A study of intercultural learning for Hong Kong multinational enterprises construction professionals with case studies

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A Study of Intercultural Learning for Hong Kong Multinational Enterprises Construction Professionals with Case Studies

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Southern Cross University
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28th July 2017
Revised on 13th Nov 2018
DECLARATION

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Signature : 
Dated : 28 July 2017
13th Nov 2018
Candidate : Gary Shing Chun, TSE
ABSTRACT

Driven by the forces of globalization, the growth of the global economy and the expansion of the construction industry have led to more international construction projects globally (Davis et al., 1998). The construction industry, characterized by its distinctive nature to involve multinational professionals, i.e., architects, engineers, builders, surveyors, etc., with diverse cultural backgrounds, i.e., Roman Catholics, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Confucians, etc., is essential towards national, social and economic development of global economies (Lock, 1999, 1999b, 2009, 2010; Lopes, 2011; Ofori, 2012). Researchers have therefore been advocating collaboration among cultures in order to improve the performance of those multinational construction enterprises (MNEs).

The Study was aimed to investigate and evaluate the cross-cultural management issues in Hong Kong’s construction industry, with a particular focus on how different cross-border management models could influence the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals. This Study employed the concept of ‘Communities of practices’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to scrutinize how construction professionals with diverse cultural backgrounds were engaged in intercultural learning. The said concept has been essential for understanding elements of intercultural change for construction professionals and presents some new perspectives for MNEs to enhance business performance. This Study was set within the interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach was formally approved/utilized. Three case studies of MNEs in Hong Kong operated under the models of Decentralized federation, co-ordinated federation and Centralized hub, were conducted. The Study used the instruments of documentary
analysis and interviews to collect data. Documentary analysis was initially done to conversant the company strategies and business portfolios of these selected MNEs. Individual and focus group interviews for construction professionals in those MNEs were exercised subsequently to explore their intercultural experiences during the execution of international construction projects.

The findings demonstrate that, within the three different operational models of MNEs, strengths and weaknesses exist in the development of the participants’ intercultural competence. In these models, construction professionals were engaged in intercultural interaction in different fashions, according to which unique Communities of practices emerged with different intercultural learning experiences. Furthermore, the Study also related the unique value of multicultural Communities of practices to nurture professional and intercultural competence for construction professionals, thereby intensifying the business performance of MNEs in construction industry (Tran, 2016).

The Study opens up opportunities to develop possible training and continuing professional development for cultivating the intercultural competence necessary for construction professionals to boost up business performance. To this end, with the Globalization of the construction sector, the development of transferable skills and intercultural competence is critical for the new generation of construction professionals.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis appears to be a ‘stage’ of a very long academic journey. This academic journey and exploration would have been impossible if my seniors/colleagues/friends had rendered less support to it.

To start with, I must acknowledge the long support and guidance of Professor Ian EDDIE and Associate Professor Michael Charles, the Principal Supervisors, for their patience, advice and guidance through the past eight years. They have guided me through a research process that has provided a new horizon in my life. I am indebted to Ir Professor Louis LOCK, my Co-Supervisor in Hong Kong, who has furnished me the required industrial context throughout the Study.

Dedicated to my parents and Mrs TSE, my beloved, for their unfailing support and encouragement! I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my professional peers, colleagues and friends, especially Dr CH CHAN, the President of the Hong Kong College of Technology, for their generous advice and tolerance during the research.

This is definitely a substantial challenge in a lifetime, one of the many, but one that would not have been met without the support of the mentioned and many that have not been.

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>BRI</td>
<td>Belt and Road Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEPA</td>
<td>Close Economic Partnership Arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>Construction Industry Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCP</td>
<td>Global Construction Perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKTDC</td>
<td>Hong Kong Trade Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>HQ</td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNE</td>
<td>Multinational Construction Enterprises</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Driven by the forces of globalization, there has been rapid expansion of international ventures in the construction industry globally during the past few decades, leading to an increase in the number of international construction projects. The construction industry is one of the areas to include multinational participants with diverse cultural backgrounds, i.e., Roman Catholics, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Confucians etc., and the industry plays a key role in national, social and economic development (Lock, 1999, 1999b, 2009, 2010; Lopes, 2011; Ofori, 2012). Based on the Construction Intelligence Centre (2015), a grouping of the 50 largest and most influential markets in the world, the global construction industry is projected to grow from US$7.4 trillion in 2010 to US$8.5 trillion in 2015 and to US$10.3 trillion by 2020 (calculated at 2010 prices).

Influenced by the forces of globalization, global construction industries involve professionals from multidisciplinary, i.e., architects, civil/structural/mechanical/electrical/building services engineers, builders, surveyors, etc., and diverse cultural backgrounds. The industry has distinctive features that need to be scrutinized if it is to be able to perform effectively and efficiently (Ofori, 2012). With the rapid development of international construction projects,
global construction industries’ workplaces have become more culturally diverse (Rodrik, 1997). Under such environment, construction managers of various disciplines need to display a high level of intercultural competence, for examples, the implementation of the cultural practices, i.e., Roasted Pig Cutting Ceremony for projects in China/Hong Kong (HK)/Macau, early release of Chinese workers during Mid-Autumn Festival/Winter Solstice, special arrangement for Muslims during Ramadan and Roman Catholics & Christians during Christmas, for the purpose of positively addressing issues arising from a lack of consideration and understanding of cultural diversity (University of Notre Dame, 2016).

In recent research “Global Construction 2030: A Global Forecast to Construction Industry 2030” (Global Construction Perspectives [GCP], 2015), the major developments in the global economy have been analysed in relation to their influences on shaping the construction outlook across the major regions of the globe. The research forecasts some emerging patterns for the development of the global construction outlook, highlights of which include the following: firstly, the global construction market has been estimated to expand likely at a rapid rate than world GDP over the next decade, as Asian economies have been industrializing on a continuous basis. Secondly, it has been predicted that there probably would be continuing shift towards faster-growing construction markets in Asia and other emerging economies next decade (Noronha, 2009; Noronha et al., 2014). These countries are expected to experience rising
populations, rapid urbanization and strong economic growth, which contribute to the major
drivers for developing the construction industry. In addition, it is expected that China is most
likely to significantly increase its investment in real assets and infrastructure, which could
enhance the export of construction services and building products into key global markets over
the said period. Nonetheless, Europe and Japan in particular seem to face very weak longer-
term prospects owing to poor demographics and limited potential for economic growth. In view
of the fact that any future growth in construction output in China and the emerging markets
would outweigh global growth, it is forecasted that the number of international projects in these
countries would experience a significant enhancement in the next two decades (GCP, 2015).
International construction projects refer to those projects in which the contractors, the lead
consultants, or the employers are not of the same domicile, with at least one of them operating
outside his or her country of origin (Stebblings, 1998). Following the globalization of the world
economy, transnational commercial activities in the construction sector have become attractive
for countries to be involved proactively (Rodrik, 1997). It is based on such a background that
this Study can contribute to existing commercial intelligence by analysing how to better
develop the intercultural cultural competencies of the construction managers of different
disciplines.

The construction industry is complex and in multidimensional. Major construction projects in
developing countries are often carried out as joint ventures with construction companies from
developed countries (GCP, 2015; Moavenzadeh, 1978). International collaboration can be of
particular benefit to less-developed and developing areas. Transnational economic
developments offer an opportunity to develop products using the most up-to-date expertise and
knowledge in a cost-effective manner (Accenture, 2009; Clark & Ip, 1999). International
construction projects are normally fast paced but require a longer time span, with more parties
involved. Collaboration between the concerned parties requires clear project definition, with
each set of objectives under the definition being subject to change as the project evolves
(Accenture, 2009).

The globalization process in global construction industries would very likely to have a
significant impact on the future of the HK construction industry. In the context of HK, the
outlook for the industry is dynamic and it is set to continue its growth throughout the next
decade (Construction Industry Council [CIC], 2014). According to the CIC’s forecast, total
construction expenditure in 2024 will increase to 280 billion HK Dollars (HKD), as compared
to the current figure of 205 billion HKD, representing an increase of 36% over the next 10
years. Such a rapid development of Hong Kong’s construction industry has made the industry
more globalized with the increased involvement of more multinational project groups, with
these groups evolving as a consequence of various forms of cooperation between construction
companies such as partnerships, joint ventures, or consortiums (CIC, 2014). In HK, these multinational groups take on multiple forms, with one thing in common: they are made up of cross-cultural teams, having members from different cultural backgrounds (Chen & Partington, 2004). The effectiveness and efficiency of projects are greatly affected by their cross-cultural characteristics and how they are managed (Fayol, 1949). In view of the scale of development of HK’s construction industry and the associated development of the multinational project groups, construction professionals need to be ‘intercultural’ competence (as one of the important parameters, like professional qualification) in order to deal with the complex nature of these international projects successfully.

Currently, the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by the People’s Republic of China has provided promising opportunities for the future development of HK’s construction industry. In March 2015, China’s National Development and Reform Commission issued ‘The Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road’, outlined the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), cooperation priorities and mechanisms. HK has a strong reputation for its professional services in particular in building and construction. Hence, with transport networks and infrastructure comprising the first stage in the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, the construction sector in HK and the professionals involved in international project management are expected
to benefit from the said opportunities. In fact, it was widely believed that the “BRI offers promising opportunities for HK corporations in sectors such as property development, construction, mass transit, energy and telecommunications” (HKTDC, 2016). Many of these corporations have successful operations overseas, in both new and developed markets (Sneader, 2016).

In this context, capacity building for HK’s construction professionals, in particular in their intercultural competence and intercultural awareness, will receive increasing attention in the interests of the betterment of the industry. In order to capitalize on the possible opportunities offered by the BRI, Chief Executive CY LEUNG, in his 2016 policy address, proposed to set up a Belt and Road Steering Committee “to formulate strategies and policies for HK’s participation in the Initiative, as well as a Belt and Road Office to take forward the related studies and co-ordination work” (Officer of the Chief Executive, HK SAR Government, 2016).

In recent years, there have been increasing discussions on the importance of understanding national cultural differences to enhance the performance of international construction projects. Various surveys and research (Chen & Partington, 2004; Wong, Wong & Li, 2007) have been conducted to investigate differences in managerial principles and leadership styles between Chinese and Western managers in different contexts. The results of these investigations
(Bibikova et al., 2007; Chen & Partington, 2004; Wong, Wong & Li, 2007) have suggested that Chinese and Western construction managers are likely to exhibit differences in their concepts of construction project management work, the fundamental value and skills in communication/dispute resolution and their decision-making processes. These results have contributed significantly towards determining how Western and Chinese organizations could interact successfully. As discussed above, while the “Chinese construction market will continue to be an attractive proposition in the foreseeable future, it is essential for international construction firms to take note of the issues of cultural diversity emerging from the complex nature of global construction industries” (Low, 1997).

In view of the rapid increase in international construction projects in HK and the increasing opportunities offered to HK construction professionals through the BRI, it is critical for the HK construction practitioners to be ‘intercultural competence’ to achieve better effectiveness in the delivery of international construction projects. Moreover, such competence is also fundamental to the multinational construction corporations if they are to learn from the cross-cultural management process and enhance business performance. In fact, the issue of how HK’s construction professionals, with their diverse cultural backgrounds, can be engaged in intercultural learning is an under-researched area and constitutes a significant gap in knowledge that this study intends to fill. The study aims to investigate how construction professionals can
be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. In addition, the study also adopts a micro-perspective in examining how different cross border management models have impacted on the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals.

In this study, a few cultural related terms, including ‘cross-cultural’, ‘intercultural’, will be used in parallel to indicate different context of intercultural interaction. Given the fact that these are all highly contested terms, the working definitions of these terms will be provided below to facilitate the reader’s understanding of how these terms are used to frame the discussion. The working definition ‘cross-cultural’ in this study means a comparison and contrast between groups who are culturally different. ‘Intercultural’ refers to what happens when people from different groups come together, interact and communicate (Gonzalez, 2017). Both terms are used in parallel in this study to describe the important aspects of intercultural exchanges. In view of the aims of this research, the term ‘intercultural’ is significant in representing cultural integration and collaborative learning.
1.2 Personal Statement

As a construction practitioner for over 18 years, wide varieties of international projects have been engaged. Most of the projects could provide the platforms to enable me to work with professionals, i.e., architects, civil/structural/building/building services engineers, surveyors etc. with different cultural backgrounds, i.e., Catholics from the UK/local, Muslims from Mainland/local, and Buddhists from Mainland/Japan/Korea/local, etc. In view of the rapid development of international projects in HK, the experiences of working within a multicultural context have inspired me greatly with regard to the importance of nurturing the intercultural competence of the professionals involved. It is definitely vital to treasure the significance of intercultural learning in the future development of the construction sector, driven by the forces of globalization.

As a director for engineering of a reputable tertiary institution in Hong Kong and equipped with practical experiences in construction industry for around 2 decades, it was my sincere desire to conduct a study to address the important factors of intercultural learning in the construction industry in Hong Kong such that the outcome could contributed to related industries. It is hoped that international projects involving experts of different countries could be implemented more effectively/smoothly subsequent to the acknowledgement of the crucial
parameter of intercultural learning. Examples will be disclosed in Section 6.9. This role enables me to embrace current issues in the global construction sector and apply them in shaping education for construction professionals in my institution. Over the past decade, I am honoured to have been able to develop some strong initiatives in developing expertise in construction education that may benefit the whole sector. In this connection, the previous experiences in construction education, and professional experiences in international construction projects, attribute to the shape of the topic of this study.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

As mentioned above, there are increasing numbers of international construction projects, which have led to the increase in multinational construction enterprises (MNEs) developing their business across different geographical and cultural borders. In view of the development of a multicultural context in the construction sector, it is essential to form an understanding of the management process and the intercultural learning inherent in MNEs (Bartlett & Beamish, 2014). The purpose of this study is to develop another way of investigating companies’ integrative learning process and how they could react to the forces of change. This section explains the research gaps in the context of multicultural management in the construction industry, and how the research questions are developed.
In the HK construction context, most MNEs operate under the paradigm of ‘Decentralized Federation’, ‘Co-ordinated Federation’ and ‘Centralized Hub’ (Bartlett & Beamish, 2014). In the following chapters, these models are scrutinized in detail, with a specific emphasis on their impact of the intercultural learning of construction professionals. A few cases under these models are examined with a view to investigating how construction professionals with diverse cultural backgrounds could learn from the multicultural dynamics (Tran, 2016). The primary aim of this study is to investigate cross-cultural management issues in the construction industry. In particular, the cross-cultural management issues in MNEs, with the specific intention of exploring those methods of intercultural learning in which there may be emerging Communities of Practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991) would be followed up. The intention is that giving specific attention to the cross-cultural issues of the MNEs would make it feasible to identify those characteristics and behaviours that may be used to characterize the learning process taking place between the individual and the organization (Bowditch et al., 2001). Interrelated concepts, including Communities of Practices and intercultural competence, as well as cultural dimension, is going to be presented throughout the research. Drawing on these concepts with reference to MNEs models and the individual learning portrayed in case studies, the focus of the study is how construction professionals could be better engaged in intercultural learning for capacity building.
In summary, the research aims to investigate and evaluate the details of intercultural learning of construction professionals in HK construction industry. The study would employ the theoretical model of ‘Communities of Practices’ in analysing the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals. Furthermore, the research process adopts a micro-perspective in examining how different cross border management models such as those introduced above would impact on the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals. A range of qualitative methodologies are utilized to collect data for this research. In order to achieve the above aims of this study, the research questions are set as follows:

Research Question (RQ)

RQ: How is intercultural learning developed by Communities of practices in the construction sector?

Sub-questions (SQ1 and SQ2) have been derived from RQ.

SQ1: How could Communities of practices be developed through three MNE models?

SQ2: How do particular models of MNE in the construction sector nurture intercultural competence for communities of construction professionals?
1.4 Research Design

An interpretive paradigm of inquiry is adopted for this study, as the study is focused on understanding the participants’ intercultural learning experiences. The inquiry of the study is set within the interpretive paradigm, using a qualitative methodology. The study uses a case study approach to discover more about the MNEs under the three operation models discussed. Data collection of the study is conducted through the instruments of documentary analysis and interviews (including individual interviews and focus group interviews), with the aim of involving diverse groups of construction professionals with differing cultural backgrounds. This research strategy requires the researcher to liaise with other practitioners in HK’s construction industry, and to acquire their experiences in intercultural learning from different perspectives.

1.5 Contributions of the Research

The study considers the related concepts and theories of Communities of practices and intercultural learning and the attempts to apply them in the context of cross-cultural organizational studies. In view of the rapid process of globalization in the construction industry, construction professionals with intercultural cross-cultural competences are at a distinct
competitive advantage in the global construction industries; hence the development of intercultural learning for HK’s construction professionals is rapidly becoming a priority. The study aims to investigate how construction professionals can be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. In addition, the study also adopts a micro-perspective to examine how different cross border management models’ impact on the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals.

The study, in many ways, offers practical solutions that aim to resolve the industry’s existing knowledge gap (Brown et al., 2001). In addition, the study also sheds some light on the training needs and focus with regard to capacity building for future professionals in HK’s construction industry. The research questions stated above are answered to varying degrees from qualitative instruments, including conversational interviews and case studies.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This chapter introduces background information on the globalization of the construction industry across the work, reflecting a need for the HK construction professionals to be intercultural competent. In this chapter, the research questions of this study have been addressed, together with the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is the literature review of this
study. This chapter identifies the relevant models and frameworks in which current practices and phenomena could be reflected and criticized. Chapter 3 outlines the research design which aims to justify the research approach and qualitative methods of this project. Chapter 4 illustrates the findings of the study. Chapter 5 discusses these findings with reference to the conceptual frameworks elaborated in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 as the Conclusion provides a summary of the study, its implications and recommendations for the future direction of how the intercultural learning of construction professionals could likely improve the business performance of multinational construction enterprises in the long term.
CHAPTER 2- LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

As far as this chapter is concerned, it is intended to furnish a detailed account of the literature underpinning the fundamental ideas and articulates the concepts developed in this research. Furthermore, it introduces the macro context of construction industries within the context of Globalization and provides an overview on the outlook of the sector. This contextual background information explains the existing knowledge gaps in intercultural learning for construction professionals in HK. In addition, this chapter also delineates the collaborative models of multinational enterprises (MNEs) in the construction sector and demonstrates how MNEs are modelled in the construction industry, as these models may impact on the intercultural learning of construction professionals. In brief, the primary aim of this study is to investigate how HK construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. The study adopts a micro-perspective in examining how different cross border management models could impact on the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals, especially in HK.

The body of knowledge applied originates from the concepts of ‘intercultural learning’, ‘intercultural competence’ and ‘Communities of Practices’, which, together, establish the
Theoretical perspectives for this study. In the latter part of this chapter, these inter-related concepts are further scrutinized and adapted in order to understand how construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning through the Communities of Practices (Brown et al., 2001). This chapter explores the theoretical frameworks of ‘intercultural learning’, ‘intercultural competence’ and ‘community of practice’ in order to investigate the proper responses to the said research questions. The framework of Communities of Practices deliberates the social learning processes which lead to intercultural learning. Whilst evaluating the theory of Communities of Practices, this chapter also appraises the limitations of the framework. Secondly, this chapter is designed to consider how intercultural competence may develop among construction professionals, thereby providing underpinning knowledge which helps to clarify how intercultural learning may take place among construction professionals with different cultural backgrounds. Finally, the collaborative models of multinational corporations are explored and reviewed for the purpose of discussing how multicultural Communities of Practices emerge in HK’s construction sector. The data of this research is presented by using three case studies. These analyse how intercultural learning takes place through Communities of Practices in each collaborative model.

The chapter includes the following sections: Section 2.2 reviews the macro-perspective of HK’s construction industry within the context of globalization, including the definitions from various
gurus. Section 2.3 presents three collaborative models, which demonstrate how multinational construction enterprises could be operated in a cross-cultural context. Section 2.4 appraises the concepts of Communities of Practices, with critical analysis applied in the context of the construction industry. Section 2.5 illustrates the concepts of intercultural learning and intercultural competence, and their relationships with the development of multicultural Communities of Practices in the construction sector. Section 2.6 highlights The study’s knowledge gap and tries to address how the framework of this study could integrate with the three related concepts of intercultural learning, intercultural competence and Communities of Practices. Section 2.7 summarises and concludes this chapter.

2.2 Definition of Globalization

According to Kluver (2000), globalization refers primarily to the ways in which economic and industrial institutions (such as industries or corporations) interact in various locations throughout the world, with primacy given to no specific geographic location. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) defined globalization as “the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of international capital flows, and also through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology” (Khan, 2004). Friedman (1999) defined globalization as
“the world integration of finance markets, nation states, and technologies within a free-market capitalism on a scale never before experienced”.

Globalization concerns international relations, global markets, and the augmentation of the power of individuals in relation to the power of nations (Friedman, 1999). Hirst and Thompson (1996) and Child (1981) wrote that the global economy operated in a world with no national cultures, domestic economies or even borders; in addition, the global processes had determined the recent economic globalization and the associated social impacts. Glyn and Sutcliffe (1992, p.76-95) noted that “macroeconomic unification represents the idea that the world is now really a single economy in the macro-economic sense. That means that the main determinants of income and employment can now only be understood at a global and no longer a national level”.

The world is a ‘global marketplace’ with different cultures and economic interdependence where the political boundaries are becoming irrelevant (Ngowi and Lema, 2002). Globalization calls for a ‘global culture’ where accord of markets is acknowledged without ignoring the variety in cultures (Fletcher and Vyakarnam, 1999).

In the literature, the term ‘globalization’ is sometimes used in connection with other terms such as modernization, ‘informatization’ and internationalization. The interaction between globalization and modernization is obvious in a way that globalization entails modernization (Ahmad, 2001). The modernization and world system theories imply that globalization aims to
combine different societies into a large, well-built, socially, economically and technologically integrated organization; the integration process should be open for the involvement of all nations to enable them to keep their individual national characters and cultures (Ahmad, 2001).

Kluver (2000) defined ‘informatization’ as “the process primarily by which information technologies, such as the world-wide web and other communication technologies, have transformed economic and social relations to such an extent that cultural and economic barriers are minimized”; he also referred to ‘informatization’ as “the process whereby information and communication technologies shape cultural and civic discourse”. Although ‘globalization’ and ‘informatization’ differ, they still meet at a certain point at which their social, political, economic, and cultural impacts intersect (Kluver, 2000).

Fletcher and Vyakarnam (1999) emphasized the term ‘internationalization’ and other related common terms such as ‘borderless world’, ‘shrinking world’ and ‘global village’, which indicated interdependencies between the world countries; they also wrote that “Internationalization is constituted by a variety of transactions and exchanges that are carried out across national borders to satisfy the needs of individuals, customers and organizations”. Maringe (2009) agreed with these viewpoints.
2.2.1 Positive and Negative Effects of Globalization

Globalization has implications for different fields, in addition to the economic field, including society, culture and customs. While some people see the positive side of globalization, some look at it as a source for generating poverty and destroying the environment and others believe that it produces a negative impact on national interests (Kluver, 2000).

Kluver (2000) further wrote that globalization had added international and global awareness to certain issues like economy, culture, politics, human rights, the workers’ rights, the environment, information technology and telecommunications and had encouraged local and economic development. Ghesquiere (2002) thought that globalization had marked influence on information and communication technologies, which had led to free trade and better market economies and had resulted in creating jobs, improving productivity, reducing the number of people living in poverty, and had led to general economic growth. Rodrik (1997) noted facilitating trade and investments worldwide as an advantage for globalization. Globalization leads to economic growth, which could improve living standards (Lukas, 2000). It results in competition and progress in world trade, and therefore often reduces the prices of goods and services worldwide (Murray and Appiah-Baiden, 2000).

The United Nations Development Project (UNDP, 1999) viewed globalization as a source of
broadening the gap between the wealthy and deprived countries (Kluver, 2000). Globalization and ‘informatization’ cause contradictions between global and local economies, in addition to the ambiguous effect on traditions and cultures (Kluver, 2000). Ahmad (2001) advised to deal with globalization carefully as it could have negative impacts on local economy as well as opposition to cultural aspects (Rodrik, 1997).

### 2.2.2 Impact of Globalization on the Construction Industry (CI)

In a globalized market, the ‘international construction market’ is open for firms from both developing and developed countries. The exports of construction activities are also available from all countries, though the biggest contribution is from the developed ones (Ofori, 2000; Ngowi et al., 2005). The concentration of economic wealth and the global construction in the developed markets impedes the improvement of economies in the developing countries, so great attention has been focused on the role of construction in development, even though more attention should be given to the nature of construction activities in developing countries (Wells, 1999).

