly, the quantitative measurement process is artificial and spurious. It is argued that the connection between the measures and the concepts is assumed rather than real. For example, when respondents complete a questionnaire which is about an indicator of a concept, to prevent the respondents from interpreting the terms differently, quantitative

researchers often give fixed answers. This merely provides the solution to the problem by simply ignoring it (Bryman, 2001, p. 78).

Many scholars believe that qualitative research methods can solve these problems in a better way. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2) explained qualitative research as follows,

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials case study, personal experience, introspective, life story interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts-that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives.

Creswell (1998, p. 15) defines it as:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Qualitative research methods are usually associated with the interpretive approach. It intends to understand people's feelings, thoughts, reactions and experience in authentic environments and take a holistic view of these experiences. The qualitative research data gathering techniques include interviews, observations, focus groups, videos, photographs, and document studies. These methods allow the researcher to capture the complexity of contexts of the experiences of those who live in them.

To know the procedure of the qualitative research is very important for a researcher. Bryman (2001, p. 269) has discussed six steps in qualitative research. Figure 4.1 provides a representation of how qualitative research progresses.

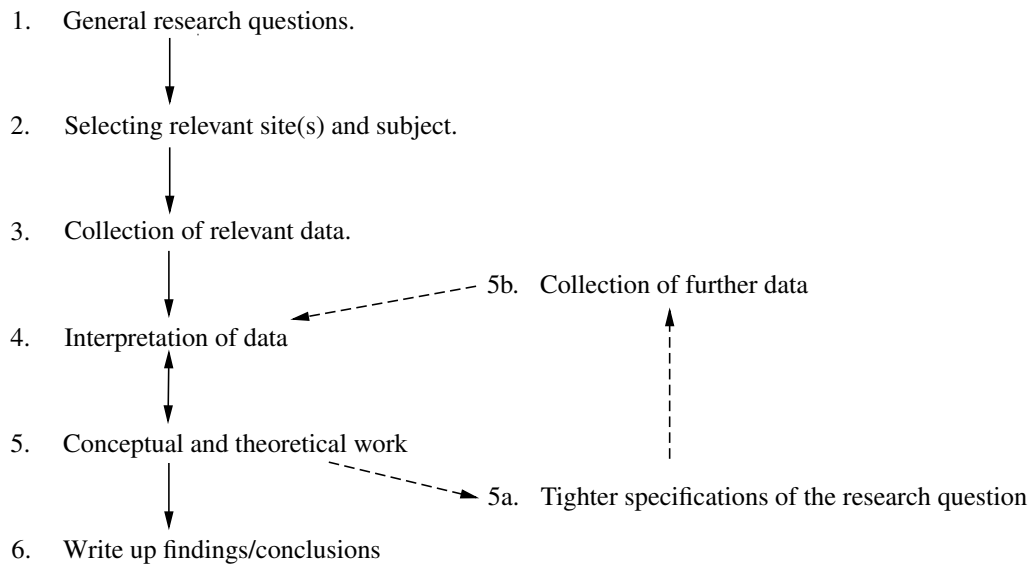


Figure 4.1: Progress of qualitative research. Source Bryman (2001, p. 269).

Step 1 – General research questions. Qualitative research starts with general research questions. The researcher needs to find a problem s/he is interested in first, and then form the research questions and set the objectives. For example, if a student is interest in inter-cultural studies, s/he can starts with a general topic, such as the *Education of Chinese Children in Irish Primary Schools*.

Step 2 – Selecting relevant site(s) and subjects. In this procedure, relevant research participants, such as some Chinese children and their parents for the previous example, should be identified.

Step 3 – Collection of relevant data. This requires the researcher to become involved in as many aspects of the research as possible, such as parental meetings and interviews.

Step 4 – Interpretation of data. It is very important to interpret data into useful information. This may include transcriptions and coding the interviews.

Step 5 – Conceptual and theoretical work. It is this step, coupled with the interpretation of

data that forms the study's findings. Step 5a. Tighter specification of the research questions, and step 5b. collection of further data. At this stage, the researcher should be clearer about what the research question is about, and try to narrow it down and try to collect further data to support the work.

Step 6 – Writing up findings/conclusions. In this step, the researcher writes up the main findings and the conclusions of the research.

Over the years, qualitative research has had to face a lot of criticism, particularly from exponents of quantitative research. Bryman (2001, p. 284) argued that qualitative research has been criticized as being too subjective and impressionistic. For example, qualitative research often begins in a relatively open-ended way and entails a gradual narrowing-down of research questions or problems. Secondly, quantitative researchers often argue that it is difficult to replicate a qualitative study. They emphasize that the responses of participants to qualitative researchers are likely to be affected by the characteristics of the researcher, such as personality, age, gender, etc. On the other hand, because of the unstructured nature of qualitative data, interpretation will be influenced by the subjective leanings of a researcher.

Comparing qualitative and quantitative research, which one is more appropriate in a social science setting? Several writers have explored the contrasts between these two research strategies. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) indicate that qualitative researchers emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shaped inquiry. "Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning". In contrast, quantitative studies stress the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Proponents of such studies claim that their work is done from within a value-free framework. Halfpenny (1979, p. 799, cited in Silverman 2000, p. 2) claims that qualitative research is soft, flexible, subjective, political, speculative, grounded and normally uses case studies.

Whereas quantitative research is hard, fixed, objective, value-free, abstract, and normally uses hypothesis testing and surveys to gain its objectives. As Becker (1986, p. 122) explained, both qualitative and quantitative researchers “think they know something about society worth telling and mean to communicate their ideas and findings”. However, “each work tradition is governed by its own set of genres; each has its own classics, its own set of forms of representation, interpretation, trust worthiness, and textual evaluation” (ibid., p. 134-135).

It is always difficult to say which research approach is better in social science. The researcher has to pick the appropriate strategy in a specific science setting. A Chinese past President Xiaoping Deng used to say that “it doesn’t matter whether it is a white cat or a black cat, the one who can catch the mouse is the best.” The same is true of research, no matter whether we use qualitative or quantitative methods, as long as it can facilitate investigators to reach their goal and is suitable for the research area, it is appropriate. “Knowing what you want to find out leads inexorably to the question of how you will get that information” (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 42, cited in Silverman 2000, p. 121). In this sense, the choice of methodology is important to each researcher, who should be clear about which methods are going to be used and how each method is used.

In the last few years, there have been quite a lot of publications addressing mixed methods research. As Creswell pointed out, mixed methods research is “a research design (or methodology) in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and mixes (integrates or connects) both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry” (cited in Johnson *et al.* 2007, p. 119).

In 1966, Webb *et al* first coined the term “triangulation” in mixed methods research. Triangulation is defined by Denzin (1978, p. 291) as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”. Patton (1990, p. 14) also pointed out that both quantitative and qualitative data can be collected in the same study. Bryman (1992, p. 59) claimed that

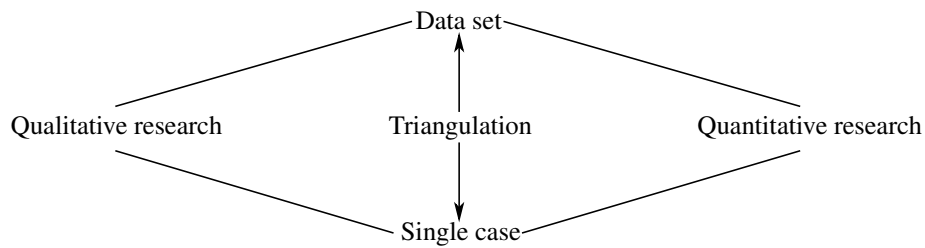


Figure 4.2: Levels of triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research. Source: Flick (2009, p. 27).

the logic of triangulation indicates that quantitative research can support and facilitate qualitative data, and vice versa; both strategies are combined in order to provide a more general picture of the issue. The integration of the two research approaches lead to maximizing the strengths of the quantitative and qualitative research and minimizing their weaknesses. Figure 4.2 shows levels of triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research.

Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative research can study the same single case, such as the same group of people, using both methodological approaches. In this case, data may be collected from questionnaires and interviews from the same participants. The data set results which is formed from both methods then can be compared and refer to each other in the analysis.

In mixed methods research, Creswell (1994, p. 177) introduced three models of combined designs: “two-phase design”, “dominant-less dominant design” and “mixed methodology design”.

Creswell (ibid., p. 177) explained that in a “two-phase design” study, the researcher would conduct a qualitative and a quantitative phase of the study separately. However, the connection between the two phases might not be obvious. In the second kind of model, the “dominant-less dominant design”, “the researcher presents the study within a single, dominant paradigm with one small component of the overall study drawn from the alternative paradigm” (ibid., p. 177). The advantage of this model is that the paradigm in this kind

of approach is consistent, and but can also harness the strength of the other paradigm. As suggested by Morse (1991, cited in Creswell 1994, p. 179), “a project must be theoretically driven by the qualitative methods incorporating a complementary quantitative component, or theoretically driven by the quantitative method, incorporating a complementary qualitative component”. The third kind of design is called “mixed-methodology design”. Researchers who are using this model would mix the qualitative and quantitative paradigm at all or many methodological steps in the study. This is the most complex approach among the three designs and represents the highest degree of mixing paradigms. However, it needs the researcher to have a great knowledge of both paradigms, and “conveys the linking of paradigms that may be unacceptable to some authors” (ibid., p. 178)

The research presented in the present text is conducted using the second model, the “dominant-less dominant design”. In this study, the dominant methodological approach is qualitative research, and quantitative research method is a complementary component. Qualitative research has a variety of forms. The case study approach is one such form and is chosen for this study. The next section will explore the rationale for using a case study approach.

4.4 The Case Study Approach

In qualitative inquiry, Creswell (2007, p. 10) pointed out that there are five approaches: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. The researcher has chosen the case study approach for this study. The reason for choosing this approach is because case studies appear to have the capacity to work within and to be suitable for the context. The flexibility of a case study approach helps the research questions to be answered.

Many scholars have tried to define case study. According to Yin (1984, p. 23), case study is

“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. Eisenhardt (1989, p. 534) describes the case study approach as “a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings.” Creswell (2007, p. 73) claims case study research is “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.” As a research strategy, a case study refers to the study of social phenomenon. It is a form of inquiry usually employed by those engaging in qualitative or interpretive inquiry. The context of research is normally stressed in case study, and it provides understanding for how ideas and principles work side by side and the capacity of the work within the complexities of real life situation.

According to Stake (1995), the procedures of a case study can be conducted as below:

- First, the inquirer needs to determine whether a case study is appropriate to the research problem.
- The researcher needs to identify their case(s), which may involve an individual, several individuals, a programme, and event, or an activity. The investigator needs to decide which type of case study is most promising and useful for the study.
- Data collection phase. In this phase, multiple source of information can be collected, such as observations, interviews, documents and audiovisual materials.
- Data analysis phase. The analysis of the data can be a “holistic analysis of the entire case or an embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case”.
- Final interpretive phase. In this phase, the researcher reports the meaning of the case.

In the words of Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher should give the “lesson learned” from the case in this section.

Case studies have been classified into various types by different scholars (see Yin, 1993; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1988). Yin (2003, p. 1) identifies three types of case study: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. The exploratory type of case study aims at defining the questions and hypotheses; the descriptive type of case study presents a description of a situation within its context; and the explanatory type of case study illustrates cause-effect relationships discovering order to extrapolate theory. Stake (1995, p. 3) gives a different three types of case studies: the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study. In a single instrumental case study, the inquirer focuses on one study issue and selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue. In a collective case study, the research also needs to select an issue first, but in this circumstance, multiple case studies are selected to illustrate the issue. In an intrinsic case study, the focus of the research is on the case itself, such as evaluating a programme or studying a student who has a certain learning difficulty. For the purpose of this study, the collective case study approach has been chosen. This kind of research design, Yin (2003, cited in Creswell 2007, p. 74) claims, “uses the logic of replication, in which the inquirer replicates the procedures for each case”.

The case study approach has a number of strengths which make it the ideal choice for answering the type of questions posed in this study. Berg (2004, p. 251) suggests that this form of inquiry “tends to focus on holistic description and explanation; and, as a general statement, any phenomenon can be studied by case study methods”. Yin (1984, p. 9) claims that for “how” and “why” questions the case study is preferable. It can answer ‘why’ and ‘how’ research questions rather than simply ‘what’, and therefore has the potential to evaluate or explain. The research questions of this study are concentrated on how well the Chinese children integrate into Irish primary schools, on how Irish schools facilitate their needs and on why some Chinese children don’t integrate well in Irish schools. As such,

the research questions are qualitative in nature and are well matched with the strengths of a case study approach.

Stake (1995) points out the knowledge learned from case study is more concrete, vivid and sensory than abstract. It is also more contextual. People's experiences are rooted in context, as is knowledge in case studies. The knowledge learned from case study is also more developed by reader interpretation. Readers bring to a case study their own experience and understanding, which lead to generalizations when new data is added to old data. Another advantage of case study is that it also has been identified as a methodological approach that can give a voice to the voiceless (Sjoberg *et al.*, 1991), which is especially valuable for doing research with ethnic minorities in a society. Given all the above characteristics of the case study approach, this methodology appeared best suited to accommodate the research needs of the study, and was thus adopted.

However, the limitations of case study should also be noted. One of the main critiques of case study is concern about its generalizability. One common criticism is that a study of a small number of cases cannot offer grounds for establishing reliability and generality of the findings. Silverman (1993) argued that generalization is not simply determined by the number of the subjects. Some scholars suggest that even increasing the sample size does not necessarily achieve a wider range of generalization (Kennedy, 1979). Hsieh (2010, p. 109) claimed the focus point should be the sampling section, "Does the non-random sampling make the outcomes of a case study less reliable?". Punch (1998) asserts that the necessity of generalizing case studies depends on the purposes and the rationale behind the case study. Stake (1995) argued for a "naturalistic" generalization, which is more intuitive and empirically grounded. The data generated by case studies would often resonate experientially with readers and help them gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Having concluded discussion of the various research paradigms of social science and exploring the reasons for choosing a case study approach for the study, the remainder of this

chapter will be concerned with a detailed description of the research design.

4.5 Research Design for the Study

4.5.1 Sampling

The focus of the research is on the integration of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools from the parents and educational professionals' point of view. In the first instance the researcher tried to achieve a detailed picture of the current situation through the use of questionnaires distributed to 120 Chinese parents. The emergent data from the parent questionnaires identified the key questions which were posed later in interviews with parents.

The number of participants is determined by the number of children attending the three Chinese language and culture schools involved in this study. While the children were mainly initially identified through the three Chinese schools, they are also members of school communities throughout Dublin. These ethnic Chinese children attend regular primary schools in Dublin and the surrounding areas and attend the three identified Chinese Language Schools in Dublin at the weekend. This research uses an emergent methodology. Thus, the children and their parents are initially identified and chosen mainly from within these language schools. There were two Chinese parents were chosen outside these schools as they represent a certain group of the population in the Chinese community. The Chinese children' progress at mainstream schools is then examined through the views of principals and teachers within the Irish primary school sector. The Irish primary schools were chosen mainly from the schools attended by the Chinese children. The criteria used to choose the schools were sociol-economic status (middle-class schools and disadvantaged schools), gender (Boys, girls and mixed gender schools), patron body (Catholic patronage and multi-denominational schools), and the class the children are attending (senior infants

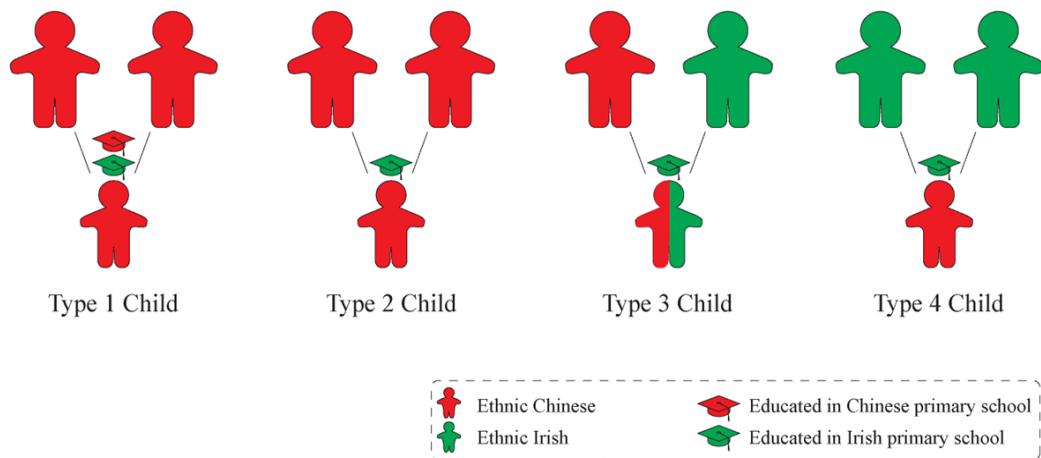


Figure 4.3: The four types of ethnic Chinese children in the research.

class, 1st class, 2nd class, 3rd class and 6th class). Six Irish primary schools were identified, these schools include a Catholic national mixed-gender primary school, a Catholic national girls' primary school, a Catholic national boys' primary school and three Educate Together schools. In these schools, interviews were conducted with six principals and four class teachers and two language support teachers.

Twelve interviews with parents, mainly from within Chinese schools population, were conducted. Parents were chosen throughout Dublin and from different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. An effort was made to achieve a gender balance among the parents. However, most of the parents who come to schools to pick up their children are mothers rather than fathers. Therefore, there are eight mothers and two fathers' interviews in this study. Their children number 13 boys and 11 girls (some parents have more than one child).

There are four distinct groups of children in this research, who are referred to collectively in the present text as ethnic Chinese children (see Figure 4.3).

The first type is those for whom both of the parents are Chinese, the children are Chinese and moved from China after the age of six, and have had experience of both Chinese and

Irish primary schools. The second type is where both of the parents are Chinese, but the children were born in Ireland or moved to Ireland when they were under six years old, and they only have experience of Irish primary schools. The third type is where one of the parents is Chinese, the other parent is Irish, with the children born in Ireland. Finally, the fourth type is where both of the parents are Irish, and their children were adopted from China. There are other types of ethnic Chinese children in Ireland, such as a child of Chinese and French parents, but this study will only concentrate on these four main types. Two to four parents were chosen from each of the typologies and interviews were conducted with them. Emphasis is put on the Type 1 and Type 2 children. Accordingly, more participants from these typologies were selected for interview. Table 4.2 gives details of the parents who participated in the interviews in this research.

Besides parents and Irish school principals, the researcher also conducted interviews with the three principals from the three Chinese schools and one interview with an educational expert from an Irish institute for Chinese studies. The details of the educational professionals who were interviewed during the course of the research are given in Table 4.3.

To ensure the data is collected from all the aspects, the researcher also did four children's interviews. The details of these children are summarised in Table 4.4.

4.5.2 Data Gathering

4.5.2.1 Survey

In a survey, “design provides a quantitative or numeric description of some fraction of the population—the sample—through the data collection process of asking questions of peo-

Role	Gender	Ethnicity	Circumstance of the Child (or children)	Ref No.
Parent	F	Chinese	Born in China. 2 years school experience in China.	Parent 1
Parent	F	Chinese	Born in China. 5 years school experience in China.	Parent 2
Parent	M	Chinese	Born in China. 3 years school experience in China.	Parent 3
Parent	F	Chinese	Born in China. 2 years school experience in China.	Parent 4
Parent	F	Chinese	Born in China. Only has school experience in Ireland.	Parent 5
Parent	F	Chinese	Born in Ireland. Only has school experience in Ireland.	Parent 6
Parent	F	Chinese	Born in Ireland. Only has school experience in Ireland.	Parent 7
Parent	M	Chinese	Born in Ireland. Only has school experience in Ireland.	Parent 8
Parent	F	Chinese	Born in Ireland. Only has school experience in Ireland.	Parent 9
Parent	M	Irish	Born in China. Only has school experience in Ireland.	Parent 10
Parent	F	Irish	Born in China. Adopted and brought to Ireland at a very young age. Only have school experience in Ireland.	Parent 11
Parent	F	Irish	Born in China. Adopted and brought to Ireland at a very young age. Only has school experience in Ireland.	Parent 12

Table 4.2: Parent participants in the interviews in the research.

Role	Gender	Ethnicity	Circumstance of the school	Ref No.
Principal	M	Irish	Catholic National School	Irish Principal 1
Principal	F	Irish	Catholic National Girls' School	Irish Principal 2
Principal	M	Irish	Catholic National Boys' School	Irish Principal 3
Principal	F	Irish	Educate Together School	Irish Principal 4
Principal	F	Irish	Educate Together School	Irish Principal 5
Principal	F	Irish	Educate Together School	Irish Principal 6
Language Support Teacher	F	Irish	Catholic National School	Language Support Teacher 1
Class Teacher	F	Irish	Catholic National Girls' School	Teacher 2
Class Teacher	M	Irish	Catholic National Boys' School	Teacher 3
Class Teacher	F	Irish	Educate Together School	Teacher 4
Language Support Teacher	F	Irish	Educate Together School	Language Support Teacher 5
Class Teacher	F	Irish	Educate Together School	Teacher 6
Principal	F	Chinese	Chinese Language and Cultural School	Chinese Principal 1
Principal	F	Chinese	Chinese Language School	Chinese Principal 2
Principal	M	Chinese	Chinese Language School	Chinese Principal 3
University Senior Lecturer	F	Chinese	Irish Institute for Chinese Studies	Educational Scholar

Table 4.3: Participating educational professionals in the interviews in the research.

Role	Gender	Ethnicity	Circumstance of the school	Ref No.
Student	M	Chinese	Catholic National Boy's School	Child 1
Student	F	Chinese	Catholic National Girls' School	Child 2
Sudent	F	Chinese	Catholic National School	Child 3
Student	M	Chinese	Catholic National School	Child 4

Table 4.4: Child participants in the interviews in the research.

ple” (Fowler, 1988). Babbie (1990) claimed that the purpose of using a survey is to generalize from a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristic, attitude, or behavior of this population. The reason that a survey is rational for this study is that it helps the researcher to gain a general picture of the schooling of Chinese children in Irish schools from their parents’ point of view. The themes that emerged from the questionnaires also helped the researcher to identify the main themes for later interviews.

The research started from the three Chinese language and culture schools in Dublin, which the researcher had identified. In the first instance, a questionnaire (See Appendix D) was designed, piloted, revised and sent to the parents of 120 Chinese children in the three Chinese schools. The researcher contacted the three principals of the Chinese language and culture schools in the first instance. Then the researcher was introduced to the class teacher of each class of these schools. With awareness of how important these teachers’ “gate-keeper” role is with relation to the success of the questionnaire, the researcher emphasised the importance of these questionnaires to the teachers. In the presence of the researcher, the teachers then stressed the importance of these parents’ questionnaires and the expectation to get them back the following week to the students in the class. However, only 8 questionnaires out of 120 were brought back the following week. The researcher then went to these three schools every weekend half an hour before the schools finished in the following month, so that the researcher could ask some parents one by one to fill in the questionnaires while they were waiting to collect their children. The number was brought to 27 after a month. This reflects a trend observed previously in the United Kingdom, where many researchers (O’Neill, 1972; Cheung, 1975; Tsow, 1984; Taylor, 1987) have indicated that gaining access to the Chinese community is one of the major difficulties in their research. Even when access is gained, many Chinese people are not willing to reveal their problems (Wong, 1992, p. 6).

Afterwards all of the data collected from the questionnaires was coded and entered in to Microsoft Excel. Excel was used because it could be used to process small data sets simply

and quickly (Black, 2002, p. 252). Based on an analysis of the responses to the questionnaires and an identification of the key emergent themes, the researcher followed up with a number of interviews with parents, children, Chinese and Irish school principals, class teachers and language support teachers.

4.5.2.2 Interviews

The key research instrument used during the research was semi-structured interviewing. There are a few reasons for this. Patton (1990, p. 278) points out that “the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on a person’s mind, to access the perspective of the person being interviewed ... to find out from them things that we cannot directly observe”. Semi-structure interviews may provide rich insights into people’s experiences, opinions, values, attitudes and feelings (Bleach, 2010, p. 89).

“Qualitative interviewing is a way of uncovering and exploring the meanings that underpin people’s lives, routines, behaviours, feelings, etc.” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, cited in Arksey and Knight 1999, p. 32). Brenner *et al.* (1985, p. 3) claims that interviews focus on the interviewers’ understandings rather than checking the accuracy of their account, which is the case with questionnaires. “It allows both parties to explore the meaning of the questions and the answers involved, which is not so central, and not so often present, in other research procedures” (*ibid.*, p. 3). Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 32) suggest that qualitative interviews allow for understanding and meanings to be explored in depth. It examines the context of thought, feeling and action and can be a way of exploring relationships between different aspects of a situation.

Thus it was assumed that interviews would generate a greater depth of understanding of the issues faced by Chinese children in Irish Primary schools. Initial analysis of returned questionnaires facilitated the design of a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews

were carried out with reference to the topics outlined in the questionnaire. Open-ended questions were used to ensure that responses were grounded and emerged from the participants' perspectives. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. In addition to the identification of parents who were willing to be interviewed, the interview schedule also included principals of a number of schools where Chinese children were part of the school population and the principals of Chinese schools in Ireland who could give an insight into the cultural needs of both Chinese children and their parents. Finally class teachers and language support teachers were interviewed, with a view to eliciting the response of the Irish State to the needs of migrant students, specifically in this instance, Chinese children. In total, interviews with ten parents, six school principals, six class teachers and three children were conducted.

