#### Introduction

Increasing The growing numbers of international students, defined here as 'individuals enrolled in institutions of higher education who are on temporary student visas and are non-native English speakers' (cited in Andrade, M.S., 2006), have been flooding toenrolling at universities in-across the Western world. -such as Institutions in -the United Kingdom, the United States , and Australia, as well as a range of other states, , pursuinghave been chosen by international students seeking to attain higher educational qualifications and to broadening their horizons- (Akanwa, E.E., Akanwa, 2015). From 2000 to 2014,—'the number of international students more than doubled, with an average annual growth of around 7%-'\_(OECD, 2016; c)(eited in Yu and Moskal, 2019). In Of the Western countries, the United Kingdom and the United States attracted most the largest minorities of international students, 16% and 13% respectively, in 2014 (Yu and Moskal, 2019; OECD, 2015). For the UK, the arrival of a large growing number of international students has made a significant contribution to its economic growth and cultural diversificationty. For example, in 2010, the international students population have contributed '\$14 billion to the U.K. economy' (cited in Smith et al., 2011; UK council for International Student Affairs, 2010).

Meanwhile, some Many international students who have stayed in the UK after graduation; these graduates tend to be equipped with top-knowledgeable and skills highly skilled in different their respective fields. They also have enriched added value to the UK labour market and have promoted its boosted the UK's international competitiveness. Similarly, for Linternational students studying in the UK in turn; they acquired greater an unique opportunity of to improveing their English, thus broadening their horizons, being and they are exposed to different cultures and gaining better whilst obtaining a world-class education (Jibeen and Khan, 2015). It seems to be mutually The growing influx of

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international students is hence beneficial for both the international students and the UK. In Ffact, for international students, the changes in the new environment, the differences in language and culture, and the differences in teaching styles may bring them manycan enable them to overcome potential significant learning challenges and increase their adaptability pressures (eg: Andrade, 2006; Hsieh, 2017; Jibeen and Khan, 2015; Yan and Berliner, 2011). Many international students have experience adn empowering yet challenging process of tremendous cultural adaptation pressures, especially when they have just newly arrived in a newthe environment. Some students may even have some Students often encounter, psychological problems which arise from the pressure to adapt, including diagnosable illnesses such as depression, loneliness and anxiety, and Some students have even committed suicide while under excessive extreme pressure when whilst studying abroad.

Unlike Compared to the aggregated cohorts other of international students from European countries, the acculturation process of Chinese international

Istudents (CISs) is oftencan be more challenging, with higher levels of anxiety, language barriers, and cultural shocks prevalent (Chataway and Berry, 1989; Yan and Berliner, 2011; Zhou et al., 2018). The UK's higher education community has also been working hard systematically to help international students to adapt to UK academic and social life, such as; policies have included providing language courses, academic support, mental health services and, wellbeing service programmes on campus (Zhai, 2002).

Not only do As well as universities caringe about the acculturation and well-being of their international students, but many off-campus institutions have been also helping to integrate international students, such as including some local churchchurches (Yu and Moskal, 2019). Some Several churchchurches have held hosted various activities for international students, such as international café meetings, providing a social events that use the venue in the

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ehurch church as their venue and introducing seminars that introduce the traditional British culture and customs. These have aimed to assist in building friendships with among international students, and potentially sharing the gospel (Sun and Rhoads, 2018).

Because the <a href="https://environment.com/environment">ehurch\_church\_environment</a> is <a href="more-welcoming">more-welcoming</a> and safe, many international students have participated <a href="more-welcoming">in these activities</a> and <a href="more-welcoming">they have</a> received <a href="more-welcoming">valuable</a> a lot of support from people working at the <a href="more-welcoming">local</a> ehurch\_churches (Yu and Moskal, 2019). However, it <a href="more-remains as yet unexplored">remains as yet unexplored</a> in academia sunclear—how this kind of participation <a href="more-welcoming">ean-helps drive</a> acculturation and reduces <a href="more-welcoming">their-acculturative</a> stress <a href="more-welcoming">for international students</a> in the UK.

This study is based onuses the existing knowledge of the acculturation of international students to further explore the acculturative stress experienced by CISs at the University of Bath; it and learns about their analyses their experiences when participating in two Christian churches at in Bath.

There are some reasons for choosing these These two Christian churches have been sampled for two key reasons. Firstly, due to the nature of their evangelist nature and their extensive outreach services thos have meant that most of proportionately more the CISs who have participated in the church participated in the activities of these particular two Christian churchehurches.

Secondly, both churchehurches are situated close to the city centere of Bath.

Thirdly, I have the strong contacts membership relationships with of these two churchehurches and these have which helped me to recruit participants with ease.

There are a growing number of There is a large body of literature studies exploring pertaining to the acculturation and acculturative stress experienced by the broadly defined immigration populations (eg; Gómez et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2011 Zhou et al., 2018). A range of types of

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acculturative stress has been identified, such as including stress elicited by Formatted language differences, academic pressures and psychological stressfactors. However, theose literatures studies were are based on different specific populations, and at different periods of arriving in the migration hostcountrytrends. Thus,, and this study fills a gap in the research by further exploringes the acculturative stresses that CISs in particular experience whend studying in the UK. In contrast, in the field of In terms of studies on church engagement, few **Formatted** studies have concentrated on the experiences of CISs. The limited existing literature that available that has examined the experiences of international students attending ehurchchurch activities have focused on their students' motivations for behind participationng (Yu and Moskal, 2019) and generalised students their experiences of acculturation at a local churches (Sun and Rhoads, 2018). Therefore, there is a literature key gap in the evidence base. This study deepens understanding of the role of church engagement in reducing the acculturative stress experienced by CISs studying in the UK. The presentis dissertation aims to provides insights valuable for the educational **Formatted** community and for other organisations that are interested in increasing the well-being of international students, Ssuch as organisations include, not least churches that work to better incorporate CISs. The study also helps \_and for CISs to maximise their ability to benefit from the advantages of studying in the UK. YOU SHOULD OUTLINE THE PROCEEDING SECTIONS HERE, **Formatted** STATING WHAT EACH CHAPTER COVERS. **Literature Review** Formatted: Font color: Auto, English (United Kingdom) This chapter will-reviews the existing literature related pertaining—to **Formatted** international students' acculturation, acculturative stress, coping strategies,

social support, and <a href="mailto:church\_engagement">church\_engagement</a>. The different manifestations of acculturative stress that international students experienced <a href="will-beare">will-beare</a> identified and the <a href="mailto:positive">positive</a> impacts of social support on <a href="mailto:acculturation">acculturation</a> and <a href="mailto:lowering">lowering</a> acculturative stress <a href="will-beare discussed and analysed">will-beare discussed and analysed</a>. <a href="mailto:literation at the will also review">It will also review</a>
<a href="mailto:Studies">Setudies</a> that focused on international students' <a href="mailto:church\_engagement">church\_engagement</a> and their motivations</a>, <a href="mailto:for-behind\_engaging">for-behind\_engaging</a> in religious organisations whilst studying abroad <a href="mailto:area">are also highlighted</a>. This chapter concludes with <a href="mailto:the-a">the-a</a> justification of this <a href="mailto:dissertationstudy">dissertationstudy</a> and a clear statement of its rationale.

## The Definition of Aacculturation and Aacculturative Sstress

Thomson and Hoffman-Goetz (2009) have reviewed the varied definitions of acculturation in-from sociological, anthropological and psychological perspectives (Berry, 2003; Gordon, 1964; Redfield, 1936). At the beginningits genesis as a concept, acculturation was considered as a one-dimensional process, that is; the process of giving up one's original culture and accepting the new culture after immigrating to a nonnative-new socio-cultural environment (e.g., see Gordon, 1964; Rogler et al., 1991; Schwartz et al., 2010; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). A more recent and more commonly used definition of acculturation was is provided by Berry (2005): 'the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members' (p. 698) (Zhou et al., 2018). Four different acculturation strategies are identified in Berry's (1997, 2003) works; i-Integration, assimilation, separation and marginali szation, 'were identified in Berry (1997, 2003)'s work.

The concept of *acculturative stress*, was first proposed used by Berry (1970) and used as an alternative to the notion of 'culture shock' (Berry, 2006;Oberg, 1960). Berry (1987) defined acculturative stress as 'a reduction in the health

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status of individuals, and may include physical, psychological and social aspects' (p. 493).

In addition, there There are many different definitions of acculturative stress, all of which generally refer to the negative results aspects of the acculturation process (e.g., Allen et al., 1998)

## **Acculturative Sstress**

Among Within the extensive research literature on acculturative stress; studies mainly focus on the classification of acculturative stress (eg.,see Berry et al., 1987; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Ying, 2005), factors affecting causing acculturative stress (eg.,see Parr et al., 1992; Sakurako, 2000; Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Kim, 1991; Yang and Clum, 1994), potential stressors (eg., Chen, 1999; Dao et al., 2007; Trice, 2003), the impacts of acculturative stress; and the key coping strategies (REFS?).

## Classification of Aacculturative Sstress

Smith and Khawaja— (2011) — concluded state that the acculturative stressors as-take place at the levels of language, academic, socio-cultural norms, discrimination and practical stressors life.

Earlier, Berry et al. (1987) <u>have classified the acculturative stressors into five</u> main <u>sub-categories</u> (Zhou et al., 2018):

- Physical environment: stressors relatinged to accommodation and safety issues (Berry et al., 1987; Bradley, 2000; Zhou et al., 2018).
- Biologica<u>l: 1:-</u> stressor<u>s</u> relat<u>inged</u> to physical <u>and mental</u> health
- Social: stressors relatinged to seeking opportunities to build new social networks and concomitant the experiences of loneliness (Savile et al., 2008).

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International students who have left their home country, families, and friends need to build new social networks in their host country; decisions and actions in this respect are which are influenced by their personalityies (Brisset et al., 2010; Wang and Mallinckrodt, 2006), language proficiency (Townsend and Poh, 2008), cultural differences between the home and host countriesy (Lee et al., 2004; Mori, 2000; Triandis, 1999; Yeh and Inose, 2003), and local social support mechanisms (Ward et al., 2001). A number of studies have reported that the more eximtroverted they students are, the higher language level they have, the smaller the cultural differences between the two cultures, and the more social support they receive, the easier it is they find it to build new social networks and the lower the levels of social stress they would experience (Brisset et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2004; Mori, 2000; Townsend and Poh, 2008;\_ Triandis, 1999).

Many studies have shown that social stress often can lead sto a sense of loneliness among for international students, especially during the first few months of their stay (e.g., see Chataway and Berry, 1989; McLachlan and Justice, 2009; Sawir et al., 2008). Among some Sstudies of international students from Asia, whose cultures are characterised by collectivistic culture values and strong family ties, have found that these students tend to have face more difficulty to in makinge friends and building relationships with locals in the host country, featured which - in the West - are more shaped around byindividualistic eulture normative values (Mori, 2000; Smith and Khawaja, 2011: Triandis, 1999).