Fletcher and Vyakarnam (1999) believed that the main barriers and opportunities were related to market demand, regulations, language, resources, management skills, timing, experience,
firm age, and decision-making policies. They highlighted the barriers and the available opportunities for small firms to move towards internationalization (Sondegaard, 2004). In this regard, they emphasized various views concerning obstacles encountered, as far as small firms expanded through internalization (Barkema et al., 1996 and Robertson, 1992), and the suitable timing to overcome such obstacles (cf. Misenbock, 1988; Aaby & Slater, 1989, Birley & Westhead, 1993; Barkema et al., 1996, Dichtl et al., 1990, Cannon & Willis, 1983, Czinkota & Johnson, 1982, Smallbone & Wyer, 2000, Morgan, 1997, Solberg, 1997).

Researchers who are studying the Construction Industry (CI) in developing countries are optimistic about the efficient role that these countries would play in future (Ofori, 2000; Ngowi et al., 2005). Kangari (2002) expected some changes in relation to the geographical area of business for the construction firms, in addition to the methods and techniques of implementation of projects. He believed that technology had and would continue to improve which will therefore enhance the efficiency, performance and consequently the productivity of companies. He further elaborated that changes in features such as in human behaviour and life style, enable construction firms to provide new customer services.

The CI in developing countries might benefit from foreign competitors; however, the construction firms in these countries are not in favour of having foreign interference in their
industry. The CI in these countries have sought their government’s assistance in protecting local markets by discouraging foreigners from dominating their own market through imposing trade barriers, quotas, duties and laws on the implementation of construction projects (Ngowi and Lema, 2002); however, the local businesses in developing countries are not capable of carrying out infrastructure works, and therefore governments in some countries rely on foreign contractors for this type of work (Ofori, 2000; Ngowi et al., 2005). Although the foreign contractors use local labor, governments have imposed certain polices to guarantee a certain level of involvement for the local businesses by giving preference to local contractors depending on their capabilities (Ofori, 2000). Assessment of the development of the CI in several Asian countries revealed that the involvement of foreign construction firms had been recently growing almost in all of these countries (Ofori, 2000; Ngowi et al., 2005).

Singapore and Botswana are typical examples of countries where governments have encouraged local construction firms with given preference to contractors working in joint ventures with foreign contractors so that the host nation benefits from the technologies transferred/acquired through the implementation of public projects (Govender and Watermeyer, 2000). Ofori (1991) expressed his concerns regarding effective transfer of technologies and believed that joint ventures did not necessarily conclude such aimed results. He cited joint venture agreements in Ghana and training schemes in Singapore to support his argument.
Ofori (2000) and Ngowi et al. (2005) referred to the observations made by several authors about the involvement of international contractors in public projects in developing countries. Among these are: Turin (1973), who believed that foreign contractors were the most capable of undertaking ‘international-large’ projects; Edmonds and Miles (1984) and the World Bank (1984) realized that ‘international’ contractors were known to be among large construction firms in developing countries. Ofori further alluded to researchers like Turin (1973) and Drewer (1980) who believed that local contractors in developing countries should gain experiences from international construction firms involving public projects in their countries and gradually work independently, while Moavenzadeh (1978) held that the contributions of foreign companies in large complex projects would remain essential.

2.2.3 Impact of Globalization on Hong Kong Construction Industry

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the rapid development of HK’s construction industry has been seriously driven by the process of globalization. As a result, increasing numbers of construction enterprises have been sharing the international market. According to recent research (HKTDC, 2016; Ngowi et al., 2005), there are several ways for the construction enterprises to enter the international market. One of the major routes takes the form of bilateral and multilateral agreements through distinctive collaborative models, which enable construction enterprises to
enter each other’s respective international markets. Furthermore, the increasing numbers of construction enterprises in HK have engaged in large international projects, or in carrying out construction projects for MNEs. In fact, the growth of multinational ventures has been one of the key features in the internationalization of the construction industry. With the neo-liberalist approach adopted by various national governments, trade barriers have been lowered and there are increasing numbers of joint ventures and MNEs engaged in innovative models of international operation.

The internationalization of HK’s construction industry can be illustrated through local mega infrastructure projects and the export of expertise services. According to HKTDC (2016), construction work performed by main contractors in HK in recent years was dominated mainly by public expenditure on the 10 Major Infrastructure Projects announced in the 2007-2008 Policy Address. These included transportation infrastructure projects of high gross value, such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link. Most of these major infrastructure projects involved MNEs during the construction process. Following the logic, there was an increasing demand for HK’s construction expertise, especially in Asia. In recent years, the Middle East had emerged as a market with a growing potential for HK’s construction companies. Many Asian countries, such as India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam have been experiencing more demands to
upgrade their infrastructures and housing developments (Noronha, 2009; Noronha et al., 2014). These countries have provided enormous opportunities for HK construction companies. According to statistics released by HKTDC (2016), Luks Group (a Hong Kong based construction company) is involved in cement production and property development in Vietnam.

The Middle East is another market that has attracted many HK companies, with many projects won in several Middle East countries. Hip Hing Construction (a HK-based construction company) has won contracts in Abu Dhabi’s carbon-free city Masdar, as well as a contract in Dubai to build a 72-storey residential building through a joint venture with a local contractor.

Within the process of globalization, a rapid development of urbanization in China has driven the country’s infrastructure development. In order to boost domestic consumption, China’s urbanization plan 2014-20 aims to increase the proportion of the urban population from 53.7% in 2013 to 60% by 2020 (HKTDC, 2016). This higher rate of urbanization would very likely generate a huge demand for public infrastructure, housing and transportation networks. Under the “Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement between Hong Kong and the Mainland (CEPA)” set up in 2003, construction professional services in HK, including construction design services, engineering services, integrated engineering services, urban planning and landscape design services could be exported to Mainland China. The CEPA has created huge opportunities for the export of HK’s construction professional services.
Moreover, the most recent announcement of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, as outlined in Chapter 1, has had a significant impact on the blueprint for the future of the HK construction industry. In his 2016 Policy Address, Chief Executive LEUNG Chun-ying has proposed to set up a Belt and Road Steering Committee to formulate strategies and policies for HK’s participation in the Initiative, as well as a Belt and Road Office to implement the co-ordination work (Office of the Chief Executive, HKSAR Government, 2016), as ‘super liaison officers/professionals’.

In brief, the globalization process of global construction industries is having a significant impact on the outlook for HK’s construction industry. Given the above-mentioned development, the further outlook for the industry is dynamic and set to grow for the next decade (Construction Industry Council [CIC], 2014). In order to fulfil the industry’s manpower needs for the next few decades, there are urgent needs for knowledge advancement in terms of how the operation of international construction projects could be enhanced in an intercultural context. One of the major aims of this study is to investigate how HK construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. The following sections in this chapter attempt to explore concepts of Communities of Practices and intercultural learning as a guide to the research process.
2.3 Models of Multinational Enterprises (MNEs)

The globalization of national economies and the development of information technologies mean that it is now much faster to source capital, goods, information and technology around the world via online facilities. As mentioned in the previous section and Davis et al. (1998), more globalized economy, faster transportation and communication lead to diminishing role of geographical location in competition. The development of the construction industry on a global scale, however, is slightly less flexible than the retail and services industry, particularly in relation to supply chain, sourcing and transportation of materials. This explains why some construction corporations chose to compete in the foreign market via setting up MNEs (Chen and Partington, 2004; Accenture, 2009). While the issue of international competition is far from new, abundant literature and previous researches on multinational firms focused heavily on MNE’s ability to exploit know-how and expertise gained in another country’s market at lower costs (Porter, 1986). Striving to develop competitive advantages in response to the forces of change, MNEs have to develop strategies that strive for efficiency, responsiveness, innovation and learning. The act of ‘going international’ poses challenges to many companies’ management processes, especially in HK.

The models of how MNEs could operate in the construction industry in HK are significant in the intercultural learning of construction professionals. For the purpose of revealing the
scenario of an MNE’s business operation within the HK construction industry, it is necessary to look into the details of the ‘administrative models’ of MNEs. This section discusses three collaborative models identified by Bartlett & Beamish (2014, p.336), including ‘Decentralized Federation’, ‘Co-ordinated Federation’ and ‘Centralized Hub’. These models are commonly adopted by the construction industry and will be discussed and reviewed in the context of construction. In fact, cross-border management models have created significant opportunities for intercultural learning (Park & Petermann, 2014; Tran, 2016), expatriate managers who are intercultural competent and strategically localized could address global-local tensions in daily interactions with the host country’s staff. According to Tran (2016), dimensions of languages are essential towards effective intercultural interaction among expatriate staff and local staff.

In simple terms, understanding these models of MNEs provide a fundamental understanding of the development of MNEs in the construction industry. The roles and responsibilities of the MNEs and their partners located in different countries will also be discussed in this chapter. Finally, these models illustrate a fundamental framework in which the core discussions of this study are formed.

2.3.1 Decentralized Federation

According to Bartlett and Beamish (2014), ‘Decentralized Federation’ refers to a transnational
collaborative model in which organizations build up local production facilities to compete with local competitors, with their own plants and national subsidiaries to modify products and marketing approaches to meet widely different local market needs. This model would result in a loose federation of independent national subsidiaries, each focused primarily on its local market (Barlett & Beamish, 2014, p.337). In the context of the construction industry, such a federation would imply a model of setting up an offshore subsidiary operation, where the management of the offshore operation would tend to have more independence and strategic freedom. Such a model is widely accepted by the MNEs as being flexible and able to cater to local demand.

According to Bartlett and Beamish (2014), most companies face local competition during their overseas expansion; to this end, they build their local production facilities which become increasingly independent. These independent units have more operational independence and strategic freedoms from headquarters (HQ) and could manage more as a portfolio of offshore investments rather than a single international business. At HQ, strategic decisions are decentralized with simple controls over subsidiaries. This type of organizational management enables the company to have a multinational strategy. Indeed, the model of decentralized federation helps to maintain a favourable balance of payments for the HO countries in the long run. In contrast, the model also brings benefits in the form of cultural change among the HO
countries and the host countries. Nishimatsu Construction Co Ltd. is a typical example of a decentralized federation construction firm in HK.

2.3.2 Coordinated Federation

Bartlett and Beamish (2014) also suggested a model of ‘coordinated federation’ for multinational corporations. In this model, many of the assets and resources of the cross-border operation are Decentralized but controlled by a local centre, the knowledge and systems are controlled but locally adapted, and the local subsidiaries are treated as an extension of the domestic operations (Bartlett & Beamish 2014, p.338). In the context of international construction projects, this model of federation can apply to a joint delivery for both HK and overseas companies, like Schneider, Leighton Asia ,etc.

According to Bartlett and Beamish (2014), the history of co-ordinated federation derives from the differences among American companies and European companies. While HQ provide mainly formal system controls such as planning, budgeting and replicating parent company administrative systems, the subsidiaries mainly furnish knowledge feedback to HQ in terms of technologies, products, processes and systems. It was mentioned that the management systems of these subsidiaries were mainly treated as extensions of HQ’s plans, carrying out formal plans.
and subject to controls by HQ (Bartlett and Beamish (2014)).

2.3.3 Centralized Hub

In addition to the above, Bartlett and Beamish (2014) introduced the model of ‘Centralized Hub’ for the operation of offshore subsidiaries with most assets and resources centralized, including decision-making processes. Such overseas operations are often treated as delivery of pipelines to the global market (Bartlett & Beamish, 2014, p.339), and the model involves tight strategic and operational control through centralized decision-making processes.

The history of Centralized Hub is somehow unique, according to Barlett and Beamish (2014). Typical Japanese companies forayed into the international market mainly in the 1970s and faced a different environment to American and European companies at the time. Trade barriers were falling, and its plants were new, efficient, and scale-intensive. The Japanese culture also contributed to this form, where a competitive strategy emphasized cost advantages and quality assurance, all requiring tight central control of product development, procurement and manufacturing. A centrally-controlled, export-based internationalization strategy represented a perfect fit. Group-oriented management practices came into play, communications-intensive and people-dependent. A global strategy with an export focus was the norm for these MNEs,
with HQ maintaining tight, simple controls in key strategic decisions made centrally, while subsidiaries mainly managed the flow of goods. According to Bartlett and Beamish (2014), this model brings the benefits of intercultural exchange, as in many cases there are arrangements for home country staff to relocate to the hosting countries. Sanko Electrical Engineering Co. Ltd., China State Construction Engineering Corporation etc. are examples of Centralized Hub Construction Firms in HK.

As a summary, each model described above represents a different business strategy for construction corporations to implement during the development of their international business portfolio. As indicated by Tran (2016), the role of languages and cultural diversity is crucial to intercultural interaction, which, in turn, contributes to the betterment of the operation of MNEs construction business. It appears that there is no exception for HK (Sondegaard, 2004).

2.4 Communities of Practices: A Social Form of Learning

In the digital era, the development of information technology seeks to narrow the physical distance of intercultural communication, the concept of Communities of Practices is essential in promoting close interaction and learning among members, which is the key focus of this study (Gates, 1999).
Previous research on intercultural communication focused on exploring the cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures (Hofstede, 2009; Leavitt, 2003; McSweeny, 2002; Noronha, 1997; Tran, 2016; Tse, 2009) and attempted to identify core differences in cultures’ cultural dimensions of ‘individualism vs collectivism’, ‘masculinity and femininity’, ‘power distance’ and ‘Confucian dynamism’ (Lock, 1999, 2009, 2010). While this study recognizes the cultural differences specified by the above cultural dimensions, the key focus of this study is to examine how the intercultural learning of construction professionals with diverse cultural backgrounds are taken place with the facilitation of Communities of Practices.

The elements of Communities of Practices are essential to the discussions and analysis of this study. The concept is widely applied to illustrate the discourse of social learning and learning by practice. Built upon the understanding of cultural differences specified by the framework of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2009; McSweeny, 2002; Noronha, 1997), the concept of Communities of Practices in this project aims to enrich the understanding of intercultural learning.

2.5 Definition of Communities of Practices (CoP)

Lave and Wenger (1991) originally defined ‘community of practice’ as being a set of relations
among persons, their activities, the relevant environment, the relationship existing over time (brief or extended) and interfacing with other adjacent or tangential Communities of Practices.

The definition of CoP gives important insight into what learning is, how it occurs through collaborative interactions of community members and the description of mechanisms that could support learning. By adopting the community of practice concept as a well-developed theory of situated learning suitable for the context in which practitioners involved in international construction projects learn intercultural skills through interactions with each other. Nedic and Nafalski (2011) developed a framework for supporting development of healthy dynamics of interactions within the groups of learners.

### 2.5.1 Characteristics of Communities of Practices

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002)’s study has indicated that a community of practice differs from other communities by its specific characteristics. The structural model of a community of practice is based on 3 fundamental elements: domain, community and practices (Wenger, 2012).

The structure of CoP including a domain of knowledge defines a set of issues; a community of
people who care about this domain, and the shared practices that have been developed to be effective in respective areas. The domain creates common ground and a sense of common identity, while also legitimizing the community by reaffirming the purpose and values to members and other stakeholders. The community forms the social fabric of learning. Moreover, a strong community fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust (Wenger, 2012).

This study investigates in detail the practices and effectiveness of Communities of Practices generated by the inter-cultural business settings of HK MNEs, in order to examine whether construction managers exhibit such interaction as identified by Wenger (2000). Furthermore, the practices refer to a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, artefacts and documents which the community members could likely have shared (Wenger, 1998). The defined practices are the specific ways for members of communities to share and develop knowledge. When all 3 elements are functioning, a community of practice would become an ideal knowledge structure that could facilitate the development and sharing of knowledge.

Given the above structure, Communities of Practices are important places of negotiation, learning, meaning and identity (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) identified that 3 dimensions to the relationship which defined practice as the source of coherence within a community. Firstly,
members are encouraged to/could interact with one another, establishing norms and relationships through mutual engagements. Secondly, members are bound together by the understanding of a sense of joint enterprise. Finally, members produce over time a shared repertoire of communal resources. These include, for illustration/example, languages, routines, artefacts and stories. The three elements of ‘mutual engagement’, ‘joint enterprises’ and ‘shared repertoire’ form the core fabric within ‘practices’. Through these 3 elements, members of the communities interact and engage in some form of practices sharing, which contribute to a form of social learning. In fact, the existence of a community of practices may not be noticeable to the members because, as per Wenger (1998) notes, “Community of Practices need not be defined as such in the discourse of its participants”. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) also delineated that Communities of Practices might be greatly varied. They could be small or large, long-lived or short-lived, within and across boundaries, spontaneous or intentional, unrecognized to institutionalized etc. Given the specific nature, Communities of Practices naturally evolve over time, when new members join, and others leave. Communities of Practices, as defined by Lave and Wenger (1991), cannot be intentionally formed, management is not able to establish a community of practices. What management could do is to facilitate the spontaneous emergence of Communities of Practices and support those Communities of Practices that could develop. More recent contributions suggest that Communities of Practices can be cultivated and leveraged for strategic advantages (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).
The following sections discuss the details of ‘practices’ within the framework of Communities of practices.

2.5.2 The Practices

Wenger (1998) developed the 3 dimensions of practices in ‘mutual engagement’, ‘joint enterprise’ and ‘shared repertoire’, serving to inter-relate ‘practice’ and ‘community’. Dimensions of practices are the core elements of the framework of Communities of Practices, indicating how communities can exchange, share information and engage in social learning; for instances, the respect of Ramadan for Muslims, early release of Chinese during Mid-Autumn Festival and Winter Solstice, Christmas and Easter holidays for Christians, etc. Such elements are of paramount importance in understanding the details of how construction managers, i.e., engineers, architects, surveyors, inspectors, etc., could be more competitive. Sections 2.5.2.1 to 2.5.2.3 will be used to elaborate the 3 dimensions of Practices, i.e., Mutual Engagement, Joint Enterprise and Shared Repertoire and how these 3 dimensions of Practices could be attributed to reinforce the intercultural learning of construction professionals in Hong Kong.
2.5.2.1 Mutual Engagement

The first dimension of practices is the mutual engagement of participants, i.e., realize the components of the participants, especially the majority as the kick off. For example, in the international construction company, it is critical to know the culture, religion (Muslims, Confucians, Christians, etc.), academic background, west/east, age, etc., of the corresponding professionals i.e. engineers, architects, surveyors etc. (Lock, 1999, 1999b, 2009, 2010). Of course, the percentage of the respective components i.e. participants, is vital. By mutual engagement, Wenger (1998) defined it as ‘membership’, a community of practices being more than simply a group of people categorized by the characteristics. Wenger suggested that there were forms of activities in any practice that could enable participants to mutually be engaged as a group. Moreover, the diversities of ‘connection by engagement’ participants could become closer in relationships (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014). Wenger also pointed out that, during the course of mutual engagement; participants could disagree, challenge and compete with each other. This implies that a community of practice is diverse and complex.
2.5.2.2 Joint Enterprise

The second characteristic of practices as a source of community coherence is the negotiation of a joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). This is the result of a collective process of negotiations reflecting the complexity of mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998). The joint enterprise creates mutual accountability among the participants; it builds up common goals for them. The enterprise is ‘joint’ not because everyone believes similar thing or agrees with everything, but because it is communally negotiated (Probst and Borzillo, 2008). Moreover, Communities of Practices are not self-contained entities: “They develop in larger contexts, including historical, social, cultural, and institutional: with specific resources and constraints” (Probst & Borzillo, 2008). In referring to the regime of a joint enterprise, Wenger (1998) also referred to the influence of external forces: Communities of Practices could be influenced, supported or inspired by external forces. Nevertheless, Wenger (1998) mentioned that these external forces had no direct power over the production of any community because the community would have mutual engagements and would negotiate the enterprises.

Different stakeholder groups in international construction projects might form different levels of communities and share ‘joint enterprise’ by mutual engagements. Communities at senior management/technical experts/engineers/architects/surveyors levels might have members with
more diverse identities and backgrounds; and technicians/workers communities would have memberships that are more specific and a more prescribed enterprise. Through 3 distinctive case studies, this research project explores details of how the joint enterprise functions in the intercultural context.

2.5.2.3 Shared Repertoire

The third characteristic of practices as a source of community coherence is the development of a shared repertoire: “The repertoire of a community of practices includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres …. that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence and which have become part of its practice” (Wenger, 1998). The repertoires of the communities are ‘resources’ enabling the negotiation of meanings, reflecting histories of mutual engagements and remaining inherently ambiguous; hence, it is shared in a dynamic and interactive manner. In relation to international projects, which include professional staff, with different cultural backgrounds, the repertoire for the communities might involve different artefacts, systems or tools, such as the workflow process developed by the community. The professional practices which the group of engineers/architects/surveyors adopted for HK, the shared quality assurance framework, i.e., ISO9001, ISO14001, OHS18001, TQM etc. and the workers’ shared logbooks. Case studies conducted in this research will
examine the nature of the repertoire; and how they could be shared among Communities of Practices.

2.5.3 Critique of Communities of Practices

The concept of Communities of Practices has become increasingly essential as a tool of organization learning, some scholars raised critical appraisals regarding the practicality of using the Community of Practices approach to manage academicians and professional practitioners. Scholars did question whether the framework was suitable for the use of modern organizations (Hughes, 2007 & 2007b; Roberts, 2006). Roberts (2006) argued that the framework would neglect to address issues of power dynamics: “while meaning may be negotiated within Communities of Practices, it is vital to recognize the role of power in this process”. Moreover, it was pointed out that the framework failed to explore the implications of the distribution of power. In fact, in the framework of Communities of Practices, Lave and Wenger (1991) advocated the importance of social participation with respect to learning. While the core elements of Communities of Practices are mutual engagement and negotiated enterprise, the dimension of power structure is definitely influential within the negotiation process. Roberts’ critique may be valid in establishing some counter arguments when applying in a business context; however, it is essential to acknowledge that the original framework of Communities
of practices is a form of social learning theory (Hughes, 2007; Wenger, 2000) as opposed to
the management tool. In summary, the case studies consider this element in identifying how
intercutural Communities of Practices could format within international construction projects.
Furthermore, Roberts (2006) argued that trust, familiarity and mutual understanding developed
in their social and cultural contexts are prerequisites for the successful transfer of knowledge.
The nature of the relationship, therefore, plays an essential role in determining the success of a
community of practice. In view of the complexity of cross-cultural relationships within the
MNE models adopted by multinational construction enterprises, the development of a trust
relationship seems to be a potential challenge for the communities to learn and improve
subsequently. In addition, there are queries on the size and spatial reach of Communities of
Practices (Engestrom, 2007; Roberts, 2006), as the boundaries among the Communities of
Practices are not fixed but flexible, it is continuously shifting and difficult to identify. As a
result, there seems to be a need to differentiate Communities of Practices in terms of size and
spatial reach. Given the rapid development of information technologies in the digital era, the
concept of Communities of Practices has been rapidly adopted in developing virtual
communities that are cross-cultural and cross-distance.

On account of the forces of globalization, the contemporary business environment for all
sectors is increasingly complex, with an intensification of competition. The growing demands
in business performance lead to a more short term perspective on financial markets, with increasingly rapid technological changes transforming the competitive landscape. Roberts (2006) argued that, in the light of accelerating changes, there would be difficulties forming communities within business organizations. The orginal Communities of Practices suggest a degree of trust and mutual understanding which requires time to develop, hence they are regarded as a ‘slow’ community. To this end, Engestrom (2007) also criticized the adaptability of the original framework of CoPs in a modern business context, as he was of the opinion that the concept had clear boundaries and membership criteria, limiting its flexibility. Furthermore, it excessively privileges the supreme skills and authority embodied in the master. Engerstrom (2007) also criticized the concept as it was characterized by movement from the periphery towards the centre, from novice to master, from marginal to fully legitimate participation. In fact, the original notion of apprenticeship is deemed to be out of fashion in modern business contexts; the boundaries of groups have to be less fixed and communities could interact with high level of diversity in knowledge and skills. Subsequently, Wenger (1998, 2002, 2016) acknowledged that communities had increasingly problematic and permeable boundaries by adopting the notion of ‘constellations of practices’. According to Wenger (1998), “some configurations are too far removed from the participants, too broad, too diverse, or too diffuse to be usefully treated as single Communities of practices. …… whereas treating such configurations as single Communities of Practices would gloss over the discontinuities that
are integral to their very structure, they can profitably be viewed as constellations of interconnected practices”. Such acknowledgement was regarded as too broad by Engestrom (2007) and Meyer et al. (1989) and could hardly be applied in the context of highly rationalized hierarchical mass production organizations, or in business environments driven by outsourcing and the fragmentation of work.