The interviews with the school principals seemed much more difficult to arrange. Fifteen primary schools had been contacted, but only six school principals agreed to do interviews with the researcher. The six schools include three Catholic schools and three Educate Together schools. It is interesting to note the readiness of the Educate Together Schools to cooperate with the research as these schools are committed to a system of education "where children learn together to live together".

4.5.3 Data Analysis

Once the information has been collected, it needs to be transformed into "data". The following paragraphs will explain the data analyses of the survey and the interviews.

4.5.3.1 Survey Analysis

For the analysis of survey data, the researcher is normally concerned with the use of techniques for quantitative data analysis to reduce the amount of data collected, to test for relationships between variables, to develop ways of presenting the results of analysis to others, and so on. During this procedure, we must interpret the results of the analysis, and the “findings” will emerge (Bryman, 2001).

Questionnaires about schooling of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools were sent to 120 Chinese children’s parents in the three Chinese schools and 27 responses were received. In the main, these parents are ethnic Chinese, though some Irish parents who have ethnic Chinese children (e.g. adopted Chinese children) also filled in the questionnaires. As mentioned earlier, these parents are from different parts of Dublin and from different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. An effort was also made to achieve a gender balance among the parents. A total of 15 mothers and 12 fathers completed the questionnaires.

4.5.3.2 Interview Analysis

Analysing data is the heart of case study and it is also the most difficult part of the research (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 539). Creswell (2007, p. 148) claims data analysis in qualitative research involves preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and finally representing the data in discussion or other forms, such as figures or tables. Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p. 145) also emphasise that the aim of data analysis is to reduce large amounts of information into understandable patterns and themes and get the essence of the material. It involves “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others”. Hatch

(2002, p. 148) sees qualitative research data analysis as a “systematic search for meaning”. The procedure of data analysis can be described as “organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding”.

Creswell (2007, p. 149) compared three authors that have different perspectives on data analysis strategies (see Table 4.5). In these strategies, Madison (2005) takes a perspective from critical ethnography, Huberman and Miles (1994) use a systematic approach to data analysis, and Wolcott (1994) adopts a more traditional approach to research from case study analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 149).

All these authors emphasize the importance of reducing the information to meaningful “code”, then combining these codes into categories or themes, and displaying and comparing the data in graphs, tables and charts (ibid., p. 148).

Punch (2005, p. 199) explains that “codes are tags, names or labels, and coding is therefore the process of putting tags, names or labels against pieces of the data. The pieces may be individual words, or small or large chunks of the data”. So the function of coding is to index the data, to help the researcher to organize the data in different categories, and to provide a good foundation for data interpretation.

During data analysis process, data is continuously gathered, coded, interpreted, recoded and reinterpreted. Creswell (2007, p. 151) claimed that data analysis is a spiral (see Figure 4.4) and its procedure moves in analytic circles, rather than a fixed linear approach.

From the Figure 4.4, it can be seen that the procedure of data analysis has a few steps:

Analytic Strategy	Madison (2005)	Huberman & Miles (1994)	Wolcott (1994)
Sketching ideas		Write margin notes in field notes	Highlight certain information in description
Taking notes		Write reflective passages in notes	
Summarizing field notes		Draft a summary sheet from field notes	
Working with words		Make metaphors	
Identifying codes	Do abstract coding or concrete coding	Write codes, memos	Identify patterned regularities
Reducing codes to themes	Identify salient themes or patterns	Note patterns and themes	
Counting frequency of codes		Count frequency of codes	
Relating categories		Factor, note relations among variables, build a logical chain of evidence	Contextualize in framework from literature
Relating categories to analytic framework in literature			
Creating a point of view	For scenes, audience, readers		
Displaying the data	Create a graph or picture of the framework.	Make contrasts and comparisons	Display findings in tables, charts, diagrams, and figures; compare cases; compare with a standard.

Table 4.5: Analytical strategies by author. Source: Creswell (2007, p. 149).

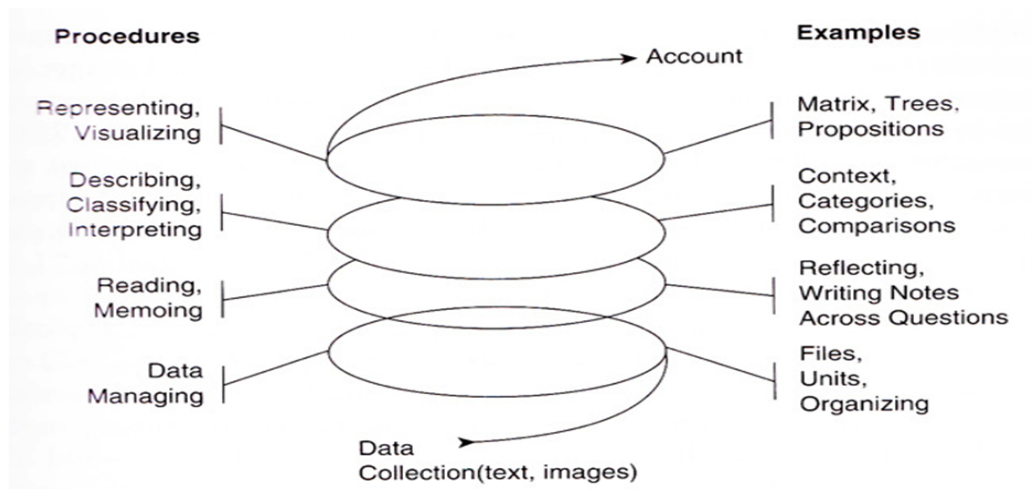


Figure 4.4: The data analysis spiral. Source: Creswell (2007, p. 151).

it starts from data collection loop (e.g. text, images) from the bottom, then moves to the data managing loop (e.g. files, units), followed by the reading and memoing loop (e.g. reflecting, writing notes and across questions), the describing, classifying and interpreting loop (e.g. context, categories, and comparisons), and the representing and visualizing loop (e.g. matrix, trees and propositions). All these steps are interconnected and move spirally to the top continuously.

The data analysis format used in this study is adopted from this data analysis spiral. The following paragraphs explain the phases of data analysis.

Stage 1. Interviews were conducted with parents, school principal, teachers and children. All the interviews were audio-taped.

Stage 2. Each interview was transcribed and translated (as more than half of interviews were done in Chinese language). In this procedure, notes were also marked in the margins of the transcription.

Stage 3. Reading the transcribed interviews, identifying words and phrases which were

related to the research questions and themes that emerged from the questionnaire.

Stage 4. Creating a matrix and grouping the identified words and phrases into sub-categories.

Stage 5. Reading the matrices and then grouping these sub-categories into broader categories.

An example is presented is presented in Table 4.6 to illustrate how the coding took place. The full text of Parent 1 Matrix is in the Appendix F.

Stage 6. Re-read these sub-categories and categories and make notes to relate them to the literature.

4.5.4 Ethical Factors

In qualitative research, the researcher always faces many ethical issues during data collection, analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports. Lipson (1994) claims that ethical issues include informed consent procedures, deception or covert activities, confidentiality toward participants and sponsors, benefits of research to participants over risks, and participant request that go beyond social norms.

Approval had been given to carry out this research by Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Schools were always the first place of call as a contact point to establish contact and respect. Approval was sought in both regular and extracurricular schools. Requirements of the research included involvement in questionnaires, interviews, and audio-taping of the interviews. Legal process was observed at all times to guarantee safety and protection of

Phrase/Word/Term	Page	Sub-Category	Category
Irish education emphasises literature a great deal . This might be because there were many famous writers in Irish history, so great emphasis is put on language and literature. For example, their school has a small library with more than 1000 books. Every student is required to borrow a book every week . The school also sent a letter to all the parents to let parents encourage their children to read more , and try to buy books for their children and borrow books from the library. The school also suggested the parents can read the books with their children , afterwards the parents can ask some questions to the children. The children can talk about their own opinion, and are encouraged to write a book review . What is this book written about? Who is your favorite character? What did you learn from this book? So they need to write a book review every time they finish a book.	3	English Reading	Language Curriculum
I'm actually one of their volunteers who work in their library. We take turns. I help them once or twice a month . The children can borrow books from Monday to Thursday. There would be two or three parents there every day to help to lend and get back the books, and classify the books, etc. I think this is really very good .	3,4	Volunteer work	Parental involvement
However, their mathematics seems not that good . I remember the government emphasis to improve their mathematics education last year. Their mathematics, well, compare to the mathematics in Chinese primary school, it is much easier . For example, same in 3rd year, the Chinese mathematics textbook already covered the two digits multiplication and three digits division. The divisor can be three digits number too. They also learned indivisible division. Anyway, it is much higher level than the one in Irish schools. They only learned one digit multiplication, three digits addition and three digits subtraction. The mathematics level in Chinese primary school is much higher. It is too easy here .	4,5	Mathematics	Curriculum

Table 4.6: An example of matrix for T1 Parent 1.

the children, e.g. Meetings took place in an accessible public space instead of taking place at the researcher's or participant's home. In the interview of any child, there was always another adult present.

Before the participants agreed to participate, the researcher explained to them that the aim of the investigation was to ease Chinese children's integration into Irish schools. They were informed that the research may benefit Chinese children, their parents, the teachers and the schools in a variety of ways: for example, in helping to build more bridges between the parents and the schools; to involve the parents more and improve the communications between the two groups; to give children more support in varieties of ways, such as cultural and language support, etc. through the dissemination of research findings to the Chinese community.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, their involvement was catalogued numerically. All personal and school names were omitted. Participants were asked to consider this carefully prior to committing to their involvement in the project. If participants agreed at the outset to participate they could withdraw from the project at any time and this was made clear to them throughout the research process. It was made clear that there was no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research study had been completed. For parental interviews, the researcher ensured they had written consent from the parent involved, while for child interviews both written assent from the child and written consent from the parent was required (Please see Appendix C). At all times the researcher ensured that the child was not coerced, was free to withdraw from the process and that the interviews were conducted in a neutral setting (the Chinese school). A plain statement of the study and the consent form were also translated into Chinese language, so that the Chinese participants could fully understand what they were agreeing to (Please see Appendix A and Appendix B).

4.5.5 Reliability and Validity of Study

Hammersley (1990, p. 57) explains that “validity” means truth, “interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers”. He also claims that “reliability” “refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Hammersley, 1992, p. 67). Therefore, it is very important to ensure the reliability and validity of the study by using different research methods to ensure that the data recording, transcription and interpretations are empirical and logical.

Many scholars (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990) have stressed the importance of a triangulation strategy to increase the level of validity and reliability. Patton (1990, p. 464) points out that there are four kinds of triangulation: methods triangulation (reconciling qualitative and quantitative data), triangulation of qualitative data source, triangulation through multiple analysts and theory triangulation.

The first type of triangulation, methods triangulation, often involves comparing data collected through qualitative methods and data collected through quantitative methods (*ibid.*, p. 464). This is also the triangulation strategy that was applied to this research. During the research, data was collected through survey and interview. The comparison of the result from the two kinds of research methods hence strengthens the reliability and validity.

The reliability of the research is also enhanced by field notes that were made during interviews by the researcher. The translation of the Chinese transcripts was carefully thought and written to reduce the bias. The researcher has consulted colleagues with expertise in translation about some issues to make sure the translation is accurate.

In the data analysis process, to help ensure the reliability of the coding scheme, it was

discussed and approved by a second party, in this case, the researcher's supervisor.

4.6 Conclusion

Having considered a variety of potential approaches, this chapter has compared the positivism and interpretivism paradigms, discussed the quantitative and qualitative methodologies, explored the case study approach, and explained why these approaches were selected. The latter part of the chapter described the research design, how the data was collected and analysed, and examined issues of the ethics, reliability and validity of the study. The following chapter will focus on the findings of this research.

Chapter 5

Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which emerged from the data around the core categories of Chinese children's integration into Irish primary schools. The data from surveys and interviews are presented separately in two sections, to clarify the findings for the reader and to avoid any ambiguity.

5.2 Findings of the Survey

A questionnaire, as described in the previous Chapter was designed, piloted, revised and sent to the parents of 120 Chinese children in the three Chinese schools and 27 responses were received. These schools are located in Dublin with the key focus of transmitting Chinese language and culture to Chinese children in Ireland. The return rate was 22.5%. The low response rate may have been influenced by two factors. The first is the limited

willingness of the parents to spend time filling out the questionnaires. The second factor was that immediately prior to the commencement of this work, other research was carried out by a different researcher involving some of the same families, which led to an amount of confusion among the parents as to whether they had returned questionnaires or not, and may have exhausted the goodwill of the parents to participate in such studies.

After the survey data was collected, it was inputted into the software package Excel and analysed. Of these 27 respondents, there were 15 female and 12 male parents.

According to the survey results, the children's ages ranged from 5 to 12 years old, and were gender balanced, including 14 girls and 13 boys. These children include all four types of ethnic Chinese children that had been identified earlier. Type 1 is those for whom both of the parents are ethnic Chinese, and where the children had experience in Chinese schools before they came to Ireland; Type 2 is where both of the parents are Chinese, but the children only have experience in Irish primary schools; Type 3 is where one of the parents is Chinese and the other parent is Irish; Type 4 is where both of the parents are Irish, and their children were adopted from China. However, these four types of Chinese children were not represented in equal numbers in the survey. The largest population was of Type 2 and the least represented was Type 1. However, the researcher has found that the proportions of population of each type of children in all the Chinese schools is similar to the proportions represented in the survey. Of the 27 respondents to the survey, one was a parent of a Type 1 child, seventeen were parents of Type 2 children, seven were parents of Type 3 children and two were parents of Type 4 children (see Figure 5.1).

Among these Chinese children, 79% of them are in Catholic schools, 7% of them are in Educate Together schools, 7% of the children are in Ghaeilge (Irish) schools under the patronage of Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán- Ghaeilge Teo (Patronage Institute of Irish Medium Schools Ltd.), and 7% of them are in schools under the patron of Church of Ireland. It is interesting to note that all the ethnic Chinese children who are in Ghaeilge

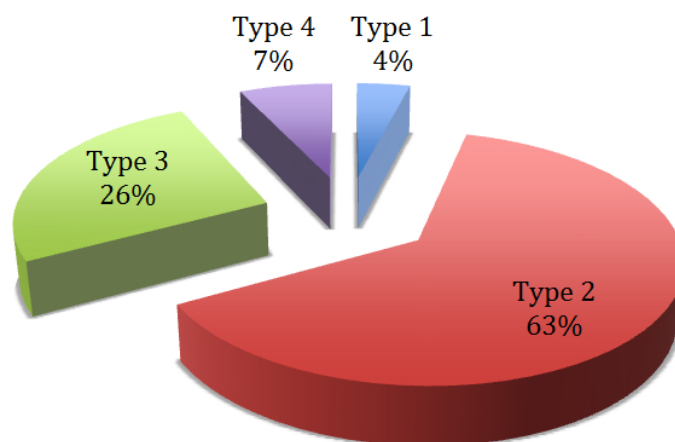


Figure 5.1: The proportion of different types of ethnic Chinese children in the survey.

(Irish) schools in this survey are the children who were adopted by Irish parents. It could be deduced from this that these Irish parents do not only encourage their adopted children to learn Chinese, but also try to build an Irish identity for their children. Figure 5.2 shows the distribution of ethnic Chinese children in schools under different patron bodies.

Among the 27 parent participants, 60% thought that both English and Chinese were the most important language for their children, 33% of parents thought that English was the most important language and 7% of them thought Chinese was the most important language. As 81% of these ethnic Chinese children were born in Ireland, and some of the children's parents are Irish, most of the children's fluency in English was quite high. As shown in Figure 5.3, among the participants, nearly half (44%) of the parents think their children's level of English is excellent. However, the parents didn't feel that optimistic about their children's Chinese level, with only 4% of parents rating their children's Chinese level as excellent. No parents thought that their children have no English and only 7% of parents thought that their children's English level was poor. Conversely, 26% of parents thought that their children's Chinese level was poor and 7% of parents claimed that their children have no Chinese. From these responses depicted in Figure 5.3, it can be seen that for the

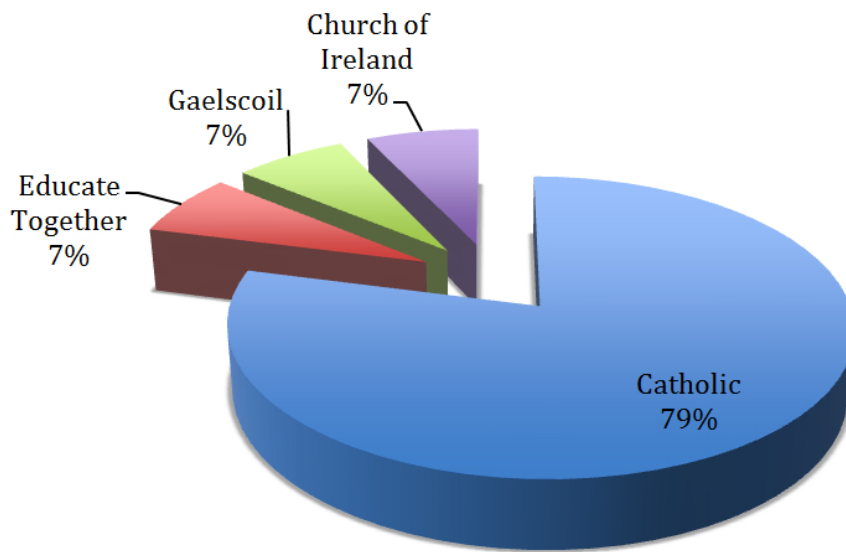


Figure 5.2: Distribution of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools under different patron bodies in the survey.

children in these Chinese language schools, their English language level was much higher than their Chinese language level.

Within the four types of children, 37% of them receive extra help with English in school, such as contact with language support teachers, 56% of them don't receive extra help with English, and 7% of parents don't know whether their children receive extra language help in the school or not. From Figure 5.4, it can also be seen that the main population of children who have extra English help are of Type 1 and Type 2. All Type 3 and Type 4 students receive no extra English support at school as at least one of their parents is Irish, which would help the child to attain a certain level of English. The 7% of parents who don't know whether their children have extra language help or not in their schools are all ethnic Chinese. This fact may reflect the level of communication between these parents and the schools.

With the question of the greatest challenge the child encounters at the Irish school (parents

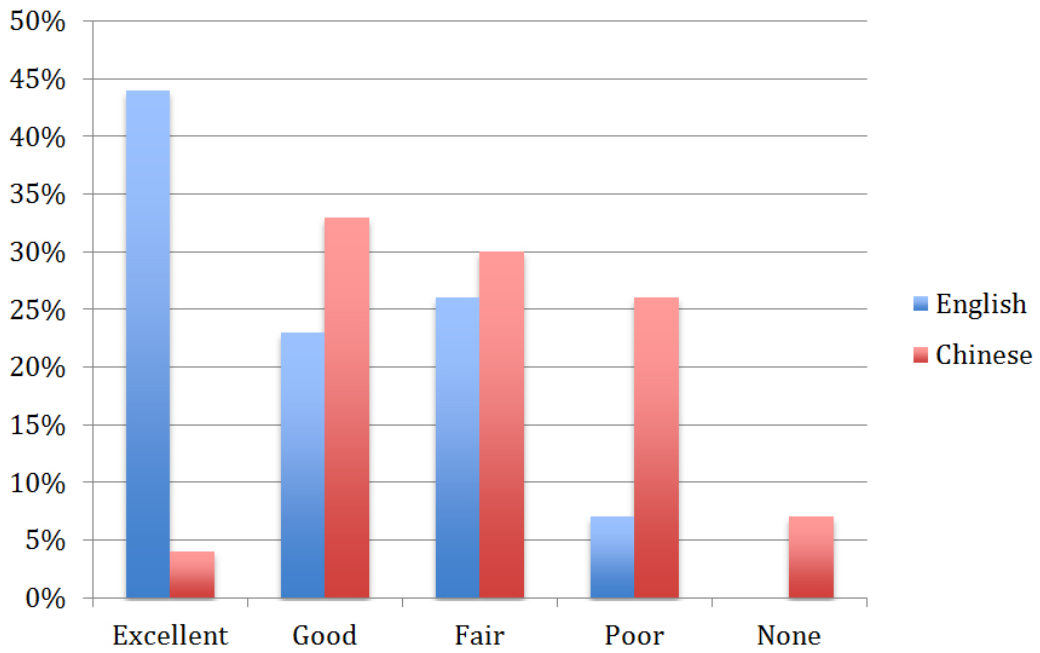


Figure 5.3: Ethnic Chinese children's English and Chinese fluency from parents' perspective.

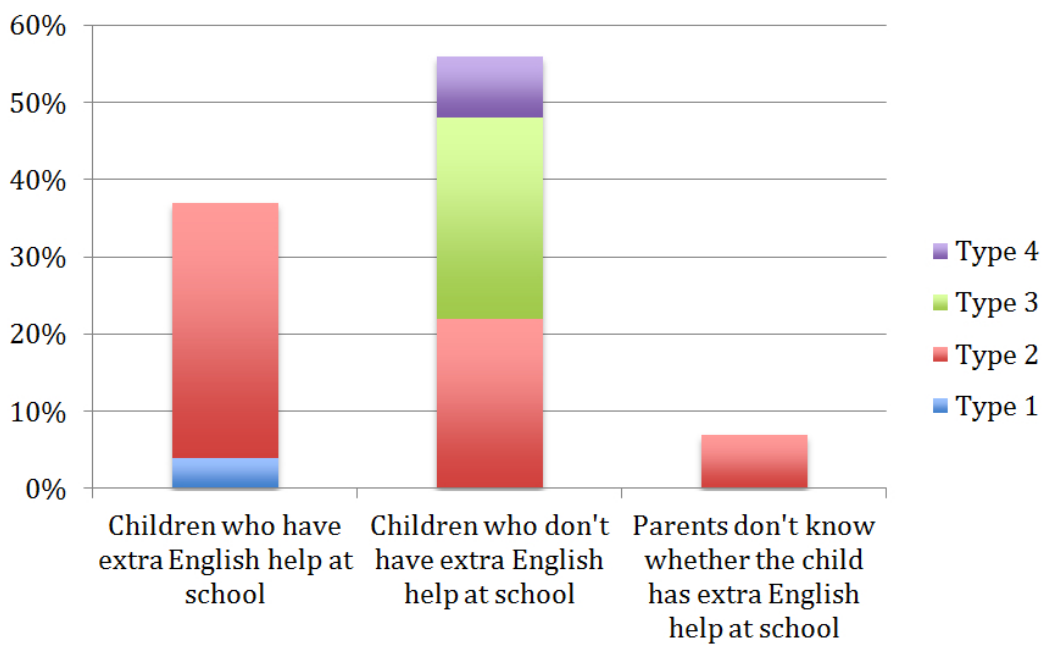


Figure 5.4: Ethnic Chinese children with extra English support at Irish primary schools from parents' perspective.

could choose more than one answer), 48% of parents thought that the lack of Chinese culture was the main challenge, 37% of parents thought that the cultural differences between two countries was the main challenge, 15% of parents identified language as the main challenge, 15% of parents thought that the child's social relationship was the biggest problem, 11% of parents chose communication between parents and the school/teachers, 4% of parents thought that the school application was the most challenging thing and 7% of parents thought that their children did not have any challenges at school.

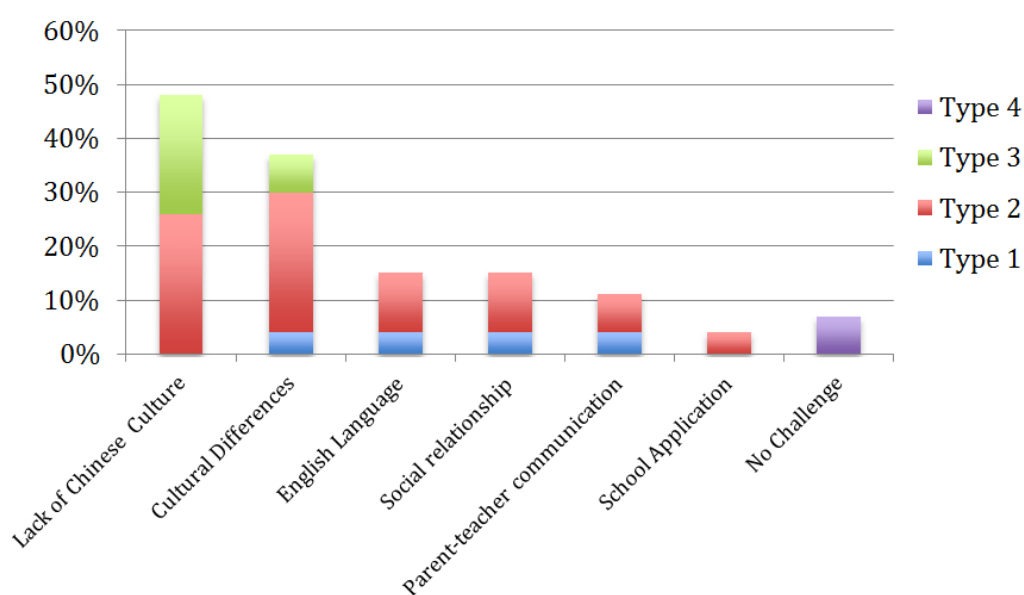


Figure 5.5: Greatest challenges for ethnic Chinese children studying in Irish primary schools from parents' perspective.

It also can be seen that Type 1 and Type 2 children have relatively more challenges in school. For Type 1 children, the main challenges are cultural differences, English language, social relationship and parent-teacher communication issues. The main challenge for Type 2 students is lack of Chinese culture in the learning environment and cultural differences rather than language or social relationship difficulties. Type 3 children parents claim that their children lack education in Chinese culture and a small amount of them have cultural difference issues. They don't have any language and/or social relationship problems. All

Type 4 children's parents claim that their adopted children don't have any such challenge in school.