Cultural; stressors due to arising from the cultural differences between the home country and the host country (Yeh and Inose, 2002)

While each international students, may all tend to experience a certain degree of acculturative stress in when adapting to a new environment, many studies have found that the greater the cultural difference, the greater the degree of acculturative stress they may experience (e.g., Choi, 1997; Furnham and

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Bochner, 1982; Lin, 1998; Yan and Berliner, 2011; Yang and Clum, 1994). For example, Asian students studying in Western countries reported higher levels of acculturative stress than other international students from other Western countries, which may and this can result from the the greatkey differences. between individualistm and collectivist ideas and valuesm (Hofstede, 1984; Lin, 1998; Lusting and Koester, 2003). In particular, traditional Traditional Chinese culture may affect their the acculturation process and can lead to greater more intense acculturative stress for CISs experienced (Yan and Berliner, 2011; Yeh and Inose, 2002). For instance, Ttraditional Chinese culture tends to be group-centered, which may bring a sense of loneliness for and so, CISs who-livinge in an individual-centred, less communitarian \_independence centered country may experience acute acculturative stress. especially during their initial stay in the host country (Yip, 2005; Zhou et al., 2018). In addition, mental health problems in China have has not been paid enoughreceived inadequate attention and recognition, so many Chinese students consider exposing their own mental health problems is as somehow shameful; this and therefore may also serve to increase their sense of psychological pressure (Zhang and Dixon, 2003; Zhou et al., 2018).

Psychological: Hanassab (2006) has found that the most significant psychological stressor faced by international students is perceived discrimination, including 'direct verbal insults and physical attacks' (cited in Zhou et al., 2018; Lee and Rice, 2007).

The <u>D</u>discrimination against international students is <u>mainly manifested inoften</u> verbal-insults but it also covers a disadvantages in when seeking employment and <u>patent</u> physical attacks, particularly against international students from developing countries such as Asia, India and Africa (Hanassab, 2006; Lee and Rice, 2007; Royrazil and Lopez, 2007). Discrimination has a negative effects on the ir-acculturation process, <u>can</u>-leading to poorer well-being and the onset

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of mental health problems (Atri et al., 2006; Jung et al., 2007; Wei et al., 2007); it can, and may prevent them students from proactively interacting with locals (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000; Smith and Khawaja, 2011)

In addition to the five entegories types of acculturative stressors, Ying
 (2005) has identified another stressor type — functional stress, mainly often manifested in lianguisticage, academic and financial aspects forms.

For international students whose native language is not the same with as that of the host country, language barriers can be a significant stressor. Moreover, language barriers was have been found to interact with academic and socio-cultural stressors (Chen, 1999). For example, international students' ability and enthusiasm to in understanding lectures, and actively asking and answering questions, have been found to suffer; and thededicating time and effort they need to reading the teachinglearning materials and completinge written work can also be severely negatively affected by language barriers (Morris, 2000; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). In terms of social interaction, language barriers may stop international students from making friends and may discourage them from interacting with locals (Chen, 1999).

Studies on of key academic stressors focus on the comparisons between domestic and international students (e.g., Hashim and Yang, 2003; Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008; Misra and Castillo, 2004), the influentialeing factors of co-existing with academic stressors (Chen, 1999; Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Sherry et al., 2004; Ward et al., 2001) and the possible positive effects of academic stress (Edgewoth and Eiseman, 2007). With regard to the oppositethe findings of the comparative studies of son between the academic stress home and international students experiences of academic stressel (Hashim and Yang, 2003; Khawaja and Dempsey, 2008; Misra and Castillo, 2004), Misra and Castillo (2004) explained

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claim that international students may be are often concerned that reporting that they have been are facing difficulties arising from experiencing academic pressure symbolizes conveys a lack of academic competence. However, such this explanation has not been supported by anyin other studies.

Regarding the factors that influence academic stressors, the existing literature mainly has identified the high academic expectations that families and peers have of international students and their families (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991), the confrontation with radical changes differences in educational systems and teaching styles (Aubrey, 1991; Liberman, 1994), and language proficiency issues (Porazli and Kavanaugh, 2006). Some studies, however, have also found that the dealing with a new education system and different teaching styles have also brought bring certain benefits to international students, such as the improvement of improved independent and critical thinking abilities; and enhanced team work and leadership skills and eritical thinking; these are which are some significant advantagestenets of the Western educational system (Liberman, 1994).

Costly tuition fees and high living expenses, and coupled with work restrictions, also have also putplace significant pressure on international students' financial management (e.g., Chen, 1999; Li and Kaye, 1998; Mori, 2000; Robert et al., 1999).

# The Ooutcomes of Aacculturative Stress experienced by international students

Acculturative stress can cause <u>and exacerbate</u> many physical and mental health problems. <u>Many-Several</u> studies have shown that international students experiencinged acculturative stress are <u>prone-vulnerable</u> to many <u>physical-physiological</u> problems, <u>such asincluding</u> sleep disorders, gastrointestinal problems, loss of appetite; and headaches (Mori, 2000; Smith and Khawaja,

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2011). In addition, acculturative stress resultinged from thea range of challenges international students faced can also lead to the onset of mental health problems, such as anxiety, acute loneliness and low self-esteem (McLachlan and Justice, 2009; Nilsson et al., 2004; Wei et al., 2007; Wilton and Constantine, 2003). For example, the The huge gap-discrepancy between their students' expectations and the reality they face can results in feelings of loss-loneliness, and depression.

However, it is still unclear that what the long-term effects of acculturative stress on international students' psychological well-being are or how they interplay with nd-social-cultural adaptation (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

# Coping Sstrategiesy

Coping in this context refers to the behaviours of designed to manageing stress and contain its damaging effects;— individuals under pressure tend to use their their mental resources and engage in behaviours to cope with stress as effectively as possible (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus, 1999).

RMany researchers have classified coping strategies in different a range of ways (e.g., see Berry, 1997, 2006; Folkman, 2008; Ward et al., 2001). Lazarus (1999) proposed maps out a two-dimensional coping pattern that includes distinguishes between problem-centered and emotional coping strategies. Later, Folkman (2008) has divided coping strategies into problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and meaning-focused coping.

Among the In terms of the coping strategies of deployed by international students to deal with acculturative stress, social support mechanisms that individuals ean-access and use for coping are ais the majorin resource (e.g., see Berry, 1997, 2006; Safday et al., 2003; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Social support pertains to 'vyerbal and nonverbal communication between recipients

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and providers that helps manage uncertainty about the situation, the self, and—the other or the relationship and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience' (Albrecht and Adelman, 1987 p. 19). —

(1987).

Two common forms of social support are informational support and emotional support (Rose & Campbell, 2000; Thuen, 1995; Ye, 2006)

- Informational support: this refers to providing practical, knowledgebased advice or assistance related to individuals in the facinge of difficult and stressful situations (Uchino, 2004; Ye, 2006).
- Emotional support: this 'refers to verbal or nonverbal expression of caring and concern' (??? cited in Ye, 2006 p. ???)

The latter is often expressed as encouragement, compassion, understanding, and concern through via verbal or nonverbal expression communication, such asincluding giving hugs (Ye, 2006).

Social support is considered as an effective coping strategy that can alleviate and manage the acculturative stress that international students experienced, which. This contention is supported by various studies of international students (e.g., see Arends-Toth and Can de Vijver, 2006; Safdar et al., 2003; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Ward et al., 2001).

# Social Support Wwithin and Beyond the Celassroom

Social support ean beis at times provided by, and facilitated by, \_uUniversity service deliverers and at other times it is accessed and developed volitionally by individual behavior and actions. Leask (2009) emphasises that social support takes place within and outside the classroom: both are equally important factors in supporting and furthering the acculturation process (Yu

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and Moskal, 2019). Social support within the classroom cannot be underestimated; and teachers play an important role in the international student acculturation process on campuses (Yu and Moskal, 2019). As Cushner (2008) suggests, the teacher acts as ans 'cultural translator and mediator', teachers linklinking the formal courses with a wide range of events in-across a the global context. However, Stone (2006) and Ward (2001) have found, however, that higher education teachers are not adapting sufficiently when dealing with to the heightened influx of international students; they claim that teaching staff are failing to help students a particularly to those from countries withdeal effectively with significant cultural differences; this finding is which is also supported by Dessel (2010) and De Beuckelaer et al. (2012).

Compared to classroom interactions, which is are more academia-orientatedeeentered, extracurricular activities and organisations such as clubs and —
festivals can provide a variety of opportunities for international students' to
enhance their intercultural integration and establishment of meaningful social
networks (Couros, 2009; Yu and Moskal, 2019). In the meantime,
substantialSeveral notable, studies indicate that most international students who
tend to get involved into different extracurricular activities do so to achievee
ngage in social interaction and to build friendship with locals, thus thereby,
decreasing the acculturative stress (Brown, 2009a; Holmes, 2007; Marginson,
2014; Tran & Vu, 2017b; Yang, 2016; Yu and Moskal, 2019).

Social networking with co-nationals, other international students and locals is another an important source means of accessing social support. In general, such social networking seems to have a significant buffering effect on adapting to difficulties in adapting to the new culture by thereby lowering their acculturative stress (Safdar et al., 2003). However, Brown (2009a) has found that there is a lack of interaction between students of different backgrounds in

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an-the intercultural environment of the campus. The main reasons for this include theare locals' lack of interest in interacting with international students (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Brown, 2009a), the limited and superficial interaction opportunities (Brown, 2009a; Dunstan, 2003; Eisenchlas and Trevaskes, 2007; Peacock and Harrison, 2008; Yu and Moskal, 2019), and international students' fear of being unintentionally offended, embarrassed, and stereotyped, expelled, and or misunderstood (Peacock and Harrison, 2008).

The coping strategies used by CISs were are greatly influenced by their culture (Mortenson, 2006). In general, CISs would tend to choose self-control as the a major coping strategy when dealing with acculturative stress (Bai, 2016). They were are often educated to be patient and to not complain when they face difficulties (Zhou et al., 2018).

# Positive Limpacts of Social Support

Well-documented The literature has consistently shown that social support has a positive impact on reducing acculturative stress amongst international students experienced (e.g., see Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Misra et al., 2003; Ra, 2006; Zhou et al., 2018). Key The main effective sources of social support are include the services provided by universities and other formal organiszations (Misra et al., 2003), the establishment of new social networks (Ra, 2016) and support from their peers and families (Bertram et al., 2014).

Studies concentrating focused on CISs have identified the significant positive role of social support in helping to alleviate acculturative stress (Bertram, Poulakis, Elsasser, &and Kumar, 2014; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Ye, 2006; Zhou et al., 2018). For instance, Bertram et al. (2014) and Ye (2006) have found that social support from others and the new social networking have \_\_\_\_

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helped CISs to experience less perceived discrimination and less acculturative stress.