Echoing these views, scholars suggested a consideration of the discourse on ‘collaborative community’ as a new form of emerging community (Adler & Hecksher, 2006), which could address the needs of a model business environment. Based on Adler and Hecksher (2006), collaborative community could co-ordinate better interactions which attributed to capacity buildings for individuals.

2.5.4 Communities of Practices in Context of Multinational Construction Enterprises

In the context of the construction industry, the delivery of international construction projects requires substantial input from multidisciplinary, i.e., architects, civil/structure/electrical/mechanical engineers, surveyors, etc., and multicultural actors, i.e., Catholics, Christians, Muslims, Confucians, etc. (Lock 1999, 1999b, 2009, 2010). It is necessary to point out that culture is not identical to religion; however, they are almost inseparable (Durkheim, 1976, p.
47). He defined a religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices. Beliefs and practices should be united into one single moral community. From this perspective, religion and culture are very likely to be inseparable, as beliefs and practices are uniquely cultural. For example, religious rituals (one type of practice) unite believers in a religion and separate nonbelievers.

The act of communion, or the sharing of the Eucharist by partaking in consecrated bread and wine, is practiced by most Christian denominations. However, the frequency of communion differs extensively, and the ritual is practiced differently based on historical and theological differences among denominations. Depending on the models of collaboration, these international projects involve different levels of stakeholder groups, including senior managers who develop the multinational partnership arrangements, technical experts and professionals who usually come from different cultural backgrounds and the technicians or workers implementing the construction site operation work (Ofori, 2012). In multinational construction enterprises, the senior managers of multinational projects are usually expatriate staff from headquarters. Their responsibilities include the legal set up of the cross-border development, the local operation of the projects and the compliance and quality assurance of these technical projects. Technical experts and professionals usually include a mixture of expatriate and local technologists from different cultural backgrounds, with sound professional knowledge and the skills for due project delivery (Ofori, 2012). This study reviews/investigates in detail how these intercultural communities could be established; and, more importantly, how the members could
be engaged in intercultural learning and generate knowledge, and ultimately beneficial to the company, profession, industry and HK at large.

According to the basic architecture of the Communities of Practices described above, the aforementioned core stakeholder groups could form different communities under the domain of each multinational construction project, legitimizing the identities of the groups. The methods of these groups’ ‘practice’ and ‘learn’ are the major focuses of the investigation in this study.

As mentioned in the Chapter 1, the development of multinational construction corporations and the rapid development in international construction projects is mainly driven by the forces of globalization. The above mentioned critiques on CoPs’ limitations in addressing issues in modern industry, which include quantifying performance management systems and the high level of diversity in skills and knowledge required to tackle the dynamic business environment, are relevant in the context of this study.

In the context of international construction project management, the question of whether construction professionals are able to establish the mutual understanding/trust, which is necessary to establish intercultural learning; again, it is the core interest of this Study.
2.5.5 How to Cultivate Communities of Practices to Achieve Learning?

Recently, Wenger (2002; 2010) reflected on how Communities of practices could be related to knowledge management in organizations. Since communities of practices are voluntary, it is essential for them to be alive, spontaneous and self-directed. While the concept of Communities of practices evolved, Wenger, Mcdermott and Snyder (2002) introduced principles aimed towards aliveness. These principles included: (1) design for evolution; (2) open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives; (3) invite different levels of participation; (4) develop both public and private community spaces; (5) focus on value; (6) combine familiarity and excitement; and (7) create a rhythm for community.

The above principles have added values and characteristics to CoP and delineated how elements of design work together to enhance the effectiveness of Communities of Practices. These characteristics and principles are studied alongside the dimensions of practices, mutual engagements, joint enterprises and share repertoire, in order to provide the core theoretical framework of the case studies.
2.5.5.1 Design for Evolution

According to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), the dynamic nature of communities has been crucial to their development. As the community develops, there are new members bringing new interests and knowledge into the community, thus leading to changes in its direction. Community design is much more of an evolving process compared to formal organizational design. In an intercultural community related to an international construction project, this process might start with a coordinator and a few core members aiming to prepare themselves for peer support. They might begin with very simple structure of regular meetings or sharing ideas on how technical matters could be addressed, then attracting different members in different areas of expertise, which might lead to the introduction of other elements of community structure. Evolution is common to all communities, and according to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), “the primary role of design is to catalyse that evolution”. The evolving nature of CoP is core to this study and guides the subsequent analysis of the case studies.
2.5.5.2 Open a Dialogue Between Inside and Outside Perspectives

Wenger specified that good community design required an insider’s perspective, but it also had to consider new perspectives from outsiders if it was to help members to see new possibilities (Wenger, 2002; 2016). This characteristic is closely related to better performance of MNEs in construction sector. In the context of international projects, the well-connected construction professionals who understand the construction codes of practice and local regulations might concern the methods to develop the community when many other competing companies are in the vicinity. External perspectives may help this understanding of how other similar communities in other organizations could be established for providing potential inspiration for further enhancement.

2.5.5.3 Invite Different Levels of Participation

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) emphasized that a structure of community had to have many different levels of participation. Firstly, a small core group of people actively participated in discussions or development of the community; then, as the community matured, they took on much of the community’s leadership. This group was approximately 10-15% of the whole community. The next level outside this group was the active group, whose members
participated discussions regularly but without the intensity of the core group. The active group comprised another 15-20 percent of the community. Large portions of community members were peripheral and rarely participated. Finally, outside these main levels were those surrounding the community who were not members but did have such interest. Putting these characters into the context of international projects would enhance the understanding of how multicultural Communities of Practices could develop.

2.5.5.4 Develop Public and Private Community Spaces

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) and Castells (2000) referred to dynamic communities as “rich in connections that happen both in the public spaces of the community – meetings, website – and the private space – the one-on-one networking of community members”. In fact, the public and private dimensions of a community are interrelated. When the individual relationship among community members is strong, the public events are much more meaningful in terms of providing members with learning opportunities. Informal sharing and discussions help to build up public space and are key to future group sharing. With the fast development of information technology in the digital era, the spatial reach of communities extends far beyond geographical borders, with increasing numbers of virtual communities
facilitating practices sharing and intercultural learning. The study examines how construction professionals develop online spaces for their practices sharing and communication.

### 2.5.5.5 Focus on Value

‘Added value’ is essential to the life of a community. Since participation is voluntary, most of the valuable activities of a community are the small, daily interactions etc., which provide informal discussions to solve problems, or one-to-one sharing of information. In any case, early and frequent discussions could help members as well as potential members for more understanding the real significance of the community. In a cross-cultural community engaging multinational project, the value resulting from information sharing among construction professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds is a significant factor in their daily activities, especially the critical path activities.

### 2.5.5.6 Combine Familiarity and Excitement

According to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002, p.61), “successful communities offer the familiar comforts of a hometown, they have enough interesting and varied events to continue drawing new ideas and new people into the community”. As the communities become more
mature, they offer a comfort zone for members, including familiar/regular events and meetings. Lively communities combine both familiar and new events to provide members with new connections and development. Unfortunately, within the construction sector, different team members on different projects and with the usual time span for each project of around 3-5 years, the transient nature of projects might influence the familiarity of communities.

2.5.5.7 Create a Rhythm for Community

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) suggested that the rhythm of a community was the strongest indicator of its aliveness, and that there were different rhythms in a community, including the syncopation of familiar/exciting events and the frequency of private interactions. Some regular informal retreats or briefing events are essential to the sustainability of a community. In this study, different models of MNEs in HK Construction Industry dictate the rhythm of the community. In these models, some professionals would be engaged more frequently for intercultural interactions. Consequently, the models of MNEs and the frequency of intercultural interactions may be of paramount significance towards intercultural learning.
2.5.6 Concluding Remarks on Communities of Practices

Wenger’s early work (Lave & Wenger, 1991) has had a significant impact in linking learning and practice. This study adopts the dimension of his earlier work, utilizing the concepts of ‘mutual engagement’, ‘joint enterprise’ and ‘shared repertoire’ to discuss how intercultural learning takes place, as these three dimensions emphasize the elements of interaction and social engagement that are advocated in this research. In view of its distinctive features in linking learning with social participation, Communities of Practices create a strong social platform for individuals to share practices, knowledge and artefacts (in the form of stories, documents and recordings) that have led to collaborative learning (Wenger, 2002; 2010).

The concept of CoP has become increasingly popular from a knowledge management and organizational management perspective (Hughes, 2007 & 2007b); however, so far there has been insufficient research into intercultural interactions and the development of intercultural learning using the model of social learning. It is therefore a challenging task to investigate intercultural cases in construction professionals, especially in HK, by using CoP theory. This study adopts a new approach to reappraise the concept of Communities of Practices in the context of intercultural learning for construction professionals, to expand current understanding in developing multicultural Communities of practices in HK construction sector.
2.6 Intercultural Learning

This section explores concepts of intercultural learning that provide guidance in developing a conceptual framework for this study.

2.6.1 Definition of Intercultural Learning

Deardorff (2006) defined intercultural competence as the ability to behave and communicate in appropriate and effective ways in intercultural situations, based on one’s attitude, knowledge and skills. Effectiveness could be determined by the individual while the jurisdiction of appropriateness could merely be done by others; as appropriateness is directly related to cultural sensitivity perceived by the others.

Intercultural learning thus refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes and skills that are demanded when interacting with different cultures. As well, we could view it in a larger context: it is the required process to resolve global challenges and to build a fair, inclusive society where people with different backgrounds could live harmoniously together.

Intercultural learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that support learners in both understanding culture and interacting with people from cultures different from their own
(Lane, 2012). Specifically, learners develop the cultural awareness, which is important if they have to communicate and get along with people from different cultural backgrounds (Lewis, 2003). Intercultural training could be designed to be culturally specific by dealing with a single target culture or culturally general by focusing on universally applicable skills, such as perspective taking and active listening (Lane, 2012). In this sense, it is important to understand the cultural dimensions to be able to develop intercultural learning. Hofstede (1980; 1988; 2009) has been engaged in large scale researches aimed at developing cultural dimensions, in order to know more the differences of cultures. These dimensions included ‘social inequality’, ‘individualism and collectivism’, ‘masculinity and femininity’, ‘uncertainty and ambiguity’ as well as ‘Confucian dynamism’ (Lock, 1999, 2009, 2010); however, Hofstede’s work has been criticized for overgeneralizing complex real-world issues (Bond, Zegura & Spencer, 2000; Fleming & Sobot, 2004; Gooderham & Nordhaus, 2004; McSweeney, 2002; Syndergaard, 2004).

Not long ago, Holliday (2011) related Hofstede’s approach of classifying cultural dimension to ‘essentialism’, a concept commonly felt to be negative. According to Holliday (2011), “essentialism presents people’s individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are”. Hence, it is possible to infer that people with an essentialist view of culture would consider their own
culture to be mutually exclusive to other national cultures and that they are essentially different to those from other cultures. In contrast, Holliday (2011) pointed out that people with a non-essentialist view of culture believed that one culture was complex, and it was difficult to pin down individual characteristics; cultures could flow, change, intermingle, cut across and through each other, regardless of national frontiers. Holliday argued that the liberal side of the duality implied Western society’s desire to oppose cultural bias, but the essential side did exist because of lack of criticality to recognize such bias.

The foundations of ‘liberal-essentialist duality’ provide us with multiple perspectives on how the cultural prototype could influence business organizational management, specifically in respect of cross border business operations (Taylor, 1947; Weber, 1947). Simultaneously, the foundations indicate how intercultural learning could be taken place. Adopting the liberal approach as indicated by Holliday, this study advocates nurturing intercultural interactions and intercultural competence for the development of intercultural learning. Within the context in modern management, the core issues of intercultural learning focus on perceptions and practices towards different cultures and their practices (Council of Europe, 2002). Whereas homogeneous practices and speech seem unlikely in any imminently foreseeable future, the objective of finding common purpose through mutually coordinated communication across cultures and languages will continue to be the major indicators for intercultural learning
In pursuing such objectives for intercultural learning, academics have been trying to study intercultural communication competence. This section reviews selective models of intercultural competence that are crucial to the process of intercultural learning.

The above classical theories of scientific management approach and human relations approach in the context of intercultural learning are also applicable in the context of construction MNEs. Given certain societal and national cultural influences, some MNEs adopt a more scientific management approach to drive the business performance while some other MNEs focus on the roles and relationship between home staff and offshore staff in generating cultural exchanges to develop business performance over the longer term (Taylor, 1947). Up to the stage, the diverse collaborative models have been mentioned in the above section representing different business strategies. These models are sought to generate intercultural interaction, and lead to intercultural learning (Weber, 1947).

In brief, intercultural learning is an interactive and ongoing process, related to the discourses of learning as well as the cultural dimensions (Council of Europe, 2002). Given the complexity of these cultural dimensions, it is not easy to comprehend cultural differences through clear classifications of cultural dimensions (Holliday, 2010). Instead, the process of intercultural
learning could be associated with the notion of social learning, which is closely related to the framework of Communities of Practices (Nedic, 2011).

The following sections endeavour to explore the elements of intercultural competence that are essential components in the process of intercultural learning.

2.7 Components of Intercultural Competence

In order to let construction MNEs to be competitive in a globalized society, it is essential for stakeholders to put emphasis on intercultural learning and to establish the ability to relate people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. There are many reviews of intercultural competence (Arasaratnam, 2007; Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Rathje, 2007) that are relevant to this study. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) pursued a review of conceptualizations of intercultural competence and identified several core dimensions that were essential to conceptualize such competence. The intention to make use of this section to review the core models of intercultural competence that are essential to the development of intercultural learning as delineated in this section. Models of Hamilton, Richardson and Shuford (1998) and Deardoff (2006) have been selected, based on their advocacy of the components of ‘skills’, ‘attitudes’ and ‘knowledge’ in developing intercultural competence.
Hamilton, Richardson and Shuford (1998) core components for intercultural competence were classified within three dimensions, namely ‘attitudes’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills’. As far as the ‘attitudes’ component is concerned, ‘intercultural competent’ persons are expected to treasure their own group, the basic equality of groups, multicentre, risk taking and to appreciate the role of cross-cultural interactions on quality of life. Such values complement knowledge competencies such as the awareness of the influence of cultural differences on communication processes (Bibikova et al., 2007).

Deardorff (2006)’s study entitled ‘Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence’ revealed a set of research-based components of intercultural competences representing an important framework of intercultural competences. In Deardorff’s model, ‘skills’, ‘attitudes’ and ‘knowledge’ are also core components for the development of intercultural competence. Deardorff visualized the data in a pyramid model that is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Deardorff Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence

Source: Adapted from Deardorff (2006)
Figure 2.1 delineates different components of intercultural competence in ‘skills’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘attitudes’. This model appears to be effective in representing a fundamental concept of elements and an implicit ordering of elements with the resulting external (visible) outcome being the effective and appropriate communication, and behaviour in intercultural situations (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). From the above discussion, the concepts of intercultural competence are essential to the process of intercultural interactions, through which multicultural Communities of Practices are developed. The development and nurturing of intercultural competences in different stakeholders’ groups within multinational construction corporations, including expatriate professionals, local professionals and local professionals working for outreaching construction projects, are expected to facilitate the process of
Hofstede (2009) believed that the development of intercultural competence implied ‘knowing one’s biases’, ‘adapting’, ‘assisting’ and ‘leading’, all of which are key concepts related to intercultural competences and, in a wider aspect, facilitating the process of intercultural learning.

In summary, the above elements of intercultural competences provide core foundations in evaluating an individual’s competence in communicating and interacting within an intercultural context. These elements provide guidance on how the data collected from the three selected cases should be analysed. In addressing the research questions identified in Chapter One, this study focuses on investigating how construction professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds could be engaged in intercultural interactions and intercultural learning to develop intercultural competence through the facilitation of Communities of Practices.

2.7.1 Communities of Practices for Developing Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence and intercultural learning are concepts that provide crucial insights into guiding the case studies and data analysis in this study. This section provides linkage between these concepts to provide an overview of how the platform of Communities of
Practices could be utilized to develop intercultural competence and subsequently to cultivate intercultural learning for construction professionals, especially in HK, from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The concept of Communities of Practices gives an important insight into how learning could take place with social participation and how learning takes place through the collaborative interactions of community members. Previous research indicates that, by adopting the community of practices concept as a theory of situated learning suitable for the context of construction professionals involved in intercultural interaction, participants are able to develop healthy dynamics of interactions within the groups in order to maximize the opportunities of intercultural learning (Nedic & Nafalski, 2011).

Wenger specified that the dimensions of ‘joint enterprise’, ‘mutual engagement’ and ‘shared repertoire’ were closely related to the domain of ‘practice’ (Wenger, 1998); in fact, these dimensions have also broadly been adapted to the nurturing of ‘skills’, ‘attributes’ and ‘knowledge’ as specified by the framework of intercultural competence. In this connection, the three elements of practice specified by CoP and intercultural competence are closely related and complimentary. Through sharing joint enterprises, members from diverse cultural backgrounds share their distinctive professional practices and mechanisms that nurture the
‘knowledge’ and ‘attitudes’ of intercultural competence. In addition, mutual engagement is an essential dimension in facilitating the regularity and frequency of intercultural interactions necessary to nurture ‘skills’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘attitudes’. Finally, the dimension of ‘shared repertoire’ is substantially related to the build-up of ‘knowledge’ associated with intercultural competence.

2.8 Knowledge Gap of Study and Conceptual Framework

The previous sections in this chapter introduce the concepts of Communities of Practices, intercultural competence and intercultural learning that represent key conceptual elements of this research. This section also highlights the knowledge gap addressed by this study and integrates the above three concepts to form a conceptual framework.

As discussed in the previous sections, the development of the global construction industry is mainly driven by the process of globalization, and it is projected to accelerate at a rapid rate as indicated by Construction Intelligence Centre (2015). As one of the world’s essential industries, the continued growth of the industry is of paramount importance to the world’s economic development. With the increasing number of international projects in the Middle East, South East Asia, China and Hong Kong (HKTDC, 2016), the construction industries in these
countries will likely have an increasing number of professionals from multidisciplinary and diverse cultural backgrounds. With the rapid development of intercultural construction projects, the workplace of global construction industries becomes more diverse. Consequently, construction managers need to be intercultural competent in order to positively address any issues that arise from the lack of consideration and understanding of cultural diversity (University of Notre Dame, 2016). Studies, such as those of Chen and Partingdon (2004) and Ofori (2012) revealed that conflicts and misunderstandings did occur among construction professionals based on cultural differences and the lack of intercultural competence of construction professionals engaged in international project managements. As an illustration, in Hong Kong Lamma Power Station, there were workers from the West, Japan, China and Hong Kong. During the regular progress meetings, the critical path activities including milestone events like first column lifting, drum lifting, generator no load test had to be made known/carried out during ‘Green Zone’. Attention had to be drawn for technologists from various areas/cultures, i.e., Christians/Catholics would not work during Christmas, limited activities for Muslims during Ramadan, no work for Chinese during Winter Solstice and Mid-Autumn Festival, etc. (Hanada et al., 1986).

In view of the construction industry’s paradigm shift towards increasing numbers of international construction projects, there is an acute need for construction professionals,
especially in HK, to engage in intercultural learning to enable them to manage these international projects with quality. It is essential for construction MNEs to develop their staff with cultural awareness, through cross-cultural exchanges and intercultural learning, in order to embrace the future development of the industry. The concept of intercultural learning and multicultural Communities of Practices is very likely to be crucial in filling the knowledge gap.

In view of the shortage of research addressing the intercultural learning of construction professionals, the study investigates how they could be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. In addition, the study also adopts a micro-perspective in examining how different cross-border management models could affect the process of intercultural learning.

Because of the ‘gaps’ in knowledge, it is vital to develop a conceptual framework to guide the investigation of this study (Lesham & Trafford, 2007). The analysis of the background, trends and issues of international construction projects and the fast development of the multinational construction corporations has been reviewed. Figure 2.2 indicates the core concepts explored in this study. The major conceptual framework of the study is formed by these core concepts; the design and data collection process of the study are informed. Furthermore, the framework is essential to inform the findings and discussions of this study.
The conceptual framework represented in Figure 2.2 is integrated through (1) operation models of construction MNEs (2) framework of Communities of Practices (3) concepts of intercultural competence and interaction (4) concepts of intercultural learning. A new discourse in multicultural Communities of Practices is developed at the end of this study to advance the existing practice of international project management.

2.9 Summary

This chapter began by reviewing literature related to the globalization of the construction industry. Under the context of globalization, multinational construction with different operational models have been analyzed because of their significant influence on the outcomes of this study. This chapter has further reviewed the literature relating to the concepts of
Communities of Practices, intercultural competence and intercultural learning. Finally, the knowledge gap has been identified by using the conceptual framework developed in Figure 2.2. The following key points analysed are specifically critical to the later chapters of this study: (1) the models of MNEs identified in this chapter have brought about significant developments in the globalization of the construction industry in HK, (2) developing intercultural competent professionals in the construction sector is essential in enhancing the business performances of construction MNEs and (3) the dimensions of practice and its elements of social learning within the concept of Communities of Practices are related to the development of the intercultural learning of construction professionals.
CHAPTER 3- RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study explores the cross-cultural management practices in the HK construction industry and investigates how construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. The central aim of this study is to understand intercultural learning of construction professionals. Hence, the research adopts interpretive perspectives to explore the research questions. The study adopts the case study approach, which aims to some in-depth understanding of how construction professionals in different models of MNEs could be engaged in intercultural learning. The study employs research instruments of focus group interviews and individual interviews for data collection, the data collected is analysed through the approach of qualitative thematic analysis.

The chapter includes the following sections: Section 3.2 illustrates the research paradigm and clarifies the interpretive nature of the position of this Research. Section 3.3 discusses and justifies the qualitative research methodologies; how is the data collected through the instruments of documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews? Section 3.4 elaborates how the collected data is organized and analysed. Section 3.5 presents
the ethical considerations of this Research. Section 3.6 discusses the limitations of the Research and, finally, Section 3.7 provides a summary of this chapter.

3.2 ‘Interpretivist’ Research Paradigm

The primary research aims for this study is to investigate the cross-cultural management issues for the HK construction industry and therefore it is essential to investigate and observe how the HK construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning in different MNEs models. Given the nature of the research questions, the research adopts an ‘interpretivist’ approach to explore the details of intercultural learning of construction professionals. The ‘interpretivist’ paradigm is based on the philosophical belief that “all human life is experienced and indeed constructed from a subjective point of view, and that social research should seek to elicit the ‘meaning’ of events and phenomena from the point of view of participants” (Johnson, 1994).

In an ‘interpretivist’ research, the researcher’s mission is to interpret how other views are developed about the world (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), ‘interpretivist’ researchers establish social ‘reality’ through the approach of qualitative research methods. In this connection, “the principal concern is with an understanding of the way in which the
individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself or herself” (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Interpretive researchers often utilize open-ended questions to draw participants’ views. In addition, they usually seek for understanding the context through field visits and collecting information personally in real life context; frequently, the researchers interpret the context using their own experiences and background (Crotty, 1998).

Subsequent to the data collection, ‘interpretivist’ researchers analyse the collected data after familiarizing with the context; they categorize the data into themes and use their personal experiences to interpret specific socio-political and historical moments (Creswell, 2014). As put by Easterby, Thorpe and Jackson (2012), the essence of ‘interpretivism’ was that “the reality is determined by people rather than objective and external factors”, the focus of ‘interpretivism’ is to understand how people are thinking and feeling.

Holloway and Wheeler (2010) perceived that, in interpretive research, knowledge was produced by exploring the social issues, where social reality could not be captured ‘accurately’ given the fact that people would have different perceptions and interpretations. ‘Interpretivist’ researchers believe that facts and values are not absolute and objective, therefore it is not possible to conduct value-free research; in the ‘interpretivist’ paradigm, positivist research methods used in the natural sciences are not appropriate for studying the social world. It seems
a must to understand that the process of ‘interpretivist’ research is largely inductive, within the research meanings and interpretations are advised by the views of the participants.

In summary, qualitative methods are employed in this study to investigate and interpret the details of intercultural learning of construction professionals in HK. An ‘interpretivist’ paradigm is applied in order to make sense related to the learning of the said professionals observed in this Paper.