It is necessary to remain aware that the distribution of the four types of ethnic Chinese children are uneven, there are very few Type 1 children in the three weekend Chinese language schools on which the research focused. The low percentage of Type 1 children doesn't necessarily translate into fewer or lesser challenges. This circumstance required the researcher to find more Type 1 children from outside of these schools for the interviews.

According to all the findings above, it is noticeable that there are great differences between these four types of Chinese children and their needs are very different as well. The interviews that were done with parents, children, Chinese and Irish school principals, class teachers, language support teachers and an educational scholar. The next section will explore the findings from these interviews.

5.3 Findings of Interviews

From the survey, it would appear that Type 1 and Type 2 children have more challenges in integration into Irish primary schools, but Type 3 and Type 4 have relatively fewer issues arising from their schooling. To further explore these results, the twelve interviews were conducted with all four types of parents, but with more emphasis on Type 1 and Type 2 children and their parents. The twelve parent interviews comprising of four Type 1, four Type 2, two Type 3 and two Type 4 children's parents. Interviews were also conducted with two Type 1 and two Type 2 children. In addition, interviews were conducted with sixteen educational professionals, which included six Irish school principals, four class teachers, two language support teachers, the three Chinese principals of the three Chinese weekend schools and one Chinese educational scholar.

Integration of children from minority ethnic groups into Irish primary schools is a major topic. In the interviews, a number of key themes emerged from the different perspectives. The key themes that emerged in the interviews are:

- Educational environment
- Curriculum
- Culture
- Language
- Social development
- Parental involvement

Many of these themes (such as culture, language and social development) were present in responses to the initial questionnaires, and the interviews were used to expand upon them. Others, such as educational environment, curriculum and parental involvement, emerged in response to open ended questions. Questions such as “how much do you know about Irish primary school” and “what is the greatest challenge of your child in school” were used to allow the interviewees the freedom to highlight issues that they felt were important. This led to the identification of the above themes. The following sections will discuss each theme in detail, and examine how each theme was viewed by parents, children and educational professionals.

5.3.1 Educational Environment

Questions about educational environment were asked of all the interviewees, such as their level of knowledge and experience of Irish and Chinese primary schools, and how they compare them.

5.3.1.1 Parents' Perspective

Nearly all the ethnic Chinese parents expressed the view that, when compared to Chinese primary schools, Irish primary schools have a very relaxed study atmosphere, with short school days, long breaks, small amounts of homework, group seating plans, while students have little pressure and a lot of freedom in Irish schools. On the other hand, Chinese primary schools were seen to have longer school hours, more homework, more students in a class, more discipline and more pressures. In the view of the Chinese parents, children studying in this kind of relaxed learning environment can enjoy studying more, have more time to do the things they like and have a happier childhood.

Many Chinese parents mentioned that Irish primary schools have short school days and long breaks, and children have no pressure in school.

From my own experience, the children finish school at 2 o'clock. I feel the study atmosphere is very relaxed here, not like the Chinese schools. ... He needed to arrive at school before 7:30am (in his Chinese school), then he came back home for lunch, two hours, like twelve to two o'clock. It would be early if he finished school at 5pm in the afternoon, sometimes it was 6pm. They even work harder than adults everyday.

– T1 Parent 2

The most obvious one (difference) is the children have no pressure in Irish primary school. ... There is no pressure at all. The other thing is there is too much spare time for them. In China, children may go to school at 7:30am in the morning and finish school at 4pm or 5pm. How many hours do they have in school here? They go to school at 9am and finish school at 3pm. There are also long breaks during the middle of the day. It is very easy.

– T2 Parent 6

So the length of school day is approximately three hours shorter here (in

Ireland). . . In Ireland, the school day is already very short. The children even get two long breaks. The first one is about 20 minutes. It is pure playtime on the playground. The second time is about 40 minutes and it is the students' lunch time.

– T1 Parent 1

Furthermore, most Chinese parents expressed the view that they thought that their children have a small amount of homework in the Irish primary schools.

He doesn't have much homework here, he is so happy. It is very relaxed here, compared to his Chinese school, he feels like he is on his holiday everyday now. (Laughter) His previous Chinese classmates have lots of study burden at the moment, because they all have started the secondary school and they have started evening classes already¹.

– T1 Parent2

Homework is the same. The maximum written homework is only 10 to 20 minutes all together. . . Very little (homework). There is no pressure from the school or the teachers at all. I don't know about the other children, but for my two children, if they have any pressure, then it is all from their Mum, myself. (Laughter) I will add a bit extra for them as the school work is too easy.

– T2 Parent 6

The other thing is that the amount of homework is much less than the amount of homework in China. My child is a good example. She came to Ireland when she finished her first year in school in China. Every day, she normally needs to take one to one and a half hours to finish her homework (in China). The amount of homework would be doubled on Friday. Because the teacher would think that the children have Saturday and Sunday two days free, so of course there will be more homework during weekend. However, in Ireland, she started at the 2nd class, she normally spends half an hour to do her

¹1. Most Chinese secondary schools have evening classes. The evening classes may start around 7pm, and finish around 9:30pm. In the evening classes, the students normally study on their own rather than taught being by teachers.

homework. When she got to 3rd class, she takes about 45 minutes to finish it. There is no homework on Friday. If there is any holiday, there is also no homework. They seem to want the children to play more.

– T1 Parent 1

The seating plan was also mentioned by some of the parents. The seating plan in Irish primary schools is that children sit in groups. In China, because of the large population, there are many more students in one class, good discipline is needed and the students normally sit in pairs and rows. Parents expressed their approval of the Irish group seating plan, and agreed that it is better for children's development in many ways, such as the social development of the children, which is an important part of the integration of children from different cultures into the class.

The children in the Irish school have more freedom. They have lots of freedom in the class as well. Four children sit around one desk. The children in China need to put their hands behind them, you know that.

– T1 Parent 3

Another is that there are much more students in a Chinese classroom, normally there are 50-60 students in one class. There even can be 80 students in one class in a key school. It is very normal in China. In Ireland, there are normally 20 students in a class, and they sit in groups, for example, six children sit around a desk, and their seats get changed every two weeks. It is good to get children to know each other and encourage their socialization a bit more. I think it is great. Irish education is very good in this aspect. So when children grow up, their personality can be more extrovert. Otherwise it is a boring thing to be locked in school to study from a young age. It is not very beneficial to their growth in childhood.

– T3 Parent 9

In Chinese primary schools, all the students sit in pairs, rows and rows, the teacher teaches in the front of the classroom. However, in Irish primary

school, the seating plan is kind of like a kindergarten. The students are divided into groups. There are three groups in her class. There are about seven or eight people in each group.

– T1 Parent 1

When the researcher asked this last parent (T1 Parent 1) which kind of seating plan she preferred, she answered the Irish one as the group seating plan is better for children's team work.

Some Chinese parents criticized the Irish primary school learning atmosphere as over relaxed, and they hoped that the schools could build a more solid foundation for the students and give them more pressure.

I would like Irish schools to focus on both aspects. They should not only focus on providing a relaxed environment to develop the child's full potential, but they also should give the child a solid knowledge structure. I hope so, because we are still benefiting from our study (in China), such as logical thinking. It did establish a great foundation for us, although now we don't use some of the knowledge we had learned. I know it is not easy to change, but I just feel that the study atmosphere is over relaxed here. The children will be totally fine if they could add a bit more pressure.

– T1 Parent 2

On the other hand, the positive side of the relaxed educational environment is also recognized by Chinese parents.

Children here (in Ireland) have more freedom, enjoy the study a bit more. Because my child would never say, "I don't like to go to school." She always misses school during the weekend.

– T2 Parent 5

I think the children in Irish primary school can have a happier childhood. In Chinese education, there is lots of forced learning, so children can have too much burdens relative to their age. It seems that children in China don't have time to learn the things they like. They have lots of homework. Children in Ireland don't have much homework, and they can finish homework in ten minutes time. . . . My child has lots of time to read the books she likes. She can learn the music instruments. So in general, I think children's growth in Ireland is healthier

– T2 Parent 5

The same question, “how do you compare Irish and Chinese primary schools”, was asked to one of the Irish parents who had a few years experience of living in China. He described Chinese primary school as having “very long hours” and “much more structures”. In general, the parents see the different learning atmospheres in Irish and Chinese primary schools. In the parents' view, the learning environment of Irish primary schools is more relaxed and more enjoyable for the children than the learning environment in Chinese schools.

5.3.1.2 Children's Perspective

The researcher also asked the children's view of what they think about Irish primary schools and all the children gave positive answers towards Irish schools. Children who have had experience in Chinese primary schools expressed that Irish schools are easier to cope with.

I: Compare Chinese primary school and Irish primary school, which one do you prefer?

C: Irish primary school.

I: Why?

C: Because Irish teachers aren't as strict as Chinese teachers. Irish school life is much easier. There is also less homework, and teachers treat you better as well.

– T1 Child 1

I: Then which one do you prefer, Chinese primary school or Irish primary school?

C: I like both.

I: I see. Can you tell me why you like Chinese primary school, and why you like Irish school please?

C: Irish primary school is very much relaxed. There is no homework during weekend. We can paint and play games every Thursday. . . . I can learn lots of knowledge in China. I can finish my homework at school when I was in China.

– T1 Child 2

When the children were asked whether they were happy in Irish primary schools, all of them said they were happy in Ireland. The researcher then asked for the reason and both of the children who had experience in Chinese primary schools gave as their first reason that there is less homework in Irish schools.

Because there is less homework in Irish school, teachers are so gentle, and classmates are very friendly...

– T1 Child 1

Because we only have a little bit of homework, there is no homework during the weekend. So I can play with my friends.

– T1 Child 2

A Type 2 child who only has experience in an Irish primary school gave the reason as below.

Because I have lots of friends to play with. I often go to my friends' home, and we do lots of art too.

– T2 Child 3

For these children, Irish primary schools are a happy place to be. This observation is also supported in the interviews with the parents and aligns with the researchers' personal experience prior to engaging in this research.

5.3.1.3 Educational Professionals' Perspective

A Chinese educational scholar interviewed as part of this research viewed the difference between the Irish and Chinese educational environment from the cultural aspect. She thought that Chinese education had been greatly influenced by Confucianism for a long time. Most Chinese people highly value education, and they believe that only good education can bring their children a good future. Therefore, the children in Chinese schools have great pressure from the family, the school and the society.

I have to say that Chinese people are deeply influenced by Confucianism. Chinese people believe that "*officialdom is the natural outlet for good scholars*"². This actually leads the direction of education to the wrong way. So the child must go to university, and s/he must go to a well-known university. To be honest, I found the people live here (in Ireland) are very happy. Even for the people who don't have good jobs don't seem to worry about whether their social class is low, they still enjoy their annual holiday very much, and they still feel they have their own life. Their lives seem fine. It would be such a big thing in China if you don't have a decent job. It is not only about your economic situation, but also about the family pride. In this aspect, I think that Chinese people are deeply influenced by Confucianism. Because of this, parents and teachers can actually give children lots of pressure.

– Chinese Educational Scholar

One of Chinese principals pointed out that the social environment of Ireland and China is different. For example, there is a big difference between the populations of these two countries. With the largest population in the world, people in China face more competitors,

²This is a famous saying of Confucius.

and they have to work harder to be outstanding in a large field of competitors and to get better opportunities.

Ireland is very different from China. China has a large population, you try to be the best all the time. People are very competitive. Of course, we know that it is good to be the best, but not everyone can be the best. Ireland has a small population, so it has more opportunities. You don't need to be the top, as long as you can do things and can contribute something, then you will be fine.

– Chinese Principal 1

All parents, children and Chinese educational professionals in the interviews agree that Irish primary schools have a relaxed happy learning atmosphere with less pressure. Some Chinese parents think it is good place for children to have a happy childhood, but many parents think it is a bit over relaxed and school should build a solid foundation of knowledge for the children.

5.3.2 Curriculum

5.3.2.1 Chinese Parents' Impressions of the Irish Curriculum

When the questions about Irish primary school curriculum were asked most of the Chinese parents said they didn't know the Irish curriculum very well and could not name all the subjects the children studied at school. Some parents even thought the subjects the children studied at school were just English, Irish and mathematics. This came as a surprise to the researcher.

I don't know about the other classes, but for him (a boy in the 3rd class), he has Irish, mathematics, English. . . . So mathematics, English and Irish. . . . what

else does he have? Then the rest is just some after school activities.

– T1 Parent 3

I: So what subjects do they have?

P: They have mathematics, and. . . . what else do they have? ...

I: English?

P: Yes. English, Irish. They also have religion class.

– T1 Parent 2

When the researcher tried to hint to one of the parents that the children might also learn some other subjects, such as history and geography, the parent immediately denied that her children learnt these subjects in school, although the history and geography curriculum start right from Infant class in Irish primary schools.

No, they don't have history and geography in 2nd class. Maybe next year, 3rd class, but they don't have them this year. They are only learning English, Irish, and mathematics at the moment.

– T2 Parent 6

Obviously, these parents were not very clear about what subjects the children are studying at school. The knowledge of the curriculum came for the most part from their children's homework.

Some parents know the curriculum subjects a bit better than others.

I'm not quite clear about their curriculum, but I know what subjects they learn. They learn Irish, mathematics and English ... they seem also have geography... and science. They have music and P.E. as well.

– T1 Parent 1

All the subjects this parent mentioned are the subjects that a Chinese primary school curriculum has as well (except Irish), and therefore perhaps she was more familiar with these subjects.

Only one out of nine Chinese parents in the research interviews could name all the subjects in Irish primary school curriculum. This Chinese mother explained that she knew the NCCA online curriculum before, and she especially reviewed it again just to prepare for the interview with the researcher. She clearly named all the subjects in the Irish primary school curriculum. Not only the subjects like English, Irish and mathematics, but also social environmental and scientific education (including geography, history and science), social, personal and health education, arts education, P.E. and religious education. She claimed that the subjects of Irish and Chinese primary school subjects are very similar, with the only difference being moral education and religious education, and, in her opinion, these two subjects have very similar aims.

Although most of the parents didn't know much about the Irish primary school curriculum, many parents did comment that they do feel that Irish primary education aims to develop the children's full potential, creativity, independence, hands-on ability, active learning and individual development.

I think Irish primary schools concentrate on the child's hands-on ability and team work spirit. The Irish education is quite flexible and emphasises the development of the different talents of the children. Children learn things very actively.

– T1 Parent 4

From the experience I have had with my kid, I have found that the Irish school emphasises the child's creativity. The Chinese school concentrates on the child's academic study. . . . I feel the Irish school and teacher put more emphasis on children's individual character development. For example, I was late

for collecting him one day, he was waiting there and called me to go to see his art work. The teacher tends to encourage each child's interests and talents. They exhibit the children's paintings, calligraphy, or sculptures in the classroom. I think this is a great way to encourage them. I don't think there is much like this in China.

– T1 Parent 2

P: I think the Irish schools are trying to cultivate children's hand-on ability.

I: Yes, how do you see that?

P: Last time, his teacher gave him something. they call it a *project*.

I: Yes. That's right.

P: He was asked to make this, make that, sometimes he needs to go to the Internet to check about the Earth or planets. This kind of way is great, but in China the teachers might just tell you all the answers instead of letting you find it out for yourself. So children just need to memorise more. So it is different in this aspect. That's what I know about the curriculum.

– T1 Parent 3

It is interesting to note that all these comments were made by parents of Type 1 children. Their children's experience from both Chinese and Irish primary schools allowed them to see the difference between the two educational systems more clearly and also to appreciate the advantages of each educational system.

Seven out of nine Chinese parents mentioned that they felt that the academic level of Irish primary school curriculum is lower than the level of curriculum of Chinese primary school.

The academic level of the Irish curriculum is quite low. The curriculum isn't that structured. Chinese curriculum is very structured and systemised. In Irish schools the teacher can teach anything. It is not very structured and the level of the knowledge is a bit shallow. So those are the difference.

– T1 Parent 4

So far, I feel that the difficulty level in Irish primary school curriculum is lower than the one in the Chinese curriculum. They have great emphasis on the things like drawing, colouring, these kinds of things and making things, maybe some simple spelling. However, the Chinese curriculum ... it seems that it is much more strict than this, and the level is much higher as well. My child went to infant class since she was four years old. That has been three years so far, and she has just learnt the twenty-six letters of the alphabet.

– T2 Parent 5

Although these parents had never read the actual Irish primary school curriculum, they may get this kind of impression from their daily interaction with their children's study, such as checking their homework, looking through the textbooks, and chatting about their school day. Some parents may also draw their conclusions from talking with their friends or relatives in China and comparing their children's progress in school, comparing the Irish and Chinese primary school textbooks and so on.

The only Chinese parent who actually knows the Irish curriculum very well in this study also claimed that the level of Irish primary school curriculum is lower than the one in Chinese primary school, especially mathematics.

In general, the academic level of Irish primary schools is much lower than the one of Chinese primary schools. It is much easier as well. ...I'm really worrying about my children's mathematics. I don't know when Irish primary schools can raise their mathematics level to the degree that Chinese schools have.

– T3 Parent 9

Mathematics is an issue that nearly all the Chinese parents in this study mentioned. The next section will look at the views of Irish mathematics education as held by the Chinese parents, in more detail.

5.3.2.2 Mathematics

Mathematics has stood out as an important topic in this research. Every Chinese parent seems to have had much to say about their children's mathematics studies in Irish primary schools. In general, all the Chinese parents think that the mathematics taught in Irish primary schools is very easy, and the level of mathematics in Irish primary school is lower than the level of mathematics in Chinese primary schools.

I feel it (the Irish curriculum) is very easy. Mathematics can be a good example. I really have a very strong feeling about it. For example, my son is in the second class this year. In normal circumstances, the children in second class in China would have no problem to do the mental calculation under 100, I mean addition and subtraction, I'm not talking about multiplication and division. However, until second class, they even needed to use their fingers to help calculate addition and subtraction under 10. Do you know what I mean? ... They count fingers for addition and subtraction, and sometimes they need to think for a while. It is not like the situation in China where children answer immediately after the question is asked. I feel it is very easy, the thing they learn is very easy. When I look at their homework, it seems they only learn a little bit in school every day. I feel that there are great differences from the Chinese situation.

– T2 Parent 6

(The mathematics in Irish primary schools is) Very bad, too bad actually! Give you a very simple example, a child starts junior infant at 5 years old in Ireland. My niece in China is the same age, She has already started to study Olympiad mathematics. She would do all the additions and subtractions up to 20 very easily in her head. However, back to Ireland, children only need to learn the calculation up to 5. Can you believe that? I nearly fainted when I saw the difference. The fact that the mathematics is very bad in Irish schools is very well known. It is even in the newspaper. So the Irish and Chinese schools are very different. The Chinese children staying in the school and continuously doing the mathematics exercise, of course they would have a very solid foundation of mathematics. Once the foundation is good, then the difficulty degree of the exercise can be increased. That's why most Chinese children's mathematics is great.

– T3 Parent 9

However, their mathematics seems not that good. I remember last year the Government emphasizing the need to improve mathematics education. Indeed the mathematics in Irish primary schools is at a much lower standard to the mathematics in Chinese primary schools, For example, by 3rd year, the Chinese mathematics textbook already covered the two digits multiplication and three digits division. uneven division. It is at a much higher level than the one in Irish schools. The children in Ireland only need learn one digit multiplication, three digits addition and three digits subtraction. The mathematics level in Chinese primary schools is much higher. It is too easy here.

– T1 Parent 1

These parents' complaints did not come out of nowhere. In the Chinese primary school mathematics curriculum, the requirements are higher than the level prescribed in the Irish curriculum in several aspects. For example, in the *number of operations* strand in Chinese mathematics curriculum, there is not only calculation with more digits, but also a very clear requirement for students' mental calculative ability and speed of calculation. These are not emphasised in the Irish primary school mathematics curriculum.

Chinese parents appeared to have very high expectation of their children's mathematics.

Her mathematics in the 1st class here (in Ireland) is similar to the level of preschool class in China. . . . My child went to infant class from the age of four. That was three years ago, . . . and she only does the addition and subtraction up to one hundred. Ummm ... it seems too easy. Because it is too easy, she sometimes asks me for more homework.

– T2 Parent 5

According to the Irish mathematics curriculum, children in 1st class are only required to be able to do addition and subtraction within the numbers up to 20. Parent 5's child is only seven years old, but she already knows how to do the addition and subtraction up to 100. This is already much more than the curriculum required. However, the parents still felt that her child's mathematics level is too low. With this in mind, she taught her child the

multiplication at home. This action has raised questions from the child's school teacher.

The teacher asked me one question once, "Why do Chinese children always study more than other children?" (Laughter) Because my child can do the mathematics that has not been taught yet. For example, sometimes when she is interested, I let her recite the multiplication table, although multiplication has not been taught yet in her class. She knows the relationship between addition and multiplication. So when her teacher was teaching addition with the same number once, she immediately realised that she could do it by using multiplication. Then she raised her hand and wrote the result by using multiplication on blackboard. The teachers said, "I haven't taught you that yet!"

– T2 Parent 5

Many Type 1 and Type 2 Chinese parents claimed that their children's mathematics is good compared to their peers in school.

His Mathematics is the best in all the subjects. . . . He has an obvious advantage over his Irish classmates in school now as the mathematics in China is much more difficult than what they learn here. The mathematics teaching is very structured as well.

– T1 Parent 4

She was chosen for a mathematics class for gifted children. There were two children chosen in her class and she was one of them. Her mathematics is outstanding. She can digest the more difficult mathematics.

– T2 Parent 5

Not every parent thought their children's best subject was mathematics. Parent 1 and Parent 5 said that their children's best subject in school was actually English. The researcher then interviewed these two parents' children. Interestingly, both children actually identified mathematics as their best subject in school.

I: To compare with your classmates, which is your best subject now?

C: I think my mathematics is the best.

I: Can you work out the mathematics problems that your teacher gives you?

C: Yes. I can work them all out. (T1 Child 2)

I think my mathematics is the best. . . . My teacher asked me to go to a “Mathematics Challenge”. Only the student who was good at mathematics can go, because it was more difficult than what we had learned in the class.

– T2 Child 3

The reason that parents and their children have different perceptions of the best subject in school might be because of different expectations towards mathematics and English. It was found that Chinese parents in this study tend to have a very high expectation toward mathematics.

One of the Chinese school principals also emphasised this point. She stressed that most of the Chinese parents have very high expectations toward their children’s mathematics.

I: In your opinion, what subject would be the one in which Chinese children have the most advantages?

P: It must be mathematics. I tell you why, it is not because that Chinese people are cleverer, but because of the parents’ high expectation from a very young age. Of course I’m not saying every Chinese parent has high expectation, I am just saying that most of the Chinese parents would. If a Chinese child says that $2+2=3$, I believe most of the Chinese parents would be shocked by the child’s answer and get very agitated. They would tell the children, “ $2+2=4$, you must remember it!” In Ireland, most of the Irish parents wouldn’t be that shocked, they just tell the child the right answer. So the Chinese and Irish parents have different reactions to their children’s wrong answer and have different expectation too.

– Chinese Principal 1

Many Irish class teachers also mentioned the fact that many Chinese children are very good at mathematics in school as well. One of the class teachers said a Chinese boy in her class

had little English and found it hard to communicate with other children in the class, but he was “an extremely capable mathematician”, and always became very happy when he was doing mathematics work.

He could be very, very good at mathematics. When language is not needed, he’s very good at number work. Extremely quick at adding and subtracting in his head. But then when it comes to using words, say mathematics vocabulary, he doesn’t understand, he finds that quite tricky. And, particularly with this child, at times will get very frustrated if he doesn’t understand, he’ll just kind of sigh and he likes things done. He likes things done now. So he’s a little bit impatient and he really wants things done quickly.

– Class Teacher 4

In general, it appeared to the researcher that all the Chinese parents and children in this research thought that mathematics in Irish primary school is easy for Chinese children. There was not a single parent, child or educational professional in this study who thought mathematics was an obstacle for the children’s study in Irish primary school.

5.3.2.3 Religious Education

One of the big differences between the Irish and Chinese primary curricula is in the area of religious education and moral education. How much does religious education influence the schooling of Chinese children and would it affect the integration of these children into Irish primary schools?

Of the twelve parent participants, one of parent’s children is in a Church of Ireland school, two of the Irish parents’ adopted children are in the Gaelscoils³ (two Type 4 children), and the rest of the nine parents’ children are all in Catholic schools. It is noticed that the way

³The Gaelscoil is under the Inter-denominational patronage. It provides for a variety of religious education opportunities.

the parents chose schools for their children is related to the parents' own beliefs, especially for parents who are religious.

Because we are Protestant ourselves, we tried to find a Protestant school when we were looking for a school. I don't know the specific content they teach, but I made sure that the school is Protestant as I have asked the principal and the teachers. They read the Bible and pray at school. Because I wish my child to have some education in religion as well. However, I feel they don't teach much religion.

– T1 Parent 2

The Catholic religion is taught in their school, but they have been brought up as Catholic, so it is not a problem for us. It's just an extension of how we practice at home. So it doesn't cause any difficulties. And I suppose to some extent we chose it for that reason because we would like them to be brought up in the same religion as ourselves.

– T4 Parent 11

These two parents are religious themselves, so they would like their children to follow in their footsteps.

Seven out of the nine Chinese parents in this research are atheists and all their children are in Catholic schools. Their attitude toward their children's religious classes in school is that they don't mind their children learning about religion in school, but six of the Chinese parents would keep their children atheist until they are 18 years old. They think the children are too young to decide whether to believe in a specific religion now, but once they grow up, they can choose their religion themselves.