The widespread-positive and multifactorial impact of social support on individuals' physical and mental health has already been well recognised. Information support and emotional support can bring a greater degree of well-being to individuals who are under pressure peace and help can help them alleviate stress. Emotional support 'may also increase a sense of belonging, dignity and self-worth': (Cited in Ye. 2006 PP.?), Many studies showed have shown that informational support and emotional support provided by family members, peers and others has have a profound and positive impact on the physical and mental health of individuals (e.g., see Bovier, Chamot, & and Perneger, 2004; Davis, Morris, & and Kraus, 1998); Ye, 2006). For instance, the presence of sufficient social support from others can provide them essential information and resources and a sense of security and happiness (Kim, 1988; Berry, 1997).

Therefore, social Social support plays an important vital role in lowering emotional and psychological stress levels associated with acculturation (Ye, 2006).

# **Church Church Eengagement**

Li et al. 's (2017) study of CISs' acculturation experiences has found that over half of the participants studied participated in churchchurch activities and they were provided with "spiritual and social support" from by local churchchurches. The sampled CISs reported through that by engaging in churchchurch activities, they received practical help, such as being provided a temporary abode house before finding accommodation; they can reported that

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they could "see things differently", and that their understanding of the local culture was has been deepened (Li et al., 2017).

It is, therefore, understandable to argue that Religious institutions have been found to have played a significant role in relieving the pressures of to quickly change and assimilateion into the host environment (Stewart et al., 2008; Yu and Moskal, 2019).

The majority of relevant studies to date have focused on the role of ethnic religious organisations within in the lives of immigrants (Liao, 2017) and refugees (Wilkinson et al., 2017). However, there is limited research has focusinged on the role of religious organisations on in terms of international students specifically (Yu and Moskal, 2019). Such research includes The evidence to date includes just a few studies; these relate to \_-on-international students' motivations behind , for church participation (Yu and Moskal, 2019), the transformation of their transformation of their Christian identitiesy (Li, 2012), and CISs' experiences of acculturation at a specific Chinese Christian church (Sun and Rhoads, 2018). In addition, Williams (2012) has researched new the emergence of a newing Christian identity for international students, and their investigating church involvement of international students the students after they have returned to their home countries. In Yu and Moskal's (2019) study, examining which examines the church engagement of among international students, it was found that over 90% of the total sample had participated in a Christian ehurchchurch during their studies and three fourths quarters of them had been involved in local evangelical Christian ehurchchurches (Yu and Moskal, 2019). Students who participated in **church** activities were grouped into four categories: 'social birds', 'cultural learners', 'English practitioners', and 'Christian explorers' (Yu and Moskal, 2019).

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Christian churches can be seen asthus act as a strategic cross-cultural and socio-al and languaginguistice practicing venue medium for CISs (Yu and Moskal, 2019). Their CISs involvement in church activities often stems from their strong will-desire to interact and connect with the local culture, which is as is the case for many similar to the motives for immigrants and refugees engaging who engage with local religious organisations (Constant and Massey, 2003; Yu and Moskal, 2019). It is reported that Eevangelical churchchurches tend to be very friendly and welcoming to and this can attract international students (Yang, 1998). For instance, Mmany churches provide dinners and student lunches; they offer airport pickup services, held hold, "international café' sessions," and invite international students to attend Bible discussion groups where they can practise their English. In addition to providing material support, religious organisations can be regarded function as a vehicle for international students to assimilate to the host culture. Thus, CISs who that attended church activities often find they can pursue build more rewarding and meaningful relationships (Yu and Moskal, 2019). Unlike university services, \_\_that lack continuity and adequacy in terms of of atheir role as cross-cultural facilitative mediaer for CISs, through by attending church activities regularly - CISs would feel grateful for the receive ample linguistic, cultural, academic, and psychological helpsupport.

It was also found that CISs were engaged in church activities are also provided with much moremany opportunities to build friendships, practise English, learn about be exposed to different cultures, acquire information, access resources; and gain psychological and practical assistance (Yu and Moskal, 2019).

<u>I.J.</u>, therefore, arguecontend that CISs at the <u>University of Bath who are</u> engaged in local Christian churches to gainenjoy a range of significant and tangible benefits; a crucial one of which is to these is that they experience

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lower acculturative stress and a greater ability to cope with the myriad pressures they face in the UK. Although some studies pertaining to church participation exist that have focused on the motivations and experience of international students to who attend religious organisations, it is still unknown that to what extent doit is vital to deepen knowledge and understanding of how CISs in particular experience and respond to acculturative stress and that how can churchchurch participation helps to alleviate that stress.

## Research Qquestions:

Accordingly, this This study follows on is fed into by from existing studies of international students. It has and examined the acculturative stress of in Chinese students in and around who engage with religious organisations at in Bath.

# The research aim: Core Research Question

To what extent <u>might\_does</u> engagement in religious groups help to alleviate acculturative stress in Chinese <u>iInternational students studying at the University</u> of Bath?

This broad <u>core</u> question is <u>broken downcomplemented</u> into <u>by</u> the following more specific research questions:—

# Research objectives:

1) To what extent do Chinese international students at the University of Bath experience acculturative stress?

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2) To what extent How have Chinese international students been affected by engaging with different types of religious groups in Bath in terms of their integration and acculturation?

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## Methodology

#### Introduction

A qualitative approach methodological approach was used in this study to explore the acculturative stress that the sample of CISs experienced and the role that engagement with Christian churchchurcheses has played in alleviating their that acculturative stress.

This chapter outlines the detailed justification of the research design and gives a detailed justification of the adoption of the philosophical underpinnings and the data collection and analysis methods, Firstly, the The ehosen foundational philosophical assumptions underlying this study and their congruence with the research question will be are detailed. It will then describe the The research procedure, such as the process of including the participant recruitment process and the data collection methods, is then outlined. Finally, the researcher lengage in and the data collection on the and key ethical considerations will be addressed relevant to this study.

## **Philosophical Underpinnings**

In terms of <u>its\_ontological stancey</u>, this study assumes that the nature of reality is <u>restricted by individualintersubjectively negotiated</u> and constructed through social interaction (Bryman, 2012; Burr, 2003; Ormston et al., 2014). As Bryman and Bell (2003) suggests, objectivists argue that 'independent social actors' can shape the nature of reality and truth and <u>that people can only</u> passively accept the social world as neutral observers of a stable reality.

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Considering the nature of this study, the researcher has participated in recruiting participants, collecting data and data analysis, so objectivist This objectivist or 'realist' ontology is rejected here because the sample of The study attempt to examine CISs and their acculturation experiences of acculturative stress and churchchurch engagement whilst studying in the UK need to be understood in perceptive terms. Because I am concerned with perceived motivations, subjective experiences, meanings, associations of ideas and normative evaluations at the level of the subject, I adopt a and thus constructivist/interpretivist ontology was adopted in this study.

As Bryman (2012) suggests, an epistemological stancey answers the question ofdetermines, what the proponent claims can be known and how it can be known, as well as the nature of the knowing subject. Interpretivism insists that there is no objective reality on earthwhich is operationally independent of human subjectivity, and Therefore the only way that people can understand and interpret the world is through social interaction and analysing by existing in an ideational interplay with broader and intangible social structures (Hovorka and Lee, 2010). In this study, each the Chinese international students' experiences of the 's acculturation process is constructed seen as through a product of social interaction discourses and their values. Aacculturative stress as well as and church engagement experience needs to beare relevant concepts here insofar as they are interpreted as such by the participants (Myers, 2009; Scotland, 2012). Hence, the The epistemological position of this study is thus interpretivistm as it focuses on interviewing and interpreting each the study uses interviews and researcher-participant dialogue to participant's develop a clearer impression of the personal experiential side of acculturation experience, acculturative stress, and the role of the benefits of church engagement.

Research Design

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A qualitative research method<u>ology</u> was used in this study to explore the acculturative stress that that the CISs experienced and to discern the role of churchchurch engagement whist studying in the UKin influencing acculturation and associated stress. Admittably, Bboth qualitative and quantitative methods can could produce helpful insights into general truths in this area (Ituma et al, 2011), and using codification and statistical analyses would help to explore different. In addition, the types of acculturative stress CISs experienced by CISs and different types of benefits of to churchchurch engagement can be produced from a quantitative study.

However, unlike quantitative methods, which require researchers to objectify\_
the data as well as and ignore the specificities 'soft', meaning-rich data of

personal meanings, qualitative methods are more person-orientated and less
about breadth and is more with and seel to engage in in-depth of inquiry which
is de facto not aimed to enable generalisation (Cresswell, 1998).

Moreover, a Using a qualitative design in the social sciences is more concerned with theenables researchers to meaning explore of different aspects of individual's lives which are not pre-hoc set within a structure of closed issues. This design enables us to use participants' own, and with his or her accounts of how he or she understand some behaviour and beliefs and it ensures the researcher is open-ended and can incorporate new data categories ('deductive reasoning'). Because this This study focuses on each Chinese international student's detailed account of their acculturative stress and their interpretations, of their churchchurch engagement, so it which requires high flexibility and depth. Thus a qualitative approach is was deemed to be most appropriate (Yin, 2003).

# Data Ceollection

Focus groups and interviews are the two-most widely used deployed research

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tools used by researchers to collect data in a-qualitative researchstudies. Unlike focus group, which involves a-group discussion to explore the opinions and ideas of a chosen-group of people on a particular subject (Edmunds, 1999), interviews can effectively generate detailed explore the ideas and allow forof individuals and allow them to express their personal feelings, opinions; and ideas-values independently of their respective group associations (Francis, 2000). R.Moreover, the respondents may often feel more confident and comfortable during such interviews, as they are more motivated tocan share their deepest ideas, feelings, emotions and experiences about a particular topic without being concerned about how they come across to others being in the discussion at the same timegroup (Mason, 2002). Given that this This study aims to explore CISs' intra-personal experiences, rather than exploring the degree of consensus in terms of acculturation on a particular subject experiences, so interviews would be more are the most appropriate data collection method for this study.

In addition, The semi-structured interviews were performed conducted to gain obtain knowledge ofdata on CISs' personal experiences, points of view and understandings (Irvine, 2012) concerning their acculturation process and their church engagement in the UK. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to prepare a small score schedule of questions and to take these questions answers in off into distincts pontaneous—directions based on what when the participant's answers bring up a significant or pertinent issue.

Thus, the semi-structured interviews can provide the for a high degree of researcher flexibility, enabling me to improvise through by asking more flexible, off-schedule questions, allowing the researcher to and thereby to obtain a deeper and wider-reaching knowledge-understanding of the participants' respondents' perceptions, ideas and and their ideas as well as beliefs (Bryman, 2016). Such an approach is also extremely appropriate if the researcher has some pre-existing understanding in relation of the overall topic,

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to the study and evidence to date on it (Gill et al., 2008). In this study, as a Chinese international student studying in the UK, I personally became got involved in a range of events held by local Christian church, which and this provides me with some an insider understanding about of acculturative stress and the associated benefits of church engagement in dealing with it.