### 3.3 Qualitative Research Methods

The philosophical position adopted within this study has a major impact on how the research is conducted and evaluated. Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) has highlighted that ‘interpretivist’ research is primarily associated with qualitative methods. To reflect this, the research design is primarily a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative methodology is concerned with the interpretation of individuals’ perceptions of the realities and seeks insight rather than statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2006).

In a qualitative approach, the researcher’s closer involvement grants an insider’s view of field. In this connection, researchers are able to discover details that are often missed by the more
positivistic and scientific enquiries. Qualitative researchers adopt a more descriptive and narrative style in conducting researches. In the context of this study, the topic is of particular benefit to the researcher who was also a local construction professional; the forms of knowledge reviewed in this study is of much relevant and insights to the professional practices of the construction industry in HK. A qualitative description could play the important role of suggesting possible relationship causes, effects and dynamic processes (Hancock, 2002; Neuman, 2006). Also, there are limitations of using a qualitative approach, owing to the subjective nature of qualitative data and its origin in single contexts. The approach was criticized for its reliability and validity (Creswell, 2014). According to Burns (2000), one of the major limitations of qualitative research was that the contexts and situations were not to be replicated, not could be generalized in a wider context. Furthermore, a researcher’s presence in the research may lead to bias and impact on the participants of the study.

3.3.1 Case Study Approach

To explore the details of how construction professionals are engaged in intercultural learning in different MNEs models through multicultural Communities of Practices in HK, the study adopts a case study research approach, and is set as an interpretive research. A case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”
(Yin, 2013). According to Robson (2002), a case study provides a strategic framework for how the study could be undertaken and how data collection should take place. Based on Bassey (2003) & Yin (2013), case study research explored phenomena within a context, which was one of the effective approaches for interpreting data.

A case study may be in many forms. The approach of case study allows the researcher to explore in-depth of how construction professionals from different cultural backgrounds in HK could be engaged in intercultural learning, through the framework of Communities of practices. In the study, 3 MNEs in HK’s construction industry were selected as cases. One construction enterprise from each of the following MNE models, namely, ‘Decentralized Federation’, ‘Co-ordinated Federation’ and ‘Centralized Hub’ was selected as a case for this research. As introduced in Chapter 2, the 3 models may have significant impact on how the construction professionals from different cultural backgrounds could interact and engage in a social form of learning. This study employs interviews as the major data collection instruments.

Case study researchers, Bassey (2003), Yin (2013) and Stake (1995) have written on the topic of case study research. They have provided guidance on how case study research should be organized and conducted successfully. Built on their previous work, the following sub-sections explain the process of case study to be applied in this research.
3.3.1.1 Selection of the Cases

Within this study, the case studies have been undertaken after the clearance of ethical procedures. Given the limitation of the timeframe and relevant resources, the case study includes 3 cases as specified above. The target cases are multinational construction corporations in HK operating multinational projects. These corporations have management staff with experiences in working with project members from different cultural backgrounds.

As an ex-senior construction professional in HK, the selection of multinational construction companies was conducted through the professional network and recommendations from construction trade bodies in HK. The 3 cases selected for this study are introduced in the following sections. Throughout the study, pseudonyms have been applied for these cases in view of ethical considerations.

3.3.1.2 Case A [Decentralized Federation]

As an international construction company, Case A’s parent company is based in Europe; the company had its roots in Asia in early 1900s and its base in HK for more than half century. Case A is involved in a range of international construction projects in HK. The company brochure reveals that Case A (HK) has an outstanding record of accomplishment in delivering building and civil works in HK, mainly related to HK’s infrastructure development.
The company has had experience in co-ordinating multidisciplinary and multicultural teams in public private partnership in HK. As a multinational enterprise, Case A (HK) has been operating within the model of Decentralized Federation as stated in Chapter 1. The HK Company is an offshore subsidiary operation of the parent company; the management of the offshore operation is independent and has strategic freedom. Owing to Case A’s long-term establishment in HK, it is widely accepted as being flexible and able to cater to meet local demand.

3.3.1.3 Case B [Co-ordinated Federation]

With its parent company based in China, Case B was established in HK in 1979. Similar to Case A, Case B is increasingly engaged in integrated construction production, including building construction and civil engineering operations as well as other peripheral operations such as foundation work, site investigation, mechanical and electrical engineering, highway and bridge construction (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations).

Case B has been active in Hong Kong, China and Macau for over 3 decades, its projects ranging from building works to infrastructure civil engineering work. Building on its success and experiences, the group has extended its boundaries to the United Arab Emirates, India and other
international locations. Case B adopts a different management philosophy to Case A and is set up under the model of ‘Co-ordinated Federation’, as illustrated in Chapter Two. Some senior management members are despatched from the parent company to work in HK as expatriate staff, with many of the HK operation’s assets and resources decentralized but controlled by the parent company. The knowledge and systems are controlled but locally adapted and the HK operations are treated as an extension of the domestic operations in China. In addition, the company is increasingly involved in exporting their construction professional services to Middle East and Asian countries. There is an increasing need for the local construction professionals to be ‘intercultural’ competent in order to make these overseas projects to be more successful.

3.3.1.4 Case C [Centralized Hub]

Case C is a British construction and engineering enterprise. As an international engineering services enterprise, Case C delivers services through its European and Australian Hub; its core sectors including buildings, transport, power, water and utilities, mining and national resources, oil and gas (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations). Case C’s HK operation falls within the remit of the Australian Hub; its HK branch office was set up in 2011. With a few joint ventures in infrastructure construction, all Case C’s joint venture projects are in
collaboration with international construction companies. Building on the award of these major projects, the company mobilized a team of expatriate staff to relocate and work in HK in 2011. The company was set up in accordance with the model of ‘Centralized Hub’, as introduced in Chapter 2. In view of the new set-up of Case C’s HK branch, there is an urgent need for relocated British staff and the local HK staff to interact and to engage in intercultural learning.

In order to investigate the details and different perspectives of cross-cultural management issues for each case, different forms of data are required. In this study, the data collection has been conducted using the instruments of interviews, focus group interviews and documentary analysis. The detailed justifications of using these instruments, as well as the administration procedures, are elaborated as below.

3.3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection of this study was conducted through documentary analysis and interviews. Documentary analysis was undertaken for each case prior to field visits in order to better understand the background and context of intercultural learning, i.e., to be well prepared in advance. The documents, including policy, strategy papers and marketing literature for each MNE (Table 3.1 below), were perused to explain the mission and corporate strategies of each
MNE. Subsequent to the document review, the researcher conducted individual interviews and focus group interviews to acquire the views of participants on their experiences in international projects. These interviews were designed to have a particular focus on their views of intercultural learning. The instruments of individual interviews and focus group interviews enable the acquisition of various groups of construction practitioners by “collecting primary, observational data” (Creswell, 2014), with the aim of interpreting the practices of the professionals in relation to intercultural learning in HK’s construction industry.

### 3.3.2.1 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was carried out before the data collection to test the instruments of the research method. As Van Teijlingen et al. (2001) suggested, a pilot study is crucial to a good study design; it could help to identify potential practical problems during the research procedure, and it would be positive for assessing the adequacy of the research instruments. A preliminary interview with a HK Legislative Councillor representing the engineering industry in functional constituency seats was held in March 2012 with a view to receiving an updated overview of policy and context for the development of HK’s construction industry. The specific focus of the interview was on the development of international projects and the global competence and outlook for the professional workforce. The major aims of this interview were
to:

- acquire an overview opinion about the future development of the construction industry’s workforce, particularly with regard to their intercultural competence.
- determine an overview opinion about the management practices and style of HK’s construction professionals, paying particular attention to their attributes in intercultural communications.
- furnish guidance for the data collection strategies.

In the pilot interview, the development and context of the HK construction industry were discussed, together with the current knowledge and practice gap in intercultural communication within MNEs. The key points of the interview are summarized below:

**3.3.2.1.1 Summary of the Pilot Interview**

According to the Legislator, the HK Government’s aim is to develop the city as a globalized business hub within the South China region. There would be substantial increase of the spending in civil and infrastructure work over the next 2 decades, involving an extension of the workforce within the industry (*Case 0-RH_Interview*). As part of the globalization process in HK’s construction industry, the Government would likely develop appropriate business
schemes to attract overseas investment. In addition, it is expected that there would be increasing projects involving overseas consulting firms during this growth phase of the industry, particularly in civil work and planning areas. Construction and engineering professionals like architects, engineers, surveyors, etc., in HK would very likely encounter different challenges in this globalization process, particularly with regard to how they interact with professionals from different cultural backgrounds, such as Christians/Catholics, Muslims, Confucians, etc. and how they could learn and evolve from current practices (Lock 1999, 1999b, 2009, 2010).

In order to cope with the future development of HK’s construction industry, there is an acute need to develop multi-disciplinary project teams having professionals equipped with intercultural competence.

As the Representative of the engineering profession, the Legislator indicated that cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence were essential attributes for HK construction professionals, stating that “this is one of the key skills which could enhance HK’s construction workforce and would help to enhance the industry and progress the globalization of the industry” (Case 0-RH_interview). The professionals in their continuing professional development are currently neglecting these transferable skills.
3.3.2.1.2 Significance of the Pilot Study

The interview with the Legislator has reaffirmed the contextual development of the industry. Firstly, the pilot study provided guidance on the design of interviews adopted in the main study. The pilot case study used qualitative instruments, including documentary analysis and interviews to collect data. Interviews with individual and groups of construction professionals were carried out to understand participants’ experiences on their intercultural learning experiences in international projects. The discussion of the pilot study assured that the topic of This study is significant in terms of research, and that the research methods are appropriate in responding the research questions (Van Teijlingen et al., 2001). The interview schedule and questions were fine-tuned afterwards to fulfil the needs of the investigations.

The pilot interviews indicated that the MNE models adopted by the construction corporations could be important towards the development of multicultural Communities of Practices in HK construction industry. Therefore, the details of how construction professionals from different cultural backgrounds interact within these models would form the core subject for follow up of this study.
3.3.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used interview technique in qualitative social research. These interviews were designed as part of the data collection methodology within each case study. In general, an interview is a two-way conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. The interview reflects the ‘interpretivist’ philosophy “regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The direct interaction of interview is the source of its advantages and disadvantages as the research technique. The advantage is that it allows for greater depth than the other methods of data collection. The disadvantage is that it is potentially prone to subjectivity and bias on the side of the interviewer (Creswell, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews provide a fairly open framework that allows for focused, conversational and two-way communications. Unlike the structured questionnaire or interview framework, which the detailed questions are formulated ahead of time; in semi-structured interviews, relevant broad topics could be identified, followed by detailed discussions among/between the interviewer and the interviewee/s, to explore more details within the relationship of the topics.
Within each selected case, 2 to 3 senior managers were invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews, i.e., nine interviews (Table 3.1). The major objectives of interviewing the senior managers would be:

- to acquire the business development strategy and the importance of multinational projects to the selected cases.
- to learn the current issues / problems encountered through the project teams with multicultural groups i.e. Christians/Catholics, Muslims and Confucians etc. (Lock, 1999, 1999b, 2009, 2010)
- to investigate how the multicultural Communities of Practices of these cases interact and contribute to intercultural learning.
- The interviews with these senior managers would be conducted individually; the duration would be 30-45 minutes in general.

3.3.2.3 Focus Group Interviews

Group interviews are usually regarded as a data collection tool for acquiring a reasonably comprehensive selection of data under the circumstances that time and resources are limited. In this study, focus group interviews have been conducted with junior construction managers/officers who have previous experiences of working in an intercultural environment.
The focus group’s participants could provide practical experiences and observations relating to intercultural learning issues within the context of international construction projects. Each focus group would include 3-4 junior managers and 5-8 senior managers from the selected case, making a total of 9-12 participants. The duration of each focus group interview is designed to be approximately 45 minutes.

3.3.2.4 Administration of Interviews and Focus Groups

The major objective of the interviews and focus groups in this study is to explore the views of how the multicultural Communities of Practices emerge within the three different MNE models. The interviews and focus groups were used as part of the data collection methods since enriching and contextual data that were crucial in understanding the research questions could be collected. All participants were formally invited with an invitation package including information sheet, and consent form (Appendix A-C). The package was despatched to each participating organization prior to the conduct of the data collection.

The interviews (including the individual interviews and the focus groups) commenced with a briefing to introduce the purpose of the study. The researcher assured participants of the confidentiality of the data and requested permission to take notes and record the interview
details. The interview notes were prepared in English (Appendix D); the interviews were conducted in English (for the expatriate construction managers) and Cantonese (for the Chinese local construction managers). In order to reduce the subjectivity and the interviewer’s bias, the interview schedule was prepared in advance and all interviews were conducted using identical format and process. Moreover, all interviews were recorded/transcribed, to minimize misunderstandings and bias from the interviewer or some possible random errors.

3.3.2.5 Documentary Analysis

A document is an artefact that has its central feature as inscribed text (Scott, 1990). It is a written text produced by individuals and groups during the course of their daily routine activities and is geared exclusively to their own immediate practical needs. It is written with a purpose based on particular assumptions and presented in a certain way or style. In this respect, the researcher has to be fully aware of the origins, purpose and original audience of the documents (Grix, 2001). In this study, some sources of documentation have been used as part of the data within the cases. These documents included:

- company website information on the selected cases: this information provided comprehensive background and the company profile. This information also provided the mission and international strategies of the companies for further analysis of the
participations in international projects.

- promotional materials and brochures detailing the selected cases.

- annual reports of the selected cases. These revealed the details of the organizational structure, composition of the senior management team and their profiles. Such information was essential to furnish background analysis for the intercultural environment of the selected cases.

Table 3.1 below lists the data collected through the above instruments. In brief, the three data collection instruments identified above collected multiple sources of information, all with the purpose of informing how intercultural learning had taken place through Communities of practices in each of the MNE models.
Table 3.1 Data Collection Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Documentary Analysis</th>
<th>Individual Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Group Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Case A** | - company website  
- corporate brochure  
- annual report | 6 senior managers / expatriate senior managers | 3 junior managers |
| **Case B** | - company website  
- corporate brochure  
- annual report | 5 senior managers / expatriate senior managers | 4 junior managers |
| **Case C** | - company website  
- corporate brochure  
- annual report | 8 senior managers / expatriate senior managers | 4 junior managers |

3.4 Data Analysis

Since the textual data of qualitative research is lengthy and not all the information could be used, Creswell (2014) has suggested the following hierarchical approach for the analysis of the qualitative data. The first step is to organize and prepare the data for analysis. The second step is to rehearse the data to get a sense. After that, the researcher has to organize the data for coding. In this study, the data collected includes organizational documents, and audio recordings of interviews. The audio clips have been transcribed to notes for further analysis. The latter part of this section deliberates the detailed procedures of data analysis.

According to Yin (2013), every case study should strive to have a general analytical strategy in
which the following 3 approaches could be included: theoretical propositions, setting up a framework based on rival explanations, and developing case descriptions. These three general strategies should underlie the specific analytical techniques highlighted later. Furthermore, according to Easterby-Smith et al. and Elo et al. (2008), qualitative data can be analysed through the following stages:

- familiarization: the data transcripts would be reviewed to get a clearer view on the focus of the interviews.
- reflection: during this stage, the researcher would evaluate and reflect how the data could address the research questions. For example, could the data support existing knowledge?
- conceptualization: along with the questionnaire result, it is expected that a set of concepts have emerged which seem to be important in understanding the key findings of the research.
- cataloging concepts: once the above concepts appear to occur in a pattern, they could then be analysed via certain databases or codes.
- linking: at this stage, the analytical framework and clarifications would be further clearer and there should be clear patterns.
- re-evaluation: to re-evaluate the data and the explanations to examine whether the resulting interpretations are proper and make sense.

Within the research process, there are advantages and disadvantages to the researcher, as a practitioner in the HK construction industry. Positively, the professional practices/ experiences
could enable the researcher to understand the professional background of each case effectively. On the contrary, such relevant practices and experiences could influence on the interpretation of the data.

In this study, the process of data analysis involves sorting data into coded sets, recognizing sub-themes and subsequent sorting the data under various themes. Patton (2002) suggested that the major challenge was to ensure that the categories were internally homogeneous and externally heterogeneous. In this connection, everything in one category has to be in alignment with some meaningful themes and that the differences among these themes need to be distinctive. As guided by Creswell, a category has to be included for every data segment. In other words, when the process of sorting all data into the different labels is complete, there should be nothing left (Creswell, 2014).

3.4.1 Organization of Data

The principle of qualitative research involves the researcher’s interpretation of the information. Records of the interview are compared and reviewed with reference to the theoretical framework highlighted during the Literature Review.
The inductive phase of analysis would be undertaken in different stages, as disclosed by the above principle. Firstly, the data was organized for analysis; secondly, the data was reviewed to align with the protocol of “how a researcher gains an overview of the data coverage and becomes thoroughly familiar with their material” (Spencer et al., 2014). Table 3.2 demonstrates the raw data collected during the research process.

**Table 3.2 Volume of Raw Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Interviews | 26 audio clips  
50-80 minutes each |
| Documents  | each case has more than 50,000 words  
a total of over 150,000 words |

The researcher transcribed the interviews and reviewed the transcriptions to prepare for the coding procedure. During this process, the researcher tried to familiarize himself with the transcription notes and the documents, to properly understand participants’ experiences and views, and to identify the topics of interest. The researcher used Popplet for iPad to organize and summarize the data into clusters and ideas before undertaking the coding procedures (Creswell, 2014).
3.4.2 Coding Procedures

In view of the volume of textual data generated from the case studies, a systematic coding process had to be adopted. During the coding process, NVivo, a software application for qualitative data analysis, was applied for that purpose. Nodes and categories were created; these categories were grouped under higher order headings to provide further categories for describing phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Subsequently, the data was categorized into patterns that emerged into themes.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The study has adopted a range of ethical principles for social research; the details will be outlined in this section. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), ethical issues could emerge at any stage of a research project and the following items could be influential:

- nature of the project
- context of the research
- procedures adopted
- methods of data collection
- nature of the participants
Bryman and Bell (2007) conducted a content analysis of the ethical principles of nine professional associations in the social sciences. These principles are listed as per Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 Ethical Principles Adopted by this Study**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ensure no harm to the research participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Respect the dignity of the research participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ensure the consent of the research participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Protect the privacy of the research subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ensure the confidentiality of research data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Protect the anonymity of the individuals &amp;/or organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Avoid deception about the nature or aims of the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Declare of affiliations, funding sources and conflicts of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Be honest &amp; transparent in communicating about the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Avoid misleading or false reporting of the research findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above codes of practices provide guidance and the framework for research in social science; it is applicable to this study. In addition, the “National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research” from the Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council (2012) was consulted.

This study should be independent of other researches and solely for the Doctor of Business Administration of Southern Cross University research project. The researcher is an independent
researcher with a complete transparent position with respect to the ethical decisions and issues.

During the study, the following ethical considerations have been duly exercised.

Firstly, voluntary participation was ensured. The researcher approached the related construction managers within the professional network to explain the research procedures and responsibilities of the researcher. The researcher sought consent to access to information prior to collect data. All participants were well informed of the aims, objectives and methodologies of the research. The researcher ensured that all selected interviewees were willing to participate and assured that they were free to join and leave.

Secondly, the researcher advised the participants and the respondents on the full aspects and procedures of the research. The participants were provided with the necessary information about the identity of the researcher, the procedures and the nature of research. The researcher sought feedback from the participants related to their participating experiences as well.

Furthermore, confidentiality was guaranteed during the research process. It was promised that no personnel other than the researcher would be able to access the raw information and data. In parallel, the researcher strove for anonymity, so it was impossible for others to identify the participating organization or individual. In view of the ethical considerations, pseudonyms
were adopted for the participating organizations to avoid disclosure of any sensitive business information.

In addition, the researcher ensured that participants had been properly cared for with appropriate consideration. The researcher drafted the interview schedules to avoid any embarrassment or discomfort that might be caused. The whole data collection process has been duly approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University (Approval Number: ECN-11-245).

3.6 Limitations of the Research

In this chapter, the research paradigm of this study, the research methodologies and the procedures of data analysis have been elaborated. Practically, case study research is usually time consuming, with particular issues involved in gaining access to the sites and permissions to research within the sites (Bryman, 2012; Robson, 2002). Moreover, case studies of a few MNE models and collaborations in Hong Kong’s construction industry is not necessarily representative in explaining all other cases in the industry. In fact, with the nature of interpretive paradigm, this study might not be able to generate universally valid results. Under the circumstances, the selection of three cases was to enable in-depth explorations in order to
interpret the multicultural Communities of Practices in the HK construction industry.

Furthermore, the study is also limited by the mass volume of the textual data involved during data collection. Because of the large volume of textual data, the number of case studies was limited to three. The qualitative research design has also made the data collection process lengthy. With crossover between the cases, a prolonged data analysis process for each completed case was necessary.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has delineated the philosophy, research design and methodologies of the study. The study has adopted a qualitative methodology under the ‘interpretivist’ paradigm. The chapter has explained the research design and philosophy during the early stage. This study has employed a qualitative research methodology, with a case study approach. The instruments of documentary analysis, focus group interviews and individual interviews are utilized to collect data. The chapter further analyses the context, background and characteristics of the selected MNEs. Furthermore, the procedures of interviews, data collection and ethical issues have also been explained. Finally, this chapter discusses the limitations of the study and how such limitations can be properly dealt with.
CHAPTER 4- CASE STUDY: AN OVERVIEW

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the case study data collection and the researcher’s reflections during the process of collecting and analysing data. During the data collection process, three multinational construction corporations in Hong Kong and a total of 19 individual managers participated in the study. The detailed documentary analysis and interviews have garnered insights into how Hong Kong construction professionals have been equipped in intercultural learning while they have been engaged by international projects. Moreover, the data collected could provide further wisdom regarding the process of nurturing multicultural Communities of Practices, through which the construction professionals from different cultural backgrounds have interacted and engaged in collaborative learning.

4.2 Overview of the Case Study

The data collection of this study lasted for more than one year and was divided into two different stages. Stage one was the documentary analysis of the construction corporations, while stage two involved the proceeding of the three case studies. The data collection was
carried out within the qualitative framework, including three case studies, aiming to investigate the details of the cross-cultural management issues in HK multinational construction enterprises.

4.2.1 Case Studies: Background

The case studies conducted as part of this project involved 3 HK multinational construction enterprises. The 3 companies selected are all public listed corporations. Some corporate documents including company background, international operation, company turnover and international construction projects are available for public access which enable partial documentary analysis to be carried out. Several visits were made to collect discourse data through interviews with the construction professionals, in order to investigate the details of the cross-cultural management issues and the development of learning communities within the participating companies. A total of 19 interviews were conducted. As indicated in Chapter 3, case studies and interviews may result in large volumes of contextual data. In this study, each individual interview took approximately 30 minutes. Before sorting, coding and analysing the interviews’ full transcriptions, each individual interview was summarized in order to enable a precise and focused understanding of the participant’s perceptions and interpretations in response to the items contained in the interview questionnaire. In order to respect the business
interests of the 3 companies, all the 3 cases are presented anonymously with pseudonyms. Furthermore, reference to the company websites is withheld for ethical considerations. The detailed background of the 3 cases and their business portfolios are described as below.

### 4.2.1.1 Case A

As an international construction company, Case A has its roots in Asia in the early 1900s and has had its base in HK for more than half century. Case A (HK) is one of the MNEs involved in a range of international construction projects in HK. The company brochures reveal that Case A has an outstanding track record in delivering building and civil works in HK, including:

- commercial buildings, exhibitions centres, multi-purpose venues, residential buildings
- bridges, railways, tunnels.

Case A (HK) also has experiences in co-ordinating multidisciplinary teams in public private partnership in HK. According to the company profile, the company has partnered with both the public and private sector in the construction work of an expo centre in HK. This work is regarded as an exemplar of public-private partnership, involving multi-disciplinary professional team members, i.e., architects, engineers, builders, surveyors etc. from different cultural, i.e., Christians/Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, Confucians, Atheists etc. (Lock, 1999,
Case A’s parent company, a French listed construction company, is a leading international player in international construction projects and the group of companies to which Case A belongs has a core value based on balancing its business model between the economic profitability of its businesses and their labour, social and environmental impact. According to the website of Case A, the Group “designs, builds and operates buildings and structures which improve the quality of people’s living and working environment: public and private buildings, transport infrastructures and energy and communications networks” (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations). Moreover, the Group also aspires to adopt sustainable construction practices, act in the interest of their territories and co-innovate and enter into joint development with their stakeholders (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations).