He has religious education in his school. However, I think the reason we let him learn religion is to have a general knowledge about religion and how to do

things right and how to treat people. I don't advocate that he joins any religion. He has this subject so I can't let him be different and not attend the class. I would tell him that you are too young to choose religion now. If you want to choose a religion, you can choose after you are 18 years old. I don't disagree that he learns religion but I hope he learns how to treat other people through religious education. . . . I won't let him go to Communion or be Confirmed. As I'm not Catholic myself and I don't know this religion very well. ,I won't lead my child into it.

– T1 Parent 4

He didn't go (to the church with other children) in the first school term, but it was not because that I didn't let him go. I don't give him any opinion on religion. I'm an atheist myself, I don't believe in any religion. So I can't ask him to believe or not to believe, it depends on him, he can do whatever he thinks. The other thing is that he is very young, only 10 years old, how can such a young age child know about beliefs? However it is good for him to go with his classmates to have a look. Normally it needs the parents' permission to go to church, so he told his teacher that I agreed that he could go to church. Then his teacher brought him to the church. However, I think there is holy water in the church, but he couldn't get any holy water, so he was just like a bystander. Because he was not baptized and not a Catholic, he could go to look, but can't participate in any activities. I think that is good too, I told my son, "Once you grow up and have the right judgment, you can still be baptized if you decided to believe in the future. You are too young to tell what religion is now." So if he wants to go to and have a look, it is no problem with me.

– T1 Parent 3

I think it is all right to have religious education. Because we are in a foreign country, most European people have their religion. I used to read her religion book. When she was in 2nd class, sometimes her religion homework is to read the story with the parents. So there would be a story, a picture and some questions. So the parents can ask the children after reading. I read her religion book, just a quick glance. I think the book is quite good. The stories are mostly about the Jesus. It aims to teach the children to have courtesy, to help other people, and not to laugh at other people. They are the stories that have moral meaning. I think the book is quite good. Their religious education is different from what we thought. What I thought is Buddhism learning in China, the learners need to learn the Buddhist scriptures and so on. The Irish religious education is more like the moral education in Chinese primary school.

– T1 Parent 1

Although most of the Chinese parents in the study are atheists and they wouldn't like their children to join in any religion, they have quite positive attitude towards the religious education in Irish primary school. In their view, religious education can help their children to learn about religion and how to live with other people.

One of the Chinese principals also made similar points about her own child. However, she then questioned herself, if she won't let her child believe any religion when she was young, there might be less chance that the child will believe in any religion when she grows up as the worldview had been set when the child was young.

My daughter asked me several times, why I won't let her believe in religion, I told her that I didn't say I won't let you t believe, I just want to wait until you grow up then you decide whether you believe or not yourself. However, I'd realised now, if I do like this, she might have less chance of believing in religion in later lifes. Because she just grows up like this, her view of the world is coloured by her early experience. If you bring her to church every day when she is young, then it might be a different story.

– Chinese Principal 2

It is important to note that parents' beliefs can also be influenced by their children. Parent 5 and her husband were both atheists before their child went to school. After her experience in school, their child wanted to be Catholic. As a result Parent 5 and her husband then spent one year learning about the Catholic religion. After that year, both of the parents chose to be baptised. The parents then allowed their child to become a Christian as well. This mother said to the researcher that she would do anything that brings her child happiness.

One day, she (my child) asked me, "Mum, do you believe in God?" I said, "Do you?" She said, "I do believe, God will bless me, God can give me more strength." Then I said, "Mum is kind of believing in God too, but I need more study." So for her, I went to have the weekly Bible study with a sister for a year. So did my husband. He studies one year too. Our whole family got baptized

in June this year. I think it is good to have a religion for our children. It is easier when they meet any difficulties in the future. I think I should do whatever brings her happiness.

– T2 Parent 5

One of the Chinese principals also described her similar experience with her children.

I think young children would just follow their parents' belief. If the parents won't believe, then the children won't believe. However, the children might influence their parents when they get older. I am a good example. One of my children always wanted to be a Catholic. He wanted to be a Catholic when he was in primary school. However, at that time, I thought he was too young to decide his religion. He has religious activity in his school every day and he believes in God very faithfully. He talked this with me a lot of times but I never thought it was important. My younger child grows up and she says she wants to be a Catholic as well. Then I started to consider this seriously. Because I am not a Catholic, I didn't know what I should do. I told one of my Irish good friends about this and she said that she would introduce my children to the church. Then I went there to study as well. Because only if I know it well, can I let my children join in. As it turned out, I'm a Catholic now.

– Chinese Principal 1

As most Chinese people are atheists, it is common for them not know much about Christianity. Both of the parents were willing to make the effort and to spend time to getting to know a religion to promote their children's wellbeing. The Chinese principal has stayed in Ireland for over 30 years and, as she described, most of her Irish friends are Catholics and her mother is also Catholic. None of these factors persuaded her to become a Catholic for many years. However, later, because of her children, she chose to study more about Christianity and changed from an atheist to a Catholic. It would seem that once the parents know a religion well, they are more likely to approve of their children joining that religion.

Some Chinese parents may be more pragmatic about religion. Parent 9 is a good example of this. She was an atheist herself. However, once she found out that Catholic children

have a greater chance of getting into a primary school which she liked, she was afraid that her children couldn't get into the school on time. To get around this, she chose to let her children be baptised so that it was easier for them to get into the school. This action may show two things. The first is her trust of the Catholic church. Unlike the two Chinese parents mentioned above, this Chinese parent has an Irish partner, who was brought up as a Catholic, so they feel more secure with her children being Catholic. The second thing is that this parent is an atheist, and so religion doesn't mean much to her. So as long as the children could get into the school, whether the children believe the religion or not was not an issue for her. She also explained that the criteria by which she chose the school for her children depended on how academic the school was rather than what religion it taught.

So in the end, I compared schools and thought that the strength of academic area is the most important criteria, as the students need to learn knowledge. Religion is only a small part. Then we think the school near where we live is stronger in the academic area. They also have lots of sports and music activities. That's why we chose that school, otherwise I would choose an Educate Together school.

– T3 Parent 9

It is interesting to note that none of the parents interviewed in the course of this research sent their children to Educate Together schools. However, there were three parents who had considered Educate Together Schools, but in the end chose differently for a variety of reasons. Two of them are parents of Type 3 children, in families that have Irish and Chinese parents. The other parent was a Type 1 child's parent. The reason this Chinese parent wanted to send her child to an Educate Together was because she is a very religious Protestant herself, so when she couldn't find a Protestant school, she chose Educate Together. In the end, she found a Protestant school, so she gave up the offer from the Educate Together school. When the researcher asked one of the Type 3 children's parents why she didn't send her children to the Educate Together school in the end, she described it as "difficult to get into" and thought the curriculum was too broad.

The other thing is that Educate Together School is very difficult to get into. People need to queue to get in. I went there and tried to register when my child was four years old. We are number 120 in the queue so I asked the school how many students they can take in one year. They said they take 30 students every year. So it is difficult to get in. That is another problem.

– T3 Parent 9

Because their learning area is too wide, you can't tell what is the most important subject and which is the second important subject and so on. The children must learn the basic subjects well, such as mathematics, English and science. Children need to have a very good foundation in these subjects. Educate Together schools have too many subjects and they teach everything. ... They teach a small bit of every subject. The school day is very short, but the children need to learn so many subjects. So I think the basic subjects are the most important, as the children have to face leaving certificate exams one day.

– T3 Parent 9

The children in Educate Together schools are not only taught the Irish national curriculum, but also the “Learn Together” ethical education curriculum, which includes moral and spiritual, equality and justice, belief systems, and ethics and environment in four strands. In this parent's view, the curriculum in the Educate Together schools is too broad and does not sufficiently concentrate on the “basic subjects, such as mathematics, English and science”.

It would seem that the parents in this study who considered Educate Together schools for their children could be classified into two types. The first type is the Chinese parents who have Irish partners. One of the Chinese parents explained the reason as below.

It seems that some Irish parents tend to like non- Catholic denominated schools. At least Chinese parents don't have any bias on religions but a lot of Irish parents are really against religion. As lots of Irish parents themselves grew up in Catholic schools. At that time many of the teachers were sisters or priests and some students may not have had a very good experience when they were young. Therefore, they don't want the next generation to enter this kind

of schools. Nowadays, all the teachers are properly trained in college, so there should be no problems.

– T3 Parent 9

The second type of parents identified in this research who would choose Educate Together schools are ones who have a strong specific religious belief themselves but can't find a school which teaches the same religion, and as a result choose Educate Together schools instead.

The researcher has interviewed Irish teachers and principals from three well-known Educate Together schools. Interestingly, it was found that they have very few Chinese students in their schools. The percentage of the Chinese student population in these three Educate Together school were 0.7%, 0% and 3% (see Table 5.1).

School Name	Total student number	Percentage of non-Irish students	Number of Chinese student	Percentage of Chinese students
Educate Together School 1	313	25%	2	0.7%
Educate Together School 2	200	10%	0	0%
Educate Together School 3	283	95%	8*	3%

Table 5.1: Chinese student population in three Educate Together national schools. *These eight Chinese children are from four families.

Even the Educate Together school 3 which has the largest Chinese population, at 3%, has a large proportion of foreign students (95%). When compared to other ethnic groups, the school principal said, the Chinese contingent is actually very small for them. The small proportion of Chinese students in Educate Together schools may support the idea that the criteria by which Chinese parents choose schools for their children is not based on religion but on other issues, such as how academic the school is.

In the course of this research, the children were also asked about their feelings about religious class. Different children have different views about it. Child 1 is a nine year old boy who has had a few years experience in a Chinese primary school before coming to Ireland. Both of his parents are atheists. He saw his religion class as teaching him to be a good person.

I: Do you have religious education in your school?

C: Yes.

I: What do you think of it?

C: We learn lots of stories in our religion class.

I: What do you think of these stories?

C: It teaches us how to be a nice person.

I: Do you believe these stories?

C: I don't know, but it teaches us to be good.

– T1 Child 1

Child 3 is a seven years old girl who had all her education in an Irish Catholic school. She not only believed in God herself, but also influenced her parents to become Catholic.

I: What do you think of your religious class?

C: I like it.

I: Why?

C: Because I can know God better, and God will bless me.

– T2 Child 3

It can be seen that children's views on religion could be influenced by their parents and the type of education they had in school. Some children may even influence their parents' beliefs. When the researcher interviewed Child 3's mother, she explained one of the reasons

that she encouraged her child to learn religion was that religion is an important part of Irish culture, and that learning religion helps them to integrate better into Irish society.

This country is a Catholic country. This is its culture. We need to integrate ourselves into this kind of religious culture. There is only a small amount of religious culture in China, so we didn't have the chance to learn religion. Now we are in Ireland, I think it is better to have religion.

– T2 Parent 5

Many Chinese educational professionals also claimed that religion is a factor that affects the integration of Chinese children and knowing religion well can help children to integrate better.

It (religion) can affect integration a lot. Since 8/9 of Irish population is Catholic, there are a lot of ceremonies in Irish primary schools, such as communion and confirmation. If a child doesn't attend these kinds of ceremonies then this child might be seen as different. Therefore the children's religion can affect the integration to some degree.

– Chinese Principal 1

I encourage my children to attend all the religion classes and activities. I think it is very good, as religion is very important in this country, the history and culture cannot be separated from religion here. If you don't know religion, then you will miss a big chunk of historical and cultural aspects.

– Chinese Principal 2

One principal mentioned that if a Chinese child is not Catholic as other Irish children are, it may have a negative effect on his/her integration in the Irish school.

It can be a bit difficult for children if they are not Catholic, and sometime child may feel s/he is an outsider. . . . They can understand, but they just feel they are outsiders. It has some negative effect with integration, as religion is very important in this country.

– Chinese Principal 2

This Chinese principal had always encouraged her child to attend religious activities although she is not a Catholic. Even for communion, as her daughter couldn't wear the same white dress as others, she bought a little light blue dress for her daughter, so that she didn't feel too much of a difference. Her daughter was then invited by her Irish friends to their parties after the communion.

In summary, it is found that the Chinese children's religion are mainly influenced by their parents' (both Chinese and Irish parents) beliefs. Seven out of nine children's Chinese parents examined in this research are atheists, but they have quite a positive attitude toward their children's religion class. They think religion class can give children knowledge of religion and Irish culture, and help children learn how to treat people, but they don't want their children to adopt any religion when they are young, especially a religion the parents don't know well themselves. In some cases, children may influence their parents' beliefs as well. Some parents were willing to get to know a religion in order to decide whether they should let their children adopt it. Educational professionals suggested that as an important part of Irish culture, learning about religion would help Chinese children to integrate better.

5.3.2.4 Assessment

School assessments help to evaluate the progress of the children's performance in school. The main assessment methods in Irish primary schools include portfolio assessment, questioning, teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests and standardised tests. However, the standardised testing method is very new to Irish primary schools, and it only

appeared in 2011 at the request of the Department of Education and Skills. It is designed to test the English reading and mathematics skills of the primary school students who are in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes. Compared to these Irish primary school assessment methods, Chinese primary school assessment is much more formal, with teacher-led methods and the standardised test as the main methods of assessment.

One parent noted that her child had all kinds of exams when she was in a Chinese primary school previously and that there is much higher pressure in Chinese primary schools.

There is greater pressure in Chinese school Chinese primary schools have exams. Even the first year students have exams. They have tests every time they finish a lesson unit, they also have mid-term exams, final exams after each school term, even mock exams. The first year students have mock exams before their final exams. . . . Children have lots of pressure. In Irish primary schools, there are no exams ... well, I can't say there is no exam. There is a sort of test once a year, English and mathematics. I don't know whether it is organized by the Department of Education and Skills. Compare to her exams in China, these tests seem quite easy anyway.

– T1 Parent 1

Another parent had a similar point of view.

There are so many exams in each year in Chinese primary schools, unit exams, mid-term exams and final exams every year, so many exams! However, there is no exam in Irish primary school at all! If there is no exam, then there is no pressure; if there is no pressure, the foundation cannot be that solid. . . . The students need to get used to doing exams from an early age.

– T3 Parent 9

The parents thought that exams are related to the pressure on students. The two parents were complaining that there are fewer exams in Irish primary schools, and even though there is

a standardised test, it seems very easy. So there is too little pressure on their children. In their view, less exams mean less pressure, and less pressure means a less solid knowledge foundation. On the other hand, as the English and mathematic standardised tests are relatively new in Irish primary schools, the parents didn't know much about these tests. Parent 1 thought there would be a test every year, and Parent 9 didn't even know that there is such a test.

A few Chinese parents also mentioned that the Irish education system respects students' confidentiality. They were only allowed to see their own children's test mark. This was very different experience from Chinese primary schools in the parents' recollection.

When I went to the parent meeting in the Irish school, the teacher covered the children's names, which were above and under my child's name. They won't let you see other children's marks they only let you see your own child's mark. It is not like that in China. When the term exams are finished the teacher sticks a big piece of paper with all the ranked children's marks on it beside the blackboard. I remember it so clearly. This will automatically pressurise the children.

– T2 Parent 6

What this parent has said was based on her own experience when she was young. Since the Chinese curriculum reform in the year 2000, students' exam results are no longer allowed to be announced publicly and it is forbidden to rank students anymore (MEPRC, 2001c), which is a big improvement for education in China. However, students in China are still encouraged to get high marks and to be competitive.

Compared to Chinese parents, Irish educational professionals have very different views on examination. One Irish language support teacher who, had five years teaching experience in Japan, explained that different cultures value different things in education. She thought that where the parents come from is very important. In some countries in Asia, students'

work is marked and ranked and it is very important for the students to be at the top of the class. As an example, she brought up children in Japan, who are ranked from age four even on their colouring work. Some parents would even colour the pictures for their children so that their children can get the highest score. Students' work is examined as a product rather than a process of growth.

They (China and Japan) are very similar and there is a real emphasis on passing the test and getting a perfect score and memorization. And I think Irish primary schools, maybe we did have that to a certain extent, but not the level of testing they have. We are more interested in the process and constant improvement.

– Language Support Teacher 1

There is a case to be made against the product being perfect. In terms of looking at the whole child's development, not just at the academic side of things. (In Ireland) we wouldn't encourage children to sit for four or five hours after school doing work. We don't think that it is good development for their social skills or their emotional development and other things too, you know. They need to go and play and they need to be outside and have fun and there is more to life than just doing perfectly on every test. But obviously (in Asia) their whole educational system is set up to have this exam to go into the university, and particular universities. And it is very, very structured and prioritized by who does the best on this exam. So their outcome, I suppose, is different. Where here, parents ... I'm not saying no parents push their children, and maybe some push too much and some don't push enough ... but certainly there isn't that pressure for exams and that kind of thing (in Ireland). There is more here than I would have experienced myself in America, but to me this seems very pressurized. Secondary school in particular: the leaving cert and the junior cert seem very pressurized for teenagers. But those types of cultural differences I suppose, assist in understanding the educational system in other countries.

– Language Support Teacher 1

This language support teacher emphasised that it is important for Irish teachers to know what culture the parents and the children come from and to understand their different ed-

educational systems, which may have different desired outcomes due to their culture. This teacher also pointed out that the intended outcome in Irish education is to educate the child as a whole person rather than just looking at the academic side. The child's social and emotional development is also very important.

5.3.3 English Language

5.3.3.1 Importance of English Language

Language proficiency has always been recognised as a vital factor associated with integration difficulties experienced by immigrant children, in Irish schools, when their first language is not English (Keogh and Whyte, 2003; Devine *et al.*, 2004; Smyth *et al.*, 2009). A good English language foundation not only helps the children to achieve academically, but also helps their social and emotional development.

Without relative proficiency in English, integration can be very tough for non-Irish students. Many class teachers have explained that it is "extremely difficult" for some Chinese children to start school in Ireland without much English.

I suppose at the start the main barrier was the English language. They had no English. It's extremely difficult for them to communicate with the children. And it's a big change for them. But once they get the basics of English and the confidence to be able to speak it, they're fine. At the start it was very difficult for them.

– Teacher 3

One of the biggest challenges I have is when I'm giving instructions, and the vocabulary might not be there, so he might not understand. So say for example we were doing a science experiment, he might not be able to understand

what the names of things are. So straight away he wouldn't be able to access it. So, the greatest barrier is his access to the curriculum through deficiencies in his English language, particularly with regard to subject specific vocabulary.

– Teacher 4

The importance of English language is easy to understand. It affects access to the Irish school curriculum, communication with teachers and friends, the development of children's self-esteem, and so on. The following section examines the English level of Chinese children and their English learning at school and at home.

5.3.3.2 English Level and Language Learning at School

The different types of Chinese children identified in this study exhibit different levels of English. From the interviews, the researcher has found that the Type 3 and Type 4 children examined in this research have no problem with their English language, with one of the main reasons for this being that at least one of their parents is Irish. Their English tends to be better than their Chinese. Most of Type 2 children's parents in this research think their children's English is at a good level but they do have some difficulties when they first start school and all the Type 2 children identified in this research have had language support teachers at school. The Type 1 Chinese children tend to have more problems with English language. However, children from China can have very different levels of English and it will depend on how well they learn English in their previous Chinese primary schools and on how much their parents help them.

Parent 1 is the mother of a 9 years old girl. She said her daughter had learned English for two years in her previous Chinese school. Before she started school in Ireland, the parent was afraid that she wouldn't be able to catch up with others in English, so she helped the child to learn a 1000 word vocabulary over the two months of Summer holidays. After

she got into the Irish school, the child had a language support teacher for one year and her English improved rapidly.

She had difficulties when she first arrived in Ireland. ... After two months, her teacher said she was all right, there was no big problem, but she needed to improve her writing. ... After the first school term, in general, she has no big problem anymore. Now, I think her English is very good. Her listening and speaking is good, reading is her best. For example, I bought her a few *Harry Potter* books, and she also borrowed a few from the school library. She has finished reading them all!

– T1 Parent 1

This girl not only finished reading all the *Harry Potter* books, but also often retold the stories to her mother. The mother explained that one of the reasons her child is good at reading is because she likes to read and her Irish school puts a lot of emphasis on children's reading as well. Children in her school not only need to do reading homework every day, but also need to borrow a book and write a book review every week. When she was in her Chinese school, she had less time to read. The parent also explained the child has no problem with communication, and she can understand 90% what the teacher says and can pass on messages from the teacher to her parents easily.

When the researcher asked whether the parents help the child's English at home, the mother said both parents don't help the child's English as they think their English is not good enough to teach her.

The girl's class teacher (Teacher 1) also confirmed the high level of English of this girl. She said that this child came to the school with "one of the highest standards of English" compared to other foreign children in the school. The teacher also mentioned that this Chinese girl is extremely good academically three times during the interview and that "she is extremely bright and she is able to access all areas of the curriculum". The class teacher

hadn't experienced any difficulties with her.

Not every Type 1 Chinese child has a high level of English. A different example comes from Parent 2. Parent 2 has a 12 years old boy who had just moved to Ireland a year ago. The parent thinks the greatest difficulty for her son is English language. With little English, communication for him is a difficult issue.

He told me his experience, with lots of facial expressions, he described it very vividly. On his first day, he told me, "Mum, do you know, I'm surrounded by English all the time now! My eyes are like this!" (The parent uses fingers to draw spiral shape in front of her eyes) (Laughter) He feels dizzy. He doesn't understand anything. The other children are quite kind to him. They asked him all the time, "Are you all right?" "Are you Okay?" They ask him continuously. I asked him, "What did you answer?" He told me he just said "Yeah, yeah! Yeah yeah!" Or just nodded his head. Then I asked him, "What do you say everyday?" He said he only says two or three words. Two or three...? Yeah, I think only two words. He only said "yes" and "no" everyday. He only knew these two words.

– T1 Parent 2

He is much better now, after three months. Not long ago, I asked him what you chat about with your classmates? They all bring some snacks to school, so they just chat about what food they brought. I asked him, "Can you chat about that?" He said, "Of course! I know the food they brought is called *burger!*" So he can have a bit more vocabulary through this kind of thing.

– T1 Parent 2

Limited English not only sets limitations on the child's social development, but can also be an obstacle to learning other subjects. Parent 2 explained that the child normally needed his parents to explain the exercise headings of different subjects, so that he would know what he was supposed to do the next day.

With time, this child was gradually improving. However, he has no language support

teacher at his school. The mother said it was because he was the only one who needed a language support teacher when he came to the school. Since then, two new Korean children have come to the school and the parent hoped that there would soon be a language support teacher arranged. Without a language support teacher, school life can be tougher for the child. He needed to ask his parents to explain the headings of the exercises before the class the next day. However, giving such help to the child with his school work may lead the teacher to misjudge his level of English. The situation the child finds himself in reflects the problems posed by a shortage of language support teachers.

A lot of Type 1 and Type 2 students in the study were found to have good speaking, listening and reading skills, but had more problems with writing, especially with English grammar.

Orally speaking they are both very good. When it comes to the writing, sometimes their grammar can suffer. They get mixed up in tenses. The past tense, the present tense. And sometimes they omit words from their sentences. Like, they leave out a word. And the sentence mightn't always make sense. But their reading and speaking are very good.

– Class Teacher 3

So, I suppose he doesn't have the background knowledge the other children have and the vocabulary. And then with his English writing, sentence structure, etc. ... He finds that still quite tricky. ... Because especially with his sentence structure. Even though he might have some words, he finds it very hard to put them ... in the right order when writing. That is probably linked to the different structure of his own language. I'm not sure if you found that in your other studies, maybe. ... But, as I've said, like, he has improved a lot especially with his English. Like his reading has come along a lot. His spellings have come along a lot.

– Class Teacher 4

Her reading has no problem. Her writing is fine too, better than before. At first she had some problems with tense, for example, when she wrote about an

event that had happened, she used the present tense. The teacher taught her some grammar, so her writing is much better than before. In general, her English level is ... not low.

– T1 Parent 1

This is easy to understand, as there are huge differences between Chinese and English grammar. Tenses are not used in Chinese language, and therefore when these children write English they will require more effort to think outside of their native language comfort zone.

From the children's point of view, they are aware of their disadvantage with English, particularly when they need to go to a different class to have special English class in school.

When she was with the English support teacher, once she asked me why she was not like other Irish children and had to come to this kind of English class. I told her the English teacher could help her to be better. Then she said, "I will be like them (Irish children) soon." She was very young at that time, because she knew she was not the same as her other classmates, and she needed to go to a different classroom. She told me that the things she learned in the special English class is not the same as the one her other Irish classmates were learning. She told me that whenever she was in the English class that she would miss the things that the Irish children were learning and the homework that they had. Then she would have to find time to catch up. So sometimes, she said to me, "I will be good in the future."

– T2 Parent 5

This child actually raised a very good point. When she is learning English in a different classroom, she could certainly miss out on what is going on in the class, and she would then have to spend extra time to catch up on the material she had missed. This may cause additional problems for children with a language disadvantage.

Two of the language support teachers also commented on this. They criticized the curriculum for language support, *Up and Away*, for not acknowledging the things that the class

teacher teaches in the main class. The children in the language support class often learn very different things from what the other children are learning in class.

5.3.3.3 Language Learning at Home

Throughout all the interviews, it is found that Type 1 and Type 2 children normally receive more help from their parents with their English in early years, when they enter primary school, than in later years, since the parents fear that when starting school their children's English won't catch up with their Irish peers. After the child gets used to school life, most of the Chinese parents don't help them with their English much anymore except, perhaps, to check their spelling. The reason behind this is that Chinese parents often think that their English is not good enough to teach their children, and they are also afraid that they will pass on their accent to their children. Instead, they would rather the children learn English at school, through playing with English-speaking children, or watching English TV programmes.