Before conducting semi-structure the interviews, an interview schedule was developed to address the research questions—set above. The questions in the schedule were intended to be open-ended, and the interview schedule can allowing me to probe and follow up on answers in order to obtain a better understanding of the respondents' sense—making of their experiences (Denscombe, 2014). Two

Additionally, two-pilot interviews were conducted with two-CISs prior to the interview to ensure that there is nominimise the risk of loss of significance or meaninggenerating invalid or irrelevant data resulting fromby sticking too rigidly enforcing a standard way of posingto the questions or by failing to probe into answers in adequate detail. These pilot-interviews also helped me practise different ways to of imposing questions and ways to use using prompts to elicit more information (Smith et al., 2012). Furthermore, I made an effort to I also ensured that I had established a relationship with each pilot participant so that both parties would feelfelt more comfortable.

# Sampling

Previously, snowball sampling was intended to for use to in recruiting participants in for this study. This was, however, abandoned as the hardre was

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difficulty in accessing to international students and limited target population.via the snowballing method.—

Therefore—access to the participants was provided by via just two contacts (A and F), both working for and being responsible for in the "International Café' in two different Christian churchchurches at in Bath. The "invitation to participate in the research;" that offersprovided detailed information about this the study; these were given to both contacts and they sent this invitation to their respective contacts, who are were all Chinese international students, via email. The sample was chosen purposively in accordance with the qualitative paradigm approach (Smith et al, 2012; Grbich, 1999; Smith and Osborn, 2007). Thirteen Chinese international students were recruited through via thise process.

Purposeful ly-criteria-based sampling was used to identify qualified participants in eligible for this study (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The criteria that was used in the selection of participants arewere:

- Must b e a student from Mainland China studying at the University of Bath (UoB) holding the Tier-4 student visa
- 2. Must be a Aged above 18
- 3. Must hHave stayed at the UK for at least 6 months and l—less than 1 year
- 4. Must hHave weekly participated weekly in events (allowing for occasional absence) held by local Christian Churches, such as the International CafCafé, é, Globe CafCafé, é, Sunday service, Bible study or Carol service.
- 5. Must be sStudying at PG level

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It was suggested that the The criterion relating to the length of stay of the international students in the host society is was closely intended to be linked to their levels of acculturative stress (Kuo &and Roysircar, 2004). AIn addition, according to the "U-Curve" theory of cultural adjustment, after fascinating and exciting "honeymoon' experiences", immigrants would often advance to a "cultural shock" period (Lysgaard, 1955; Quintrell &and Westwood, 1994). After arriving for three to six months, immigrants may enter the "crisis" stage. To capture the experiences of CISs and their cacculturative stress, I decided to narrow down the sample to one-year Chinese masters students who had never studied in the UK before, and who hads stayed in the UK for more than 6 months and less than 1 year.

Twenty Chinese international students who attended ehurehchurch activities weekly responded to the invitation and agreed to take part in this study and atlast thirteen of the sem were selected considering pending their their availability. Eight of the participants weare female students and five male (the other five are male), and all participants are were studying at PG level.

## **Research Locationsite**

When Once the participants had agreed to take part in this the study, I asked each participant for suggestions of as to their preferred interview venue ing place and interviewing time to make sure that the participants would feel comfortable (Smith et al., 2012). It is suggested that the place for Linterviewing should be take place in a safe, quiet, accessible and uninterrupted space (Smith et al., 2012). At the end, Mmost of the interviews were conducted in the open area of Virgil Building (which is one of the libraries of the University of Bath), and some interviews were undertaken in the interviewees' ir homes due to for their convenience and comfort.

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# **Data Analysis**

All participants chose to be interviewed in Chinese, and the coding process was also accordingly conducted in Chinese. Thirteen participants were interviewed over a period of fifteen days span in August. Each interview lasted from 12 minutes to 56 minutes depending on the willingness and confidence the participant has had to in sharing their opinions and experiencese. In order to To codify e and interpret the data easily and accurately, the transcripts were not translated into English. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. The transcriptions were read several times whilst I took notes, and data were coded and then collated into several themes. The method of data analysis used in this study is was, broadly speaking, that of thematic analysis. As thematic analysis is theoretically relegiously, it can address different kinds of research questions in in alignment with different theoretical frameworks.

Tespecially, thematic analysis can be used to answer research questions associated to with the opinions and ideas of individuals (The School of Psychology of Auckland, 2018).

In order to To effectively analyse and interpret the transcripts produced from all the interviews, I coded the data by identifying recurring themes phrases, topics, words and points of emphasis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I read through all the transcripts several times and tried to identified recurring themes, also noting themes, which potentially relate to the existing literature. However, some other new themes, that were not formerly covered in previous studies, were also found in during this process (Boyatzis, 1998; Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

#### **Ethical Considerations**

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An ethical approval form was presented to the SSREC at the Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath and this study was fully approved before conducting the interviews (Code: S19-067). This research was rigorous in was eagerputting all measures in place to not to expose respondents participants to any harm (May, 2011).

The My position of as an 'insider' may eause have affected my less serelations and dialogues with the intervieweesnsitivity regarding some information due to because my pre-existing relationships with some of the participants and the fact that I have attended most may church church activities they alongside them attended mean that the interviewees may have conveyed their opinions in a different way to how they would if speaking to an unknown researcher. This therefore introduces certain methodological and validity issues which are discussed later.

Moreover, Ssince some of the participants have already got to knowknew I was recruiting Chinese international students for my study, they might feel have felt compelled to participate when I talked to them about in the study. However, the purpose of the study and For this reason I repeatedly asserted their right to withdraw at any time had been fully notified before they agreed to participate for any reason, and I emphasised that they were under no obligation to partake in the study and there would be no negative consequences from withdrawing whatsoever.

A main\_core\_principle elosely related to in research is 'beneficence \_\_\_doing good for others and preventing harm' (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2000, p.95). Because the data was were collected by in interviews, I was acutely aware of the importance of evaluating how and to what extent sharing about their personal experiences, particularly those regarding stress and possible psychological problems, may have affected the participants. I accordingly

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ensured that the participants were aware of support services they could access if any issues in the interview discussion caused them any distress.

Research on the The ir acculturation process can be a sensitive topic and can make participants feeling emotional, and possibly harm them vulnerable.

(Allmark et al., 2009). In this study, the participants need to look back to their experience of feeling challenging or stressful after their arrival in the UKThis is why I made it clear where participants could access professional support should they need it, and I reminded them that they were under no obligation to reveal or discuss anything that they find upsetting.

Kavanaugh and Ayres (1998) suggested argue that the researcher should be alert 'throughout the research process for signs of potential distress' (p. 95) and that the researcher needs to adopt different approaches to avoid harm coming to respondents according to the respondent's ability to 'Freveal and manager his or her own distress' (p. 95).

If the participant is willing to share his or her experiences of stress openly and deeply, and he/she is able to cope with thathis or her stress during and after the interview, then the participant should be allowed to guide the researcher throughout the interview (Kavanaugh and Ayres, 1998). However, for participants who are reluctant to reveal their stress or who have limited ability to in dealing with their stressit, it is absolutely necessary to stop further exploration of this area topic (Kavanaugh and Ayres, 1998).

Therefore, the questions had been were written and proposed read with sensitivelity and with tact; and probing questions had been avoided were not posited when the participant was unnot willing to talk more about one a question or showed themselves to be upset in doing so.

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During the interviews, all the participants were animated highly vocal, open and engaged and seemed unnot affected emotionally while telling their stories—whatever the depth is.

Mutual respect and trust between the researcher and participant sareis the basis for a core component of a successful study; I sought to build an and this was achieved by open and honest communicative rapporton (Tindall, 1994). Thus, Aall participants were provided with an informed consent form, an information sheet explaining the aims of the study, their a clear overview of their rights including the right to withdraw at any time, and how a comprehensive statement as to how the data will were to be stored and used (Denscombe, 2014; Smith et al, 2012). The p.

Participants were promised informed that they have had the right to ask any questions at any time and have they signed the consent form prior to the interview. It was clarified that consent was on an on-going basis and that should they withdraw at any point then the interview recording would be destroyed and any materials pertaining to them would be deleted.

The participants were encouraged to ask questions at all stages and signed the consent form attached to the Information Sheet when I ensured that they fully understood its contents.

Ethical <u>research</u> practice is a dynamic process and participants' consent <u>is</u> necessarily on-going; rather than being a 'once and for all prior event' <u>it is</u> 'subject to negotiation over time' (BSA 2002, p3).

It is argued that the researcher cannot Researchers cannot completely guarantee 'confidentiality', and but ean they can only assure 'anonymity' (Smith et al, 2012). Before the interview, the participants were aware that their names, church names, staff names and other identifying information would be anonymised. They were also informed that my supervisor can access this

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anonymised information and that some of the transcripts would be used in the dissertation. Relevant information regarding how the data would be safely held and destroyed at the conclusion of the study was included in the Information Sheet.

## Reflexivity

It is acknowledged that reflecting on the The researcher's positioning as an observer and/or intervener is crucial to consider because their positioning would affects their perspective of in posing questions and in interpreting the data (Hollway, 2012). RSuch reflexivity is especially essential in qualitative studies due to their the implicit assumption that knowledge is constructed through social interaction (Smith et al., 2012). The potential for certain data to be pre-hoc eliminated from consideration because of the researcher's biases and epistemological scoping is riven throughout qualitative inquiry. Since it is clearly understood that as As a Chinese international student who has engaged in and helped out these in various churchchurches' activities, my position may bring have implied power difference distortions and validity skews to in the participants' answers.

Linevitably brought that I hade pre-existing friendships with some participants and their they understanding of the fact that understood. I had been helping partaking out in the "International Café" throughout the year, they the interviewees were likely to assume that my position represented that of the church and I thus expected more positive responses in terms of church engagement and lower levels of reported acculturative stress. My positioning also did motivate me to conduct this study and I inevitably brought mean that some preasumptions, in terms of normative values to this study as attached to my beliefs in church engagement, will have played a significant role in my acculturation experience and alleviating my acculturative

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stresscoding and thematisation of the data. This acknowledgement has made meI became more aware of the significance importance of *bracketing* such assumptions throughout the process conducting of undertaking this study (Smith et al., 2012).

In order to make sure that the To ensure the themes I identified represented the accounts of the respondents and not myfoci and to increase the degree to which the themes conveyed their own priorities and not mine account, I eriticised my interpretation of the transcripts and asked for engaged in critical dialogue and discussion over my transcriptions with my supervisor's advice.

As suggested by Smith (2012), I used a detailed reflection diary was created to record my ideas and challenge my presuppositions and opinions throughout the process of analysis.

There are still many Some notable constraints to the generalisability, reliability and validity of this study exist, primarily with regard to in terms of the sampling process. As mentioned earlier, the sample was not sufficiently diverse, large-scale or cross-sectional to achieve a strong representative—valueenough; all were participants were studying at the University of Bath; most of the participants had attended at least one of two "International Café' sessions" in the two Christian ChurchChurches; and all participants are were studying at PG level. These scoping criteria have meant that students at other universities, those who are less engrained in church activities but who are beginning to be, and students at other levels, may have reported significantly different experiences. Thus, the data may not be generalised to and thereby found applicable to all CISs who attended churchchurch activities whilst studying in the UK (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014; Smith et al, 2012;).