In 2013, Case A’s sales totalled around 11.1 billion euros, of which around 23% was contributed by its Asian group of companies (including the HK Branch). The core areas of development for Case A (HK) are:

- environment and sustainable construction
- customers and partners for a sustainable project
- local commitment and community aid
• respect and development of employees with a global outlook (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations).

With staff development being a core strategy of the company’s development plan, it is interesting to note the details of the HK Company’s staff profile. Their senior management team includes a team of expatriate staff (French, British, Australian) and local Chinese. There are 7 executive directors, 4 (57%) of which are expatriate staff and 3 (43%) are local Chinese. The second tier of the management team includes teams of professionals in building, civil, engineering and corporate executives. These teams include members from diverse cultural backgrounds, as listed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Senior Staff’s Cultural Profile, Case A, HK (Note: reference withheld for ethical considerations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Expatriate Staff</th>
<th>Local Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Directors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 7 members</td>
<td>4 (57%)</td>
<td>3 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Senior Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 4 members</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Senior Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 9 members</td>
<td>5 (56%)</td>
<td>4 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Senior Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 3 members</td>
<td>1 (33%)</td>
<td>2 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Executive Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 10 members</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 4.1, it seems obvious that the company has appointed a senior management team with culturally diverse backgrounds, in order to reflect its aspirations in global development and local intelligence.

As a multinational enterprise, Case A (HK) operates within the model of Decentralized Federation as stated in Chapter 1. The HK Branch is an offshore subsidiary operation of the parent company, where the management of the offshore operation is independent and has strategic freedom. Being long-established in HK, Case A is widely accepted as being flexible and able to cater to local demand.

Within the data collection process, a few visits were made to Case A (HK) to conduct interviews. During the interview, the Executive Director of Civil Engineering Work (Participant A1, Table 4.3 below) reflected on his company’s long history of business operations in HK and regarded the city as a strategic business hub for the company. In order to develop a balanced, integrated strategy to suit the geographical region, the company has a plan to further develop the local Chinese workforce to achieve better cost and management efficiency (The Chinese Cultural Dimensions, 2017). Given the corporation’s global strategy blueprint, the company would be engaged in an increasing number of international projects, leading to an increasing need to develop a professional staff team who are intercultural competent (Flemming et al., 2004).
6 individual interviews and a focus group interview (Table 4.3) were conducted within the company, involving a total of 9 participants. The content of these interviews was summarized to allow for an interpretation of how the multicultural professional teams from different backgrounds can learn, communicate and interact within the organizational context. Given the culturally diverse backgrounds of Case A’s staff, the issue of how they interact and communicate within the features of Communities of Practices is of primary interest in this study. In this context, the case study investigates the details of how construction professional staff from diverse cultural backgrounds are engaged and whether they have been engaged in intercultural learning through the development of multicultural Communities of Practices.

4.2.1.2 Case B

Case B, with its parent company based in China, started its construction business in HK in 1979. Similar to Case A, Case B is engaged in integrated construction production, including building construction and civil engineering operations as well as other peripheral operations such as foundation work, site investigation, mechanical and electrical engineering, highway and bridge construction (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations).

Case B has been active, mainly in HK, China, Macau, for over 30 years. Its projects range from
building works to civil engineering works. Built on its success and experiences, the group extended its boundaries in the United Arab Emirates, India and other countries. Such development is in accordance with the new Belt and Roads initiatives promoted by the Chinese Government. In summary, Case B’s international development seeks to capitalize on the competitive advantages of HK’s construction professionals to fulfil the fast-developing pace of infrastructure development in Asia and globally.

According to the company brochure, the company has a mission to “serve the community, to promote China and benefit the people” (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations), hence its core business is centred on mainland China. The Company’s 2015 annual report showed an annual turnover of HK$ 27 billion, of which 40% was generated from infrastructure and building works in HK.

The corporation is structured by means of different core branches in geographical areas, namely its HK, China, Macau and international offshoots. The profile of the senior management team is listed in Table 4.2.
Table 4.2 Portfolio of Senior Management Team, Case B (Note: reference withheld for ethical considerations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directorate Level</th>
<th>Mainland Chinese</th>
<th>Local Hong Kong Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director 1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director 2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director 3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Senior Management Level                |                  |                         |
| Deputy General Manager 1               | *                |                         |
| Deputy General Manager 2               |                  | *                       |
| Assistant General Manager 1            |                  | *                       |
| Assistant General Manager 2            |                  | *                       |
| General Manager of Civil Work          |                  | *                       |
| General Manager of Macau Region        |                  | *                       |

The culturally diverse backgrounds of the senior management team are, in one way, a reflection of the corporation’s mission: its core business development being in Mainland China; however, it is the company’s development in Middle East and internationally that is most relevant to the scope of this study. Specifically, the company has established a dedicated professional team that is responsible for these overseas ventures. Part of Case B’s case study investigates the experiences of this outreaching team in providing professional services internationally and also whether multicultural Communities of Practices have emerged to facilitate their intercultural learning.
Adopting a different management philosophy from Case A, Case B adopts the model of ‘Coordinated Federation’ as illustrated in Chapter 1. Some senior management staff came from the parent company to work in HK as expatriate staff, with many assets and resources of the HK operation decentralized but controlled by the parent company. The knowledge and systems are controlled but locally adapted, and HK operations are treated as an extension of the domestic operations in China. The company has a clear vision of establishing a harmonious community capable of fulfilling its vision of globalization.

Within the data collection process for Case B, visits were made to the company, to engage participants for 5 individual interviews and 1 focus group interview. A total of 5 managers took part in the individual interviews and 4 officers for the focus group interviews. The participants include members from local and overseas projects. They demonstrated different interpretations of cross-cultural management issues in Case B, which is a construction giant in Mainland China beginning to extend its business globally.

4.2.1.3 Case C

Case C is a British construction and engineering enterprise. As an international engineering services enterprise, Case C delivers services through its European and Australian Hub, its core
sectors including buildings, transport, power, water/utilities, mining/national resources, oil and gas (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations). The HK operation falls into the remit of the Australian Hub, which has a total of 90 current projects, valued at USD 4 billion. The HK Branch office was set up in 2011. With a few joint ventures in infrastructure construction, all Case C’s joint venture projects are in collaboration with international construction companies. Built on the award of these major projects, the company has mobilized a team of expatriate staff to relocate and work in HK since 2011. The set-up of the HK Branch is in accordance with the ‘Centralized Hub’ model as discussed in the Literature Review.

The company’s website reveals its vision “to challenge and change the construction industry worldwide”. Case C also states its core values as to “make safety personal and work responsibly”, “lead by example”, “work as one team, listen to everyone”, “find or follow a better way”, “collaborate with clients and partners” (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations).

The company is currently engaged in a few joint venture construction projects in HK which are managed by different project teams from different cultural backgrounds. In order to understand the cultural issues among these multicultural teams, members of one project team were interviewed (8 managers and 5 officers, as detailed in Table 4.3 below).
As the HK Branch office is a young establishment, the parent company assumes full control of the operation in HK, the set-up of the HK operation having most of its assets and resources centralized, including decision-making processes. The UK parent company has strong influence and control over the strategic and operational development of the HK operation. Specific to this model of Centralized Hub, the multicultural Communities of Practices may interact across geographical and time differences.

The interview with the General Manager of the HK Branch (Participant C1) revealed some basic operational facts. The office has a total of 260 staff, of whom over 30% are expatriate staff, holding senior positions in management, project management and commercial planning. All expatriate staff came from the European and Australian Hub, with culturally diverse working experiences. According to the Company’s published reports and the interview with Participant C1, the Company is keen to further develop its portfolio in HK and has the aim of achieving capacities of direct delivery in the interim term, implying some further expansion of HK operation. As part of its five-year interim strategy, the HK Branch aims to limit the expatriate workforce to 10%, and to nurture high-quality HK Chinese members to operate the HK Branch. Striving for sustainability, one of the major tasks of the HK senior management team is to recruit more local Chinese professionals and to cultivate their sense of identification and belonging for Case C. In view of the above strategy, there seems to be an acute need for
the corporation to build up a team of construction professionals who are culturally competent, for the benefit of company’s future development.

The individual and focus group interviews were intended to collect detailed information and views on the management decision-making process, the communication style of expatriate and local Chinese project team members; and, more importantly, the relationships, dynamics and interactions of the team under the dynamics of their multinational background. The findings would inform how the multicultural Communities of Practices could be nurtured and how the construction professionals are engaged in intercultural learning through these Communities of Practices. Table 4.3 summarizes the major source of data of the 3 case studies:
### Table 4.3 Data Collection Summary

**CASE A [Decentralized Federation]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Documentary Analysis</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate information</td>
<td>Company website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International operation</td>
<td>Corporate brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International projects</td>
<td>Company website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management structure</td>
<td>Annual Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business information</td>
<td>Annual Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Interviews</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Cultural Background</th>
<th>Working Experience in Cross-cultural Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A1 (Case A_Interview#1)</td>
<td>Executive Director of Civil Engineering Work</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>• 18 years working experiences in international projects, had worked in Europe, Australia, HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant A2 (Case A_Interview#2)</td>
<td>Senior Project Manager</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>• 15 years working experiences in international projects, had worked in Europe, Middle East, and HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant A3 (Case A_Interview#3)</td>
<td>Construction Manager</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>• 10 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK, with working experiences in international projects in HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant A4 (Case A_Interview#4)</td>
<td>Engineering Manager</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>• 5 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant A5 (Case A_Interview#5)</td>
<td>Site Agent</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>• 12 years working experiences in UK, Middle East, and HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant A6 (Case A_Interview#6)</td>
<td>Site Agent</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>• 10 years working experiences in expatriate professionals and managers in HK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Focus Group (Case A Focus Group#1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>Technical Officer</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>4 years working experiences in construction industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>Engineering Assistant</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>3 years working experiences in multinational construction corporations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9</td>
<td>Technical Officer</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.3 (Cont’d) Data Collection Summary

**CASE B [Co-ordinated Federation]**

#### 1 Documentary Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate information</td>
<td>Company website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International operation</td>
<td>Corporate brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International projects</td>
<td>Company website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management structure</td>
<td>Annual Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business information</td>
<td>Annual Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2. Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Cultural Background</th>
<th>Working Experience in Cross-cultural Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Assistant General Manager, Building Department of the Hong Kong Office</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>18 years working experiences on Mainland China, had worked in multinational Projects in HK (Chinese from Mainland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Planning Manager</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>15 years working experiences working in HK, had working experience in multinational projects in HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Construction Manager</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>10 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK, with working experiences in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Participant B4 (Case B_Interview#4)
- **Position**: Assistant Construction Manager
- **Language**: Chinese
- **Work Experience**: 5 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK

### Participant B5 (Case B_Interview#5)
- **Position**: International Project Manager
- **Language**: Chinese
- **Work Experience**: 15 years working experiences in multinational projects, including HK, Dubai

### C. Focus Group (Case B_Focus Group#1)

#### Participant B6
- **Position**: Technical Assistant
- **Language**: Chinese
- **Work Experience**: 3 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK

#### Participant B7
- **Position**: Engineering Assistant
- **Language**: Chinese
- **Work Experience**: 1 year working experiences in multinational construction corporations

#### Participant B8
- **Position**: Engineering Assistant
- **Language**: Chinese
- **Work Experience**: 2 years working experiences in multinational construction corporations

#### Participant B9
- **Position**: Technical Officer
- **Language**: Chinese
- **Work Experience**: 3 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK

---

**Table 4.3 (Cont’d) Data Collection Summary**

**CASE C [Centralized Hub]**

#### 3. Documentary Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate information</td>
<td>Company website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International operation</td>
<td>Corporate brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International projects</td>
<td>Company website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management structure</td>
<td>Annual Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business information</td>
<td>Annual Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4. Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Cultural Background</th>
<th>Working Experience in Cross-cultural Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participant C1 (Case C_Interview#1)          | British             | • 10 years working experiences in UK, Australia, Middle East  
<p>|                                               |                     | • In HK since 2011                                  |
| Participant C2                               | British             | • 10 years working experiences in UK,             |
|                                               |                     |                                                  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Case C_Interview#2)</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Middle East, India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant C3 (Case C_Interview#3)</td>
<td>Plant Manager</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Previous experiences mainly related to working with local teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C4 (Case C_Interview#4)</td>
<td>Tunnel Planning Engineer</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 years working experiences in UK, Middle East, India, Arab, Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• In HK since 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C5 (Case C_Interview#5)</td>
<td>Site Agent</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 years working experiences in UK, Middle East, Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• In HK since 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C6 (Case C_Interview#6)</td>
<td>Construction Manager</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 10 years working experiences with local and expatriate project teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C7 (Case C_Interview#7)</td>
<td>Project Quantity Surveyor</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 12 years working experiences in UK, Middle East, Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• In HK since 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C8 (Case C_Interview#8)</td>
<td>Commercial Assistant</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• No experience working with Expatriate professionals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C. Focus Group (Case C_Focus Group#1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant C9</th>
<th>Site Assistant Manager</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 4 years working experiences in construction industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C10</td>
<td>Engineering Assistant</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 years working experiences in multinational construction corporations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C11</td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 5 years working experiences with expatriate professionals and managers in HK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C12</td>
<td>Site Assistant Manager</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2 years working experiences in international projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C13</td>
<td>Commercial Assistant</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 3 years working experiences with expatriate professionals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fieldwork experiences, which mainly included interviews with professionals at different
levels and from different cultural backgrounds, lasted around 18 months. Several visits were made to each company, while documentary analysis was conducted between these interviews. The interviews were conducted in informal settings, under which the researcher was able to have open discussions with the participants about their practical experiences and could obtain examples of their experiences of cross-cultural management issues. Such golden opportunities for first-hand information were treasured.

The interviewees provided detailed views regarding their experiences in international project management. They shared examples of practices from different cultural settings. Moreover, the participants also presented their experiences of how they interacted with their colleagues of different cultural backgrounds; these interviews could provide data for analysis of how the multicultural Communities of Practices were formed by the professionals under the intercultural context of the HK construction industry.

In summary, the interviews and focus group interviews generated textual data, which was handled in different stages. In accordance with the research design described in the Chapter 3, all interviews were transcribed, with coding and categorizing conducted subsequently. Moreover, the primary sources of documents as listed in Table 4.3 have been filed and categorized. In brief, the experiences of the fieldwork enabled the researcher to explore the
topic of intercultural learning through the eyes of practitioners. The following sections
delineate the experiences of the empirical work of this study.

4.3 Coding, Categorizing and Analysis of Data

Evidence used in case studies came from a range of sources including documents, archival
records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin,
2013). Case study methodology has its own challenges due to the large volume of data
generated, resulting in potential problems associated with its analysis (Robson, 2002, p. 476).
It is therefore important to reduce the data in size, making it manageable and aiding the
recognition of patterns, themes and regularities which characterize inductive analysis in
interpretive research (Richards, 2006). In order to achieve this, the data needs to be
appropriately prepared/manipulated.

In this case, the original data consisted of web information, documents and interview notes. To
manage the information, transcriptions of each interview were compared, reviewed and
inputted to NVivo, a qualitative analysis software offering savings in time and resources (Elo
et al., 2008; Gibbs, 2002; Richards, 2006).
4.3.1 Coding and Categorizing

Within the coding and categorizing procedures, the first stage involved transcribing and summarizing all interview transcriptions, with each important sentence highlighted. The summaries of these codes were then grouped together for analysis to trace links and examine whether there were any interrelationships or/and correlation so as to work out an overall scheme to enable the emergence of themes for coding and categorizing. With these initial codes, the researcher returned to the remaining transcripts to complete the same process of detailed reading of the nodes. Representation was reviewed again to develop the emerging nodes. The original i-Popplet mind map expanded and there was an acute need to consolidate the categorization by identifying themes which align with the sub-themes.

At this stage, the second batch of interview transcription notes were available for analysis (December, 2012). Using the previous process, these transcripts were processed to establish open codes and labels, which were then compared to the prior data. By July 2013, data was available from the third case study. The data analysis generated some new sub-themes. This suggested the original high-level themes were becoming solid, their validity based on several iterations of analysis and data representation.

In this categorization, many of the sub-themes were consolidated and categorized, with all the
original parent themes remaining unchanged. In summary, the inductive process of data analysis generated the following parent level themes related to cross-cultural management issues in HK’s construction industry:

- details of interaction and communication for construction professionals from different cultural backgrounds.
- distinctive features of the Communities of Practices in different MNE models.
- skills and competence developed through the nurturing process in 3 different cases.

In this study, the coding and categorizing process were conducted by means of the process of elimination. After consolidating the phrases frequently used by the participants, these phrases were coded. They were then arranged into the most appropriate categories to form primary keywords, with these keywords then being further structured into a key theme for analysis (Creswell, 2014).

4.3.2 Data Analysis

Evidence from the case study was analysed according to the emerging themes outlined above. These themes were then developed in line with the theoretical frameworks stipulated in the Literature Review. The analysis of the case studies evidence continued with the above logic
and demonstrated how the 3 international corporations could learn to resolve such challenges.

The analysis was based on the above themes and guided by the Research Questions; and, it tended to interpret these themes against the theoretical frameworks reviewed in this Research.

4.3.3 Issues During Data Collection Process

Given the part-time nature of this Research study, the data collection process lasted for more than one year, which could cause difficulties in maintaining consistency across the 3 cases. Moreover, the interview and focus group interview participants were also invited to provide feedback and observations on their intercultural experiences in their companies that should be one of the 3 MNE models. On account of the recording mechanism, the participants were hesitant in discussing the questions; however, they became more committed and were more willing to disclose their views once the recorder was switched off. In simple terms, the data collection processes were improved after 20 minutes, when the participants became more involved in the interview dialogues.

4.4 Summary

This chapter describes the empirical work for the thesis and the reflections during data
collection, coding, categorizing and analysis process. Based upon the 3 case studies, different groups of construction professionals working under different MNE models have presented their diverse intercultural experiences. For instance, some construction professional teams have developed some joint missions, under which intercultural competence has developed and multicultural Communities of Practices are formed. As discussed earlier in the Literature Review, the models of MNEs may be essential for the development of multicultural Communities of Practices, given that each model has nurtured specific methods of engaging HK construction professionals in intercultural interaction. The more they interact, the better their intercultural learning become. These communities continue to develop at their own pace, thereby contributing to the intercultural learning of individual construction professionals in HK.

The study investigates how HK construction professionals can be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. In addition, the study adopts a micro-perspective to examine how different cross border management models impact on the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals in HK. In fulfilling the above aims of this study, the experiences gained from this field study revealed some very diverse attitudes among professionals, demonstrating the importance of developing intercultural competence within any project involving transnational participants. Detailed transcriptions and summaries written after the individual interviews have generated overall views and suggested
insights and directions for further analysis. The coding, categorizing and processing of the textual and interview data have narrowed down the most frequently found content, words and phrases in order to let the patterns, themes and constructs emerge for use in the structuring of further analysis. In summary, the empirical experiences have indicated the directions for further follow up of the development of intercultural learning among construction professionals through multicultural Communities of Practice. The detailed findings of each case study are elaborated on in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5- RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the key findings from analysing the data collected during the case studies A3E3 and the responses to the individual and focus group interviews. Through the inductive analysis process, the chapter examines the impact of the findings in relation to the conceptual frameworks deliberated in the Literature Review; these concepts include ‘Communities of Practices’, ‘intercultural learning’ and development of ‘intercultural competence’. The major aim of the study is to investigate how HK construction professionals, i.e., architects, engineers, surveyors, etc., could be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. In addition, the study adopts a micro-perspective to examine how different cross border management models could impact on the process of intercultural learning for HK construction professionals. The data collected in the study has included company documents of the 3 cases and transcribed notes from interviews. This chapter analyses the data collected to investigate participants’ views on their intercultural learning experiences. The data render advice on the analysis of how intercultural learning among HK construction professionals takes place. The chapter commences with an analysis of individual cases, with a particular focus on how the MNE models could nurture multicultural Communities of Practices.
that could lead to intercultural learning for HK MNEs. Furthermore, themes emerging from interviews with the participants have been analysed against the interrelated concepts of Communities of Practices, intercultural learning and intercultural competence, to delineate how to enhance performance in managing international construction projects for HK MNEs.

The chapter is presented as follows: Section 5.2 provides the detailed demographics of the participants of the case study subsequent to the analysis of data collected in the company documents. The findings in this section complement the detailed background of the 3 cases illustrated in Section 4.2. In Section 5.3, data collected from the 3 individual case studies is clarified and analysed, in particular that concerns the relationships among the models of MNE and intercultural competence, as well as the development of multicultural Communities of Practices. Section 5.4 explores the transcriptions of the interviews to draw the cross-cutting themes for the interpretations of how the construction professionals in the 3 cases have been engaged in intercultural learning through the emergence of multicultural Communities of Practices. Section 5.5 summarizes the findings of the 3 cases to draw implications from this study regarding professional practices for MNEs in HK.
5.2 Demographics of Participants from the 3 Cases

The study adopts a micro-perspective to examine how different cross border management models could impact on the process of intercultural learning for HK construction professionals. Assuming that the character and professional experiences of the participants are very likely to have a significant influence on their motivation to engage with intercultural interaction and to participate in intercultural learning, a demographic study of the participants from the 3 cases was used to illustrate the distribution of work post(s), age, years of working experiences in a cross-cultural context. The data was collected through company websites and annual reports, which would be utilized to analyse the relationships and motivation of the participants to interact for intercultural context.

There were a total of 31 participants from the 3 case studies. Table 5.1 below summarizes the demographics of the participants in terms of age, type of work and their experiences of working in an intercultural context. For Case A [Decentralized Federation], 9 participants were involved in individual and focus group interviews. These participants held different positions and at the time of the interviews were working in 2 different project teams. Most of them (5) were within age 40-49 and had more than 10 years’ experiences in a multicultural working context. A number of young officers (3) were also invited to participate in the interviews in order to obtain
different views and intercultural experiences.

Case B [Co-ordinated Federation] includes participants with a similar portfolio, the majority of participants being engineers (4) aged between 40 and 49. The participants had slightly less exposure to working in an intercultural context, which could potentially create some issues when working with construction professionals from different cultural backgrounds. The 9 participants worked in different project teams within the company. It is worthwhile to point out that across all 3 cases, Case B’s representation largely consisted of local construction professionals as the multinational company had a specialized team working on their outreaching international construction projects.

As a new MNE establishment in HK, Case C [Centralized Hub] represents a young team of professionals comprised of expatriate staff employed in Hong Kong, seconded staff from their British headquarters and local Chinese staff, as illustrated in Table 4.1 in Chapter 4. 46% of them are in their twenties, with the majority of participants (53.8%) working in engineering or technical capacities. Nearly 70% of them have 0-4 years’ experience working in a cross-cultural environment. All participants in this case came from the CC901 construction project, a joint venture with another overseas construction enterprise.
### Table 5.1 Demographics of Participants in Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Case A</th>
<th>Case B</th>
<th>Case C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>6 (46.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>2 (15.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>5 (55.5%)</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>4 (30.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 50</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>1 (7.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of work</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive / Management</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>3 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (15.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical / Engineering</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>7 (53.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive / Administrative</td>
<td>3 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (22.2%)</td>
<td>4 (30.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of experience in cross-cultural context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>5 (55.5%)</td>
<td>9 (69.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>1 (11.1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>3 (33.3%)</td>
<td>4 (30.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 20</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remark: The majority of each element of demographics of participants are presented in bold.

The above demographics of participants provide some basis for further analysis of the interviews and focus group findings for the 3 cases. This section aims to compliment Section 4.2.2 in Chapter 4, which provides the background of each case, and to delineate the organizational framework and brief management structure of these multinational corporations.

### 5.3 Development of Intercultural Competence and Multicultural Communities of Practices Inferred by Interviews

This section presents the findings of the individual and focus group interviews, in accordance with individual cases, and focusing on how each MNE model is influential towards developing...
the participants’ intercultural competence, and hence to the emergence of multicultural Communities of Practices. In this section, textual data collected from the interviews was reviewed to check against the framework of Communities of Practices, so as to investigate whether multicultural Communities of Practices have been developed in these multinational construction corporations with different MNE models. In addition, this section also informs how members can develop intercultural competence through their daily interaction with construction professionals from different cultural and professional backgrounds.

5.3.1 Case A [Decentralized Federation]

As introduced in Chapter 4, Case A’s HK office is a long-established multinational construction corporation in HK, operating under the MNE model of ‘Decentralized Federation’. The model enables independence and flexibility for the HK operation, within which the HK management team could develop specific business strategies to contextualize local and regional demand.