She needed extra work with her English in the first year in school. When she just started to learn letters in the first year, her pronunciation was very important. As we are Chinese family, we speak Chinese at home. So she needed extra work at the start. We encouraged her to listen to the teacher, the recordings, English songs and watch children TV programmes. We tried to help her to have a feeling of speaking English confidently. In general, it is not very difficult, she picks up English very naturally. In later stage, we didn't help much, she caught up with her classmates by herself. . . . No, I didn't teach her English. I taught her Chinese. I often bring her to a playground to play. There are many foreign friends there and they go there at a fixed time. They speak English to us. So I think she learned her English outside, not at home. I think, living in an English-speaking country, as a parent, my aim is not to teach her English, I don't think I can teach her English well enough. It is better that she learns English in this society.

– T2 Parent 5

The most difficult thing is the language. Because both the parents are Chinese, we speak Chinese at home. Like us, both of their English isn't great and I very seldom teach them English at home. Maybe the English we teach them is wrong, you know? So we don't teach them English at all. I sent them to preschool from a very young age. . . . We also let them watch the English cartoons at home. So all their English is learnt from the TV or from other children. We don't teach them English. Sometimes I feel it a bit difficult to help with their homework and they can ask lots of questions. For instance if the exercise involves using a word to make a sentence. We also have to be careful with the tense and choosing to use the right words.

– T2 Parent 6

Although many Irish class teachers still emphasise the importance of speaking English at home with the parents, some educational professionals in this study think it is more important for the minority ethnic children to speak their own mother tongues at home so that they can maintain their own culture.

For our school, we would really support home language instruction, you know home language maintenance, really. That's very challenging as well. The home language, so whatever the language is at home. They should maintain that, so that they don't lose it. So they have some sense of culturally who they are.

– Language Support Teacher 1

In fact, very few of the parents of children of Type 1 and Type 2 interviewed speak English to their children at home, although some of them were told to do so by the teachers. The Chinese parents said that speaking English at home makes them feel uncomfortable.

We speak Chinese at home. Although the teacher told me and I know that I should speak English to him at home, I can't help from changing back to Chinese. It is much more comfortable to speak our own language. It would feel so fake or something is wrong with me if I speak English to my wife and child. (Laughter)

– T1 Parent 3

The Chinese parents interviewed have very different educational backgrounds. For some parents, it is not only because it is uncomfortable to speak a second language at home, but because they themselves may not have a good level of English. This makes it very difficult for them to help their child with English at home.

In general, English language plays an important role in integration of children from minority ethnic groups into Irish primary schools. Chinese children encountered in the course of this research have very different levels of English proficiency. Type 1 and Type 2 children are the groups who normally have language difficulties. The level of children's English proficiency can depend on their previous English language education before they entered the Irish schools, their parents' English level, and how much help they received from their school and their parents.

5.3.4 Culture

Cultural issues emerged in the initial survey as the biggest challenge faced by Chinese children in Irish primary schools. We now examine this in more detail.

5.3.4.1 Acquisition of Chinese Culture

In the interviews, all of the parents expressed the view that Chinese culture is very important for their children. One of the reasons for this is that the parents want their children to know where they are from and learning Chinese culture is an essential way to help them to maintain their identity.

XXX (name of the Child) is fully aware and deeply proud of her Chinese ethnicity – it is integral to who she is as a person - to her identity. She celebrates

this identity in school by, for instance, at Chinese New Year bringing in little red bags with chocolate money inside for everyone in the class and these are distributed to all by the teacher. So, while she recognises and celebrates her unique identity she does not experience this as a “difference” that separates, she experiences it as an identity of which she is very proud and others respect.

– T4, Parent 12

The second reason is that many Chinese parents think that China is developing fast and learning Chinese culture can give their children more opportunities in the future.

I think the future of the world is in China and I also think their future is in China too. They can speak Chinese but if they want to develop in China in the future they must know Chinese culture. Chinese language is a part of the culture. If they can only speak Chinese but don't know any of the Chinese culture then their knowledge of China is not complete. Even if they can read Chinese literature, such as poems from Tang dynasty or the novel *Three Kingdoms*, they won't understand much if they don't know about Chinese culture.

– T3, Parent 9

The parents have different ways to teach Chinese culture to their children. The most common ways that parents of Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3 children normally use are to speak Chinese at home, celebrate Chinese festivals, send their children to weekend Chinese schools, encourage their children to read Chinese books and watch Chinese TV programmes, and sent their children back to China to visit relatives during summer holidays. The main way that the Type 4 children examined in this research learned Chinese culture was to go to a weekend Chinese culture school that predominantly teaches Chinese music. There, the children can learn traditional Chinese dance, singing and music instruments, and have a social network with other Chinese children. This culture school also has the largest population of Type 4 children among all of the Chinese schools in Ireland.

The following quotes give some examples of how parents help their children to learn about Chinese culture.

I let them watch Chinese cartoons online. We also celebrate every Chinese festival including the Chinese New Year. I bring my kids back to China nearly every year. I think most of the Chinese parents are like me and if you interview other parents you will find out that they all try to send their children back China every year. First of all they need to meet their relatives in China. Secondly they can experience life in China.

– T3 Parent 9

(We help our child to learn Chinese culture) by active commitment to and participation in the Chinese XXX cultural school's programme of teaching traditional dance; by natural socialization with all of the members of the school – children and adults; by reading to her (since she was an infant) stories about China and Chinese culture; by attending Chinese events; by celebrating Chinese festivals such as New Year and the Moon Festival; by holidaying in China with a group (mostly American) of families who had also adopted children from China and traveling throughout the country to experience at first hand the reality life in China.

– T4 Parent 12

The principal of the Chinese culture school emphasised that it is very important for ethnic Chinese children in Ireland to love China and Chinese culture. She pointed out that patriotism could not only be taught through words, but also by letting the children see their achievements and feel honor from Chinese culture. For example, students in the Chinese culture school undertake about twenty performances in different Irish and Chinese festivals each year, and they have achieved a large number of awards. They also raised money for different causes. For example, they raised money after the Indonesian tsunami in 2006, gave economic support to Irish athletes in the Special Olympics in Shanghai in 2007, raised money for aid following the Sichuan earthquake in China in 2008 and so on. The principal also stressed one of vital factors to help Chinese children integrate into Irish society is to

participate in all kinds of activities.

How can you integrate if you don't participate in Irish activities? Integration needs participation, no matter whether you are good or not! (Laughter) ... So, one of our aims is to cultivate the children's confidence. The other aim is to have our children integrated into the local Irish culture and to integrate both Irish and Chinese culture together. These are our main aims.

– Chinese Principal 1

These three Chinese weekend language and culture schools enroll nearly 200 ethnic Chinese students in total. From this, it can be seen how important parents think that Chinese culture is for their children.

5.3.4.2 Acquisition of Irish Culture

To integrate into Irish primary schools, a familiarity with Irish culture is essential. Irish language is a big component of Irish culture. In the interviews, not many Chinese parents showed significant interest in Irish language. One Chinese parent thought that Irish language was not a modern language, and that it was not very useful to learn Irish.

Irish schools teach English, as English is very popular in the world. It is a very important subject. They also teach Irish language, however, Irish is not a modern language and it is a very old language. Not many people speak it. Only some very old Irish people can speak Irish, young Irish normally don't speak Irish. In my opinion, it is just totally a waste of time to learn Irish, but I can't do anything about it, as the children in Ireland have to learn Irish, and it is in the curriculum.

– T3 Parent 9

Three out of four Chinese children interviewed in this research said that their least favourite subject in Irish schools was Irish language. The reasons they gave are that sometimes they don't understand and "there are fadas in Irish, lots of the words just don't make any sense and it is very easy to spell it incorrectly". Many parents also said that they couldn't help much with their children's Irish.

One of the Chinese principals completely disagreed with the position of some of the Chinese parents who think Irish language is useless. She thinks that parents' attitude toward Irish culture would influence their children's attitude, and respecting Irish culture is the first step to have the Chinese children integrated into Irish society.

First thing is to respect the Irish culture and don't judge it negatively and don't always tell your child that Irish language is useless. Lots of parents do so. They don't respect the Irish culture themselves but they ask their children to love Ireland! Is it only to love the Irish passport? That is not right! This kind of thinking that you give to the children is wrong. To love Ireland, you need to know its culture, you need to learn its language, and support all their activities. I think this is the basic duty of a citizen.

– Chinese Principal 1

She also emphasised that Chinese parents need to learn Irish culture themselves and to be a good model for their children. Participation in Irish activities is a great way to get to know Irish culture.

I think it is quite difficult to be a Chinese parent here. We need to leave the good aspects of Chinese culture to our child but at the same time we can't ignore the Irish culture. The parents need to learn for themselves as well. For example, I'm not Irish, how did I learn? I taught myself. It is not possible that you would understand everything by talking to a random Irish person. You need to read books to know more about it. The most important thing is to participate in their activities. If you don't participate you will never know their culture.

– Chinese Principal 1

Another Chinese principal also stressed the importance for Chinese children to know about Irish culture. She pointed out that religion is a very important part of Irish culture. If children want to integrate into Irish schools, they have to know about religion in Ireland.

I encourage my children to attend all the religious classes and activities. I think it is very good, as religion is too important in this country. The history and culture cannot be separated from religion here. If you don't know religion, then you will miss a big chunk of historical and cultural aspects.

– Chinese Principal 2

Two of Chinese school principals stressed how important it is for Chinese children to learn Irish culture, and that it is their first step towards integrating into Irish society.

One Irish teacher also mentioned that to help the migrant children to integrate culturally, it is essential for parents to encourage their children to learn Irish culture and to feel Irish, but maintain their own culture at the same time.

Well, I suppose, with all of these things it comes very much from the parents, and if the parents encourage the children. I suppose, if you are talking about children who are going to settle permanently in this country, then it would be helpful for those children to embrace the Irish culture, whilst at the same time maintaining their own cultural identity. So, you know, if Chinese parents were able to encourage their child to get involved in things like the local St. Patrick's day parade, or maybe learn Irish dancing, or join, you know local ... Gaelic football club in every area. To allow the child to feel Irish, whilst at the same time ... I would never suggest that the child should be discarding their own cultural identity. But so that they could have this dual identity, so that they feel part of the Irish world that they are living in, and they also feel part of the world that they have perhaps left behind. Even if it is, perhaps, temporarily. So that is, I think, going to come mostly from the parents. If the parents are not expressing an interest or are not displaying an interest in occasions that arise within the Irish cultural calendar, then the children are not going to be interested.

– Class Teacher 6

5.3.4.3 Intercultural Education

When the Type 1 and Type 2 Chinese children enter Irish primary schools for the first time, they are in a totally different culture from what they had at home. Many of them became very quiet and find it difficult to blend in with other children in the class. After some period, this situation can get better. The length of this period, however, depends on each individual.

(They are) a bit shy at the beginning. Very quiet. It takes them a while to come out of themselves, come out of their shells, and to blend in with the kids. But over a few months they come out of themselves, and become more confident.

– Class Teacher 3

It took them a long time to integrate. For example, but now I've seen this boy, who I have in my class, I've known him from Junior Infants. So each year he's getting better and he's integrating more. And even in First Class, even at the start of the year he was quite quiet and a little bit withdrawn but now because we are coming towards the end of the year he's come out of himself so much more.

– Class Teacher 4

The above phenomenon is a typical sign of culture shock. The children appeared to be very quiet and withdraw at the start of their schooling. The new language and new culture may cause the children to feel anxious and uncertain. The class teachers reported that with time the children did get better.

In this study, all the Irish school principals and teachers were aware of the importance of intercultural education in the schools. All six schools principals expressed that part of their schools ethos was inclusivity, and that they try to respect every culture and make sure every child is welcome. Five of the school principals explained that they would have an

International Day celebration in their school. On that day, the children would wear their traditional clothes and parents could be invited to the school to cook food from their own culture.

Our thing is, we would go to a lot of trouble to try to make sure that every child, every family will feel included. So we would try hard to be inclusive. . . . It doesn't make a difference what country he's from or what is the colour of his skin or who he is, once he arrives in our country, once he arrives in our school, we respect that person. And we would say, look, we would like to learn about your country, about your religion, etcetera, and even though it is a Catholic school, we would have a strong ethos of inclusivity and we would try to make an effort. . . . We make the children feel you are respected here and you have the same rights as everybody else, and you are treated the very same.

– Irish Principal 1

Further, the principals of the three Educate Together schools drew attention to their “Learn Together” curriculum.

We have our “Learn Together” programme, which is our multid denominational ethical programme. And in that we would take all the main religions throughout the world and we would teach the children about them and we would celebrate them. We would celebrate the Chinese New Year, we would celebrate Hindu festivals, we would celebrate Vaisakhi, we would celebrate Hanukkah, Jewish festivals. So all the religious festivals are celebrated. We make sure every child has access to some celebration that he can identify with. So that's one way. Our multid denominational ethos. And our ethical programme.

– Irish Principal 4

I think what's interesting in our school, in terms of our inclusive culture, is that the children who come through it, the Irish children, the foreign children, any children, they learn to be very very inclusive. They learn to accept differences so well. And they don't see the differences. And as I say to everyone, we don't just tolerate differences, we celebrate differences.

– Irish Principal 4

One of the class teachers also explained how he would teach culture when a new child from an ethnic minority joins the class.

Well, when they arrive we do a power point about their country. The big screen here. ...I show little video clips from ... let's say from China. The culture, the music. We get them to speak a few phrases. Like the kids very often come up to the front of the class and speak Chinese to us. How to say thank you. How to say hello. And they write on the board, so the children can see that it's not like our writing, that it's totally different. And they love that. And then the Chinese New Year. We celebrate that. We do lots of art for it.

– Class Teacher 3

Sometimes the child is encouraged to contribute to the class too. One of the parents in the research said that her child was, from time to time, encouraged by the class teacher to teach Chinese language and songs to the class. This not only introduced the culture, but also gave the child confidence and pride in his/her own identity. Culture is another great way to integrate the child into the class.

It appeared that all the schools in the study are trying to include the child who is from another culture and celebrate different festivals and introduce different food to the children. However, as what a Chinese principal has said, culture is not only about festivals, food and language, but also has the more important aspect, worldview.

The biggest integration issue is the need to overcome cultural differences. Culture is not only about what we eat, how we celebrate Chinese festivals and how we speak Chinese, but about the different worldviews. Worldview is formed from an early age and the Chinese worldview is quite different from the Western worldview.

– Chinese Principal 1

The principal explained that worldview includes people's beliefs and values, and it can be reflected in many ways, such as the person's approach to problem solving, their attitude to education, their view of the purpose of life and so on. An Irish language support teacher who had a number of years of teaching experience in Asia and North America claimed that cultural differences may also mean different discipline and behavior at home and school, and different expectations from the parents.

So I would say language is the primary difficulty, the challenge children face and that teachers face within the class. But in addition to that is obviously there is culture difference, particularly school culture differences in terms of what the expectations are, maybe. Both between the Irish school and maybe their home country school, and also difference between discipline and behavior at home and at school, which are often culturally based.

– Language Support Teacher 1

A good example of this was mentioned during one of the interviews. One of the Chinese parents told the researcher that his child had tried to pat an Irish boy on the shoulder in class to show closeness to him. However, the Irish boy thought that he had hit him and reported it to the principal.

Because the language and cultural backgrounds are very different in Ireland. For example, it is very normal for boys to pat a friend's shoulder to get attention or to show closeness in China. So he did the same in his Irish school. His English was not good and actually what he wanted to express was to show closeness to the other child. You know what I mean. So he patted another child on the shoulder. The other child told the principal immediately. . . . So the principal told me that my son hit another child in the class. I know my son, he is a very introvert child, he had never been involved in any fighting before. I asked him when we got home and he said he just patted another child to show that he is his good pal. He got too nervous to explain after the other child told the principal. That's the cultural difference. Patting shoulders in China is a way to show friendship, however, it is different here. If you touch someone, he would think you are hitting him. The main differences are language and cultural background, it can cause difficulty sometime.

– T1 Parent 3

People from different cultures may have different notions of personal space. Touching, for example, is more usual in some cultures than in others. With very limited English, the boy couldn't properly explain to the principal what had happened, and his parents didn't explain it later to the principal as they didn't want to cause more embarrassment.

People from different cultures may have different views on education as well. A Chinese mother complained to the researcher how angry she felt about her daughter's class teacher. The reason she got angry was because the teacher had told her that she thought that her 5 year old daughter should repeat Junior Infants because she had too little English. From this Chinese mother's point of view, it was very insulting for her daughter. In China, only students who failed their final exams in all subjects in primary school would have to repeat the year, and this very seldom happens. If it happened, it would be considered as a huge loss of face for the child and their parents. She said to the researcher with anger, "how could the teacher let a 5 years old girl repeat the year? She is only 5, and how bad can she be? How will she feel if she found out all her friends are a year ahead of her?" However, from the Irish teacher's point of view, she was likely considering that repeating the year would be good for the girl's English, and with an extra year, her language would improve and she would be more capable of learning other subjects and integrating. In the end, the Chinese mother was too angry to talk to the teacher and changed her daughter's school. This problem could have been solved more easily with more communication between the parent and the teacher. However, the limited English of the parent can be a barrier and the cultural conflict can cause misunderstanding between the two parties.

In the course of the interviews, the word and examples of a "good child" appeared many times. It was found that in Chinese peoples' mind, their definitions of a "good child" is different from the one Irish people have.

There must be some problems. Because they (children who had experience in Chinese schools) have been used to the Chinese educational methods and

models, including the idea of what an “ideal child” is and what a “good child” should be like in China. These can be quite different here. . . . Chinese people specially expect their children to be the best with their academic subjects, and of course they hope their children are the best in all different things. However, people in Ireland don’t always expect to be the best with everything. So I think these Chinese children might have some confusion. Besides the obstacles of language and culture differences, this can be a problem too.

– Chinese Principal 2

Actually, it was our neighbor suggested to me that I send my son to the church school. Then we went. My son didn’t want to go at first, but he tried to be a good child, Mum asked him to go, then he would try to go.

– Chinese Educational Scholar

The two Chinese educational professionals gave explanations for what a good child should be in Chinese people’s mind: the child needs to be obedient to parents and teachers, study well and be best at everything.

Then the researcher asked the Chinese children about their view of what a good child is.

Firstly you don’t hit people, secondly you don’t say bad words, thirdly you listen to your teacher’s words, fourthly, you should never be punished or be made to stand in the class, fifthly, nobody has ever reported you are a bad child to the teacher, sixthly, you have lots of friends, seventhly, your writing should be beautiful, eighthly, your writing should be neat, ninthly, you should be good in every aspect.

– T1 Child 1

A good child needs to listen to their teachers’ words, study well and have a good moral. They also need to be diligent in whatever they do.

– T1 Child 2

Then the researcher asked how they compare their own view of a good child with the one their Irish friends have. All the children said that they are different.

In China, as long as you study well, then you are a good child. In Ireland, you need to be nice to people, such as courtesy and so on.

– T1 Child 1

I: In another words, in your friends' mind, what is a good child?

C: Friendly.

I: Friendly is the standard of a good child in your Irish friends' mind?

C: Yes.

– T1 Child 2

Both of these two children had three years school experience in Chinese primary schools, and had over a year of school experience in Ireland. They both stated that listening to the teacher, having good morals and being good at everything is the standard of a good child. Child 2 also said that a good student should study well, just as her Irish class teacher had described her, “academically very strong”. Child 1 didn't list studying well in his standard of a good child in the interview, but he said that it is the most important criteria in Chinese schools. The reason that he didn't list it might be down to a gradual change in his worldview since entering an Irish school.

In general, intercultural education is not only about celebrating festivals, introducing traditional food and teaching a few words of the languages from different cultures. These would certainly help children to know more about a culture, but it is also very important for the parents and the school to be aware of the differences between each other's worldview towards education so that people can understand each other better and cultural conflict can be minimized.

Regarding intercultural education in Irish schools, another interesting point was raised by one principal of an Educate Together school: all the Irish primary school teachers need to pass an Irish language exam. This rule already excludes teachers from different cultures. How can a school teach intercultural education while excluding teachers from other cultures?

The problem with a class teacher in Ireland is that they have to have Irish. At primary level, teachers must have Irish. That is a bit exclusive, you know, in terms of integrating primary teachers (from other countries) into primary education. ...you're given a few years learning it to do the exam. But you cannot get a permanent class teacher post unless you have the Irish exam done. ... You have limited recognition, but you can just teach resource, or English language, without fluency in Irish. But you cannot teach in the class. So we have our American teacher and others like her with limited recognition. Our teacher from New Zealand was the same. She couldn't teach in a class, she was just in the special education department. ...So it is a difficulty as far as Irish primary schools go. Fluency in Irish language is compulsory. Class teachers have to have a certain level in Irish which is relatively high. Now, I think we could look, maybe, towards a percentage not having Irish to this level and then you could share the teaching of the Irish and swap. ...That is possible, but they haven't gone down that route at the moment. Again, when you're the class teacher, it's difficult to organize that sometimes. But it could be done, you know?

– Irish Principal 4

As the educational agent and a model for the children, teachers play an important role in the transmission of culture. At present there are predominantly white, Irish born teachers in the schools. Without having teachers from other countries and other races, equality and respect for diversity may be more difficult to achieve.

5.3.5 Social Development

5.3.5.1 Factors Affecting Social Development

Many parents and teachers mentioned the issue of the social development of Chinese children. It is considered to be one of the challenges to the integration of Chinese children into Irish primary schools. The parents who have the most concern about their children's social development had children in the Type 1 and 2 categories. Three parents of Type 1 children and three of Type 2 children claimed that their children had some level of difficulty socializing in Irish schools. None of the Type 3 and Type 4 parents found any problem with their children's social development.

One of the Type 1 parents explained that her child's social interaction with her Irish friends needs to be improved. This child has spent three years in a Chinese school, and then moved to Ireland a year ago.

I think it needs to be improved from a social aspect. She has no problem with the language communication. From a cultural aspect, I think she accepts and adapts to the culture quite well. A child is different from an adult. We had stayed in China for so many years and we already have our own way of thinking. Our child isn't an extrovert child. She won't go to ask an Irish child to play with her first. I think she needs to improve in this respect.

– T1 Parent 1

In the parent's view, the reasons that the child is not doing so well in mixing with the other children is because she is not pro-active and rather hesitant in social interactions. This is evident in that she doesn't like to approach other children first.

To be honest, I still think there are some differences between Western and

Eastern people. Western people still can't talk with you like the way that they talk to westerners. She is comparably good. When her Irish friends have a birthday party, they would invite her. well integrated. For example, there are four Indian children, one Filipino, and a half Filipino and a half Irish in her class. ... The Indian children only play with Indian children. The Irish children tend to play with the Irish children most of the time. My child is fine and she can play with most of the children. However, I still feel that the Irish children won't have a deep friendship with her. How can I express this ... I can't say that she can't integrate, she is fine in this aspect, but she can't integrate as well as the Irish children. For example, if she met a friend on the way to school in the morning in China, the two kids would chat and laugh together, and feel very close to each other. It is not like that in Ireland. When she met a friend on the way to school last time, they just said hi to each other, then continued to walk on their own. So I feel ... I don't know how to express this. I can't say that she doesn't integrate, but I can't say she integrates very well either.

– T1 Parent 1

In this parent's experience, children from some Asian countries have difficulty forming deep friendships with their Irish peers. The parent thought that her daughter could socially integrate with her Irish peers, but that the level of this integration was not as complete as for local Irish children. Another parent has a similar point of view.

My child is quite introverted. He is not a very outgoing child. He doesn't make any trouble either. Therefore I think it is a little bit difficult for him socially, because the language and cultural backgrounds are very different in Ireland.

– T1 Parent 3

In my opinion, I can't say that this will be the situation forever, but I think that it is very, very difficult to really integrate fully. If a Chinese child was born and grows up in Ireland, then it would be possible. I came to Ireland when I was in my 30s. I don't think I will integrate completely even after 50 years. Even a person who came to Ireland at a young age, for example, my son came to Ireland when he was in second class. He was very young but still his way of thinking and way of learning are still very Chinese. At least they are still very Chinese now.

– T1 Parent 3

Both of these Type 1 children's parents thought that the primary reason that their children didn't integrate well socially was because they have introvert personalities. The second reason was because the language and culture their children grew up in was different from the one that Irish children have, and so it is difficult to socially integrate to any significant extent.

One Type 2 child's parent who showed concern about her child's social development also commented on similar points. As with the previous parent, she also thought that the reason her child didn't have many Irish friends was also because her son's personality was introverted and that he didn't approach other children first.

The differences, like religion and culture, do exist. I'm just afraid that my kid cannot integrate with the others. Maybe it is because he is an introverted child himself and if he does not actively approach other children first, then other children won't approach him, either. It is a bit difficult. Maybe it will be easier for a local Irish child.

– T2 Parent 6

In my child's previous school, there were also children from other countries, such as Poland and so on. He was good friends with these children. After he changed schools, the social issue became very obvious. He always asked me after school, "Mum, when can I be familiar with them? They all don't play with me." You know, during the break, all the children are playing outside but he has nobody to play with. He just feels very isolated.

– T2 Parent 6

From this example it would appear that it is easier for children who are not Irish to integrate with each other than with Irish children. This is particularly highlighted by the mother's observation about the impact a change in school had on the child. In the second school, there were no other non-Irish children and his feeling of isolation became very apparent.

After the child changed to a new school, he had no friends to play with anymore. So her child never had many good Irish friends. This parent also explained that one of the reasons that her child didn't have many Irish friends was perhaps because of the parents' influence.

Maybe it is because my English is not good that normally I don't watch English TV or listen to English music. My children are like me and only watch Chinese TV. So one time when one of my children was talking to the Irish children the Irish child chatted about a famous singer, but my child didn't know who the singer was and then other children laughed and said, "Oh, my God! You don't even know such a famous singer!" Then he came back and told me about it, so sometimes I feel it is a bit sad ...