As mentioned, my My position, as a Chinese international student who has attended ehurchchurch activities and has helped out was possibly problematic insofar as the participants' awareness of these factors may have affected their

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answers. The potential for participants to give answers that they felt I would desire to hear was increased because of my own positioning. But judging from the level of rapport and relaxation during the interviews it seemed however, it was evident that most participants were more open and enthusiastic about in sharing their personal experiences with me than beand they were less cautious of my "insider" position than I had anticipated (Gair, 2012). In some other ways being an

In fact, since "insiders" can help to elicit more valid and more in-depth data because the participants often feel more comfortable. were found to tend to empathise with respondents, therefore respondents were more I identified that the interviewees were open and felt comfortable during the interviews and itallows the researcher to better—a rationale for this may well have been that they know I understand their values and standpoints that church activity-attending CISs often hold (Gair, 2012; Hayfield and Huxley, 2015).

However, I was conscious that despite these possible advantages to my being an "insider", it is likely that my prejudices and presuppositional values and experiences may have been \_-imposed on this study and the data itself and their can be interpretationed in a different and this may have produced different findings to those of an "outsider" \_ way or perspective by other researcher conducting the same studys. Since I conducted the data analysis, it may lack rigor and bring biases in data analysis Bias, perceptive distortions and a priori judgements and evaluations are frequently occurring factors that inhibit validity in much qualitative research (Anderson, 2010).

However, due to the limited time and resources, the Time constraints meant that I could not ask participants eannot to validate my data analyse is, particularly whereas asking them to appraise the my interpretation of the transcripts my and theme identification of themes which could have minimised such the effects of bias. The other potential problem was that the All the interviews were all

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conducted in Chinese, and whereas the themes I identified and presented in the findings were in English. This translational process may not have meant loss of meaning and/or an amplification of my own interpretive bias when emphasising certain phrases or codesfully represent the transcripts considering the difference between two languages. Moreover, the lack of literature Finally, addressing the role of the dearth of research into the effects of churchchurch engagement (especially those on acculturative stress) among international students, whilst comprising the rationale for the study, has made it difficult for me to compare and contrast my findings with those of others may influence the relevance of the review, as this is the core of this study.

## **Findings**

# CISs' Aacculturative Stress

All the participants had encounteredshared acculturative stress in their transition to the UK student life in ways that centred around terms of language, cultural differences, academic life, socialising and practical lifeneeds. It was reported found that language stress, academic stress, cultural stress and socialising stress were all positively correlated.

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# Language-Rrelated Ststress

MAlthough most participants expressed that although they were mentally prepared and had achieved an eligible IELTS score before they he arrived to in the UK, they still reported found language proficiency issues to be as a major source of acculturative stress. However, Pparticipants with different levels of English abilities proficiency expressed these is stresses varyingly in terms of their social, academic, career-related; and psychological aspects. Regarding In informal social life settings, the extensive use of idioms and slang, the diversity of English accents, second language pressures, fear of making mistakes and being a sense of feeling awkward were found to affect the participants is confidence and, their willingness to socialise with English, speaking people.

Since the English teaching is more test-orientated and he the participants washad been less exposed to English-speaking people than their European peers in China, he they found he havereported having more difficulties in communicating with the English than European peers did. —

One participant shared her experience of using an improper word in a conversation and waswhereby she was seriously corrected by a native speaker; this which made her feel not lacking in confidences and inferior when interacting with locals after that thereafter;

I was sharing my experiences of going to the peak district, and I wanna say the sheep's droppings, but at that moment, I can't find a proper word, so I just use "shit" to describe, and then a British at our table said "droppings". He looked very serious and not in a friendly way, which embarrassed me a lot. I had a sense of inferiority after that. (L)

Formatted: English (United Kingdom) Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29" Formatted: English (United Kingdom) Formatted: English (United Kingdom) Some other participants, who also pointed out that they had tried to respond concisely quickly and simply, and they would rarely open themselves in up for fear of embarrassment; echoed such feeling.

I am not confident to have deep conversations with them and locals speak so fast, I can't stop them 10 times saying "say it again", can I? So I learnt the best way to avoid being awkward is to keep conversation simple. (V)

At the beginning, I attended many different clubs, like debating, dancing. But the first time I went there, people spoke so fast, I can't fully understand, this made me feel so uncomfortable and embarrassed. So I didn't go these clubs any more after that. (H)

Many of the <u>interviewees had m therefore</u> attempted to hide their language deficiencies; they, did not ask for explanation when necessary, and they tended to socialise with Chinese peers.

Since a higher level of English proficiency is required in academic settings, the fact that English as—was their second language may result incaused increased their academic stress. Several participants reported difficulty in understanding the lectures,—especially when the lecturers hadve strong accents; they avoided asking questions during or after lectures, and they sought to avoid expressing their ideas confidently during lectures and seminars; they—and—were reluctant to communicate with their lecturers even when they had some doubts—issues about or queries about the lecture.

I think we are expected to have the same language skill with locals in academic life, but to be honest it took us much more time and effort to read and write, and understanding the lectures is so hard, especially the vocabulary and different lecturers' accents. (V)

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One participant expressed that it was impossible for him to achieve distinction in a course due to a time-limited handwriting examination:

We need to answer two questions from six given set questions within a 2-hour time frame. The maximum words I can write within 2 hours is 3000, but one of my course mates wrote 6000 words with references. That was impossible for me; I am just hopeless about getting a distinction (K).

As well as inpart from social and academic life, language proficiency has also affected them in the workplace. One participant was doing a part-time job in a restaurant; her manager's accent affected her working efficiency ability and her desire and confidence to work in the UK.

My manager is from Italy. His English has <u>a very strong Italian accent</u>, it's so hard for me to understand his instructions and my efficiency was strongly affected. I just tried twice and then I gave up. (H)

A was doing <u>an internship</u> in the summer, she expressed that <u>even</u>-she found <u>that language has not become abecame</u> barrier in her <u>work</u>, social and academic life, <u>she,because</u> 'as a non-native speaker, <u>I</u> was assigned to do more basic jobs and was not paid'.

Language was not always seen as a barrier *X*, studying TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), highlighted that *language for me is not a barrier*; *I would rather say it's a huge source of stress*.

She didn't report any difficulties in terms of language, but her strong desire to have an authentic British accent and impress native speakers, and along with her expectation to achieve native speaker proficiency, had level resulted in considerable pressurestress.

Stress Related to Ceultural Ddifferences

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The differences between Chinese and British cultures can be manifested in became pertinent in different aspects of the CISs' lives in the UK. Although such differences helped CISs to broaden their horizons, them can lead they also led to difficulty in socialising at and the to a lack of a sense of belonging. Participants provided various examples, ranging from those relating to social norms to those relating to the drinking culture to and eating culture, which put pressure on them. Some participants reported their concerns about cultural difference and about their lack of knowledge about of British norms and expectations. Some CISs attributed the difficulties to their different cultures and ways of socialising. X shared her confusion that British jokes for her were so hard to understand and that she found it tiring to pretend laughing at these jokes when everyone else was laughing. She said 'there is so much sarcasm in their conversation and I am not sarcastic person'.

P expressed that some political topics in social settings, may can result in embarrassment and frustration;

They often talk about various topics over meals, such as Tiananmen Square, Brexit. But to be honest, I don't know much about politics and I am even not interested in that. When they asked me some political issues, I just said sorry I don't know. At that moment, I felt like I amwas ignorant, which frustrated me. (P)

H also echoed with P that shared her experience of participating a quiz party
that made her feel so-upset and inferior:

The quiz night for me was like a nightmare, even if even I can understand what's the question is, bt but I don't know any of those answers. I was just like an idiot. (H)

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The differences in the ways they the two cultures socialise also included how they greet. A expressed that shaking hands and hugging made him feel unnatural andill at ease and awkward;

I think shaking hands is way too formal for me and hugging is just like too intimate. I don't really like it.

Another The other participant echoed stated that their interactions with locals are often superficial.

British drinking culture also affected the CISs' acculturation. In Chinese culture, drinking, especially excessive alcohol consumption, is socially discouraged. Therefore, some CISs reported that it is uncomfortable for them to go clubbing, because they may suffer from the a sense of loneliness and lack of a sense of not belonging.

P described herself as an introverted person and stated that she had no interest in nightlife that as many British students would enjoytend to:

Some of my British course mates had invited me to go to a pub or even a club at the very beginning, but I personally don't fancy it and I feel our lifestyles are so different. I don't like fast food like Mac Daonalds. So I just don't hang out with them. And after a while, no other foreign friends invited me. (P)

Apart from As well as the differences in social norms and drinking culture, the severe criticism of then Chinese government and Chinese politics also frustrated one participant:

When they criticised my country, my people, sometimes in an unfriendly way, and it's not true accurate it made makes me so upset and angry. (X)

Non-Llanguage Rrelated Aacademic Sstress

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Although many participants reported <u>facing academic challenges</u> as <u>the a key</u> source of stress, the <u>degree nature</u> and sources of academic distress varied from individual to individual. <u>Most</u>

As it mentioned above, most participants found it hard to understand the lectures due to a lack of language proficiency. This barrier can definitely increase their academic stress and make them CISs spend much more time reading the textbooks or other relative written materials. In the initial stage of acculturation, academic stress can also resulted from the teaching styles, the curriculum, interdisciplinary from notions of knowledge from undergraduate to postgraduate levels, time pressures and personal expectations.

Participants have expressed different views of then British educational system and teaching style. Some participants reported that they had not previously used encountered to seminars and presentations, which required students to share their own ideas. As H said:

I've never had seminars back in China, so when I got to know that everyone was supposed to share their own opinions, I felt very uncomfortable and nervous. I prefer speaking after I haved done enough research around one topic and when I really want to share.

Some participants reported anxiety around some 100 forms of 36 assessment, especially when it is-involves assignments or presentations based:

I still remember doing a 25 minutes presentation in the first term, and it was so scary. I needed to answer questions from my course mates and lecturers after presentingation for 30 minutes. And it's 100% presentation—based assessment. I felt so anxious and spent almost one month to preparinge, and it still didn't go well. (V)

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In contrast, some participants thought it is natural for them found it easier to adjust to the British educational system since because the teaching style back in their home universities was reported as being pretty similar:

When I was in China, the teaching style is was quite similar and I really like group discussion and presentations. So I found this similarity gave me much confidence in academic life. (B)

Some participants reported difficulties in academic writing. Since schools and universities in China were are more test-oriented, CISs struggled to read abundant articles, write essays or produce reports in an academic way, and bewhilst remaining conscious of the referencinge style at all times.

K expressed her anxiety about writing <u>a dissertation that because it took her</u> almost a month to review <u>the relevant literature</u> and she was still struggling with the structure, <u>logical argumentation and \_and logic flow;</u>

The dPissertation is just crazy for me, although I have three months to write it, and searching for articles and reading them through and paraphrasing useful texts has almost killed me. I really don't think I can write a dissertation like the sample. (K)

Some participants also mentioned stated that their subject as taught in the UK was different from what they studies into the way it was taught in China, the and that these emerging gaps of in knowledge put additional pressures on their academic lives fe.