5.3.1.1 Development of Intercultural Competence

During the interviews, participants recalled different experiences in the course of developing their intercultural competence. Participant A1, a senior expatriate director who had worked in HK for more than 5 years, observed that his Chinese peers / colleagues were more restricted
and reserved in open meetings, “they tend to follow what their bosses say and have been more reserved in engaging intercultural interaction” (Case A_Interview#1). Participant A1, with substantial experiences of working in an MNE context, expressed the view that “the core element of working with Chinese is harmony, and we have to seek agreements through discussions, but not through debate or confrontation” (Case A_Interview#1). His Chinese subordinates “always follow my views and instructions and never challenge me in meetings” (Case A_Interview#1). Other expatriate managers (Participant A2 and Participant A5) shared similar observations and reported that their Chinese peers had different approaches and perspectives to follow instructions (St Clair et al., 2005).

According to the expatriate managers, engaging in continuing interactions with their local colleagues has been essential towards their understanding of the local working culture. They reported their interaction with their local colleagues was conducted through daily meetings, documentation exchanges, frequent emails and informal social gatherings. All 3 managers displayed strong views that ‘understanding, listening and communication’ were the core elements of learning to work with team members from different cultural backgrounds. These elements correspond to the model of intercultural competence as developed by Hamilton et al. (1998). Participants A2 and A5 (expatriate construction professionals) mentioned that they had established some trusting and interactive relationships with their local colleagues which had
significantly helped their management performance on international construction projects (Case A_Interview#2; Case A_Interview#5).

By way of contrast, one of the Chinese managers (Participant A3) reflected that, “according to my previous experiences with multinational project teams, it is better to follow instructions from the senior management staff and to deliver what I was told” (Case A_Interview#2). For Case A, he noted that he could exchange ideas with his senior colleagues from different cultural backgrounds; and he shared the identity of the company through frequent participations in corporate events including online seminars and exchanges with colleagues from headquarters.

2 other Chinese managers (Participant A4 and Participant A6) who have worked at Case A for more than 5 years, also have displayed an open approach in communicating with their expatriate colleagues, showing strong empathy with the company identity and expecting their jobs to be of “long term”. They shared the view that “understanding, adjusting and interacting” were the major elements in communicating and working with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds (Case A_Interview#4, Case A_Interview#6). Their response evidenced that these participants had been engaged in the development of intercultural competence. As specified by Deardorff (2006)’s pyramid model, intercultural competence develops through ‘understanding’, ‘listening’ and ‘reflecting’. 
5.3.1.2 Development of Multicultural Communities of Practices

Wenger (1998) deliberated that Communities of Practices shared a common structure of domain, community and practice, in which the members were engaged in mutual engagement, joint enterprise and share repertoire. As far as this case is concerned, participants reported some activities to demonstrate the existence of Communities of Practices in different project teams for Case A.

5.3.1.2.1 Mutual Engagement & Joint Enterprise

Participants revealed that there were different forms of group activities within the project teams for Case A. These activities including formal face to face meetings, frequent email exchanges, online conferences with headquarters, formal and informal sharing, gradually evolved into a knowledge sharing platform as Communities of Practices. First of all, Participant A1 (Executive Director of Civil Engineering Work) reported that in daily operational practice, he organized interactive meetings to brief his staff about the core values of the company and to share project management practices in headquarters’ country. He found these sharing sessions ‘very essential’ for relevant staff to keep abreast of updates in the development of practices and regulations at headquarters’ country (Case A_Interview#1). Participants A2, A3 and A4, who
are leaders of different project teams, also mentioned that they had emphasized the importance of daily communication and interaction, which had greatly helped their understanding of English; and more importantly, through the daily practice sharing, the teams shared company culture and professional practice (Case A_Interview#2; Case A_Interview#3; Case A_Interview#4). Participants A1, A2 and A5, who are expatriate staff in senior positions, reported that they were very aware of the strong influence of ‘mutual engagement’ towards the enhancement of team practices. Therefore, they established informal sharing practice and interactions with other local managers from different professional departments. They reported that, through different formal and informal interactions with the local staff, they had established a closer understanding of the team and local practices. From the focus group interviews, Participants A7, A8, and A9 (who were within the age group of 25-35) reported that, in daily practices, they fully followed the directions and instructions from their expatriate senior managers. Also, they observed that they had learnt a lot about international practices from their expatriate managers: “as we are inexperienced in working with cross-cultural project teams, the working experiences here are very important for us and we have the opportunities to discuss our views and share information with expatriate senior managers who normally possess a wider exposure in handling international projects” (Case A_Focus Group#1).

Participant A5, an expatriate site agent who has joined Case A for 3 years, reported that he had
been engaged in regular social activities with his Chinese team members in order to share their views in practice and, more importantly: “to learn and understand the working and living practices in HK” (Case A_Interview#5). According to his observations, the Chinese professionals do not proactively get involved in the social activities (such as happy hour drinks after work). He further stated that through such informal activities, he was able to smooth out the conflicts among his local and expatriate professional team members practically. He had therefore established regular informal team meetings for his team members to discuss and share ideas about construction industry and workplace practices; he regarded the arrangement as “a very effective way of facilitating intercultural learning and communication within his team” (Case A_Interview#5). Participant A9, one of the junior team members of Participant A4, reported positively about these informal meetings. As an inexperienced technical staff member, he benefited from such social exchanges, in terms of both professional and personal development.

In summary, through the above-mentioned activities, members of the communities have been mutually engaged in frequent interactions. This mutual engagement took the form of the different formal and informal activities described above. Gradually, it was found that members have demonstrated some cultivation of intercultural competence through the nurturing of Communities of Practices. In addition to that, participants displayed trusting relationships
among expatriate and local project teams. As indicated by Roberts (2006), the trusting relationships between individuals indicates a high level of mutual understanding. It follows that trust, familiarity and mutual understanding are essential factors for the successful knowledge exchange within Communities of Practices. (Park et al., 2014).

5.3.1.2.2 Shared Repertoire

During the interviews, participants were asked whether they kept some written records or developed manuals for their team practices. Most participants mentioned the codes of practice of professional and regulatory bodies, including the Hong Kong Institute of Engineers. Participant A1, the Executive Director of Civil Engineering Work mentioned that they kept some project guidelines specific to health and safety issues, in particular for international construction projects. Team members (Participants A1 and A9) reflected that such project guidelines provide “a sense of identity and practice sharing for the project team” (Case A_Focus Group#1), as they were developed together by the professional team who shared professional knowledge and experience. These guidelines, as part of the shared repertoire, have served as important tools in managing the knowledge within the project teams.
5.3.1.3 *Cultivation of Communities of Practices*

According to Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002), cultivating Communities of Practices include elements of: designing for evolution and opening a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, inviting different levels of participation, developing both public and private community spaces, focusing on value and combining familiarity and excitement. In the case of Case A, given its model of ‘Decentralized Federation’, there were a considerable number of expatriate managers at senior level. Managers (A1, A2 and A3) reported that there were ‘members’ joining and leaving their communities, occasionally on account of official relocation; however, it was also worth nothing that the local HK team also engaged with the professional teams at headquarters, thus making the membership of the COPs interculturally and geographically diverse.

Furthermore, it is also worthwhile to highlight that the HK professionals have developed a “clear vision of the company’s values through daily communication with their expatriate bosses” (Case A_Focus Group#1). Participants A7 and A6 observed that “sometimes communicating with expatriate colleagues could be confusing and frustrating, because we don’t understand their past practices and experiences. Moreover, language is also a problem” (Case A_Focus Group#1). When they did not understand or agree with their bosses, they felt that it was very
important to interact and communicate, as noted by Participant A8, “this is an important learning process and it is amazing how quickly everyone can be engaged in learning” (Case A_Focus Group#1).

5.3.1.4 Concluding Remarks for Case A (Decentralized Federation)

Up to this stage, the case study of Case A offers a review on how the construction professionals from different levels and cultural backgrounds could be engaged in intercultural interaction. Given the MNE model of ‘Decentralized Federation’, the HK Branch office has autonomy in establishing an individual professional team. The participants of the interviews came from diverse cultural backgrounds, their experiences demonstrated that both the expatriate and the local teams had been engaged in frequent and regular intercultural interaction, thus leading to the development of multicultural Communities of Practices. Subsequently, the construction professionals have benefited from specific forms of intercultural learning, as identified in the different project teams with reference to Case A. As a long-established corporation, Case A’s intercultural learning experiences appear to be comprehensive, gradual and integrated, as reflected by the participants.
5.3.2 Case B [Co-ordinated Federation]

Case B has a different business portfolio and corporate ethos from with reference to Case A. As a mainland Chinese construction group, the company’s core business development is centred on Mainland China, HK and Macau. To echo the illustration in Chapter 4, Case B, HK has a specialized professional team responsible for some overseas joint venture projects, mainly in Dubai and other Middle East countries. With a distinctive background and business portfolio based in HK, Case B has far fewer expatriate staff compared to the other 2 cases, hence the participants from Case B are all Chinese (either mainland Chinese or local Hong Kong Chinese). All the participants have experiences in delivering international construction projects, mainly through joint ventures.

As indicated in the 2013 annual report of Case B (note: reference withheld for ethical considerations), the company major turnover was distributed in the following geographical areas:

- Hong Kong (46.9%)
- Mainland China (46.2%)
- Macau (3.7%)
- Far East and International (3.2%)
For this case study, participants came from different projects and departments of Case B. Participants B1, B3 and B4, B6-B9 (Table 4.1) were all responsible for building work in HK. Participant B1 was the head of the building department for HK projects. Participants B2 and B5 came from the International Division, which was responsible for outreaching international construction projects in South East Asia and overseas. Over the past 10 years, Participant B5 had built up project management experiences through building projects in Dubai, Middle East and Far East. Details of the case study findings of Case B are reported below.

5.3.2.1 Development of Intercultural Competence

During the interviews, participants reported different experiences for the development of intercultural competence. Participant B1, a senior local manager of Case B with substantial project management experiences in HK, reported that a core part of their company portfolio was focused on the geographical regions of China and HK. Participant B1 expressed the opinion that the core element of working with mainland Chinese staff was ‘harmony’, agreements were made via discussions, not through debate or confrontation. He mentioned that his subordinates (Participants B2-4) were mostly responsible for local projects; hence they had adapted to the hierarchical working culture. In particular, he observed that “the Mainland Chinese staff emphasized a respect for authority and power hierarchy and therefore following
instructions was important” (Case B_interview#1) (St Clair et al., 2005). Participants B1-B4 all displayed strong views that “understanding, listening and communication” were the core elements of learning to work with team members of different cultural backgrounds. In fact, owing to the nature of co-ordinated federation of the MNE model adopted by Case B, where Hong Kong Branch was a subsidiary of the Mainland headquarters; there was tighter control from the parent company including control of knowledge systems and assets. Views from the above participants have demonstrated that staff in the HK Branch had been engaged in a specific model of communications. In contrast, Participant B5, the project manager responsible for overseas projects had displayed more experiences in handling intercultural communication. He had worked for outreaching overseas projects for more than 15 years and had previous experiences with multinational project teams. According to his experiences, Western project managers were more direct in presenting their views and they were more prepared to argue/insist based on their professional judgments. Moreover, as he worked on the overseas projects, he had teammates from all over the world. These construction professionals came from different backgrounds and companies and consequently it took longer for intercultural learning to be matured (Case B_Interview#5). Moreover, it was reported that in international projects which construction professionals had to station overseas, these professionals would face challenges in sharing company identity as they came from different professional and company backgrounds. In parallel, it is “important to know the exact outcome of the projects
and to know what you are doing here” (Case B_Interview#5). As the conclusion, the regularity and frequency of intercultural interaction has been essential in the nurturing of intercultural competence and the cultivation of multicultural Communities of Practices for HK construction industry.

Participants B6-B9 (technical officers) worked in Case B as supporting roles, displayed a more open approach in communicating with people with different cultural backgrounds including Mainland colleagues. They showed strong empathy towards the company identity and expected their jobs to be “long term” ones. They showed the view that “understanding, adjusting and interacting” were the major elements for communicating and working with colleagues of different cultural backgrounds. Their responses also validate the core component of intercultural competence.

5.3.2.2 Development of Multicultural Communities of Practices

The case study of Case B revealed that there were diverse group activities within the project teams. These activities had contributed to the evolution of multicultural Communities of Practices. Firstly, Participant B2 reported that in daily operational practice, he organized regular meetings involving local and Mainland staff with regard to directions and updates on
the construction projects in different countries.

Participants B2-4 also mentioned the importance of daily communication and interaction in nurturing team understanding and identity: “We work together closely, like a family, and have set up a social chat group through mobile phones to ensure updated communication. Social and informal interactions are very important in nurturing understanding” (Case B_interview#2). From the focus group interviews, Participants B6-9 (within age group of 25-35) reported that they tried to follow the directions and instructions of their seniors and felt that they learnt a lot in regard to international practices from the Mainland and local managers. The officers reflected that they were inexperienced in working with cross-cultural project teams, and therefore it was vital for them to air their views and share information with their supervisors (Case B_Focus Group#1).

5.3.2.2.1 Mutual Engagement and Joint Enterprise

Through the interviews, it was evident that members of the project teams (Participants B1-B9) reported on their intercultural exchange opportunities through daily exchange. Participant B2, an expatriate construction professional working in overseas division, came from a very different cultural background and claimed that he was “an adapted local Chinese” as his
Mainland senior taught him everything about following instructions over the past 15 years (Case B_Interview#2).

Participant B5 was a unique representative from Case B, mainly due to his distinctive overseas working experiences in international projects. In such cases, his establishment of CoP was not just among B5 and his teammates; it was in fact among B5 and his international construction professional colleagues from different countries. It is worthwhile to note that he had displayed a strong awareness of the organizational mission and displayed strong empathy for the expatriate professional colleagues encountered in different countries: “although we may not meet again in the future, we had a strong working relationship over the course of the project and we understood the differences in practices. This has been a very critical learning experiences for my professional career” (Case B_Interview#2).

During his overseas assignments, B5 also observed substantial differences in practices with his overseas colleagues; in such cases, conflicts (in particular with regard to professional standards and regulatory framework) were reported. He did report that over the course of some informal sharing and social activities, such conflicting views gradually diminished. This was aided by the sharing of different forms, guidelines and handbooks referring to the regulatory frameworks.
5.3.2.2 Shared Repertoire

During the interviews, participants were asked whether they kept written records of their team practices which might be specific to their project team. Most participants mentioned the codes and practices from their professional bodies. Participant B1 recalled that they kept some project guidelines and company codes of practice for specific projects. Such guidelines were developed after commencement of the project and were used specifically in the context of each project. According to Participant B8 (Engineering Assistant), these company guidelines and manuals were essential for them to learn their roles and understand how a project should be managed.

5.3.2.3 Cultivation of Communities of Practices

Despite the diversity of the project portfolios for Case B, most participants were Chinese-culture oriented, i.e., Buddhists, Confucians, etc. (Lock 1999, 2009, 2010). Moreover, the members of communities of Practices in this model had been separated for the purpose of local international projects and outreaching international projects, demonstrating great differences on how Communities of Practices could be nurtured.
5.3.2.4 Concluding Remarks for Case B

In summary, the case study reveals that Case B had been engaged in 2 distinctive portfolios of international projects: locally delivered HK projects and outreaching projects. There is clearly some separation between the 2 teams, in which the intercultural learning experiences for the outreaching team members have yet to be shared with the local team members.

5.3.3 Case C [Centralized Hub]

Case C represents a distinctive case of a newly established multinational construction enterprise in HK. As elaborated in Chapter 4, Case C set up HK Branch in 2011; in the first 2 years of operations, the HK Branch relied on new built projects for HK’s infrastructure development. These projects were mainly in the form of joint ventures with other multinational construction enterprises. In such a context, the HK Branch had been established with a new team, comprised of construction professionals and managers from very diverse cultural and management backgrounds (Table 4.1). Apart from Participant C1, the General Manager of the HK Branch, all participants were part of the team members for the CC901 construction project (a major/new infrastructural project delivered as a joint venture with 2 other HK multinational
construction enterprises). The company practice manual had revealed the following roles of the participants in the CC901 project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.2 Roles of Interview Participants in CC901 Project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management and Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tunnel Engineering (site)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station Box Engineering (site)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial / Procurement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial – Site Matters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the above distribution of roles and responsibilities, the following findings delineate the details of intercultural competence development and the cultivation of multicultural Communities of Practices within the context of Case C.

5.3.3.1 Development of Intercultural Competence

When asked about the decision-making process and intercultural interaction, the expatriate managers reported that they found the Chinese managers put much emphasis on authority and power hierarchy. The 2 Chinese managers (Participant C3 and Participant C6) revealed that
they tended to follow instructions from the expatriate bosses in order to avoid any conflict.

Expatriate Managers (Participants C4 and C5) felt that their Chinese teammates “were unhappy with face to face argument or confrontation” (Case C_Interview#4; Case C_Interview#5). Participant C4 mentioned that during the execution of international project management, he insisted on using the British Codes to “safeguard the company’s standards and codes of practice”, which had led to conflicts with his Chinese colleagues. Participant C4 observed that the Chinese cultural context was very “difficult” to be adapted (Case C_Interview#4).

Participant C5 shared similar experiences in his communications with local Chinese colleagues; it reflected that conflicts occurred when he adopted a direct approach in communicating his decisions. He commented that, for Chinese culture, “hierarchy was very important” and remarked that his Chinese colleagues had been very conscious of their titles and authorities. After a couple of years working on CC901 project, and as a result of more intercultural interaction with colleagues, he understood more and learnt to listen. He reported that he was more inclined to socialize with his expatriate colleagues.

Both Participants C4 and C5 had expressed their frustration during working in an intercultural context and stated that they had no intention of staying in HK after the completion of project; however, some other expatriate managers (Participant C2 and Participant C7) were more
adaptable to the working environment of HK. Both participants were senior supervisors of a local Chinese team. They clarified that they had close interactions with their Chinese colleagues and had established trust and cooperation with them. Moreover, they shared practices in construction standards and technical processes in HK and the UK, which helped them to fine tune HK technical practices and processes. Through these communications, the expatriate managers expressed the view that they had much stronger understanding of how the locals work and had been aware of the importance of intercultural interaction in nurturing a better understanding. Such practices correspond with the development of ‘intercultural competence’ as illustrated in the Literature Review. Participants C2 and C7 also participated in social activities together with their Chinese colleagues. Both construction professionals planned to continue working in HK after the completion of project (Case C_Interview#2; Case C_Interview#7).

5.3.3.2 Development of Multicultural Communities of Practices

5.3.3.2.1 Mutual Engagement and Joint Enterprise

All expatriate and Chinese managers observed that through the experiences of the CC901 project, they learnt how to work with people from different cultural backgrounds. Through
close daily interaction, information sharing and practices sharing activities, they could adjust some of their understanding and views in order to achieve the project outcomes and team success. In contrast, the senior management of the HK Branch has plans to develop social activities in order to nurture team identity.

The case study reveals that there was a clear development of Communities of Practices in the CC991 project. With some diverse cultural and management experiences, members of these communities had mutual engagement, working together on a particular project or in a specific department; despite arguments on how to implement codes and regulations, they all shared accountability for the delivery of the project (joint enterprise). Moreover, the sharing of technical information (shared repertoire) helped members to achieve learning through practices.

According to Wenger (1998, p.83), “shared practice does not itself imply harmony or collaboration”. In the case of Case C, there were conflicts between members of communities; on reflection, participants reported positive learning experiences from their practices: “The experience was important to us individually but also to the sustainability of the company” (Participant C1, General Manager of HK Branch, Case C_Interview#1). In addition, Case C was a new MNE in HK, with all staff having worked for the company for less than 2 years; it was not long enough for them to be able to engage in integrated intercultural learning. Through
the close intercultural interaction, there was a clear presence of trust between the participants.

As indicated in the Literature Review, building a trusting relationship is crucial to achieve high level of mutual understanding which is essential for successful knowledge exchange (Roberts 2006).

5.3.3.2.2 Shared Repertoire

The participants reflected that since Case C was newly established in HK, there was a very limited amount of shared information specific to the HK operation. Participant C1 reported that a staff handbook was available which introduced the vision of the multicultural construction enterprise. Furthermore, the manuals and practice guidelines for projects managers at the UK headquarters were made available online for HK staff’s reference. The projects in HK were mostly run as joint ventures with other MNEs. To this end, there were separate project guidelines which had been developed jointly by the collaborating companies.

5.3.3.3 Concluding Remarks for Case C

Given its newly-established status, case study of Case C demonstrated a steep learning curve for the expatriate and local construction professionals; yet multicultural Communities of
Practices had emerged as a result of the close interaction and practices sharing, which included face to face meetings, formal and informal gatherings and online conferences with headquarters. Despite some conflicts and misunderstandings during the initial stages, the HK construction professionals had demonstrated positive views on engaging in intercultural interaction to achieve better performance in delivering international projects.

5.4 Thematic Analysis from Interviews and Focus Groups

This section provides thematic analysis of the interviews to present the 3 cases with cross-cutting themes. Through the inductive analysis process as introduced in Chapter 3, the transcriptions of the interviews of 3 cases were sorted by means of phrases used frequently in the participants’ responses to the interview questions. The phrases were then categorized under primary keywords, with the keywords then being classified as themes for interpretation. The 3 major themes are: (1) skills and competence developed through the nurturing process, (2) distinctive features of the Communities of practices in different MNE models and (3) process of intercultural learning (Table 5.3). These cross-cutting themes are discussed in detail in the following sections.
5.4.1 Cross-cutting Themes

The following themes are a general summary of the responses from the 3 case studies’ interviews. There is comparative analysis of the following themes emerged from the interviews.

Table 5.3 List of Sub-themes and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 1.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 1:</strong> Skills / competence developed through the nurturing process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing professional knowledge for different regulatory framework for construction professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 1.2</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interacting and practice sharing to enhance knowledge of professional practice in different countries</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 1.3</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing intercultural competence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 2.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 2:</strong> Characteristics of Communities of Practices in the 3 MNE models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles of HK staff and expatriate staff in different MNE models (Joint enterprise)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 2.2</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff’s identity with the MNE (Joint enterprise)</td>
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<td><strong>Sub-theme 2.3</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercultural interaction of communities in delivering international construction projects (Mutual engagement)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme 3.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theme 3:</strong> Processes of intercultural learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies of staff interaction and</td>
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</table>
5.4.2 Theme 1: Skills / Competence Developed Through Nurturing Process

This theme emerges from the following 3 sub-themes, including: (1) developing professional knowledge of the different regulatory framework for construction professionals, (2) interacting and practices sharing to enhance knowledge of professional practice in different countries and (3) development of intercultural competence. This section aims to provide detailed findings concerning the kind of skills and competence of the HK construction professionals developed in the 3 different cases.

Firstly, participants from all cases revealed that they had developed a diverse range of professional knowledge in international construction project management. In the case of Case A (Decentralized Federation), groups of both expatriate and local construction professionals (Participants A1, A2, A3, A6 and A7) reported that regular and frequent interactions on various international construction projects were significant in their understanding of how international
projects should be handled through different regulatory frameworks. As revealed by Participant A2, a senior expatriate project manager seconded from headquarters in France:

“in Europe we prioritize the health and safety codes in all construction projects, and these are very important to the success of international project delivery. As a renowned MNE in the construction sector, we have to enforce safety practice in all our international projects in HK. These practices are core for our staff to learn” (Case A_Interview#1).

In the case of Case B (Co-ordinated Federation), the outreaching construction team responsible for delivering overseas international construction projects had demonstrated a rapid development of their professional competence, particularly in respect of how they should handle compliance matters for managing overseas projects. Moreover, Participant B5, an international project manager who had 15 years’ experience working overseas commented that:

“when I worked on overseas international construction projects, I had to handle the expectations of overseas clients. The most difficult part was to understand professional practices in other countries and handling the different practices of the multicultural teams. To me it was steep learning, but I found my professional knowledge had been much enhanced, in particular on how to handle complicated large-scale international projects” (Case B_Interview#5).

Similar to Case A, the case of Case C (Centralized Hub) has offered opportunities for expatriate and local construction professionals to learn together through frequent interactions
on the daily management of international projects. As reported by Participant C2, the senior commercial manager:

“I have relocated to HK for one year and the learning curve has been very fast and steep, but I found my team, including the local Chinese professionals, had greatly enhanced our understanding and professional practices in handling international joint venture projects. We have a better understanding of professional practices in HK and the UK, and I think this kind of practices sharing could greatly enhance our professional competence and give us more advantages in the global construction market” (Case C_Interview#3).