– T2 Parent 6

Parents are the main educators of their children and are role models for them in many respects. If the parents don't speak good English, don't know much about Irish culture and very seldom socially interact with Irish people, then it is very difficult for the children to do so. The researcher then compared these three Chinese parents, and two of them (Parent 3 and Parent 6) don't have a good level of English. Parent 1 has better English, but because she is a housewife and she has only lived in Ireland for about a year and a half, she doesn't know many Irish people herself.

So the three parents above had mentioned three reasons why they believe their children hadn't integrated very well into their school socially:

- The child has an introvert personality and doesn't like to approach other people who s/he doesn't know well first.
- Different cultural background, which is mainly influenced by the parents.
- The level of parents' integration.

Another issue that can also influence the child's level of integration is the time that the child has spent in an Irish school. Parent 8 claimed that his daughter felt very lonely in the first year in school. After three years, his child's social interaction with Irish children was getting much better.

What do Irish teachers think of Chinese children's social development in school? In the interviews with Irish teachers, three out of four class teachers described their Chinese children as "shy" and "quiet".

She is very good academically. Socially, I'm not too sure if ... She doesn't do great, honestly, with the people. She can be quite shy and quiet at times. I'm not sure if outside of school she socializes a lot with the girls in the class.

– Class Teacher 2

And sometimes he knows what to do, he just is quite shy, he doesn't like confrontation. He doesn't like to be the centre of attention. So I think that might be part of it as well. So it's a mixture of not having the phrases, the social phrases, to work with someone a little bit, but then part of it is that he's a little bit shy as well. So that's probably what my biggest concern would be.

– Class Teacher 4

It seems that these teachers think the personality of the Chinese children in their classes is quite introverted as well. However, there are also Chinese children who have a very outgoing personality in Irish schools. One Irish teacher compared two Type 2 Chinese boys who have very different personalities in his class.

One is really outgoing, and really fun and lively, and chatting to everyone. ... And the other one is, okay, a nice fellow but very shy. And you have to start conversation with him. He won't start a conversation with a teacher anyway. So here we have two quite different characters.

– Class Teacher 3

While outside the scope of this research, it appears that a child with an extravert personality will integrate better, as a chatty child has more opportunity to practice English and to make friends than a quiet child has.

Two Irish teachers also mentioned that the shy and quiet Chinese children in their class are actually doing quite well on the playground, but they would become very quiet again in the classroom or withdraw in group- work.

His friends in the yard, I've seen him, he plays and he's good fun with them out there and does lots of talking. But in the classroom he goes back to being quiet again.

– Class Teacher 3

He's good on the yard and at play time he will join in with the boys at the games, but if I ask him to work with another child solely, if it's just paired work or it's group work, he withdraws completely. . . . So he finds it quite hard socially to work with someone on a particular subject. So that would probably be his biggest problem at the moment.

– Class Teacher 4

An Irish teacher explained an interesting experience that she had with her 5th and 6th class students. There were three Chinese girls in her class. Two of the girls are twins and they were born in Ireland. She claimed that the twins have no problem integrating as they had been in an Irish school for seven years. The other girl just came from China and had only stayed in the Irish school for one school year so far. This girl also suffers from cerebral palsy. The teacher described her as “serious”, “mature” and “academic”. This new Chinese girl didn't integrate well, the teacher explained, but it was difficult to tell whether it is because of her personality, or experience in Chinese schools or her physical disability.

They (The twins and the girl) don't play together, but I'm not sure that that is anything to do with the particular cultural heritage that either of them, or any of them, are experiencing. I think it's more to do with different personalities. The little girl who has arrived last September is very serious. She's very mature in her way of thinking. Now perhaps this is because she is a product of the Chinese educational system. . . . I think she probably feels more comfortable talking to adults. I think she feels they're more on her wavelength than children the same age as her.

– Class Teacher 6

So that (cerebral palsy) would interfere with her mixing with the children in the playground. She wouldn't be able to keep up with them running around and so on. So that, I'm sure, has an effect on whether she will integrate easily or not. So it's hard to know whether the fact that she doesn't seem to be relating is because she is a product of the Chinese education system, or it's because of her cerebral palsy or it's because of her personality. You know?

– Class Teacher 6

Although the teacher said this girl's way of thinking was very mature, and she didn't integrate well into the class, not even playing with the Chinese twins, it seems she had built a deep relationship with a newly arrived Chinese girl in 2nd class in the yard.

When she was leaving, a little, a brand new Chinese girl, who only came in to second class recently, was really, really upset at the graduation. And I thought somebody had stood on her or something, because she was sitting on the ground. But it was because XX (name of the girl) was leaving. So XX must be really nice to her in the yard. Because, she wasn't crying about any other of the sixth class kids. She was just crying because the Chinese child was leaving. And she was distraught.

– Irish Principal 6

The girl seemed to have social difficulties in her class, but she made a good friend who was four years younger than her in the yard. Maybe it is that the similar immigrant experience

and cultural background pulled these two Chinese girls together, and that her personality and cerebral palsy certainly didn't stop her from making this friend.

This teacher also gave another interesting experience with this girl.

She seems quite musical, but she doesn't seem to want to get involved in things like music. We have a choir, but she didn't want ... even though she likes singing, she didn't want to join the choir. So I don't know why. She didn't give me a good explanation for why that is. She did say that she was afraid that she would be wasting her time. So I don't know whether that's a ... I don't know whether she believes that she should be working the whole time or whether that's just the way her particular preferences are.

– Class Teacher 6

According to the researcher's own experience, that joining the choir would be considered wasting time is a very Chinese way of thinking. The idea that attending after school activities will waste the child's study time is very commonly held by Chinese parents. In this point, she might have been influenced by the Chinese educational system. However, her physical disability may also have been a contributing factor to why she didn't want to join the choir.

This girl's example is probably a bit special, but it reminds us that the level of children's social integration is never the product of a single factor. It can be affected by many factors. The factors which would influence the child's social integration within Irish primary school which emerged in this study include: the child's language level for the language of instruction, their personality, their parents' integration level, cultural background, the age of the child, the time the child spent in the school, their educational background and their health situation. These factors don't act independently either, and can affect each other. For example, a child with little English can't communicate much with other people in the class, which might cause a change in the child's personality. Every child can be influenced by

different factors on different levels. Therefore, every child is an individual and their social integration levels into the Irish school are all different as well.

5.3.5.2 Irish Schools Role in Aiding Social Integration

All of the Irish schools in this research used a variety of ways to try to help the Chinese children to socially integrate better. The most common way is a buddy system. This means that the teachers buddy the migrant child up with a strong student in the class. This student can help and support the migrant child in different ways, such as showing the child where the toilet is. It is also a great way for the migrant child to make friends with this buddy.

To let the child know the rules and routines of the school is also very important, one class teacher explained, so that the child would feel comfortable in the class.

Integrating them within the class and within the school as well, so that they are comfortable, they know the rules of the school, they know the routines in the classroom. ... The other thing that I would be to make a buddy system. Buddy them up with someone in the class to help them. You know, if they didn't know the school very well, or the routines.

– Class Teacher 2

One Irish school principal said that they would also try to make sure that the migrant child would be involved in doing little jobs around the school, so that they feel they are important and needed.

5.3.5.3 Suggestions

Not all of Chinese parents interviewed think that their children don't have many friends at school. A Chinese parent claimed that her daughter (a Type 2 child) has a very good relationship with her Irish friends. She suggested to other Chinese parents that it is very important to let the child to have play dates with other children after school. She said that it is essential for the Chinese parents to get to know the Irish parents first, so that a trust can be built between the parents, so that Irish parents would feel safe to let their children go to the Chinese child's home. She also mentioned that it is important for the parents and the child to meet local people.

I think that meeting local people is quite important. You need to bring your child to the local park to meet different friends. Friends don't have to come from your child's class. Children also need to have some activity to communicate with each other in the class. You also need to hold parties for your child and your child can invite their friends so they can communicate rather than just stay at home and not have any connections with outside. Having parties should not only be for celebrating birthdays but also be used for the building of relationships. This cannot be taught in school.

– T2 Parent 5

Irish class teachers also suggested that Chinese parents should encourage their children to join in more after school activities and arrange more play dates for their children outside school. One teacher specifically suggested telling all the Chinese parents that social development is equally important as the academic development of the child.

The other important point that a lot of parents, Chinese principals and Irish principals and teachers mentioned was the importance of the parents' integration and level of parents' involvement in the school, which leads on to the next section.

5.3.6 Parental Involvement

Among all of the twelve parents, there were four parents who had so far been involved in their children's school. Two of them are Chinese parents, and two are Irish parents. Out of the nine Chinese parents in the study, two is quite a small fraction. One Chinese parent had volunteered to do work in the school library once a month. The other Chinese parent is a Chinese dance teacher, so she was invited by the class teacher to teach the students Chinese dance a few times.

5.3.6.1 Factors Influencing Parental Involvement in Schools

In this study, many teachers and principals talked about the factors that affect the level of parental involvement. What follows are the core themes that emerged.

Trust

The first factor is trust. It was raised by one of the Irish school principals. He claimed that the basis of parental involvement is the trust between the parents and the school.

The main thing with parents is that they would know that there is a bond of trust established between you and them and that they feel secure in your company. . . . That's a two-way thing. If you give trust then you must accept trust and give it back. Now for different reasons, people, maybe through shyness or for feelings of personal inadequacy, may not come. After telling me and promising me they will come, they may not come, but that is human nature. But you have to try all the time, and make people feel they can overcome any difficulties they have in terms of trust and support and help.

– Irish Principal 1

The trust the principal mentioned here is not only a simple trust between the parents, teach-

ers and the principal, but also a trust between cultures.

Language Barrier

A few Irish principals and teachers in the study mentioned that the lack of spoken English is the biggest challenge for parents to get involved and integrated with the school.

Particularly the parents' lack of language (is the greatest barrier). Because when they are not comfortable with English, they don't come to the school that often. You know, they don't integrate with us very much. They kind of keep away. This is particularly true of our school, because our children come to school by bus. We don't see our parents very often. So they don't ... There is a difficulty there with parental involvement. And I think if parents are involved in school life, they integrate really well. Because they meet other parents.

– Irish Principal 6

So there is a bit of a block there that we have to fight all the time. We have to work really hard to get our parents to come in, so that they can meet other parents, so that they can integrate. So I think that's ... The parents' language and the children's language are both barriers to integration.

– Irish Principal 6

Language is a vital tool for communication. Without good English, communication can be difficult for the migrant parents. In this study, eleven out of twelve of the parents were positive about the communication between the parent and the Irish school. The normal communication methods they use to communicate with the teacher include the parent-teacher meetings, face-to-face chats when they collect their children from school and written notes on the child's homework notebooks.

The only parent who was not positive about the communication between the parents and the teacher is Parent 6. She claimed that it was difficult to reach the class teacher in some

schools and she felt that the teachers were trying to keep away from the migrant parents. She would like the communication between parents and teachers to be improved.

Normally the teachers here won't approach the parents unless there is really a problem with your children. If you want to know more, you need to take the initiative and ask the teacher. . . . They (her children) just changed to a new school and I very seldom see the teacher. . . . Normally the teacher leaves immediately after the class in their school. The children wait outside with other teachers, which they call "helpers", who keep an eye on the children. I went to see their class teachers several times, but didn't find them. . . . In the previous school usually I met the class teacher every two or three weeks.

– T2 Parent 6

The fact that many Irish teachers leave immediately after the school finishes and leave the children with the helper makes it quite difficult for parents to meet the class teachers. She felt that the Irish teacher won't approach her unless there is "really a problem" with the child. She also told the researcher that her Chinese friends have a similar story as hers. This parent suggested, in this circumstance, that if the teachers have to leave right after school, it would be good if the teacher could write a note to the parents every month just to inform them about the progress of the child in the school.

The Chinese parents with a low level of English tend to depend more on written notes in the child's homework notebook to communicate with the teacher.

Parent 3 is a parent with a relatively low level of English. He said that he is happy about the way he communicates with the teacher now, which is mainly by writing notes in the child's homework notebook if something happens.

I normally go (to the parent-teacher meeting). We don't see much of his teacher at other times. Because both of us need to work we have no time to go to chat with the teacher, not like the parents in China, "Hi, Miss Li, how is my

child today? Is he doing well today? Thank you very much for everything. . . .”
Not like that at all. We just write in his notebook if there is really something
important.

– T1 Parent 3

This parent said he was too busy to go to chat with the teacher very often. He only writes a note to the teacher on the child’s homework booklet if there is something “really important”. He said he is happy with the communication level now. However, he was aware that his parent-teacher communication level is lower than with schools in China. It is difficult to tell whether he is really happy about the communication between him and the school, or just is more comfortable that he does not have to talk too much English to the teacher.

Four out of six Irish school principals said they managed the communication between the parents and school adequately, as most of non-Irish parents speak some level of English. Even though there are some parents who cannot speak English, interpreters can be arranged. One school principal claimed that it is difficult for her school to find interpreters and translators and that the school had to ask other parents who have the same language to translate everything.

Well, getting translating for people who’s English isn’t great. That would be a difficulty all right, but we wouldn’t automatically have translators to call on, except that we would in the past have called on families who may have been in school for quite a while. We might have to get them to try to translate for us, and to communicate with the parents on matters in school, homework, outings, the things the children would be involved in.

– Irish Principal 5

One very experienced language support teacher suggested that if a school has any difficulty with dealing with migrant parents, the school should always call for help.

So I would say, don't be afraid to ask for help, don't be afraid to ring another school and say could you help me. Because I get calls like that all the time, and I am happy to help. What worries me is the people who don't ring and then the child sits down at the back of the class with the work book, and then at the end of the year doesn't have the English because the teacher is very busy. And you know, I think there are ways to work around it. Teachers need to know what is out there in terms of support and to utilise it, and to use the Primary Professional Development Service. That's what they are there for. Ring them and say "I can't do this. Come and help me." And they have to, that's their role, to come and help you. And they will do, they're excellent. But unless you know who to ring and how to ask for help and what help you need. In terms of what I would say to parents is to get involved in school. Don't stay away because you don't know English.

– Language Support Teacher 1

What this teacher was saying is that both schools and parents should be more brave, step out of their comfort zone and do not be afraid ask for help if it is needed. In this way, the relationship between the school and the migrant parents can be improved.

Culture

One Irish parent in this study said that from his experience of living in China for seven and a half years, he found that Chinese parents don't normally get involved with the school much even in China, and this might be rooted in culture.

A lot of parents don't think that, I think. Especially coming from China where the Chinese parents tend not to get involved with the school. . . . Because they are afraid, they are afraid to approach teachers. . . . But even in China, my understanding is that my (Chinese) colleagues, they would never question a teacher. . . . They would take the teacher's side all the time. The children are told to obey the teacher and to be loyal. They don't interfere, the teacher is the boss in the classroom.

– T3 Parent 10

One principal also commented on a similar issue.

One thing that I would say about the Chinese parents would be that they allow their children to be ... they allow their children to go to school without any ... they don't contact the school much. The Chinese parents don't ... They don't contact the school much. They kind of seem to put all their trust in the school. ... And they don't ask questions about the school. That would be one thing that I would have found with the Chinese.

– Irish Principal 6

One language support teacher also claimed culture plays an important role in the interaction between the parents and the teacher.

So they kind of have an idea what kinds of things happen at school and the role of the teacher and the role of the principal; the interaction between the parents and the teacher; what's appropriate and what is not appropriate, you know, what the expectations are there. That's often not the same in their home country as it is in Ireland. So those kind of cultural differences really come into play. ... But there are certainly as many opportunities for growth, and development, and exchange and learning for teachers and staff and the family. So we don't only focus on what the challenges are, what the difficulties are, but also where the opportunities are.

– Language Support Teacher 1

Home country culture gives the parents the main idea of what everything should be like in schools and influences their expectations for their children's education. The next section will look at what Chinese parents' expectations are like from their own perspective and from the perspective of Irish educational professionals.

5.3.6.2 Chinese Parental Expectations

Eight out of nine Chinese parents in this study thought their expectations of their children is different from those of Irish parents. All these parents thought that their expectation for their children's academic study was higher than that of Irish parents and they thought that their expectation in Ireland was lower than it would be if they were in China.

Expectation ... to be honest, I think our expectation is different. Why do I say that? In China, every parent wants his/her child to be great academically. There are exams in Chinese primary school, so the exam marks can be the decider. The parents can see the exam marks and know how well the child learns. If the child get a high mark, of course the parents will be very happy; if the child get a low mark, the parents would help the child to find the reason and try to catch up. So every Chinese parent has high expectation. However, in Irish primary school, there is no formal exams, there is no pressure, so the parents don't have high expectation academically. So my expectation of my child now is not as high as it was in China. The other reason is that I know she will only be in Ireland for about two years, so my only expectation is that she can learn English well and she can catch up her English with her Irish classmates. We only stay in Ireland for a short period, so we didn't expect much. She did well herself anyway. If we were in China, our expectation would be very different.

– T1 Parent 1

This parent's daughter had spent three years in a Chinese primary school before she moved to Ireland. Parent 1 explained that she has high expectations for her child academically. However, because there is little standardised testing in Irish primary schools, and there is not much pressure on the students, the Irish parents don't seem to expect much for their children's academic study. She also said that she has lowered her expectation of her daughter since she moved to Ireland, and her expectation now was only that the child could catch up with her English. She explained that the reason that Chinese parents' expectations are normally higher is because the pressure in Chinese and Irish schools is very different. In China, only if a child gets a good mark in the primary school, then can they have a better

chance to go to a good junior secondary school. Staying in a good junior secondary school would give the child a better chance to get a good mark in the Zhongkao⁴. A good mark in Zhongkao would get the child to a good senior secondary school. Then the child would have a better chance to get a good mark in Gaokao⁵, so that the child can go to a good University. The parent claimed that the pressure on children and parents in China is continuous and is always there, and won't stop until the child gets to the highest level they can. However, in Ireland, the parent said, at least in primary schools, there is not this kind of pressure.

The researcher then interviewed the class teacher of this parent's child. The class teacher said that she thought the Chinese parent's expectation were the same as other Irish parents in the class, although she did mention that the Chinese girl is very strong academically five times during the interview.

Personally I haven't had a lot of experience with this girl's parents. I have ... I think I have met her mom once or twice. Very lovely woman. The girl I have, her homework is done immaculately. There's obviously support at home with work and school-work, so that's all I know with regards to that. Their expectations seem to be the same as the Irish parents in my class, or any other parents that I have in my class.

– Class Teacher 2

The two parties gave very different answers on the topic of parental expectations. The teacher also mentioned that she only met the girl's mother once or twice. The short contact may be the reason that the teacher hasn't realized there is any difference in expectations.

One Irish principal claimed that migrant parents don't have high expectation, and that they tend not to interfere much with the school.

⁴Zhongkao is equivalent to the junior cert examinations in Ireland.

⁵Gaokao is equivalent to the Leaving Cert examinations in Ireland.

My own opinion is that parents of other countries are very easy to deal with. They don't have high expectations. Some ways they can tend to be on the periphery.

– Irish Principal 3

An Irish principal in an Educate Together school pointed out that migrant parents' expectations are different according to where they are from. She claimed that parents who are from Asian countries tend to have higher expectations.

In general, it can vary within a country as well. But we do find that for a lot of the Asian children, the parents would have very high expectations. . . . Asian countries can have higher expectations in terms of the academia and they are very interested in the academics.

– Irish Principal 4

This principal also mentioned as an example that some parents from Asia would ask to have their children put into a higher class although the children are far too young for that.

Another Educate Together school principal said that she found that Chinese parents expect a lot from their children.

And I think that it's a bit stereotypical that they are ambitious for their children, but I think probably they are. But that comes out through the children rather than their contact with the school. They don't come to me to say that they'd like their children to be doing this or to be doing better or they want more study for their children, nothing like that. I think any of that, that happens, happens at home.

– Irish Principal 6

The principal claimed that the Chinese parents would expect their children to do a lot and make the children do more study at home, although they never tell the school what their expectations are. The high expectations can be also viewed in other aspects too. The principal then gave an example of a twelve years old Chinese girl who has cerebral palsy. This girl, in a wheelchair, and her little brother took two buses to school every day. The principal said these kids would turn up in school every day, even when there was severe snow and many of the other children, whose parents have cars, didn't turn up. Sometimes the principal and the teachers were worried about them and tried to arrange a lift for them, but their parents insisted that the children could do it themselves. "The girl is a fantastic girl, because I think she just does what is expected of her", the principal added.

Another demonstration of the high expectations of Chinese parents is that a lot of the Chinese parents in this study expect their children to get 100% in all tests.

This is a very normal phenomenon in China. All the parents and teacher would encourage the children to get 100% and they would tell the children that their aim is to get 100%. In Ireland, unless a student gets a very bad mark, like around 30%, maybe then the Irish parents would not be happy. If the child passed all the exams, the parents would start to praise, "Well done! Well done! You did a great job to pass all the exams."

– T3 Parent 9

I think my expectations for my child is a bit lower in Ireland. If you want to survive in Ireland and you get 80% or 90% in exams that is pretty good but in China, you would expect your child to get 100%. The child must get 100%, then the parents can stop worrying, only if this is the case can the child get a good job and have a good life in the future. Here is very different.

– T2 Parent 5

Although Parent 5 said her expectation was lower in Ireland now, as the researcher has learned, her child normally gets 100% in all sorts of tests in her Irish school and the weekend

Chinese school. This may be because the parent always tells the child what the students are like in China and how hard she studied when she was young. The child's Irish teacher especially talked about this with the parent and said the child's biggest weakness is that she wants everything to be perfect, and so puts herself under too much pressure sometimes. The parent also admitted that sometime she had to tell her child to relax to reduce her pressure.

One Chinese principal also told the researcher about her expectations of her own children.

My expectation of my children is like the one "tiger mother"⁶ has. I won't allow them to get grade B. I won't say that you can't get B and so on, but if the children get B, then I must let the children tell me why they got B and what they don't understand. If they can get 100%, why they only get 98%? They need to tell me the reason. Is it because that they didn't pay enough attention and lost that 2% or they didn't understand? If they still didn't understand, I would help them to understand. I would let them know the reason they lost points and help them. If they lost points because of their carelessness, I would let them know that carelessness is a very big weakness. I think the Irish school normally does not request too much from students, so how can they not get 100% then?

– Chinese Principal 1

Not every Chinese parent in this research claimed that they have high expectations. Parent 3's child just came to Ireland a few months ago with very little English. The parent thought her expectation was the same as that of Irish parents, and she believed that all parents want their children to be good. However, she did say that parents in China have higher expectations than Irish parents in the academic area, and this may be caused by the different culture, ideology and social environment.

It is interesting to note that three out the four Chinese children interviewed thought that their parents' expectations were different from Irish parents' expectations as well. The only

⁶"Tiger mother" refers to Amy Chua, a Chinese mother in America and a professor in University of Yale. She is famous for her book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. In the book, Amy Chua talked about how she raised her two children, which has caused a huge debate.

child who didn't say anything about it said that she knew nothing about Irish parents, so she couldn't make a comparison.

They are different. ... I feel ... they are like ... for example, when the Irish children finish their homework, their parents don't even check it, they would let the teacher check it the next day. The Chinese parents would check your homework and give you some more difficult exercises themselves afterwards. Anyway, they just want you to be better than what you are now.

– T1 Child 1

I think they are different. ... Chinese mums teach you more and they know how to help you. They are more ... more ... Anyway, Chinese Mums and Dads are different from Irish Mums and Dads.

– T2 Child 3

When the researcher asked these children which type of parents they prefer, they all said they prefer Chinese parents, because they are more strict and help their children to be better.

I think Chinese parents are stricter with their children, which is good for us.

– T2 Child 4

(I prefer) the Chinese parents. Because the Irish parents are too easy with their children and they will forget what they had learned in school.

– T1 Child 1

It is interesting to hear eight and nine year old children say that they like their parents to be strict with them because they think it is better for them. Similar to what an Irish principal

said in the interview, “I think their children seem to know that education is very important. And I don’t think you can do much more than that as a parent.” (Irish Principal 2)

5.3.6.3 Suggestions

In this research, some parents and educational professionals have given much advice on how to socially integrate Chinese children better into the Irish schools.

Irish Parent 10 suggested Chinese parents should be a bit more assertive, get out of their comfort zone and approach schools more often. They could volunteer their time for any activity they can do with the children. For example, the parents can come to the school during the Chinese New Year period and introduce the Chinese celebration or show them how to make dumplings.

One teacher in an Educate Together school, which has 95% non-Irish children, also talked about the importance of parental involvement so that their children can integrate more. What her class normally does is that every parent gets a whole class list, and they can volunteer to put their name and phone number on the class list. Once one parent volunteered, all other parents get a copy of it. This would give all the parents an idea what is going on in the class and they can see the other parents’ contribution. Because there are contact numbers on the list, so if other parents want to do something, they can just contact that parent. In this way, most of the parents would volunteer.

She also encouraged non-Irish parents to get involved with school events, to contribute their skills and knowledge and join in the parent-teacher association, as these are great ways to get to know other parents and teachers, and it will help the child to know more friends as well.

So I would encourage all the non-Irish parents to go along to those events. Come along to the events in the school. Come along to the coffee mornings. Get to know people. Get involved in the parent-teacher association. We are delighted that parents get involved. Talk to the class teacher and say “I have these skills”. We’re always asking parents “What skills have you? What skills can you share with the school?” If it’s music, come in and play. If you want to just come in and tell a story to the children. Or if you have knowledge about your particular faith, you could talk about it at an assembly, you know. So we like parents to come in and share their skills or some parents are wonderful artists and they come in and do art with the children. So we have many, many ways in terms of parental involvement. And we would just say get involved, get to know the other parents and get to know the other children and encourage your child maybe to ask a few friends home and things like that, you know.