Some participants realised had identified the strong association between academic performance with and their career development, so their they had high expectations of their academic performance and they made the decision to attend more tests such as CFA and ACCA during their study abroad. This brought considerably more stress onto them.

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### Non-Linguistic SOther-stress Factors Relatingrelated to Socialisationing

Apart from socialisation stresses that related to language proficiency and cultural differences, the a lack of opportunities to interact with locals and the conflict between this and personal expectations can also caused socialisation stress.

Many participants found it really hard to get to know people from other countries mainly because their course mates and flatmates are were mainly Chinese.

In my course, over 90% of the students are Chinese, so I don't really have too many opportunities to get to know British students or European students. (B)

J expressed her anxiety and tiredness exhaustion in about attending different social events, trying to make friends from various different backgrounds, and balancing social and academic life demands. Such expectation has These stresses had caused some health problems such as a sleeping disorders:

You know, I always want to make people around <u>me like me, but <del>people issuethis</del></u> is so hard, and I found-find it really stressful to impress everyone.

(J)

Some participants expressed <u>a sense of loneliness</u>. They found it hard to <u>have</u> <u>build</u> deep, <u>meaningfuler</u> relationships with people around <u>them</u> and they <u>had a</u> habit of not asking for help <u>which force-made</u> them <u>to be more isolated</u>. K mentioned <u>that</u> when she had a <u>low time</u>period of brief low-level depression she found there was not any friends she <u>ean-could</u> open <u>her heartup to</u> to talk to about it in the UK; this <u>which</u> made her feel lonely and upset:

I do have friends here, but no one is really close <u>such that you can have</u> heart-to-heart conversations. <u>I have There is a</u> time difference with my

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friends in China, so usually I fel<u>elf especially</u> lonely at night-when they were 2 am or 3 am. (K)

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#### Practical Sstress

Some participants mentioned spoke of different the practical problems they had experienced. Several participants complained about the public transport system in Bath and sometimes itexpressed that they often took them overhad to wait for up to 1 hour to wait forget a bus to the university bus. One participant found it this very really difficult and less efficient to makesaid that it posed challenges in attending important appointments. She had been late to a booking at the \_an appointment with dentists when she was sufferinged from painful toothaches. Some other participants echoed this expressing that even though they had paid costly health insurance but had found that \_the medical system was disappointinged.

# Church Church Eengagement as a Ceoping Strategy

The other focus purpose of this study was to examine the impacts of CISs' engaging in church events regularly. These impacts that emerged as relevant to the interviewees ranged from those pertaining to language practice and socialisingation to those concerning spiritual growth. Participants mentioned that Church engagement as a group activity that significantly helped them to alleviate their acculturative stress.

### **Church Engagement:** Language Ppractice

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All participants regarded practiseing English as a major key benefit of engaging in churchchurch activities. Many participants mentioned that although there were many CISs at the churchchurch, especially at the Linternational Café, they all spoke in English, which is and this was different and easier to access compared from to when they were at in lectures. Helen expressed that within of the 10 times of speaking English outside of the classroom, at least 5 times were happened were at the churchchurch. Moreover, V-volunteers at the churchchurch tend were reported to be very patient and friendly to in encouraginge CISs to talk in English confidently, which and this provided CISs with more opportunityies to practise English and buildt their confidence in speaking English sense of proficiency. A expressed that he felt more comfortable speaking English when he was talking to Christians Church members because he would not feel judged and the Christians Church members were really fully engaged into the conversation.

Christian friends are mainly native, and their accents are quite standard. And I feel they tend to slow it down when they speak, so I can fully understand. Also, when they say some native expressions or some words that I don't know, they were are really patient to in explaining them to me. So after several months, my English has paturally improved a lot, especially in terms of listening, speaking and vocabulary. (A)

Some participants also reported their undergoing progress in their vocabulary and expression s about relating to cultures and the Bible. This progress had allowed them to interact with locals better and to meet other internationals and engage with them over on topics of different of cultures and faith more confidently and comfortably:

I learnedt how to introduce Chinese New Year and acquired many new, words and expressions about cultural issues, that's because my churchchurch friends would introduce different cultures in the

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International Café and it kind of helped me to pick up these useful expressions. (A)

The <u>se</u> improvements <u>of in language skills</u> <u>—also helped them to develop their general communication skills and social skills in their host society.</u>

## Social Cocommunity

It has been frequently was frequently mentioned throughout this dissertation that socialising iwas an effective method of alleviating international students' acculturative stress. This was supported in the findings. As L said, 'talking to people comfortably itself releases my stress and is a way of recharging'. Most participants agreed that the church provided an ideal place for socialising and relaxing. Participants mentioned several advantages and differences between church events and other social events.

Firstly, compared to other social events organised by the University, people of different age groups and nationalitiesy were engaged at in the church. As H said:

I can meet people that are very different, for example, some Christian volunteers are retired British people and currently working people. Talking to older people makes me feel so comfortable and they are so knowledgeable, wise and full of wisdom.

The diversity of the church members' backgrounds can makemade the conversations more meaningful and helpful for the CISs. Church Church members were said to have distinctly different experiences, expertise areas, skills, and points of view, which makes made the CISs more willing to ask questions and to acquire new information. For these participants, the processes

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of asking questions and receiving answers provided them with useful and valuable information; and broadened their horizons;

Talking to these experienced churchchurch members definitely gives me a very different understanding about of different various issues. (M)

Secondly, the welcoming and solemn atmosphere with accompanied with calm music made the CISs feel peaceful and relaxed, which and they did stated that they do not feel the same in other social events. Most participants pointed outclaimed that the interaction and communication with people in the church church was were especially enjoyable and comfortable. One participant expressed that although he did not believe in Jesus, being in the church building and listening to the music can madke him feel peaceful and relaxed.

Thirdly, the consistency and logical pattern of ehurchchurch activities ensured that people can-could meet regularly and they are were therefore more likely to build on-going friendship. Some participants reported that the frequency, timing and stability reliability of churchchurch activities helped them to interact with different people in the activities and to have deeper conservation, thus playing a significant key role in improving their social life.

The International Café was is open every Friday night from 7.30pm to 10 pm.; I sat sit at different tables every week and talked to loads of people during over this the academic year. Many of the my Café friends have already become my close friends in the UK, we hanged out together, and have even travelled together last month. (B)

Fourthly, interactions in church buildings tend to bewere reported as being inclusive, diverse, sincere, deep and but not superficial. Church Church members often invited every single student to engage in conversations to ensure that everyone feel felt comfortable. Also, due to the religious nature of the meetings, the conversations can could often be extremely deep and

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profound, and this which attracted and impressed P and and brought gave her Formatted the a sense of belonging at church church. When they were really open about their life stories, I was touched and Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29" gradually Hegan to open up myself. Throughout \_the process, we truly **Formatted** geot to know the person. The familiarity and closeness about among the people in this environment make me feel safe and warm. (P) Some respondents even described the ehurch as their second home and **Formatted** the church members as family members. The care, welcome, company welcoming and attention of the atmosphere had won the trust of the CISs and freed-had them from countered their loneliness and bore. Some respondents reported that they had received sincere care from kind and warm-hearted church members, which and that this wais one of the key differences with to other social events: People are really warm-hearted and nice. You can tell that they really care Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29" for you and all the conversations are so comfortable. I feelft so accepted Formatted and cared for at the church church, (J) Finally, some participants had established close relationships with **Formatted** church members beyond the confines of the church building. Some participants had met up with church members to read the Bible, while some several participants were invited to church member's house homes over Christmas. Such intimacy helped the CISs to feel warm, and being loved and supported, which definitely helped them to reduce their stress. Increased Ceultural Kknowledge **Formatted** Most of the participants expressed their desire to acculturate into British culture **Formatted** and they agreed that attending church events regularly had contributed to acceleratinge their acculturation to into the wider British society. The CISs' Formatted: English (United Kingdom)

knowledge about of the UK and other countries hadve been increased through	Formatted
by interacting with British ehurchchurch members and with international	
students from other countries. '-"Cultural nights'" that aimed at introducing	
different cultures and festivals, attending as well as Bbible discussions and	
Sunday congregation services, were highlighted as increasing the CISs cultural	
knowledge and understanding.	
First, Since most church members are were British, interacting with	Formatted
them can helped the CISs to understand more about their ways of thinking,	()
greeting and acting better.	
greeting and acting better.	
H expressed that she tended to hug people for when greeting thems since	Formatted
because she had received hugs every time she went into the church, and	
although it wasthis is very different from to Chinese traditional culture it was	
welcomed by her.	
Not only CISs were engaged in the churchchurch activities, but many	Formatted
international students from Europe and other states also actively participated.	
Socialising with people from other countries also had helped the CISs tom gain	
new knowledge about other cultures.	
Some participants were had been invited to attend a British weddings at the	Formatted
church during the summer and they had regarded it this as a benefit of to	
attending ehurch events and building friendships with the ehurch	
members who just got married:	
If I didn't go to <del>churchchurch,</del> I <del>can would have</del> never known N (the bride)	Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29"
and I would not have been able to witness a British wedding.	Formatted
Second, bothBoth churches provide hold events that reflect celebrate	Formatted
cultures, festivals and customs from Britain and some other countries, such	/(*************************************
as and these include, British greetings, Irish night, Japanese night as and Pancake	
usund these metade pricion growings, man ingit, supuness ingit is and a stream	

night. Some respondents mentioned stated that through by engaging in ehurchchurch activities they had increased; their knowledge about of the British social style etiquette and their understanding of British culture had increased significantly. The more they know learned about British social style norms and British culture, the more they had felt comfortable and more confident they will be being in social events. Many participants also reported that their knowledge about of British festivals, such as Pancake day and Easter day, can be a topic with helped them to relate to their other local friends and ean deepened their communicative connectionens with other the locals, and help CISs to understand British better. The CISs' ir willingness and strong desire to understand British culture also had thereby helpeds them to be more accepted by their other local friends.

I can kind of relate to English people now and <u>I</u> can appreciate British culture more. (A)

One participant even expressed that she was less scared about socialisinge in pubs as "I think it's just chatting in another place, I can chat to locals in the church, I can also chat to locals in pubs".

Third, Several some participants mentioned claimed that Christianity represented is a significant part component of Western culture and noted that it has affected British history a lot. As some several participants mentioned, the Bible discussion leaders tend to relate the scriptures to some tropical issues in the UK. For example, onea leader used some verses in the Bible and the story of Adam and Eveespecially Genesis to illustrate that homosexuality is not acceptable by God according to the leader's interpretation. Most participants who had attended the Bible discussions (which is are entirely optional in as a component of the International Café) and Sunday congregation services, and who had met up with churchchurch members to engage in one-to-one Bible

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stud<u>ies</u> walued the se as opportunities to learn about the <u>Wwestern culture</u> through via readings of the Bible and by listening to sermons.