In summary, in the 3 cases adopting different MNE models, participants have reported significant enhancement of their professional competence, mainly related to the international standards, practices and regulatory systems required in managing international construction projects.

By way of contrast, one of the core foci of this study is to investigate how the 3 models of MNE have developed the intercultural competence of construction professionals. According to the definitions adopted in the Literature Review, intercultural competence involves attitude (respect, attitude, openness and curiosity), knowledge (cultural self-awareness, deep understanding and knowledge of culture and culture-specific information) as well as skills (being able to listen, observe, interpret, listen and evaluate) (Deardoff 2009). In the interviews,
the participants were asked about their views on how they tried to work with colleagues of different cultural backgrounds. The participants reflected on the following aspects. Firstly, across all 3 cases, they have demonstrated a positive attitude to understanding and learning from others. The expatriate professionals (Participants A1, A2, A5, B2, C1 and C2) all expressed that regular interactions and practices sharing through formal and informal channels were particularly essential for them in understanding their local colleagues and the local organizations. Furthermore, the expatriate managers in the 3 cases have also demonstrated their understanding and skills in respecting and observing people of other cultures, Participants A2, B5, C7 and C4 had reported on their previous experiences for unintentionally offending the local colleagues. It is of utmost important to respect working practices in other cultural settings and be able to learn, adapt and contribute to new practices.

In addition, participants have demonstrated development in their knowledge of culture, which could enable understanding and interaction among working team members of cultural backgrounds. For all 3 cases, both the expatriate and local Chinese groups have reflected that such knowledge is essential in improving the performance of construction professionals and in a more efficient execution of international construction projects. Local junior staff A7 and C9 reported that they had no experience for working with expatriate staff and therefore experienced a very difficult learning curve in adapting to the requirements of their expatriate
supervisors: “It is therefore very important that I understand what the requirements are within different regulatory contexts” (Case C_Focus Group#1). In contrast, it is worthwhile to note that some participants have difficulties with their intercultural experiences. Participant C4, a British tunnel planning engineer, took a negative view of his intercultural experiences. He reported his difficulties in adapting to the new culture owing to his lack of previous knowledge and experiences of working with Chinese colleagues. “I am aware of offending others, but I do not understand what the requirements are within this culture and I feel Chinese are reserved in telling me what they are thinking …. I will choose to leave HK after the completion of this project” (Case C_Interview#4). The above reflections provided evidence of the acute necessity to develop training and professional development initiatives to nurture intercultural competence for HK construction professionals. The development of intercultural interaction within Communities of Practices, therefore, is an essential tool if HK construction MNEs are to improve their business performance and achieve sustainability.

Lastly, across the 3 cases, participants reported on their awareness of the importance of intercultural competence, in particular when conflict arose. Participants from the 3 cases (A2, A5, A6, B2, B5, B8, C2, C3, C5, C7 and C8) have reported different forms of conflict, most of which are within areas of compliance to regulatory framework and practices. The Case of Case C (Centralized Hub) is particularly worthwhile to mention: as a newly established HK Branch
of an MNE, participants have reported a significant number of conflicting issues posing challenges to the operation of the international projects. These issues were mainly related to the misunderstanding of each other’s culture and professional practices.

In summary, participants displayed a strong empathy and understanding towards the elements of intercultural competence and were confident that these elements (the skills of understanding, listening and communicating) were regarded as essential in enhancing understanding within the multicultural teams and in boosting the performance of HK construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds.

5.4.3 Theme 2: Characteristics of Communities of Practices in 3 MNE Models

This theme emerged from the sub-theme of ‘roles of HK staff and expatriate staff in different MNE models (Joint Enterprise)’, ‘staff’s identity with the MNE (Joint Enterprise)’ and ‘intercultural interaction of communities in delivering international construction projects (mutual engagement)’.

One of the major contributions of this study is to adopt the model of Communities of Practices in interpreting how intercultural learning for HK construction professionals with diverse
cultural backgrounds could be nurtured. Across the 3 cases, there was evidence of the development of multicultural Communities of Practices involving construction professionals with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. This study focused on the core elements of the CoP, as delineated in the early work of Wenger (1998, 2002). These elements include mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire which together created forms of shared value, vision and, more essentially, a platform for social learning to facilitate intercultural learning. The case studies revealed that the 3 different models had offered distinctive intercultural experiences to HK construction professionals. To this end, distinctive multicultural Communities of Practices with different features emerged.

As part of the practice, joint enterprise is a common goal for members of communities, but it also creates mutual accountability for members as an integral part of the practices (Wenger 1998). For the 3 cases, there were diverse practices and interaction among the construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds which contributed to some diverse methods for creating mutual accountability. In the case of Case A (Decentralized Federation), expatriate and local HK staff worked together in the same office and managed a number of international projects together. These construction professionals demonstrated a clear vision and identity with the company and the projects with which they were involved: “We are all part of Case A here in HK and we should work to improve team performance and enhance the company’s
competitiveness to achieve long term benefits” (Participant A2, Case A_Interview#2). It is found that the continuity of practice sharing and intercultural interaction in the work place is significant in the development of the joint enterprise.

For the case of Case B (Co-ordinated Federation), given the specific organizational structure involved in handling international construction projects, the development of joint enterprises in an intercultural context is more fragmented. Local staff responsible for local projects (Participant B1, B3) could not articulate the company’s vision in overseas development as they “have no experience in handling the outreaching international projects for Case B” (Participant B1, Case B_Interview#3). Participant B5, who has worked in different countries in managing international projects, has shared his views on how international project teams should communicate in order to improve performance in handling international projects: “The differences in practices and languages are the major problems, but at least we could share the common goal of finishing these projects on time, which enable us to solve problems and learn the required know-how” (Participant B5, Case C_Interview#5).

The case of Case C (Centralized Hub) has also been unique in the development of joint enterprise. As a newly established branch office of MNE, Case C has recruited a new team of construction professionals, including seconded staff from the UK headquarters, expatriate
construction professionals from overseas and local HK construction professionals. The results of the case study have revealed that the development of joint enterprise is rapid and challenging. As reported by Participant C1 (General Manager of HK Office), in order to achieve sustainability of the company, Case C “has an urgent need to establish a coherent team of multinational staff who are able to comprehend the company’s vision, and to understand working practices in international construction projects within an intercultural context” (Case C_Interview#1)

To summarize: different forms of meetings and regular formal and informal activities took place between local and expatriate staff across all 3 cases. The 3 case studies demonstrated that the continuity of intercultural communication and practice sharing (mutual engagement) are paramount in the development of a shared vision between local and expatriate staff.

In addition, the frequency and continuity of intercultural interaction (mutual engagement) through formal and informal meetings are hugely influential in the formation of multicultural Communities of Practices. It seems obvious that, in the more mature MNE (Case A), the multicultural Communities of Practices are better established and interactive, the participants having demonstrated understanding and empathy towards the practices and professional ethics of other countries. They have also demonstrated personal care and support towards colleagues
of different cultural groups. Whereas, for the newly-established MNE (Case C), more learning appears to be required in order for the intercultural communities to evolve and become coherent and sustainable.

Wenger (1998) introduced that members of Communities of Practices shared some forms of information, artefacts and manuals in order to share knowledge and practice. In the 3 case studies, the Communities of Practices have developed quality assurance manuals, guidelines, handbooks and annual reports to aid existing and new staff in handling international construction projects, and for the purpose of continued enhancement. Table 5.4 below provides a summary of shared repertoire among the multicultural Communities of Practices for the 3 cases:

Table 5.4 Summary of Shared Repertoire in 3 Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case A (Decentralized Federation)</th>
<th>Case B (Co-ordinated Federation)</th>
<th>Case C (Centralized Hub)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>code of practice from professional bodies</td>
<td>code of practice from professional bodies</td>
<td>code of practice from professional bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health and safety guidelines</td>
<td>code and regulations for civil engineering work</td>
<td>code and practice from UK headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company quality assurance manuals</td>
<td>company quality assurance manuals</td>
<td>staff handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>project guidelines</td>
<td>company handbook</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The listed information represents the essential records and repertoire which the members of
CoPs share within their practice. More essentially, the information and manuals have provided the basis for the review of practices and for better enhancing the future performance of international construction projects.

In conclusion, responses from participants from the 3 case studies indicated a diverse range of regularities of interaction among construction professionals in 3 different MNE models studied. It seems evident that multicultural Communities of Practices could emerge from well-paced and frequent intercultural interaction, which also help to develop intercultural competence of the participants. These multicultural Communities of Practices have provided some platforms for intercultural learning to take place in which HK construction professionals have been engaged in specific interaction and this nurturing of intercultural learning has been proven to improve performance in implementing international construction projects.

5.4.4 Theme 3: Processes of Intercultural Learning

One of the major aims of this study is to adopt a micro-perspective in examining how different cross border management models impact on the process of intercultural learning for HK construction professionals. This section aims to provide details of the findings to demonstrate how intercultural learning has taken place in the 3 different cases.
The 3 case studies have demonstrated that through different rhythms and the regularity of intercultural interactions, HK construction professionals have developed intercultural competence which could enable their practices sharing and intercultural learning. In the 3 different models of MNE, these multicultural Communities of Practices have been engaged in diverse forms of social learning and knowledge exchange, including team building, group activities and informal social events (Park et al., 2014). These activities contribute to the intercultural learning for HK construction professionals. In the 3 cases, participants have reported conflicts and arguments (Participant A3, A6, B5, C2 and C3); in fact, the process of resolving such conflicts has also been part of the intercultural learning process, contributing to the continued enhancement of management practice for international construction projects.

Given the differences in operational details as dictated by 3 different MNE models, the 3 cases have sketched out different processes of intercultural learning for the participants. First of all, across the 3 cases, the HK construction professionals (Participants A1, A5, A6, B2, B5, B7, C1, C4, C7 and C8) reported their observations on the differences in the decision-making process and leadership among professionals of different cultural backgrounds. The Chinese managers were considered to be more reserved and hierarchical in their management approach, their decision making usually employed a more top down approach; hence some participants
(B7, C11, C12 and C13) mentioned the importance of “following instructions”. Communication is therefore quite linear and, as officer A9 commented: “it is important to smile and follow up what you have been told”. The expatriate leaders, on the other hand, seemed more open in their decision-making process, preferring to make decisions using a “bottom up approach” (Participant A1, Executive Director, Case A_Interview#1). In the perceptions of the participating expatriate construction professionals, it is vital that the staff should contribute their ideas in the decision-making process and be part of the learning community (A1, B2, C1). To this end, the intercultural interaction processes are important in nurturing the multicultural Communities of Practices that promote social learning through sharing practices and interaction (Wenger, 2000).

For Case A (Decentralized Federation), construction professionals of different backgrounds were engaged in long term and stable working relationships. Participants had a clear vision of the company goal and how international projects should be managed. There was a coherent team structure, including a mixture of local and expatriate staff. While reflecting upon the above cultural differences, Participant A1 (Executive Director of Civil Engineering Work) reported that in order to minimize the conflicts and misunderstandings among members of multicultural project teams, it was crucial for the construction professional to communicate and exchange their past practices in different cultural contexts. While there might be differences in
languages, professional practices and regulations in different countries, Manager A1 mentioned that “the construction industry is globalized, and international standards should be applicable to most international projects”, hence “project team members with different experiences and backgrounds should be valued and should take more time to communicate and share their previous experiences, which is important towards the success of any international construction project” (Case A_Interview#1). Given the frequent and regular intercultural interactions in formal and informal contexts, the intercultural learning processes for participants seem to be more integrated and coherent: “We gradually learned from our expatriate seniors about how standards could be applied in international construction projects, which had been a very different experience. In my previous job, I only had to follow instructions from my boss without any questioning” (Participant A8, Case A_Focus Group#1).

The case of Case B (Co-ordinated Federation) is different and unique. In order to implement the company’s strategic development for overseas markets, including the Middle East and South East Asia, Case B’s HK Branch set up a separate operations unit to operate the outreaching construction projects. This structure benefits the company by developing a specialized team of construction professionals who are competent and experienced in handling overseas international construction projects. Yet the model has limitations that prevented such cross-cultural experiences being shared amongst other construction professionals in the HK
Branch. In the case study, Participant B5 (International Project Manager) reported an acute need for training and staff development for the HK’s construction professionals if they were to engage in outreaching projects:

“I went to Dubai 3 years ago and no one told me about the regulations and compliance matters there. I arrived at the country and found that I had to work together with other professionals from different countries with different experiences. The experiences were very challenging, in particular on how to make things work” (Case B_Interview#5).

Through some steep learning experiences, Participants B5 and B2 shared a similar view in acknowledging the importance of intercultural interaction in contributing to the successful completion of international projects.

As a newly established HK Branch of a multinational construction corporate, Case C (Centralized Hub) offered a rapid and dynamic intercultural learning experience to participants. During the case study, all participants reflected that they had been engaged in intercultural interactions in different international construction projects, in which intercultural learning had taken place. As mentioned in the above sections, the HK Branch included a team of construction professionals from UK headquarters, expatriate professionals who were recruited in HK, as well as HK local professionals. Their mixture of backgrounds had greatly facilitated
intercultural interaction between these professionals. Some conflicts were also reported: “The
Chinese do not like to be challenged. When we had arguments on the implementation of health
and safety codes, we ended up having conflicts which impacted the projects; however, I did
learn a lot from being here and appreciated the experience” (Participant C4, Tunnel Planning
Engineer, Case C_Interview 4).

Yet some participants were positive towards such dynamics and challenges and viewed the
experiences as invaluable:

> “Each MNE has different practice. It is very important for team
members to communicate their practices and to share previous
knowledge, as more regular interaction would create a
collaborative and harmonized environment which will better
enhance the quality and efficiency of our work” (Participant C7,
Project Quantity Surveyor, Case C_Interview#8).

In addition, the senior management of Case C’s HK Branch initiated some informal social
exchanges to promote better understanding of the professional teams.

> “Over the past year, we held some informal social gatherings to
exchange views on our lives and experiences. It was very
interesting to know people from different countries and we learnt
a lot including English proficiency. It would be invaluable for our
future professional and personal development” (Participant C6,
Construction Manager, Case C_Interview#6).
In conclusion, the 3 MNE models offered distinctive and unique intercultural learning experiences to HK construction professionals. It is evident that the more frequent the intercultural interaction and engagement, the better the intercultural learning, which in turn enhances the business performance of multinational construction enterprises. In the case of Case A (Decentralized Federation), construction professionals from headquarters and HK Branch office were engaged in regular contact through structured and informal social activities, including daily work meetings, emails and collaboration on projects, as well as taking part in social gatherings. Within such models of intercultural interaction, Communities of Practices emerged, the participants reflected strong evidence of their development of intercultural competence and intercultural learning. In the case of Case B (Co-ordinated Federation), the intercultural interaction activities had been focused on the outreaching professional team, who were separated from the local HK team. Prior to this, the local and outreaching staff did not have regular practices in sharing and interaction; hence the development of multicultural Communities of Practices within Case B was less evident. Finally, in the case of Case C (Centralized Hub), participants reported on challenging and steep learning experiences. Yet they have been engaged in daily intercultural interaction through face-to-face meetings, formal and informal gatherings and practice sharing, all of which have nurtured distinctive forms of multicultural Communities of Practices, through which participants have reported on their experiences of intercultural learning.
5.5 Summary

The essential finding of this study rests with the innovative concept of multicultural Communities of Practices, through which the intercultural learning of construction professionals takes place. Evidence of the study demonstrates that, in the context of implementing international construction projects, it is essential to cultivate stakeholders’ intercultural competence through the dimensions of mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprises, as specified by Wenger (1998, 2002). Results from the case studies provide evidence that, through intercultural interaction, construction professionals have gradually established intercultural competence, leading to the emergence of multicultural Communities of Practices. The new idea of multicultural Communities of Practices contributes to the improved performance in managing international construction projects, which enhances the competitiveness of the workforce of MNEs in the long term.

The findings of this chapter have generated the following main themes: (1) skills and competence developed through the nurturing process in the 3 cases, (2) distinctive features of the Communities of Practices in different MNE models and (3) processes of intercultural learning. The following chapter discusses and delineates the above themes in relation to the inter-related concepts of intercultural competence, intercultural learning and Communities of Practice.
Practices for the objective of understanding how the development of intercultural learning for construction professionals could be significantly improved.
CHAPTER 6- CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The study has investigated how construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning through the lens of Communities of Practices. In addition, it has adopted a micro-perspective with the aim of understanding how different cross border management models for MNEs have impacted on the process of intercultural learning for HK construction professionals.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the forces of globalization have led to significant changes to the world’s construction industry. In the context of globalization, there are increasing cross-border international construction projects. At the stage, different MNE models have been utilized by HK multinational construction corporations to cater the increasing industry demand all over the world. In HK, the outlook for the construction industry is becoming increasingly international; with the rapid development of mega infra-structural projects, and the emerging demand for HK’s professional services from neighbouring Belt and Road countries. Given the distinctive nature of the construction industry, an industry with diverse teams of multidisciplinary experts, there are increasing calls from researchers to advocate the development of intercultural learning among construction professionals, so as to bring added-
value to the management of the international construction projects (Ofori 2012). In this context, further research is needed in order to further understand how construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural interaction and learning, and how multicultural Communities of Practices could bring distinctive values in benefiting the operation of HK multinational construction corporations.

Based on the findings of the last chapter, this chapter aims to integrate/correlate the findings and to scrutinize these findings with the following dimensions: (1) the development of multicultural Communities of Practices, (2) development of specific skills and knowledge and (3) the process of developing intercultural learning for HK construction professionals. These 3 dimensions have been generated from the data and are closely related to the concepts of Communities of Practices, intercultural learning/competence introduced in Chapter 2. Moreover, the models of MNEs are essential to this study and have been discussed in detail along with the above 3 dimensions. In simple terms, the objective of this chapter is to analyse the process of intercultural learning for construction professionals through the lens of Communities of Practices and develop the new concept of ‘multicultural Communities of Practices’.

The chapter includes the following sub-sections: Section 6.2 presents the purpose of The study
to provide a framework for discussions of the results. Section 6.3 reappraises the research questions and design. Section 6.4 elaborates the overall findings and investigates how they are related to the findings of previous literature. Section 6.5 deliberates the implications and recommendations. Section 6.6 recommends further professional practices. Section 6.7 describes the significance of this study, explains the respective limitations and proposes recommendations for future follow up. The conclusion and the personal reflections would be reported in Section 6.8.

6.2 Purpose of the Study

This project began with the researcher’s professional experiences in the HK construction industry, especially working with multicultural teams. In previous research at Master’s level, the researcher had explored the cultural differences between Chinese and Western construction managers and the possible conflicts impacted on the effectiveness of the international construction projects. This study was designed on these foundations, with the aim of exploring the intercultural learning process in HK multinational construction enterprises and with the specific intention of exploring the methods of learning of Communities of Practices. The study was underpinned by 3 interrelated concepts: Communities of Practices, intercultural learning and intercultural competence. The discussion components of this study commenced by
discussing the process of globalization and the impact on construction industries worldwide. Driven by the forces of globalization, the infrastructures of countries have experienced a rapid increase over the past 2 decades (HKTDC 2016). In this respect, there is an increasing demand for construction professionals with intercultural competence to fulfil the requirements of the experts of the global construction industries. With the aim of understanding how construction professionals can be engaged in intercultural learning through different models of MNEs, the Research further has explored the concept of Communities of Practices, intercultural learning and intercultural competence which could define attributes needed for competence in intercultural communication and interaction. With this underlying concept, the study also has explored the details of how construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds could be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices.

The study adopted a case study approach, with interviews and documentary analysis to investigate multicultural construction teams in 3 selected cases. This process facilitated a deeper understanding of how the members of these intercultural communities could interact and engage in intercultural learning. Moreover, the case studies also explored participants’ interpretations of their own learning experiences through their engagement with colleagues of different cultural backgrounds.
Through the process of integrating the themes emerged from the data and relating them to the conceptual frameworks of intercultural learning, intercultural competence and Communities of Practices, this study has generated some new perspectives to advance the knowledge of intercultural learning within the HK construction sector. Moreover, this study identifies future research directions in intercultural learning. The case studies have shown that the models of MNEs have some fundamental significances with regard to how construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds can interact. In each of the diverse models of ‘Decentralized Federation’, ‘Co-ordinated Federation’ and ‘Centralized Hub’, the multicultural teams involved have different learning experiences. It was found that the case study of Case A (Decentralized Federation) offered a more integrated and balanced approach in cultivating the multicultural Communities of Practices. The formation of Communities of Practices, as Wenger delineated (1998, 2002), naturally emerged as a result of members’ continuing participation in sharing practices and knowledge. Within the 3 cases there was clear evidence of the development of multicultural Communities of Practices; members of different cultural backgrounds could interact, share knowledge and practice.

From the responses of the interviews, this study also identified specific intercultural skills and competencies developed through different models of MNEs.
6.3 Research Questions and Design

The study investigated how construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning through the framework of Communities of Practices. In addition, the study adopted a micro-perspective in examining how different cross border management models have impacted on the process of intercultural learning for HK construction professionals.

With a mission to advocate intercultural learning for construction professionals, this study adopted micro-perspectives in analysing how intercultural learning could be developed through multicultural Communities of Practices. The gap of knowledge has influenced the following research questions, which have been used to guide the research investigation. The Main Research Question (RQ) is:

**RQ: How is intercultural learning developed by Communities of Practices in the construction sector?**

It has been clarified that the intercultural learning is developed among different levels of construction practitioners during their daily face-to-face or online communications in three selected enterprises.
Sub-questions (SQ1 and SQ2) have been derived from RQ. The questions and answers are listed below.

**SQ1: How could Communities of Practices be developed through three MNE models?**

Members of the communities with different cultures could develop their professional and intercultural competence through daily interactions and communications. Those competence could be developed for future learning and exchange. Under such circumstances, multicultural Communities of Practices have been created.

**SQ2: How do particular model of MNE in the construction sector nurture intercultural competence for communities of construction professionals?**

1. Staff with different cultural backgrounds of the enterprise in Case A (i.e., Decentralized Enterprise) have been engaged in interactions during daily communications at work and social gatherings after work.

2. The intercultural learning developed in the enterprise of Case B (i.e., Coordinated Enterprise) is similar to that in the enterprise of Case C (i.e., Centralized Enterprise). As far as Case B is concerned, staff of overseas development team in the selected enterprise have been difficult to communicate with the local staff due to the isolation of overseas development team
from the core business team, different cultural backgrounds and languages. Staff of overseas
development team have learned the practices from local staff and shared their work experiences
of international construction projects with local staff.

3. In Case C, local staff of the selected enterprise have communicated with the staff through
regular face-to-face or online communications. Staff developed a sense of empathy when they
have worked with staff with different cultures. Their language proficiency has been improved.
The UK staff seconded from the headquarters could understand Hong Kong regulatory
framework and professional practices when they have deeply involved in Sino-British or even
international construction projects.

The major elements of the study have been guided by the conceptual framework of
Communities of Practices, intercultural competence and intercultural learning. The concept of
Communities of Practices is essential to the development of the main arguments of this study.
Within this framework, the dimension of practice, which includes ‘joint enterprise’, ‘mutual
engagement’ and ‘shared repertoire’, is used to guide the research through the data collection
and the process of analysis. In addition, the 3 dominant operational models of MNEs:
‘Decentralized Federation’, ‘Co-ordinated Federation’, and ‘Centralized Hub’, have been
discussed to identify their uniqueness in the nurturing of intercultural learning. This study has
adopted a qualitative approach to research, with case studies inquiry using interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis to investigate the practices and intercultural learning of multicultural Communities of Practices through the 3 selected cases.