– Irish Principal 4

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the key findings which emerged from the data on Chinese children’s integration into Irish primary schools as evidenced by a range of stakeholders including children, parents, teachers and school principals. Chinese and Irish viewpoints are incorporated and while the majority of the findings refer specifically to the integration of Chinese children into Irish primary schools, some of the findings are more universal. The key categories, educational environment, curriculum, language, culture, social development and parental involvement, while presented individually are all interconnected. The next chapter will discuss these findings and relate the findings to the literature.

Chapter 6

Discussion of the Findings

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher has presented the multi-layered voices from the parents, the educational professionals and the children's perspectives, All these voices contribute to our understanding of the integration of ethnic Chinese children into the Irish primary schools. When compared to the findings from the surveys and the interviews, there are a lot of similarities. It is found in both surveys and interviews that Type 1 and Type 2 ethnic Chinese children have the most challenges integrating into Irish primary schools compared to other types of ethnic Chinese children. Type 3 and Type 4 ethnic Chinese children have little problem with their integration.

A number of researchers have commented on the difficulty of gaining access to members of the Chinese community as part of their research (O'Neill, 1972; Cheung, 1975; Tsow, 1984; Taylor, 1987). Although these studies were conducted in Britain rather than Ireland, the authors noted that gaining access to the Chinese community there was one of the major

hurdles faced in their research. A similar problem seems to exist within the Irish context as well. Even when access can be gained, many Chinese people in Britain and the USA are reserved and conservative and it was found that many of them are not willing to reveal their problem as they consider it as “losing face” (Wong, 1992). In this study, the researcher also found that many Chinese parents do not like to reveal any problems that their children encounter. However, once the researcher built up a deeper relationship with the parents, the parents began to talk more freely and give much richer answers.

During this research this situation appears to have been the case during the early stage of the project, and is reflected in, for example, the small number of questionnaires returned, resulting in a return rate of just 6% in the first instance. However, this is the situation when the potential Chinese participants don't know the researcher well enough. During the research it was found that an essential way to approach Chinese potential participants is to build a bond of trust between the researcher and the participants. Once this trust is built, Chinese people are more likely to participate. For example, in order to increase the number of questionnaires completed, the researcher went to the three Chinese schools many times to chat with the parents and to ask their opinion about their children's schooling situation in Irish primary schools and then gave them the questionnaires. Once the Chinese parents had a personal connection with the researcher, it was much easier for them to agree to fill in the questionnaire and do interviews.

The reasons behind this phenomenon can be very complex. Of course, it is human nature that people talk more with their friends than they do with a stranger. However, this appears particularly true of Chinese people. Chinese culture plays an important role in this circumstance. In Chinese culture, “face” means prestige, honor and reputation. It is extremely important for Chinese people to save face and unbearable to lose face. According to the sociologist Goffman (1959), in Confucian culture, face is a mask that changes depending on the audience and the variety of social interaction. People are emotionally attached to their “face”. They strive to maintain face and feel good if it is maintained. On the other hand, loss

of face in a social situation can cause emotional pain. In the study, initially many Chinese parents did not want to participate and reveal any problems encountered by their children, because this would cause a loss of face. Another reason for the low research response rate might be the educational background of the Chinese parents. Most of the Chinese parents in this research were brought up in a Chinese educational environment, where collectivism is emphasised and individual voice is not encouraged. Thus they may be less inclined to voice their views.

As an insider, an advantage for the researcher was familiarity with Chinese culture. Rubin and Babbie (2011, p. 109) claimed that it is essential to know the participants' culture if the research is conducted with an ethnic minority group. In other words, the researcher should develop cultural competence regarding the population in the study. Cultural competence includes knowledge, understanding and skill. A good researcher should have knowledge of the minority cultures historical experiences; understand its traditions, values, family systems, socioeconomic issues and attitudes about social phenomenon; and also have the skills to communicate effectively both verbally and non-verbally with the participants of the minority culture and to establish a rapport with them.

In this chapter, the findings are examined within the theoretical frameworks as outlined in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The current research findings are discussed in the six categories which emerged, as outlined below, and their effect on the Chinese children's integration in Irish schools is discussed.

- Educational environment
- Curriculum
- English Language
- Culture

- Social development
- Parental involvement

The first research question of the study asked the main challenges facing the integration needs of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools. The above mentioned six points represent the key issues to have emerged in this regard from the research. However, the degree to which Chinese children encounter these challenges differs from type to type.

Although the results of a case study cannot be generalised to the population as a whole, according to Yin (2003), the ability to generalise case studies lies in comparing their findings with other research in the same area. The following section will discuss and compare the findings in this study with other research.

6.2 Key Issues Emerging

6.2.1 Educational Environment

According to the *OECD Reviews of Migrant Education—Ireland* report, immigrant parents and students criticized the disciplinary climate of Irish schools as too lax, and the academic aspirations of Irish schools as not sufficiently challenging compared to other educational systems (OECD, 2009, p. 39). All the Chinese parents in this research claimed that Irish primary schools have a very relaxed study atmosphere, short schools days, long breaks and only a small amount of homework, with students having little pressure and a lot of freedom. All of these characteristics are very different from those of Chinese primary schools.

In Irish primary schools, the day normally starts at 9am in the morning and finishes at 2:30pm in the afternoon. The school day in Chinese primary schools normally starts from

7:30am in the morning and finishes around 4:30pm. So the school day in Chinese primary schools is clearly much longer. Students in Chinese primary schools also have a much longer school year as well. The Irish primary school year is required to have 183 days (Eurydice, 2012), while in Chinese primary school the school year is required to have 245 days (Wang *et al.*, 2007). This means that students in Chinese primary schools have to go to school two months more than the students in Ireland every year. Therefore, from the point of view of contact time, Irish primary schools do have shorter school days and longer breaks than Chinese primary schools.

Another difference between Irish and Chinese primary schools is that there is one teacher for each subject in Chinese primary schools. The teachers are specially trained for one specific subject, such as science, music, art or P.E. So the teachers are all professionals in their field, and when they teach they have a very good foundation in what they are teaching. However, in this way of teaching it is difficult to build connections between the different subjects. The early childhood education in Ireland is greatly influenced by Montessori philosophy. Montessori philosophy emphasises the integration of different subjects and always tries to build connections among the different subjects. The Irish primary school curriculum points out that learning is most effective when the knowledge is integrated (NCCA, 1999a, p. 9). The way the teacher teaches in Irish primary schools is that one teacher teaches all the subjects. This makes it easy for the teacher to integrate all the subjects. However, the teacher may not be good at all the subjects, such as music, for example. Therefore, this way of teaching appeared not to be sufficiently academic to some Chinese parents.

The relaxed learning environment in Irish schools can be a positive factor for the integration of Chinese children into Irish primary schools. All of the Chinese children who had experience in Chinese schools in this research found that the Irish schools are easier to cope with than the Chinese schools. The relaxed study atmosphere, short school days, long breaks and small amount of homework reduce the academic pressure and the stress that the new environment brings to the children, and allows them to have more time to catch up with

their English and make friends after school. The seating of the children in groups in the classroom also helps the Chinese children's social development and promotes their teamwork spirit. Most of Chinese parents recognise the benefit of the relaxed study atmosphere in Irish primary schools although they still have concerns about their children's academic study at the same time and wish that the Irish primary school could build a more solid knowledge foundation for the children.

6.2.2 Curriculum

6.2.2.1 Chinese Parents' Impressions of the Irish Curriculum

It is worthy of note that most (eight out of nine) Chinese parents in this research were not clear about the Irish curriculum and could not name all of the subjects their children were learning at school. Migrant parents arriving in Ireland with primary-age children often lack familiarity with the complexity of the Irish education system (Yoffe, 2011, p. 190). The Department of Education and Skills has written a general introduction about Irish schools and lists links to the national curriculum on its website. In addition, in 2008, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) produced the booklet *Your Child and Schools in Ireland* (JRS, 2008), which has been printed in seven languages (including Chinese) to help migrant parents to know more about the educational system in Ireland. However, the Chinese parents in this research knew very little about the website and the booklet. The language barrier could be one of the reasons that put off the Chinese parents from reading the Department of Education and Skills website. On the other hand, many Chinese parents didn't even know of the existence of the *Your Child and Schools in Ireland* booklet and didn't have the access to it.

6.2.2.2 Mathematics

All the Chinese parents in this research claimed that the academic standard of the Chinese curriculum is higher than the standard of the Irish curriculum, especially mathematics. On the other hand, the two Irish teachers who had taught the Type 1 Chinese students in this research both described these children as “academic”. All four Irish class teachers commented that all the Chinese children in their classes (seven Type 1 and Type 2 Chinese children in total) are very good at mathematics. There have been a large number of studies conducted on the high achievement of Chinese children in mathematics in American and Britain (Wee, 2011, p. 163). The students in China also showed high achievement in international examinations. For example, from 1995 to 2002, the Chinese secondary school student team ranked 1st in the International Mathematics Olympiad six times (Guo, 2005, p. 165). In the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009, students in China (Shanghai) participated in the tests for the first time and got 1st place in each of three subjects, reading, mathematics and science, among 65 participating countries. Irish secondary students ranked 21st in reading, 32nd in mathematics and 20th in science (OECD, 2010).

That all of the Chinese children in this research were claimed to be good at mathematics is not a coincidence either. A few reasons for this were found in the study. The first reason is that the Chinese parents have high expectations. The second reason is that most of the Chinese parents (eight out of nine) in this research are using Chinese mathematics textbooks to teach their children and to give the children extra homework after they have done their Irish school homework, as they think what the children learn at Irish school is too easy.

In the research, many Chinese parents commented that the difficulty level of the mathematics curriculum in Irish and Chinese primary schools is different. The following paragraphs give a simple comparison of a strand of mathematics in the 3rd class in both Irish and Chinese primary school curricula.

Operations	Irish curriculum	Chinese curriculum
Addition	Addition within 999	Mental calculation addition within 100 Written calculation addition with three-digit number
Subtraction	Subtraction within 999	Mental calculation subtraction within 100 Written calculation subtraction with three-digit numbers
Multiplication	Multiplication within 100 Multiply a one-digit or two-digit number by 0-10	Fast mental calculation of numbers within the multiplication table Multiply one-digit number by three-digit number, or two-digit number by two-digit number
Division	Develop and/or recall division facts within 100 Divide a one-digit or two-digit number by a one-digit number without and with remainders	Fast mental calculation of division with the numbers within multiplication table Divide a two-digit or three-digit number by a one-digit number without and with remainders Calculate equations with four operations with brackets

Table 6.1: Comparison of mathematics abilities in 3rd class mathematics between Irish and Chinese primary school curricula. Source: NCCA (1999a, p. 65-67), MEPRC (2011, p. 17).

Comparing the two mathematics curricula, the Chinese mathematics curriculum has calculation benchmarks that are set higher than in the Irish system as the following examples illustrate. Firstly, the Chinese curriculum has very specific mental calculation requirements for each operation, requirements not present in the Irish curriculum. Secondly, the Chinese curriculum requires manipulation of more digits in multiplication and division. Thirdly, the Chinese curriculum requires that students be able to evaluate more complex equations (composed of up to four inhomogeneous operations) than required in the Irish system.

Aside from the above, the Chinese curriculum set out speed requirements for evaluating equations, which is not present in the Irish system, as outlined in Table 6.2.

It can be seen that mental calculation and calculation speed requirements are very clearly listed and emphasised in the Chinese curriculum, although the level of difficulty of this curriculum had been reduced after the 2001 curriculum reform (MEPRC, 2001c, p. 1). However, the teachers in Chinese urban schools still think that the curriculum and the exercises in the textbooks are too simple, and it was found that they would add more difficult questions in their teaching and homework assignments to raise the standard so that the children could do better in their exams (Ma *et al.*, 2006, p. 204).

In this study, all of the Chinese parents were previously educated in Chinese primary schools, and so they had an idea at what level the children's mathematics should be due to their own experience. When they felt the mathematics level in Irish schools was low, they taught their children from Chinese mathematics textbook and gave their children more difficult exercises to practice after they had finished their homework. All of the Irish class teachers in the interviews pointed out that the Chinese students in their classes were very good at mathematics, and half of them emphasised that the children were strong at mental calculation. The Irish class teachers thought the reason could be that these children were talented with mathematics. Very few Irish class teachers had realized the Chinese parents' high expectation, the fact that most of these children were also learning from Chinese math-

Type of calculation	Content	Speed requirement
Mental calculation	Addition and subtraction within 20 Multiplication and division within the numbers in multiplication table	8-10 excercises per minute
Mental calculation	Addition and subtraction within 100 One-digit number multiplied by two-digit number	3-4 excercises per minute
Written calculation	Two-digit and three digit number addition and subtraction	2-3 excercises per minute
Written calculation	Two-digit number multiplied by two-digit number	1-2 excercises per minute
Written calculation	One-digit number multiplied by two/three-digit number One-digit number divided by two/three-digit number	1-2 excercises per minute

Table 6.2: Speed requirement for 3rd class students in Chinese primary school mathematics curriculum. Source: MEPRC (2011, p. 53).

ematics textbooks at the same time and how much extra mathematics work the parents gave to the children at home.

6.2.2.3 Religious Education

One of the unique characteristics of the Irish system of education is the nation's religious tradition, which directly affects the experience of non-Irish students in Irish schools. It was found that religion also has an effect on Chinese children's integration in Irish primary schools. The Chinese children's religious beliefs were normally influenced by their parents. The majority of the Chinese parents in this research are atheists. Most preferred that their children be atheists until they are 18 years old, because they thought that their children are too young to make decisions about whether to join a religion at an earlier age. Although most of the Chinese parents don't believe in any religion, they all had a positive attitude toward their children's religion class in school. It was believed by the parents and the Chinese educational professionals that learning religion could help the children to learn more about Irish culture and help them to integrate more into the Irish society. However, many parents claimed that the children were aware of their differences from their Irish classmates because they couldn't join in any formal religious events, such as First Confession, Communion and Confirmation.

It is interesting to note that Chinese children's religious beliefs may influence their parents' beliefs as well. After religion classes in Irish primary schools, a lot of Chinese children in the study tended to want to join the Catholic church. When they consulted their parent's opinion, a number of atheist parents took time to learn about the Catholic religion for themselves first, in order to decide whether they should let their children join. The parents who agreed that their children could join the Catholic church, normally became members themselves afterwards.

Accommodating religious diversity in schools is a critical issue for Irish policy-makers. It is difficult to sort out the conflict between the rights of denominational schools to enforce religious education and the constitutional right of students to engage in educational practices that do not violate their religious norms (Lodge and Lynch, 2004). The educational authorities have tried to solve this problem by administering a “pull-out” system, for example by taking migrant students out of religion classes or activities. However, this could label the migrant children as “different” and make them self-conscious. On the other hand, schools normally have no additional staff resources to supervise these children during the “pull-out” sessions (Yoffe, 2011, p. 185). The atheist Chinese parents’ attitude toward this issue is that they tend to let their children join with other Irish children in their religious class as they don’t want them to feel different, but they opt of the formal religious ceremonies.

Eight out of nine Chinese parents in the study chose Catholic schools for their children. As most of the Chinese parents are atheists, religion is not an important issue to them. How they choose schools based on other criteria such as how academic the school is or the distance from home to the school, rather than religion. The Chinese parents who were religious themselves considered religion as an important part of their children’s education and chose a school that has the same religion that the parents have. All three Principals of the Educate Together schools pointed out that there were very few Chinese children in their school. This is some evidence, though it is small-scale, that multi-denominational schools are not attractive for most of the Chinese parents. However it should be noted that the limited availability of Educate Together schools, may also impact on this finding.

6.2.2.4 Assessment

Irish primary school assessment methods include portfolio assessment, questioning, teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and standardized tests (NCCA, 2007, p. 13). Standardized tests are very new in Irish primary schools. The tests in English and mathematics were

set for 2nd, 4th and 6th classes at the request of the Department of Education and Skills in 2011. In Chinese primary schools, students are required to take standard examinations after each unit, semester, school year, and before graduation (Guo, 2005, p. 164). In the research, Chinese parents believed that a lack of formal standard testing in Irish primary schools is one of the reasons that the study atmosphere is relaxed. To them, no exam means there is no pressure for the students. China, the first country to start the nationwide standardized examination in 165 BC, has always put great emphasis on examinations. One of Confucius's more famous teachings was that officialdom is the natural outlet for good scholars. The national standardized tests, which appeared more than 2000 years ago in China, were mainly aimed at selecting good scholars for governmental positions. This examination system was later adopted by Great Britain in 1806 to select candidates for positions in Her Majesty's Civil Service and then gradually influenced other parts of the world (Bodde, 2004).

Cultural values such as emphasis on academic success and showing high respect for scholarship, which are normally taught in Chinese families, are less significant in Ireland and this is borne out in the research. It is also one of reasons that Chinese students normally do well in the international exams, such as Olympiad examination and PISA. Confucius philosophy was introduced to many other Asian nations and played a significant role in shaping and developing these nations' civilizations and education systems, such as South Korea, Singapore and Japan (Guo, 2005, p. 150). These countries also have high levels of achievement in international examinations (OECD, 2010).

Different cultures may value different things in education. Irish educational professionals don't agree with the idea that school should place heavy emphasis on examination. In their opinion, the goal of education is not only to have children get high marks in the exams, but also to develop their social skills and have a healthy emotional development, which are equally important to the children's academic study. The Irish Primary School Curriculum (DE, 1999) declares that education is intended to meet children's individual needs and contribute to the fuller development of each individual. In other words, it seeks to

celebrate the uniqueness of each child and to nurture the child in all dimensions—spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical (NCCA, 1999a, p. 6). It can be seen that the Irish educational professionals who feature in this research followed the spirit of the Irish curriculum closely. However this doesn't always appeal to Chinese parents. While welcoming the emphasis on the holistic development of the child, the research appears to indicate that parents are concerned by a perceived lack of emphasis on academic achievement.

6.2.3 English Language

The four types of ethnic Chinese children have very different levels of English proficiency. Type 1 Chinese children have the most difficulties with English, and two out of four parents showed great concern about this. However, it also depended on how well the child learned English in their previous Chinese primary school. Type 2 children's English is relatively better as they were born in Ireland, and many of them had been in Irish pre-schools before they started primary school, although all of them still had language support when they started school. Their parents didn't show much concern about their level of English. Type 3 and Type 4 children have fluent English as at least one of their parents is Irish and the language used at home is mainly English. Many of the Irish teachers noted that Type 1 and Type 2 Chinese children have problems with written English and grammar, especially with the use of tenses. This last point is to be expected, as Chinese language does not distinguish between tenses in the same way as European languages.

It was also found that all of the Chinese parents in the study do not offer their children much help with English, except through getting them to recite English vocabulary and listening to their children's reading homework, as they are afraid of passing on their accent and giving incorrect instructions to the children. They prefer to let the children learn English at school.

There has been considerable debate about the appropriate way to provide English language instruction for newcomer students (Smyth *et al.*, 2009, p. 118). Different countries have different approaches to help children acquire the language of instruction. These differences encompass not only the level of support provided, in terms of the amount of contact time with language support teachers and the form that contact takes, but also how it is provided, including differences in curriculum and teaching methods, as well as the role of the child's mother tongue (OECD, 2006). In this study, it was found that the language support system in Ireland is mostly given in the form of withdrawal from regular class for additional tuition. This form of language support provision has its limitations, although it is widely used in Irish primary schools. One important issue that was raised by the language support teachers is that the language support resource book, *Up and Away*, is not relevant to the Irish primary school curriculum and does not acknowledge what the class teacher teaches in class. On the other hand, the migrant children are made acutely aware of their differences and weakness by being withdrawn from the class to have separate tuition.

According to Smyth *et al.* (2009, p. 119), about 62% of non-native newcomers were receiving language support in Irish primary schools and 36% of schools report that all relevant students in their schools were receiving language support. In the current research, one of the Type 1 children was clearly in need of language support, but because he was the only non-native speaker in the school, no language support teacher could be arranged. Failure to provide appropriate support for the Chinese children may lead to underachievement and dropping out from school by some Chinese children (Chin, 1972; Sung, 1979). Because of the small number of Chinese children, who do not receive language support and the compulsory nature of primary education in Ireland, this was not observed in the present research.

The second research question considered in the study concerned how Irish primary schools facilitate the integration needs ethnic Chinese children. In this respect, English language support is one of the main mechanisms used by schools to help the integration of new-

comers. Irish schools also put emphasis on the child's integration in other respects, such as cultural and social integration. These are examined in detail in the following sections.

6.2.4 Culture

According to Wong (1992, p. 49), the major problems encountered by Chinese children abroad in maintaining their cultural identity are the complexity of the linguistic identity, the ambiguity of the concept of Chinese culture, and Chinese children's perception of identity and integration. Similar findings were observed in this study. Type 2 and Type 3 Chinese children's parents showed great concern about their children's low level of Chinese language. The survey results show that the level of English language proficiency for most of Type 2, Type 3 and Type 4 children is higher than their Chinese level. The parents would send their children to the weekend Chinese schools in order to learn Chinese language and culture in order to maintain their Chinese identity. However, it should be noted that this result may be biased by the way in which participants in this research were identified, since they were primarily identified through such weekend Chinese schools.

It is important to note that all of the interviewed parents thought that Chinese language and culture plays an important role in their children's lives. They try to introduce Chinese language and culture to their children in a variety of ways, such as bringing them back to China during the Summer holidays, celebrating Chinese festivals, studying Chinese school curriculum, watching Chinese TV programmes, sending their children to Chinese schools during the weekend and telling the children stories about when they were young and how they studied in China and so on. Most Chinese parents showed great concern that their children might lose their Chinese identity because of lack of a Chinese cultural environment in Ireland. According to Sung (1979), in order to be accepted by the majority society, some Chinese children may abandon their traditional values in foreign countries. The loss of traditional values not only can cause pain and anguish to Chinese children but also to their

parents and the wider family.

Learning Irish language and culture is also important for Chinese children. It is found that many Chinese parents thought learning Irish has not much use and the Chinese children also felt that Irish language was difficult to learn. Some Chinese educational professionals pointed out that respecting Irish language and culture is the first step to having Chinese children integrated into Irish society. The parents' attitudes to Irish culture and language will in turn influence their children's attitudes and willingness to learn and assimilate Irish culture and the language.

According to accounts from the Irish teachers, when the Type 1 and Type 2 children first started in Irish primary schools, many of them appeared to be very quiet and difficult to integrate with other Irish children, and tended to withdraw in teamwork. There can be many reasons for such behaviour. It may be a sign of culture shock. Pederson (1995, p. 1) described culture shock as "the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment". In a multicultural context, he explained "it is a more or less sudden immersion into a nonspecific state of uncertainty where the individuals are not certain what is expected of them or of what they can expect from the persons around them" (ibid., p. 1). A second reason may be the language difficulties experienced by the Chinese children, which is easy to understand. If they don't understand what people are talking about, it is difficult for them to express their own opinion or to participate in activities, which have a strong emphasis on language use and comprehension. The third reason is that there can be different cultural attitudes towards authority. Most Type 1 and Type 2 Chinese children in Ireland are brought up in traditional Chinese families where they learned that they are not supposed to challenge authority. A study of Chinese children in Britain has found that in order to show their respect for the school authority, many of the Chinese children were relatively quiet in class and seldom discussed their difficulties or queries with teachers (Wong, 1992, p. 49).

All Irish schools featured in this study are aware of the importance of intercultural education

and all schools have some form of celebration of different cultures. For example, the parents from different cultures may bring their traditional food or wear their traditional clothes for an International day celebration. However, culture is not only about food and festivals, but more importantly it is about different worldviews. The Oxford English Dictionary defines worldview as “a set fundamental beliefs, values, etc., determining or constituting a comprehensive outlook on the world” (OED, 2003). Different worldviews from different cultures can cause conflict between parties, due to issues such as differing views on personal space, education, and concept of a “good child”. Therefore, intercultural education is not merely about celebrating festivals, introducing food and a language from different cultures. More importantly, educators and parents need to be aware of the worldview differences in order to minimize cultural conflict. The best way to achieve this is to build trust and have better communication between the migrant parents and the schools.

Another issue that was raised is that immigrant teachers have difficulty entering the Irish primary school system because of the requirement that primary school teachers be proficient in Irish language. In Ireland, members of the teaching profession tend to be white, Catholic and very much embedded in the life of the dominant social group in Irish society (Drudy *et al.*, 2005). Ross (2003) claimed that education is a force for the transmission of cultural norms, and teachers’ role is especially important in the cultural transmission. “Education has a particular role to play in the maintenance of culture. Teachers are professionalized agents of cultural transmission. Schools institutionalize culture: the schooling process and the curriculum define what will be the culture of the next generation” (Ross, 2003, p. 4). Sleeter (2004) also emphasised that “teachers bring to the profession perspectives about what race means, which they construct mainly on the basis of their life experiences and vested interests” (Sleeter, 2004, p. 163). Therefore, as the role model of the children, teachers’ race does matter and it directly influences the students’ view on race in the modern multicultural society.

6.2.5 Social Interaction

One of the great challenges facing Chinese children is their social development in the schools. So far, there is very little comprehensive research evidence available on the social experiences of immigrant students in Irish primary schools. In this study, strong concerns were expressed by most of the Type 1 children's parents and a small number of Type 2 children's parents about their children's social development in Irish primary schools. All Type 3 and Type 4 children's parents showed little concern on this issue. Compared to Type 2 children, Type 1 children have more problems with this issue. Many parents and Irish teachers pointed out that the Chinese children's social interaction with their Irish peers needs to be improved.