I have heard many Bible stories now. although it's They're really old, but I think some of them are still inspiring. For example, God told people to love each other whatever they haved done for us. In China, we have similar sayings. (M)

Some participants <u>have mentioned claimed that they have acquireding "inner</u> peace" and <u>being had a sense of being "purified"</u> when attending Sunday congregation services.

When Christians worship and pray, it's so touchingy and peaceful. I never see this side of people outside the churchchurch, (N)

### Practical Aassistance

ChurchChurches do not just provide a place for international students to socialise and introduce learn about British culture: and half of the participants have had received some practical assistance from churchchurch members.

Since international students are often unnot familiar with the new environment and may have face some difficulties in different various aspects of private and practical life, churchchurch members tend to care about their offered the CISs help and support accordingly needs and offer help in different ways. H expressed her thankfulness gratitude to a churchchurch member that hewho had offered useful help and kindness for her when she was suffering from severe toothache.

I am so grateful that Mike is so kind and caring. He checked many dentists and took me to the dentist who <u>is-was</u> available and prayed for me. I can't imagine what <u>it I-would have been like</u> without his help. (H)

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One participant got had got a part-time job with the help of a churchchurch member and two other participants reported that their coursework was proof read by a churchchurch member who is was British.

When he got to knowlearned that I was struggling with grammar, he immediately told me he was more than willing to help. (M)

## Psychological Assistance

The company, care, friendship and help provided by ehurch members had helped counter kept them free from loneliness. Most of the participants stated that they had found it more comfortable staying with people in the ehurch and it is less stressful than staying in other settings. As one respondent said, "there is no competition there, I feel so relaxed" (P/X?).

Church was can also give reported as having given the international students a sense of belonging. that makes them feel safe and loved. The love and care that the CISs received can make them think in a helped them to progress and live in a more positive way. Moreover, The fun and enjoyable activities, along with and the friendly atmosphere of the church, had, they claimed, helped them release to lessen the academic stress and other stresses.

We don't talk about academic stuff at church to be honest, I really like the refreshment and the food there. I have loads of fun there. (H)

Fun and recreation ean bewere regarded as extra-being additional advantages of to attending the church events. Since the church activities are usually held on Fridays and Sundays, the CISs tend to be are more likely to be free and to be looking for social events to attend. Therefore, the church church examprovided them with an evenue to socialise and have fun with others.

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Some participants who had joined Bbible discussion groups and congregation	1	Formatted	
services <u>and they</u> reported that through worship and reading the Bbible they	//		
became had become more calmer and more peaceful:			
I don't believe in Jesus, but I have to say every Sunday when I was am_		Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29"	
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sitting in the churchchurch building, I feelft so peaceful and grateful. (X)			
One participant once had suffered from severe academic stress, and he felt less	1	Formatted	
stressedful though by reading the Bbible one-to-one with a church	//		
member_who also prayed for him:_			
These academic stress is still there, but what has changed is my attitude		Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29"	
toward <u>s</u> th <u>at<del>ose</del> stress. I was so touched by his prayer and the<del>ose</del> words in</u>		rormatted	
the Bible comforted me so much. (B)			
Some participants expressed that their ways of thinking, their personality, and		Formatted	
even their lives <u>had</u> changed after engaging in <u>churchchurch</u> events:			
I used to think the notion of God is ridiculous, and the story of Jesus		Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29"	
turning water into wine is was impossible implausible and unrealistic. —		Formatted	
But when I really read the Bible, still I didn't read too much, and but I got	///		
to know more about my Christian friends. I think I had prejudic <u>ial beliefs</u> e	/		
before, and $\emph{I}$ am more open-minded and tolerant now. I began to accept	$/\!\!/$		
and try to understand things ideas that are different from what to those that			
I believe <u>in., (L)</u>			
I was hantised last month, and I think my life has changed after coming to		Formatted	
I was baptised last month, and I think my life has changed after coming to		Formatted	
church_church_ (B)			
Negative <u>E</u> effects of <u>ehurch Church E</u> engagement		Formatted	
Although most participants reported several tangible positive benefits to their		Formatted	
life when asked about the effects of church church engagement, X expressed			()
me when asked about the effects of charen charen engagement, A expressed			

that the "International Café has labelled students according to their home Formatted countries: X is a Christian who regularly attendsed Sunday congregational services and have has been helping out in at the International Café; several times. Everyone was like draping a flag, Wwhen they asked :- "what about your -**Formatted** Formatted: Indent: Left: 0.29" culture?' ?" I really don't know what to answersay, I know they were are expecting me to share knowledge about of Chinese culture. But the thing is that we are individuals and we all have different cultural outlookses even though we are all Chinese. I think the types of questions and their introduction of  $some\_certain\_cultures$  are very biased. (X)Discussion Formatted: English (United Kingdom) Thise study has explored the acculturative stress that CISs often experienced **Formatted** and it has investigated the role of church engagement in alleviating their that stress in a sample of 13 students studying at the University of Bath. The other <u>core</u> purposes of this study have been the replication of were to deploy the qualitative methods and to advance on the existing literature body of evidence pertaining to the on-acculturation of a specific group of migrants s——Chinese international students (Constantine et al., 2005).\_\_\_ This study has highlighted some key factors affecting this the sample of CISs **Formatted** and their -cultural adaptation in the UK, including factors such as preparation, language skills, social skills, and ehurch engagement. **Acculturative Sstress Formatted** When compared to the The literature exploring the acculturative stress **Formatted** experienced by international students in general has produced some similar findings have been to those of found between this study, with existing

literature, with such as language proficiency, stress related to dealing with cultural differences, socialisation stress arising from social life and customs and academic stress were both identified as key forms of acculturative stress (see Constantine et al., 2004; Constantine et al., 2005b; Constantine et al., 2005c; Farver, Narang, and Bhadha, 2002; Koutrelakos, 2004; Mori, 2000; Ghuman, 1997; Pedersen, 1991; Sodowsky & and Plake, 1992; Rajapaksa & and Dundes, 2003).

Although all the participants expressed herein stated that language proficiency is a major stress factor regardless of their language proficiency level, the language proficiency's influence on the *level* of stress experienced by each individual varied appeared to be a key feature. Since this study did not provide the a large-scaled sampled quantified dataset pertaining to the of CISs' experiences of stress and their language proficiency, future studies ean would do well to adopt a quantitative approach to examine the correlation of between language proficiency and their degrees of acculturative stress, in different aspects.

This study tends to align wellaccords with Berry et al.'s (2006)'s researchstudy insofar as l: Language skills were emerged as very significant in determining the CISs' acculturation processes and were associated withexacerbating social stress and academic stress. In addition, itThis study provides more deeper qualitative insights into language proficiency's effects on CISs' experiences of career-related stress and psychological stress. As-X, who studied TESOL, expressed her a strong desire to achieve native speaker level-proficiency and had tried hard to "sound more British". Future studies on language stress can could explore the experiences of international students from studying different subject areass and with different expectations of self and different concepts of effective language use in academia.s-

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Moreover, The finding that the Chinese international students that reported frustration, a lack of confidence and even feelings of inferiority resultinged from their limited language skills, repeated in the former literature, should raise thebe of concern of to University support services. UFor example, universities should take initiate measures to help them CSIs in coping with language difficulties in both social and academic settings, and they would benefit from providing visible and accessible professional mental health support.

The In terms of the findings on stress related to cultural differences this study also echoed with previous studies. D: Differences in cultures, ways patterns and norms in socialising of socialising, the gaps of in cultural knowledge and the a lack of perceived common interests can make CISs feelcause upset, frustrationed, embarrassment among CSIsed (Choi, 1997; Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Lin, 1998; Yan and Berliner, 2011; Yang and Clum, 1994. This study also aligned with that of a study (Thurnell-Read, Brown and Long (2018) and their findings regarding on international students' experiences of British drinking culture. Many that international students may feel excluded and lonely due to their because they cannot relate to or comply with this radically different cultural difference phenomenon.

However, this study added more The present study adds detail to and gives a new perspective on, some of the findings in the existing literature: the severe and "biased" criticism of then Chinese government and of the Chinese political culture from the Westernwas found to distress and world may frustrate some of the CISs. Future studies should be examineing the perceptions of international students when their cultures and or countries were are being criticised. Such experience also requires more Greater attention on should be paid to these international students' dignity and self-esteem from both, within and beyond the campuses.

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The findings showed that the CISs interviewed had experienced different levels of academic stress after their arrival and although that some participants even didn'tdid not mention academic stress. This was a contradictory findings to those of with some earlier studies that have highlighted the severity of academic stress that international students experienced (Berry, 1997). It may be, however, that the students who did not report such on academic stress due to the fact that they were used to the more familiar with the Western educational system or they have indeed had lower expectations of their academic performance while in the UK (Misra and Castilo, 2004).

Also, the concerns about the nature of course assessment shared by expressed by some participants should be addressed noted. For example, K reported that it is "impossible and somehow unfair" for him to that he has to write essays in a 2-hour time frame because the speed of his handwriting is much necessarily far slower than that of his local native course mates. Such experiences may put considerable stress on many international students. Universities should address these issues that may result in their and how they may result in disappointment and discouragement. Future studies are needed in this area and more international students should be studied on.

Some previous studies had found that CISs tend to feel ashamed by notif they do not achieveing academic success (Zhang &and Dixon, 2003; Yip, 2005).

However, none of the participants in this study reported this feeling and some participants expressed their that they had low academic expectations. Thus, more studies on it should be conducted is suggests that more studies should be conducted to better understand Chinese students' expectations.

Previous studies have identified the significance of language proficiency, personality and cultural differences in resulting indriving the onset and intensification of socialisation stress (e.g., Mori, 2000; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Triandis, 1999). This study echoed with such findings, concurred and

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identified two other factors that may cause or worsen socialisation stress: the a lack of opportunities to interact with locals and personal expectations. An unmber of Many CISs studyies business-related subjects, which and these programmes can deprived CISs of accessing 'opportunities to communicate cross-culturally' because the courses are predominantly attended by Chinese students (Yu and Moskal, 2019, p 2). Personal expectations on in terms of what constitutes a good social life were found here to also affected how socialisation stress they is experienced and perceived, thus so future studies should explore the association between personal expectations and socialisation social stress.

Some An important —practical stressor identified in this study found is unique especially was the local bus service. The University of Bath should be more conscious of its effect and take immediate measures could enable and empower CISs by offering clear guidance and advice on the use of public transport in Bath.

One prevalent stressor that international students experience according to the din-existing literature is experiences of that of discrimination (Altbach, 2004a; Altbach, 2004b; Constantine et al., 2004; Constantine, Alleyne, Caldwell, McRae, & and Suzuki, 2005a; Constantine et al., 2005c; Farver, Narang, & and Bhadha, 2002). However, apart from A reporting being that she was assigned more basic job tasks in the her company because of her lack of language proficiency, no other participants mentioned it has a prosperous city well known for discrimination, the city they lived is Bath is a prosperous city well known for being a a well known and decent tolerant and low-crime eityplace, or they because the interviewees were not aware of discrimination even though they experienced that they may have been subjected to.

The university can have taken a range of measures to protect international students from discrimination. For example, the Student Union may heldcould hold various activities to help students to embrace cultural and ethnical

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differences cope with and address discrimination if and when they encounter it Formatted (Hunter, 2007; Uhlmann et al., Dasgupta, Elgueta, Greenwald, & Swanson, 2002). The Rrole of church Eengagement in Hhelping CISs to Manage **Formatted** and Decrease their Aacculturative Sstress Given CISs' face various acculturative stressesstress factors. C. churchhurch **Formatted** engagement, it emerged in this study, can provide substantial benefits to themin coping with these, including providing language practice opportunities, socialising community opportunities, cultural knowledge exchange, and practical and psychological assistance. Rose and Campbell (2000) and Thuen (1995) have classified social support **Formatted** into informational support forms and emotional support forms (Ye, 2006). Church engagement can serve as an effective form of social overall **Formatted** support to aimed at alleviatinge acculturative stress, through provingincluding both informational and emotional support mechanisms. Formatted: English (United Kingdom) In terms of informational support, interacting with local church Formatted members over and deliberating with them on different topics can provide them a range of enhancement of English vocabulary, exposure to new local expressions and increased knowledge of diverse areas subjects. Latistening to the topic presentations about different cultures and festivals ean appeared to help them CSIs increase their cultural knowledge, and attending Bible discussions and sermons on Sunday ean-were said to help them in gaining biblical knowledge as it applied to Western culture. The and practical assistance CSIs received from ehurehchurch members such as going to hospitals together can help solve their practical problems. helped the CSIs to feel safer and that they belong. Formatted: English (United Kingdom) In terms of emotional support and coping strategiesy, churchchurch engagement was found to also plays a significant role for the CSIs interviewed. According to Bertram et al. (2014) and Ye (2006), receiving social support from friends, families and other social resources can help to lower international students' experiences of acculturative stress. Specifically, Tthe solemn, safe and welcoming atmosphere in of the churchchurch settings can allow them made the participants to feel comfortable and relaxed. In addition, the The care, help, company and friendships from between and among the CSIs, churchchurch members and the other international students who also attended churchthe activities can bring thebrought a sense of belonging, and some participants even described the churchchurch as a second home and churchchurch members as family members.

Church activities, such as worshipping, playing games, reading the Bible and listening the to sermons ean were able to temporarily draw the CISs' attention away from negative emotions aspects of living in the UK ATherefore, attending church events regularly can be emerged as being beneficial in terms of alleviating acculturative stress by via both gaining informational and emotional supportmechanisms of support. There are also some concerns that were found in the findings. Firstly, the The participants consistently expressed their that engagement in churchchurch activities was a means of acculturating into British culture more broadly, by strengthening their knowledge of British culture and their exposure to and opening them up to new church related social networks. Such This finding tends to align well with the idea accords with those of Yang's (1998) and Cadge and Ecklund (2007). In the interviews, some participants reported their a ideas contention that to some extent Christianity represented the mainstream core of British culture and even the of Wwestern culture more generally. Therefore, they may regard experiencing They regarded British culture through attending church church activities as a major benefit means of

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### accessing and understanding British culture per se.-

However, an issue arises when An issue of accuracy and validity in perceiving British culture narrowly arises here. The CISs regarded attending these churchchurch activities as deepening their understanding of British culture. Some participants seem to ignore that But these particular forms of \_-Christian churchcreed and assembly is just a are essentially just one subculture within the UK's matrix of ideational and practical cultures. Given that these The two <del>church</del>churches <del>participants attended are</del>are both conservative and evangelical Christian churchesones: they make up only a tiny small part segment of the wider body of creeds and churchchurches in across the UK. The interviews have partially shown the flagged up conservative features of these two churchchurches, as demonstrated by some of the discussions in the Bible studygroup that were mentioned. In such these discussions, homosexuality and divorce were taught as being unacceptableed and against God's will. Therefore, some The specific moral values accepted at these espoused at these two churches may impede CISs if they were inin understanding how to interact in different other social contexts in the UK. This concern was alsoexpressed in Sun and Rhoads's (2018) study of CISs attending a Chinese Christian ehurch (CCC).

None of It is noteworthy that none of the participants expressed reported their concerns about the conservative characteristics of the Christian churchchurches they attended in and their ideas during the interviews. In addition, Some participants seemed to believe asserted that Christianity reflects the mainstream British culture and Western culture more generally, and saw British history was as being mainly affected by Christianity. This is particularly problematic in view of the reality that given that the UK is a multicultural and diverse pluralist society, and that many UK communities embraced values and ideas quite

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distinct from those showed at these twoof the churches. Holding these churches' value systems as universally relevant across UK society could hinder the CSIs ability to understand and respond to other, opposed value systems which are equally 'British'.—

The other concern is that oneOne participant also expressed that international students were labelled and categorised \_according to their countries in the "International Café". Such experience has not been This finding is not supported by in any previous studies, but \_Considering the limited literature on the benefits of international students' church engagement, it should be treated as credible and further studied on among more a larger sample of international students. These

While the criticisms here is not designed to underminedo not serve to negate the significant role that church engagement has played in CISs' acculturation in this dissertation, it nevertheless raises significant considerations that but they are to treated as important findings for the churches and should be considered by them in improving their services.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings provided have significant implications for practice on and policy pertaining to international students' acculturation and the role of church attendance in reducing CISs' acculturative stress by exploring the personal experience of CISs that attended church events weekly at Bath.

This study found that language proficiency issues are major drivers of stress for CISs.

One implication for practice draw on the findings of acculturative stress—CISs reported in terms of language, academic, cultural difference, socialisation, and practical aspect. Firstly, U, universities should provide

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more opportunities for CISs and other international students to practisee their English and communication skills; once intervention could involve such as pairing international students with native speakers as language mentorsee.

Secondly, in response to some Ceoncerns about 100% assessmentabout the nature of course assessment were raised expressed by some participants. it should be necessary for educators to reexamineExamination and assessment should factor these in to ensure that assessment methods are the assessment to ensure that it is relatively fair and encouraging for all students. CISs may be very knowledgeable in their subjects and may have acquired the skills to apply this knowledge in the labour market but still struggle with certain language-related challenges. Examiners and assessors should seek to find a broad range ways of accrediting knowledge acquisition.

Additionally,

There needs to be more attention paid to international students' physical and mental health; deploying services that address CISs', and their needs would specifically would help to consequently reduce the risk of experiencing dire acculturative stress. For instance, universities should make sure that CIS setudents could receive know that there is no shame in accessing enough support regardless of physical orfor addressing mental health problems. This could be affected by publishing materials targeted at CISs specifically.

A second implication for practice is to assess the The potentially positive [and negative] effects of these attending the existing church churches and their events and other social events provided by universities should be understood and may have practice and policy implications. Potential harm may come to international students may aggregate their acculturative stress who absorb themselves in an overly Christian model of British culture, and churches and universities both should be cautious of this. In

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But converselyaddition, universities can find some inspiration from the nature of the church events; these, which provided a warm, friendly and, helpful environment for CISs and consequently thus effectively lower CISs' experiences of acculturative stress (Yu and Moskal, 2019).

Universities can could plan coordinated efforts to work with a range of with local church churches and other civil society organisations to provide meaningful social support to all international students (Eckhart, 2014).

#### Limitations

Several methodological and epistemological limitations to this study need to be clarified. There are some limitations in this study:

One limitation of this dissertation is that it may not be Firstly, the findings of this study cannot be gengeralised to all CISs who attended churchchurch activities in the UK in terms of the choice of because their choice of churchchurches, theological creed, participants level of engagement in the religious activities, and church city location and congregation will inevitably influence their experiences (positive or negative) of church attendance and the relationship between attendance and their experiences of acculturative stress.

First, onlySampling limitations are relevant too. Only two CISs (who attended just two local Christian churchchurches weekly) were recruited at the outsetin the interviews. In fact, thereThere is another a "Globe Café" held by the Christian Union of the University of Bath on campus. However, given that theNone of the participants were attendant to the Christian Union does not have the contacts of international students who were involved cafe, so it is hard to access infer that the findings here are pertinent to those students. Second, most Most of the participants were

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guests at the "International Café" in Bat Bath, which is just one of the various many events that local churchchurches hoeld in a smallthe city.

The findings thus may tend to have thus focused on the effects of the "International Café" and cannot be generalised to all churchchurch activities, even in Bath alone, and some other CISs who just attended church activities a few times.

Thirdly, all the participants were studying at PG level and the findings may not represent the experiences of UG students and or A-level students.

The other Other limitations results from the timing of this the study and the pre-existing friendship between some of the participants and myselfe. According to Berry (1997), international students often experience different stages of stress and acculturation when acculturating into aintegrating into a non-native culture. However, the The interviews were conducted in the summer, when they the students were about to finish the academic year. Thus, their answers may have produced been shaped by a 'recall bias' (McAuley et al., 2018, p. 53) and cannot be generalised to CISs' acculturative stress at different stages they may also be irrelevant to students' experiences at the beginning of the academic year.

### Conclusion

Considering the There is an increasing focus among researchers on international students' acculturation-process, mental health and and well-being issues, the and it is imperative to deepen understanding about of coping strategies that are effectively in lower reducing acculturative stress. Such strategies include that of such as churchchurch engagement. The research to date is limited on this,

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so the present study. As the first study to examined the role of church engagement in coping with helping a small sample of CISs to cope with and reduce -acculturative stress. This dissertation study found that church engagement for the participants studied. —could be served as both a critical source of informational, and emotional support for CISs.

Acculturative stress as experienced by CISs can be resulted accrue, from limited language proficiency, confusion arising from cultural differences, academic challenges, socialisation-social pressures and constraints, practical issues, and personal expectations. The pParticipants all expressed that the outcomes effects of acculturative stress ranged from included physical to and mental health problems such as loneliness, frustration, disappointment, lack of confidence, feelings of inferiority, sleep disorders, and depression. Church activities ean-were found to have provided empowering opportunities for CISs to practisee their English, to build meaningful social networks, to and increase their levels of cultural knowledge and to experience a sense of belonging in the <u>UK</u>, and care, comfort, company, help, and love those CISs in different ways. Two potentially negative effects of church engagement were that it might aggregate some CISs' acculturative stress through overly emphasising the cultural difference are that church engagement may in fact amplify and exacerbate cultural differences, and it that involvement in a specific and unique creed and set of practices might mislead CISs<sup>2</sup> in their understandings about of what, in reality, is a pluralist and diverse 'Wawestern' culture.

#### However,

Future studies ion this area with should draw on a bigger larger-scale sample size in and study engagement in a number of different cities will be significant for deepening the understanding of church engagement. and in a wider range of churches. This

In conclusion, this study has highlighted that ehurch engagement can (and in the participants' cases ean does) play a positive role in lowering

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reducing CISs' acculturative stress in terms of language, cultural knowledge, social life, practical help, and emotional support in all its manifestations,

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