There are many factors that influence the Chinese children's social interaction in Irish primary schools. They include: the child's English proficiency, their personality, how much effort the child makes, the age of the child, the time the child spends in school, cultural background and the level of parents' integration level, and sometimes the child's health situation as well.

Many Irish class teachers described their Chinese students as "quiet" and "shy". Language difficulties can be the first factor influencing the social interaction of Chinese children. According to Smyth *et al.* (2009), nearly all newcomer students have problems with spoken language in Irish secondary schools. Low proficiency in the language of the host country may hinder making friends with local children and may cause isolations and loneliness of immigrant children (Kirova, 2001). Personality may be another factor. Irish class teachers think most of the Chinese children's personalities tend to be introverted. However, it is very difficult to tell whether it is the child's personality or their low level of English proficiency causing the social interaction difficulty. On the other hand, a long time with a low language level may cause a personality change as well.

Besides language and personality factors, a different cultural background can also be a reason, such as the discipline issue in class. Discipline in a Chinese classroom is relatively stricter than in an Irish classroom. In schools in China, Chinese primary school students are sitting in rows rather in groups, and they are normally told not to talk during the class unless the teacher requests someone to answer a question. Showing respect to the teacher and listening to the teacher is something that both Chinese teachers and parents stress to the child. Some of the Irish teachers claimed that many Chinese children were doing well in the playground, but change back to being “quiet” once they get back into the classroom. Differing concepts of good discipline may be a reason behind this.

The level of parents’ social integration within the Irish society is an essential factor that influences their children’s social integration level. Many studies have indicated the importance of the interaction between immigrant parents and teachers of the host country in supporting young people (Shor and Bernhard, 2003). The Chinese children who have the most problems with their social interaction in schools are normally those whose parents find it difficult to interact with Irish parents as well.

Irish primary school education supports immigrant children’s social development in variety of ways. The SPHE curriculum (NCCA, 1999c, p. 3) plays an important role in helping children to recognize, understand and accept themselves as unique individuals, nurturing self-worth and self-confidence. It provides opportunities for children to learn how to actively participate in the various communities to which they belong and help them to value and take pride in their own identities and come to an understanding of what it means to be a citizen in the widest sense.

As part of their social development children need to learn to appreciate other people in their lives and to know how to create and maintain positive, healthy relationships. A SPHE programme can significantly contribute to interpersonal development by helping children to acquire a range of communication skills and to understand the ways in which they can show respect, care and

consideration in their dealings with others. In school, children can learn how to develop and sustain relationships based on mutual respect and responsibility and can begin to understand the importance of trust and honesty in human interactions.

– NCCA (1999c, p.3)

The most common way that Irish class teachers in the study help the immigrant children's social interaction is the "buddy" system. This means that the newcomer is paired with a strong Irish student, so that the immigrant child can have somebody to talk to in order to make it easier for them to make friends. On the other hand, the relaxed study atmosphere, short school day and long breaks of Irish primary schools allow more time for Chinese children to interact with Irish children.

In general, social integration is one of the main challenges facing the integration of ethnic Chinese children into Irish primary schools, especially for Type 1 and Type 2 children. Most of the parents of Type 1 and Type 2 Chinese children, and their Irish teachers, are not happy with the social integration of these children. As the Chinese parents have indicated in the interviews, they can communicate and integrate to a limited extent, but they do not integrate into the class as well as Irish students. Social development is extremely important for children's growth and mental health. In light of this fact, Irish schools and educators are also trying to help the newcomer to settle in well, to make more friends and to integrate well socially. It was suggested by the educational expert that to improve the social interaction of Chinese children, it is very important for Chinese parents to encourage their children to attend more after school activities and to make more opportunities for their children to play with Irish children after school. At the same time, the Chinese parents integration within the Irish society is equally important.

6.2.6 Parental Involvement

Another research question of the study concerned the role of Chinese parental involvement in the process of their children's integration in Irish primary schools. The role that Chinese parents play in their children's education in Ireland has some differences from that played by Irish parents. Differing cultural background, parental involvement styles, and English language competency, as well as different expectations, can all influence the nature of parental involvement. The following section will discuss the relevant findings of the study in detail.

6.2.6.1 Chinese Parental Involvement Type

Evidence suggests that parental involvement with the school enhances students' achievement and that the benefits are even greater among members of minority cultures (Included ED Project, 2009, p. 50). Only a small proportion of Chinese parents are involved with the schools in Ireland. According to the Framework of Parental Involvement of Epstein (1995, p. 704), there are six types of parental involvement in schools: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. It is found that the Chinese parents in this study showed a distinct preference for certain types of involvement over others. In particular, most of the parents showed a tendency towards the communicating and learning at home types of involvement, although the level of communication between some Chinese parents and schools is not particularly high. Although some parents were observed to participate via volunteer work, it was clear from the interviews that this was not the preferred method of parental involvement, and only a small number of parents participated in this way.

6.2.6.2 Factors Influencing Parental Involvement in Schools

There are many factors that can influence the level of Chinese parents' involvement with Irish schools. According to other studies such as, the Task Force on Active Citizenship (2007) and Bleach (2010, p. 256), a lack of time and energy is one of the reasons that many parents do not get involved with schools in Ireland. However, in this research, only very few Chinese parents claimed that this was the reason. Most of the Chinese parents would not assume that getting involved with school is the parents' responsibility, although they are greatly involved with their children's learning at home.

A difference in culture is one of reasons that Chinese parents don't normally get involved with the school. The Irish educational professionals in this study claimed that Chinese parents do not contact schools much, tend to trust school more than other migrant parents and don't question teachers or the schools. The influence of Confucius is prominent in the Chinese educational system, and one of its lasting impacts has been to place significant emphasis on respect for the authority and expertise of the teacher. As a result, many Chinese parents consider teachers as the professional authority in school education and they are less inclined to feel that they are entitled to question the teacher or to be partners of teachers in the development of their children's schooling experience. After the Chinese educational reform in recent years, parental involvement with the schools has been stressed more by the Chinese government. However, it is a relatively new phenomenon in Chinese education, and the Chinese parents in Ireland are still following the traditional way in which they were brought up.

However, Chinese parents are greatly involved with their children's work at home. Asian parents in America have been found to be more involved in helping their children with their homework including tutoring them, checking over their work, assigning additional work and structuring and monitoring their time (Chao, 1996, p. 404). Many studies (see Wang (2001), Luo (2001), Wang (2006)) have indicated that most Chinese parents are willing to

spend time with their children or to prioritize their education.

Many studies have proved that gender difference is another of the factors that influence the parental involvement (Chao, 1996; Bleach, 2010). Previously, it has been observed that mothers are more likely to get involved with their children's education. The same has been found with the Chinese parents in this research. Most of the participants in this research are women rather than men. Chinese mothers are more likely to be involved with school volunteer work and they play an important role with their children's study at home.

The English language level of the Chinese parents is also a prominent factor associated with parental involvement with schools. The Irish educational professions in this study felt that the lack of spoken English was the biggest challenge preventing parents from getting involved and integrated with the school. Most of the Chinese parents are happy with the communication level between them and the schools. The main methods the Chinese parents use to communicate with the teachers are parent-teacher meetings, face to face communicating when the parents collect their children from school and written notes, which are very similar to the main methods Irish parents use to communicate with teachers (Bleach, 2010, p. 187). The Chinese parents with less English tend to depend on the written note as the main communication channel rather than oral communication with the teacher. In contrast, Irish parents prefer oral communication than other communication methods (ibid, p. 187).

The above discussion has concerned the main factors that influence the Chinese parental involvement in Irish primary schools, including culture, gender and English proficiency of the parent. Another essential finding of the study is Chinese parents concerns and their high expectations for their children's education, which will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.6.3 Chinese Parental Expectations

A great deal of research has been done on the role of parental expectations on the education of their children, and a number of studies have found that parents' expectations have a powerful effect on children's academic performance. Boocock (1972, p. 60) claimed that high achieving children tend to come from families that have high expectations. The parents often set standards for their children and tend to make greater demands when the children are at an earlier age. Vollmer (1986, p. 15) also concluded that there is a strong connection between parental expectations and children's school performance: "Many empirical studies have found positive linear relationships between expectancy and subsequent academic achievement". Henderson (1988) found that the correlation between parents' expectation and children's performance is true across all social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds.

In this study, most Chinese parents (eight out of nine) thought that they have higher expectations for their children's academic achievements than Irish parents. In similar research (Chao, 1996), which was conducted with forty-eight Chinese mothers, 64% of them thought that the reason why Chinese children have high achievement in American schools was because Chinese parents expected more from their children. Many other studies (Siu, 1994; Zhang and Carrasquillo, 1995; Li, 2006) also found that Chinese parents have extremely high expectations of their children and are willing to make financial investments and personal sacrifices for their children's education. Most of the Chinese parents claimed that their expectation of their children in Ireland is lower than it would be if they were in China. They notice that Irish primary education aims to cultivate well-rounded children, and stresses both social and emotional development of the children, rather than only emphasising academic achievement. Therefore they don't push their children as hard as they would do in China. However, even if this is indeed the case, their expectations still appear significantly higher than of those of their Irish peers.

Most of Irish principals and teachers are not aware of the high expectation of Chinese

parents. In their view, Chinese parents are easy to deal with and they don't ask much from the teacher or the school. Only some Irish educational professionals, who had experience with a large number of immigrant parents, felt that Chinese parents' expectations are higher, and that this is shown through their children rather than by parents telling the school what they really want.

Different cultural beliefs and values towards education and the unstable position of immigrants are the main reasons why Chinese and Irish parents have very different expectations. Many Chinese parents believe that education is the only gateway to success (Fan, 1981; Wong, 1982). It is also believed that the children's school performance is a central and necessary objective of child rearing and that academic achievement reflects successful parenting (Chao, 1996). Ireland is not like America or Britain, which have large and well-established immigrant communities. It is extremely difficult for Chinese immigrants to stay in Ireland long term, especially given the economic crisis in recent years. Many Chinese parents in Ireland have a very uncertain visa situation, particularly those parents of Type 1 children. Nearly all the Chinese parents in the study pointed out that their children will face huge pressure in their studies and it will be very difficult for them to catch up with their Chinese peers, if they move back to China in the future. Therefore many Chinese parents use Chinese textbooks to teach their children at home. Firstly, it can improve their children's learning in Irish schools; secondly, if they and their children go back to China one day, they won't be totally lost in Chinese schools.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the situation of Chinese children's integration within the Irish primary school from different aspects, including educational environment, curriculum, English language, culture, social development and parental involvement. In general, different

types of ethnic Chinese children have different levels of integration in different aspects: Type 1 and Type 2 children face more challenges than Type 3 and Type 4 children. The next chapter will return to the original research questions, the key research findings and tentatively proffer some recommendations both for Chinese parents in Ireland and also for Irish school personnel, so that the integration of Chinese children in the Irish primary schools can be made more effective for the future.

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Recommendations

This final chapter will conclude the discussion on the integration of Chinese children into Irish primary schools. First the main research questions are recapped and discussed in the context of the research findings. Recommendations aimed at aiding the integration of these children are then provided. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study and the outlook for future research in this area.

7.1 Summary of the Research

This study has examined the experience of Chinese children in the Irish primary school from the perspective of those directly involved, the children themselves, the parents and educational professionals. Because of the nature of a small qualitative research sample group, this research does not aim to be representative, but to raise awareness of the experiences of this minority group in Ireland in order to better facilitate their needs in the host country. Thus it contributes to new knowledge in the field of intercultural education in the Irish

Primary schools, with particular reference to Chinese children. In light of the size of the Chinese community in Ireland and the relative stability of numbers, this research can be effective if it is made available to policy makers within the education system. This can be facilitated through promulgation of the results in relevant journals and within the broader Irish education community.

The primary research question of this study was: How well do ethnic Chinese children integrate into Irish primary schools? This question was then further refined as follows:

1. What are the main challenges facing the integration of ethnic Chinese children into Irish primary schools?
2. How do Irish primary schools facilitate the integration needs of ethnic Chinese children?
3. What is the role of Chinese language and culture in the life of ethnic Chinese children in Ireland?
4. What is the role of Chinese parental involvement in the process of their children's integration in Irish primary schools?

The four types of ethnic Chinese children in this research face very different challenges in the Irish educational system. Type 1 and Type 2 children have more challenges with integrating into Irish primary schools compared to two other types of children considered in this study. They have similar needs in English language, Irish culture acquisition and social development aspects. For Type 1 children, the priority is to settle into the Irish school, and their parents have more concerns with their children's English and Irish culture acquisition, rather than with Chinese language and culture. Type 2 children's parents are trying to create a bilingual and bicultural environment for their children, and they think that it is extremely important for their children to learn Chinese language and culture. The

large proportion of Type 2 children in the weekend Chinese language schools also illustrates this point. Beside the challenges, both Type 1 and Type 2 children are described as being strong in academic learning, especially in mathematics. Type 3 and Type 4 children have very little problem integrating themselves into Irish primary schools, although their parents do think that they require more Chinese language and culture study in order to keep their Chinese identity. The following table illustrates the main challenges of the four types of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools.

Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
English language	English language	Chinese language	Chinese culture acquisition
Irish culture acquisition	Chinese language	Chinese culture acquisition	
Social development	Chinese culture acquisition		
	Irish culture acquisition		
	Social development		

Table 7.1: Main challenges facing the four types of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools.

Like all the immigrant parents, Chinese parents not only face the challenge of learning to adapt to life in Ireland themselves, but also need to help their children to adapt to a different school system. Coming from a culture that places a high value on academic achievement, they are not satisfied with their children's academic level in Irish primary schools. As a result, the parents use Chinese educational resources to teach their children at home to meet their high expectation. At the same time, they do recognize the strengths of Irish education, for example the extra emphasis Irish primary schools put on children's emotional and social development compared to Chinese schools. However, when the Chinese parents choose a school for their children, the academic level of the school is still a more important criteria than religion or other factors. Most of the Chinese parents did not mind their children

attending religious schools and having religious classes, but a majority of them would rather that their children remain as atheists, as most of the parents are themselves.

Irish primary schools facilitate the integration needs of ethnic Chinese children in two main ways: the provision of language and social support.

To help with immigrant children's language development, over 62% of Irish primary schools provide a language support service to the immigrant students, although only 12% of Irish primary schools do not have any non-English speaking students (Smyth *et al.*, 2009, p. 76 & p. 119). Therefore, there are still about a quarter of Irish primary schools, which have no English language support teachers even though there are non-English speaking students in need of this help. This language support provision in Irish primary school is mostly given in the form of withdrawal from regular class for additional tuition. Withdrawing students from class may highlight differences between the newcomer and the other students, which can negatively affect integration. Irish primary schools help the social development of the immigrant pupils in a variety of ways. For example by using the SPHE class to raise the children's awareness of themselves and the society; by using a buddy system to help them make more friends and to know the school better; and by encouraging immigrant parents to get involved in school activities.

The role of Chinese language and culture in the life of ethnic Chinese children in Ireland is extremely important for them. All of the Chinese parents were quite anxious that their children should learn Chinese language and culture to maintain their identity and traditional Chinese values, especially the parents of Type 2 and Type 3 children. Some Chinese parents in Ireland choose to send their children to weekend Chinese schools or teach Chinese language themselves at home. They also use various ways to teach their children about Chinese culture, such as celebrating Chinese festivals, watching Chinese TV programmes, reading Chinese books, learning Chinese curriculum, bring their children to China during the summer holidays. However, it would appear from the research that issues of culture

remain largely the responsibility of the home. Despite the celebration of festivals and feast days, it does not appear from the research that any real efforts are undertaken to ensure the preservation of individual cultures within the primary school system.

Parental involvement with school appears to be very important for the integration of Chinese children in Irish primary schools. The integration level of the parents directly influences how well the children integrate with their Irish peers. In this study, it is found that Chinese parents seldom get involved with school activities, but they do provide a great amount of help with their children's learning at home. From the perspective of Irish educational professionals, Chinese parents very seldom contact school or request anything. Because the two parties have very different cultural values in relation to the children's learning, the lack of communication may sometimes cause misunderstandings. Many such parents have little knowledge about the Irish school curriculum, and sometimes they wonder why the learning atmosphere in Irish schools is so relaxed, with teachers not putting pressure on the children. On the other hand, the majority of Irish teachers have little information about the Chinese children's home lives; the parents' beliefs and expectations; and their support of their children's study at home.

Following the above recap of the main research questions, and how these have been addressed in the findings, the next section will present a series of recommendations to help improve the integration of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools. These recommendations are based on the research findings and may, if implemented, support improved integration of Chinese children in the first instance, who are the focus of this research.

7.2 Recommendations

During the research, a number of suggestions were made by Irish and Chinese educational professionals and parents to promote the better integration of Chinese children in Irish primary schools. This section highlights the most promising recommendations to have emerged from the study.

7.2.1 Recommendations to Irish Schools

All schools should establish some procedures for the reception of newcomers. When they first arrive, it is important to ensure that the child can understand and use the basic language of the classroom, such as toilet, homework, etc.; to make sure that the student knows the rules of the school and the classroom; to encourage and help to build the confidence and self-esteem of the child who may feel different (IILT, 2003, p. 5).

As well as the basic information that Irish schools normally provide to the newcomers' parents, for example the information about the length and structure of the school day, what the child needs to bring to the school, when the holidays are and so on, it is also useful to provide more information about the functioning of Irish primary schools, such as the NCCA curriculum website and the booklet on the education system for migrant parents: *Your Child and Schools in Ireland*¹. Although this booklet has existed for a few years, it seems that not many Chinese parents know anything about it. A school welcome booklet could be created with all the above information included. Ideally this booklet could be translated into Chinese. If the immigrant parents know very little English, an interpreter should be arranged for meetings. This should be a professional employed by the school, someone who has a relatively good understanding of the Irish school system. As the interpretation may involve confidential information concerning the family, it is not recommended to use a

¹Please see <http://www.jrs.ie/resources> to download the Chinese version.

student in the school of the same race, as an interpreter.

To facilitate the child's English proficiency, the schools should provide appropriate formal support for the language needs of Chinese children. As there are significant differences between English and Chinese grammar, Chinese children are found to be quite weak on grammar and written English. Therefore, more emphasis needs to be put on these areas. The teacher may stress the importance of reading and writing to the parents and the children, and encourage them to read more after school.

It is essential for the newcomer to feel that his/her original culture is valued. The teacher may stress this by giving a lesson on the country and its culture. The teacher can also see whether the child's parent would like to give a lesson to the children on their culture. Another way for the teacher to achieve this is to ask the child to teach a small amount of his/her mother tongue to the class. This not only allows other children a chance to get to know a few words of a different language, but also helps the newcomer to build more confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand, it is important to introduce Irish culture in order to help the Chinese student understand the new environment and norms of behavior better. Of course, as stated in previous chapters, cultural differences are not merely about food, festivals and language, but more importantly about different worldviews. It is vital for educators and parents to be aware of these different perspectives in order to minimize cultural conflict. A key to achieving this is to build better communication between the schools and immigrant parents.

To improve the newcomers' social interaction with their Irish peers, the buddy system is widely used by the schools in this study. The teacher may also encourage the children to attend more afterschool activities and stress the importance of social development to the Chinese parents.

It would also be desirable to have clear written information about school's expectation for

parental involvement in school activities. Having information available in written form is particularly important when dealing with parents who have a poor level of English language proficiency, as it is easy for points made in verbal discussions to be misunderstood or missed. Ideally, this information could be translated into Chinese and possibly transmitted through Chinese communities² in Ireland.

7.2.2 Recommendations to Chinese Parents

A significant number of suggestions aimed at Chinese parents to facilitate their child's integration also emerged from the study. These can be summarised as follows:

The Chinese parents in this study appeared not to have a very clear image of Irish primary education, particularly in the area of curriculum. Such parents need to approach Irish schools with a learning attitude, gather information from different resources and gain an awareness of how the Irish school system works. Parents should make an effort to learn about the Irish primary school curriculum so that they can have a better understanding of Irish education and pedagogy.

Parents should encourage their children to read and write more. This might be accomplished, for example, by going to the library, writing book reviews and keeping a diary. A child who enjoys reading and writing is motivated to read and write, and the more frequently the child engages in literacy, the better a reader and writer the child will become (Cambourne, 1987; Graves, 1991). This is especially beneficial for children who are from a different language background. Playing with local children will also improve the child's English proficiency, and therefore the child's social interaction with Irish children is also essential to the child's language development.

²The Chinese communities that the author would recommend are Chinese embassy in Ireland and the Confucius Institute for Ireland, UCD.

As many Chinese parents are aware, learning Chinese culture and language is one of the main methods of maintaining their children's Chinese identity. There are a variety of ways to achieve this, for example by sending the children to weekend Chinese language and cultural schools or by bringing the children back to China during Summer holidays. On the other hand, the Chinese parents should also encourage their children to learn Irish culture and language.

Chinese parents should encourage their children to get more involved with after-school activities, such as football or the school choir; encourage their children to be friends with local Irish children and arrange more play-dates for the child. As role models, parents themselves need to make an effort to integrate more within Irish society as well, especially with Irish parents.

Chinese parents need to make effort to establish partnership with schools so that their children's needs can be better communicated to the school. Communication is extremely important between the parents and the school. The Chinese parents should let the teachers know their expectations and educational beliefs and request help when there is a need. It is vital for the Chinese parents to get actively involved with their children's education in the school setting, rather than just at home, such as participating in the school's International Day celebration, volunteering to work in the school library, volunteering to teach a lesson about Chinese culture to the children in the class, or by joining the school's Parents' Association or Board of management.

In summation, Irish schools and the parents are the main agents of Chinese children's education in Ireland. By actively working together with each other, they can help to ease the difficulties faced by these children in Irish primary schools. This is particularly important for Type 1 and Type 2 children who face greater difficulties due to language difficulties, cultural differences and the potential lack of parental integration into Irish society on a broader scale.

7.3 Implications of the Study

Although there have been a number of studies done on the experience of immigrant students in Irish schools (Eurydice, 2004; DES and OMI, 2010; Keogh and Whyte, 2003; Smyth *et al.*, 2009; Devine, 2011), this study is the first of its kind in Ireland, in specifically focusing on the integration of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools. This study provides insight into the previously undocumented experience of Chinese children in the Irish school system and the challenges they encounter. It provides an opportunity for the voices of parents and children to be heard on the issues of their experience and their opinions about Irish primary education. At the same time, both Irish and Chinese educational experts gave their views and suggestions on the integration of Chinese children in Ireland.

The findings of this research suggest that the issue of integration of these children into Irish schools and Irish society more broadly is not a simple issue. Ethnic Chinese children are not a homogeneous group, and the difficulties experienced by various children were largely affected by their family background (i.e. the various types had differing problems and challenges). Type 3 and 4 children had fewer integration issues, while the integration issues experienced by Type 1 and Type 2 children were different. This suggests that any solution to the problems facing the integration of Chinese children must take into account each child's background, rather than treating all ethnic Chinese children identically. It also has implications for parents of Chinese children in Irish primary schools who, based on the evidence of this study, must become more involved with the school and more familiar with the Irish education system. Through such measures and by becoming active partners in the education of their child, positive changes can begin to happen.

7.4 Limitation of Study and Recommendations of Future Study

This study has investigated the experiences of ethnic Chinese children in Irish primary schools. The chief focus has been on the Type 1 and Type 2 children to gain an insight into the experiences of this minority groups' process of adaptation to their schooling in Ireland. It is recommended that more investigation may be useful with Type 3 and Type 4 children, their parents and teachers in the future to further explore their needs in more detail.

Due to the large variety of groups interviewed in the course of this research, only four interviews with the children themselves were conducted. It is highly recommended that more interviews with children may be conducted in future research. The researcher also suggests that it is better to do interviews with older children in primary schools, as the young children tend to give more simple and short answers. Thus issues cannot be explored in depth and it can prove difficult to elaborate on themes.

At the same time, it is suggested that more participants outside of Chinese language schools should be identified to reduce any bias in the selection procedure on certain areas, such as the acquisition of Chinese language and culture.

Due to time and financial restrictions, this research's fieldwork was mainly constrained to the Dublin area, with the exception of two interviews, which were conducted in County Galway. For this reason, it cannot be claimed to be representative of all experiences of ethnic Chinese children living in Ireland today. Therefore it is recommended that a next step in any future research on this topic would be a nationwide study on the experiences of this minority group.

7.5 Conclusion

This research focuses specifically on the issues arising from the schooling of Chinese children in Irish primary schools, the level of their integration and their individual experience in Irish primary schools. The aim of this research is to identify problems that disproportionately affect Chinese students, and examine ways in which these problems can be addressed. The study explored the Chinese children's school experiences from the perspective of the educational environment, curriculum, culture, English language, social development and parental involvement aspects as experienced by parents, children and educational professionals. Each child is an individual, and their level of integration and needs vary due to their different family background and educational experience. It is essential for the parents and teachers to know how to facilitate these needs to promote a higher level of integration. In the same way, the needs of the Chinese community in particular from the perspective of culture, language and identity are specific and must be negotiated with the education authorities through wider communication with Chinese parents in Ireland.

From a broader point of view, the findings of this research are relevant not only to the integration of Chinese children in Irish primary schools, but, as these children continue their educational journey beyond primary school, these findings will also contribute to the understanding of the issues faced by these students as they progress through the education system. Additionally, while some of the study's findings may be specific to the integration of ethnic Chinese children, it is likely that many of the findings are also relevant to other Asian ethnicities, many of which hold common views of the role and value of education, for example. Lastly, by comparing the findings of this study to similar studies of different ethnic groups in Ireland, it may be possible to identify groups sharing common difficulties in integration, so that these problems can be addressed with the most efficient use of resources.

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