6.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the empirical work indicate how multicultural Communities of Practices can be used as a development platform to facilitate intercultural interaction and learning for HK construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds. From a macro perspective, the results emerging from this study’s empirical work are driven by the process of globalization (HKTDC 2016, 2018; UNESCO 2010, 2016), as introduced in the Literature Review. The forces of globalization have a strong influence on the development of construction industries all over the world. In this context, different models of MNEs have emerged to cater for the increasing market needs of intercultural construction projects. In view of the rapid development of infrastructure projects in neighbouring countries, there is an increasing demand for HK construction professionals with intercultural competence. In fact, there is a need to adopt context-sensitive measures with reference to the richness of other cultures in order to offer quality construction professional services (Chen & Partington 2004).
The research also investigates the details of intercultural learning within the 3 MNE models: ‘Decentralized Federation’, ‘Co-ordinated Federation’ and ‘Centralized Hub’. It is discovered that each model of provision has its strengths and weaknesses in the nurturing of multicultural Communities of Practices. One of the key findings of this study is that unique forms of multicultural Communities of Practices are naturally developed within the 3 different forms of the MNE model. Figure 6.1 below presents the conceptual elements of the study.
The Study provides evidence that in the 3 models of MNE, there is association between the development of intercultural learning and the ways in which construction professionals of different backgrounds could interact and share practices. The findings demonstrate that, within the 3 different operational models of MNEs, there are advantages and disadvantages of developing intercultural competence for HK construction professionals. As a result, unique forms of Communities of Practices are developed. Subsequent to the emergence of multicultural Communities of Practices, there are distinctive ways to interact within these multicultural communities leading to a core finding of the study (Figure 6.1).

Through multicultural Communities of Practices, members of the communities have developed
professional and intercultural competence for future learning and exchange; ultimately, opportunities arise for the participants to be engaged in intercultural learning. A new discourse in ‘multicultural Communities of Practices’ (Figure 6.1) has emerged. It is vital to acknowledge that, within the process of developing multicultural Communities of Practices, there are added values brought to the intercultural experiences of the participants (Bibikova et al., 2007). This creates a long-term benefit towards the management of international construction projects. The study therefore concludes that the models of MNEs are important factors affecting the development of multicultural Communities of Practices. The following sections have interpreted how the 3 models nurture intercultural learning through the development of multicultural Communities of Practices.

6.4.1 Development of Specific Skills and Knowledge

This section discusses the details of specific skills and knowledge developed through the 3 specific cases. The case studies have demonstrated that the operations of 3 MNE models have been developed by various levels of intercultural competence and professional knowledge for HK construction professionals. The case studies have demonstrated that, during the knowledge exchange, construction professionals have enhanced the proficiency of their languages, knowledge and attitudes, thereby enabling them to interact with empathy to other people of
different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff, 2009). In previous studies, the abilities of communicating and interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds were firmly rooted in the concept of ‘intercultural competence’ (Deardorff, 2009). Because of globalization, the world becomes borderless and therefore such abilities are crucial to the sustainability of the individuals and organizations (Bok, 2009).

Results of data collection have demonstrated that the development of intercultural competence works in close relationship to learning by practice which aligns with Wenger’s framework of Communities of Practices (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002). The 3 MNE models involved varying levels and models of interaction with headquarters staff of different cultural backgrounds. Results demonstrate that the regularity of interaction are influential towards developing intercultural competence for HK construction professionals. For Case A (Decentralized Federation), the HK staff team had been well established for over 2 decades and included both expatriate staff and the local HK team. As a more established team, the expatriate staff and the local HK-based staff are engaged in more continuing, regular intercultural interactions, which offer opportunities for them to be aware of the practices of their colleagues of different cultures.

During the interviews, participants of Case A (Decentralized Federation) has indicated that they
are engaged in intercultural interactions through daily communication at work, as well as through after-work gathering. In the case of Case B (Co-ordinated Federation), the intercultural learning experiences apply only to the specialized project team responsible for developing the MNE’s overseas ventures. During the case study, it was found that the overseas development team was managed separately from the core business of Case B, hence limiting the opportunities for the overseas team to share their experiences with other professionals for Case B. During the interviews, staff from the overseas development team shared their outreaching working experiences participating in international projects in Dubai and Malaysia. It is found that such short-term outreaching assignments has been influential in the development of intercultural competence as well as professional knowledge for HK’s construction professionals. Participants reflected that the outreaching opportunities had posed many challenges; in particular, participants reported that it was difficult to engage in-depth communication with international project team members of different cultural backgrounds, especially speaking different native languages. The intensive engagement opportunities with other construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds could enable an understanding of how to communicate and work with people of other cultures and could greatly enhance the understanding of regulatory systems in other countries, as well as their empathy of different cultures. By stages, they have been engaged in a form of multicultural Communities of Practices with construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds. In addition to
intercultural competence, the HK professionals have advanced their professional knowledge in technical knowledge and compliance matters while working in different geographical locations. In brief, the outreaching construction professionals of Case B have involved in some diverse intercultural learning experiences.

Case C (Centralized Hub) portrays a distinctive learning experience for professional staff in the HK Branch. The HK staff team included construction professionals with culturally diverse backgrounds, with a significant number of expatriate staff seconded from UK headquarters. Staff from HK Branch have engaged in regular and frequent face-to-face and online platforms for intercultural interaction with their UK counterparts. Participants reported that they had experienced a steep learning curve over the past 2 years and had developed a great sense of awareness and empathy in working with people of different cultural backgrounds. In addition, they greatly enhanced their language proficiency and understanding, along with their ability to communicate with others. In this case, the Centralized Hub model has contributed to an integrated intercultural learning experience for multiple stakeholders, including local HK-based professionals and the HK-based expatriate professionals who are either seconded from UK headquarters or employed locally. Case C’s new set up in HK has largely nurtured the development of intercultural competence for multiple stakeholder groups as discussed. The model offers a range of cross-distance online and face-to-face intercultural interactions, which
include staff from HK and the UK headquarters. At the stage, it is found that local staff from HK and expatriate staff based in HK could benefit from the developing process of intercultural competence. In addition, the expatriate staff either seconded from UK headquarters or recruited from overseas indicated positively concerning their development of professional competence in understanding the HK regulatory frameworks and professional practices in managing international projects.

In summary, the results of the case studies demonstrate that through 3 different operational models for MNEs, construction professionals with different backgrounds have engaged in diverse modes of intercultural interaction with their counterparts from other countries for international projects delivered in HK and overseas. It was found that, for all 3 cases, the participants developed different levels of intercultural competence and professional knowledge in different regulatory frameworks and practices. A large portion of participants in the case studies displayed a clear awareness of the notion that, if they had to interact with other cultures, they needed to know and learn about those cultures. In all 3 cases studied, the expatriate groups and the local groups of professionals have learnt about the context of different cultures at the same time. Through the social learning of multicultural Communities of Practices, they have shared knowledge of languages, contextual meanings and values of different cultures, like no pork for Muslims, family day for Chinese during Mid-Autumn Festival, Winter Solstice and
Lunar New Year, etc. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005).

The Centralized Hub model (Case C), among the 3 models discussed, has offered the most ‘intercultural’ setting by including staff seconded from UK headquarters, local HK staff and expatriate construction professionals employed in HK. Case C offers an integrated and balanced way of developing intercultural competence for the participants, through regular and frequent daily communication in the HK Branch. Moreover, the participants in this case have developed professional knowledge and shared their professional practices through intercultural interaction and communication over a relatively short period.

6.4.2 Process of Intercultural Learning

So far, the relationships concerning the models of MNEs and their influences on nurturing intercultural competence have been discussed. The results from the study disclose that the process and the methods of intercultural interaction can impact on the nurturing of intercultural competence and the development of Communities of Practices as well. The results also indicate that models of MNEs could contribute to the diverse forms of intercultural interaction among construction professionals of different backgrounds.

In the model of Decentralized Federation (Case A), participants engaged in daily intercultural
interaction through a variety of platforms, including face-to-face meetings, Skype and conference meetings, as well as informal interactions between expatriate staff and local staff. As Case A is a well-established MNE in HK, the expatriate staff team and local staff team have established regular routes of communication. Local staff reflected that they had frequent interactions with the expatriate staff with these interactions took place naturally in the workplace and construction sites of individual projects. Through these interactions, participants reported that they had learnt from colleagues of different cultural backgrounds (Participant A4, Case A_Interview#4; Participant A2, Case_Intereview#2). The interviews also reveal that, through these interactions, the expatriate staff have solicited good support from the local staff in their understanding of local culture and regulatory practices. In return, through the frequent exchanges, manuals and guidelines developed from the French staff, the local staff have acquired a better understanding of international practices in managing international construction projects.

The case of Case B (Co-ordinated Federation) has shown the limitations in the nurturing of intercultural interaction. The company has been involved in overseas international projects through developing joint ventures with other MNEs. Participants from Case B revealed that they received limited support from the company in preparing them for the challenges of operating international projects outside HK (Participant B5, Case B_Interview#5). Staff
engaged in outreaching project management activities in Dubai and overseas have experienced extreme challenges while working with a team of international construction professionals of diverse cultural backgrounds. For this case, the HK professionals made regular visits and participated in interim stays overseas where the projects were based. Given the irregular nature of their intercultural communication and interactions, the data evidence has shown that there is no apparent development of multicultural Communities of Practices within these overseas ventures. It is worthwhile to note that, during these outreaching activities, there is evidence of construction professionals developing a better understanding of regulations and compliance matters in international context as part of their interactions with their overseas counterparts.

Finally, the case study of Case C (Centralized Hub) presents a more regular and intensive model of intercultural interaction. In this model, the seconded staff from the UK, expatriate staff employed locally, and the local staff all engaged in day-to-day interactions and practices sharing through the execution of international projects. A distinctive form of multicultural Communities of Practices has been gradually developed through their frequent and intensive intercultural interactions. Moreover, evidence has shown that, in the Centralized Hub model, construction professionals of diverse cultural backgrounds have experienced extreme challenges during the course of their interactions. This helped them to achieve a better understanding of the practices of managing international projects at headquarters. There were
regular conference meetings with UK headquarters, which greatly promoted the sense of belonging and understanding of practices in the UK and HK. In summary, the involvement of UK staff in intercultural interaction has greatly enhanced the intercultural learning of the HK team; thus, misunderstanding could be minimized, and engineering activities could be smoother.

The 3 case studies reveal the significance of regular intercultural interactions towards developing construction professionals’ intercultural competence and hence on the development of multicultural Communities of Practices. The more frequent the intercultural interactions, the better the development of intercultural competence for the participants, would subsequently lead to better development of multicultural Communities of Practices.

6.4.3 Development of Multicultural Communities of Practices

One of the major contributions of this study is to identify the cultivation of intercultural learning through Communities of Practices, leading to ‘multicultural Communities of Practices’. In Wenger’s (1998) terms, communities developed their practices through social learning and social participation are crucial towards learning. The 3 elements of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire are the most essential elements required for
social learning to be taken place (Wenger, 1998, 2002). With the gradual nurturing of intercultural competence as delineated in Chapter 5, multicultural Communities of Practices have been cultivated. Sharing the major fabric of Communities of Practices, multicultural Communities of Practices have the following major characteristics: (1) members come from distributed communities, including cross distance, cross cultural, cross professional and cross organizational boundaries and (2) they speak different languages.

The results of these case studies reveal that models of MNEs nurture practices in different ways. In the case of Case A (Decentralized Federation), the expatriate and local teams are well established; both structured and unstructured intercultural interactions occur among construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds. Members of communities are mutually engaged on a regular and well-established regime of communications, including face-to-face meetings in the HK Branch and conference calls with overseas practitioners. In parallel, they develop practice manuals and guidelines outlining the communities’ enterprises. They share repertoires in company reports, guidelines, health and safety protocols and codes of practices. In brief, these multicultural Communities of Practices have been well established and have proved to be engaged in continuing intercultural learning, adding values to the management of international construction projects. The development of multicultural Communities of Practices is illustrated in Figure 6.2.
For Case B (Co-ordinated Federation), the development of intercultural learning is limited to the specific team of outreaching construction professionals engaged by international construction projects in Dubai and overseas. The interviews have revealed that these HK professionals have challenging experiences in managing overseas ventures, with insufficient support and staff development initiatives provided by Case B. The development of intercultural learning in this case has yet to be developed and is illustrated in Figure 6.3.
On account of the ongoing process of globalization in the construction industry, HK construction professionals are going to be involved in increasing number of outreaching activities. The case study of Case B implies that there is an acute need for the promotion of continuing professional development in intercultural competence for HK’s construction professionals in order to enhance their competitive edge.

Case C (Centralized Federation) reveals that construction professionals have been engaged with integrated yet challenging methods of intercultural interactions. The members of Communities of Practices in this case include seconded staff from UK headquarters, expatriate professionals and local HK professionals; they have been mutually engaged in diverse modes of intercultural interactions. In the joint enterprise of the Case C, they have been developing regulations, codes of practice, manuals and guidelines and could form the shared repertoire for local operations. In fact, the participants are positive about their intercultural learning
experiences. Figure 6.4 illustrates the development of multicultural Communities of Practices of this case.

*Figure 6.4 Multicultural Communities of Practices of Case C (Centralized Hub)*

The results of the case study indicate that the development of multicultural Communities of Practices is an interactive and evolving process, as indicated by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002). In the context of operating international projects at MNEs, the first step of the development involves building a multi-professional team of diverse cultural backgrounds. In different regimes and intercultural interaction such as face-to-face meetings, online meetings, informal social gatherings and virtual social groups, the members have developed specific methods of intercultural interactions. This could enable them to share professional practices, cultural preferences and different management experiences in various regulatory frameworks. During the sharing of practices and interactions, the members developed their intercultural
competence with multicultural Communities of Practices. The platform of multicultural Communities of Practices provides physical and virtual spaces for members to engage in intercultural learning, which have furnished great values to the management practices for international construction projects. The study has analysed the case studies of different models of MNEs. In those models, some professionals have engaged more frequent intercultural interactions than others. In fact, the models of MNEs and the frequency of intercultural interactions are of great significance in the development of those multicultural Communities of Practices that facilitate intercultural learning. The discourse on developing multicultural Communities of Practices could benefit the effectiveness of HK construction MNEs in future. Figure 6.5 summarizes the development of multicultural Communities of Practices.

*Figure 6.5 Development of Multicultural Communities of Practices*
In short, with such diverse backgrounds and distributed attributes, the nurturing of multicultural Communities of Practices is strongly related to specific models of MNEs. Each model of MNE dictates some prescriptive methods of intercultural interaction for HK construction professionals. These intercultural communities have experienced some challenging interactions, conflicts and disputes. The results of the study demonstrate that the members have frequently communicated through shared repertoire, thereby could facilitate the development of intercultural learning. Evidence shows that the development of multicultural Communities of Practices is vital to the establishment of a harmonious and an efficient intercultural team of construction professionals in HK and the creation of added value to the management of intercultural construction projects.

6.5 Implications of this Study

The major contribution of this study relates to the newly developed idea of multicultural Communities of Practices within the HK construction industry. The study adopts micro-perspectives to apply the concept of Communities of Practices to the global construction industry, the new concept has created a new form of social learning among construction professionals, i.e., architects, engineers, surveyors, safety officers, etc., of diverse cultural, i.e., Catholic, Christian, Muslim, Confucian, Buddhist, etc., backgrounds (Lock, 1999, 1999b, 2009,
The implications of this study are summarized as follows.

6.5.1 The Importance of MNE Models in Nurturing Intercultural Competence of Construction Professionals

The results of this study indicate that MNE models are crucial in the development of intercultural competence for construction professionals. As mentioned in the Literature Review, the MNE models have a strong impact on engagement with construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds, especially in HK. The study has reviewed the impact of MNEs’ operational models on nurturing of intercultural competence for HK construction professionals. The study demonstrates that the development of intercultural competence is essential, especially in interactions among construction professionals of different cultural backgrounds. Participants have higher level of intercultural competence (regardless of their cultural background) and are more likely to show their motivation and empathy towards others and respect judgments made by colleagues of various cultural or professional backgrounds (Leavitt, 2003). Moreover, the study has scrutinized the strengths and weaknesses of the 3 MNE models, and identified the impact on the development of intercultural competence and intercultural learning. At that stage, there are only few studies related to the concept of intercultural learning to MNE models as well as Communities of Practices.

6.5.2 Development of Multicultural Communities of Practices and Their Roles in Improving
Performance and Enhancing Management Practices for International Construction Projects

The key findings of this study are related to the concept of multicultural Communities of Practices, through which the intercultural learning of construction professionals emerges. The results of the study show that, in the context of delivering international projects, it is essential to cultivate stakeholders’ intercultural competence through the dimensions of mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprises, as emphasized by Wenger (1998, 2002). The results of the case studies support that through intercultural interactions, construction professionals have obtained intercultural competence from multicultural Communities of Practices. The members could share their experiences of managing international projects, professional knowledge and cultural preferences with others in the communities. This regular sharing could improve the members’ intercultural learning abilities and working relationship with their colleagues. It improves the performance of MNEs in managing international projects.

6.6 Recommendations for Professional Practices

This study would bring more understanding of intercultural learning for professionals in the HK construction industry, with the major objective of scrutinizing the methodologies of development of intercultural learning through the MNE models of ‘Decentralized Federation’,
‘Co-ordinated Federation’ and ‘Centralized Hub’. The findings of this study re-examine Wegner’s concept of Communities of Practices and apply this framework to the HK construction sector. The findings of the study have generated recommendations that are important to professional practices. These include: adopting a fit-for-purpose MNE model; cultivating multicultural Communities of Practices to develop intercultural learning; making use of the transferable skills and intercultural competence necessary for construction professionals in improving organizational performance; widening staff exchange opportunities for professional development; and utilizing regular and online dialogue with the aim of improving mutual engagement for multicultural construction teams and developing shared repertoire among branches of MNEs. Each of these will be discussed in detail below:

6.6.1 Recommendation 1: Adopting a Fit-for-purpose MNE Model

The findings of the study recommend that for any MNEs to set up cross-border business operations, it is crucial that they understand the advantages and disadvantages of each MNE model. In addition to the operational implications, it is essential for the MNEs to be aware of the impact of intercultural interactions emerging from these models. The results of case studies show that in the models of ‘Decentralized Federation’ and ‘Centralized Hub’, staff have been seconded from the headquarters and the expatriate staff have been recruited in local offices.
The arrangements of staffing offer the opportunities for regular and frequent face-to-face interactions for construction professionals of different backgrounds. As discussed in the previous section, the more regular the intercultural interactions, the better the intercultural learning. This leads to an improvement in organizational performances in the long run. Occasionally, the short run and interim period are likely to have similar outcomes, although more statistical data are necessary. For Chinese enterprises, the culture of ‘Roasted Pig Cutting Ceremony’ during the kick off the big/mega projects would mean that related professionals could gather and get to know each other better, so that the projects could be executed more smoothly.

6.6.2 Recommendation 2: Cultivating Multicultural Communities of Practices to Develop Intercultural Learning

The results of the case studies reveal that the emergence of multicultural Communities of Practices is of paramount importance in facilitating intercultural learning. For Case A (Decentralized Federation), construction professionals of diverse cultural backgrounds have been mutually engaged in regular face-to-face and online interactions; later, they would be able to exchange their knowledge in different cultural contexts and share practices. The elements of intercultural learning have improved the organizational performance of Case A. To this end, it
is vital for senior management of MNEs to be conscious of developing appropriate space and platforms through physical office settings and online settings to cultivate CoP. Furthermore, MNEs should be aware of the understanding of Communities of Practices through engagement, exchange and staff development activities that need to be expanded if interactions within their multicultural teams could be facilitated.

6.6.3 Recommendation 3: Developing Transferable Skills and Intercultural Competence for Construction Professionals to Enhance Organizational Performance

The findings of this study show that, in the context of globalization, transferable skills in communication and intercultural competence are essential for HK construction professionals in MNEs in handling disputes and cultural misunderstandings in international construction projects. In the case of Case C (Centralized Hub), a newly set up MNE in HK, some expatriate staff reported the experiences of ‘cultural shock’, thereby leading to disputes with local HK colleagues; similarly, in the case of Case B (Co-ordinated Federation), the HK professionals assigned overseas for international projects reported to have challenging intercultural experiences. So far, the study clarifies that there is a need for MNEs to provide staff development opportunities in developing their staff’s transferable skills in intercultural competence so as to enhance intercultural communication and interactions for HK construction professionals working on international projects. These training and staff development activities
can be better prepared for construction professionals to work in a multi-cultural environment to properly handle cultural misunderstandings/shocks. This can result in the long-term enhancement of multicultural construction enterprises’ business performance (Hartey et al., 2007). Again, it is hoped that such arrangement could be beneficial to short run and interim period as well.

6.6.4 **Recommendation 4: Widening Staff Exchange Opportunities for Professional Development**

The results of the study show that knowledge of compliance and regulatory systems, as well as codes of practices, are critical if construction professionals are to engage in international projects in different geographical locations successfully. In the case of Case C (Centralized Hub), misunderstandings and disputes emerged among the multicultural teams. Consequently, MNEs may consider widening the exposures especially intercultural professional manipulation, of their senior professional teams in different countries in order to let them familiarize themselves with the practices in different regulatory systems.

6.6.5 **Recommendation 5: Adopting Regular and Online Dialogue to Improve Mutual Engagement for Multicultural Construction Teams**

The findings of the 3 case studies indicate that the regularity of intercultural interactions is one
of the most essential elements in nurturing intercultural learning. Participants from the 3 cases expressed that the more regular the intercultural interactions, no matter through regular or online dialogue, the better the development of intercultural learning. Construction professionals in the case of Case A (Decentralized Federation) reflected that it was through regular face-to-face interaction that ideas and practices from different cultural contexts were shared.

In this context, it is essential for MNEs to facilitate and set up regular face-to-face or online meetings to promote mutual engagement for construction professionals. Based on the rapid development of social media in this digital era, the development of regular online dialogues could be much more diverse and innovative.

6.6.6 Recommendation 6: Developing Shared Repertoire Among Branches of MNEs

The findings of the study indicate that shared repertoire is one of the essential elements in nurturing intercultural interactions. Shared repertoire includes routines, words, tools, methods of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols and genres, as far as multicultural Communities of Practices are concerned (Wenger 1998). In this study, the shared repertoire of the multicultural Communities of Practices of MNEs includes quality manuals, workflows, codes of practices in handling health and safety issues and handbooks. According to the participants across all 3
cases, these artefacts are essential for different branches of MNEs in sharing practices for different projects and ensuring that essential practices and knowledge could be transferred. In summary, for knowledge management purpose, MNEs should consider promoting systematic repertoire including workflow, manuals and codes of practices among their branches.

For the objective of achieving a quality thesis, a gathering with 2 academicians concerning the stated subject was held at City University, Hong Kong on 30th September 2018. It was concluded that the factor/parameter of ‘Integration’ could not be ignored for intercultural learning. The details are as per attached Appendix E.

6.7 Significance of the Study

This study has demonstrated the benefit brought by multicultural Communities of Practices to the management of international construction projects. The cultivation of intercultural competence within these intercultural communities has been proved to enhance communication between construction professionals of different cultural and professional backgrounds. Moreover, through multicultural Communities of Practices, members engage in social learning to foster close working relationships and it enables an understanding of worldwide professional practices. The implementation of case studies in this research provides deeper and multiple
perspectives in understanding how intercultural teams work within diverse operational models of MNEs in the context of the HK construction industry.

In addition, the study provides opportunities to develop possible training and continuing professional development to cultivate intercultural competence for construction professionals. In fact, with the globalization of the construction sector, the development of transferable skills and intercultural competence is essential for the new generation of HK construction professionals.

Last but not least, the study is also significant because it opens the research horizon for cross-cultural organizational practices in the HK construction sector. The findings contribute to a wider understanding of how construction professionals could be engaged in intercultural learning of different MNE models. As mentioned above, the results of the Research initiate the opportunities for continuing professional development for HK construction professionals. This would augment their knowledge and competence, thereby enhancing the management/execution of the international construction projects. The study further recommends that future research may be required to investigate the process and design of these multicultural Communities of Practices, which could contribute significantly to resolving the dynamics and conflicts in practices among those multicultural construction project teams.
6.8 Limitations of this Study

This section elaborates the limitations of this study. The findings of this study have contributed opinions for intercultural management research and insights that are of value to the HK construction industry; however, the findings of this study cannot be generalized for all multinational construction corporations. It is limited by the nature of interpretive research.

In addition, the number of cases selected is small and cannot be used to represent all other multicultural construction corporations, especially in other countries. It would be possible to conduct a larger-scale, cross-sector sample with statistical techniques of a positivist nature research based on the finding of this study in order to provide evidence leading to a more wide-ranging set of findings. It is recommended that further research could be conducted to explore groups of construction practitioners from various ethnic backgrounds and different professional levels through scrutinizing the details of their intercultural learning.

6.9 Personal Reflections and Conclusion

As an ex-construction professional, I have a strong passion for buildings, as well as the process
of project management. I had been as a construction professional for over 15 years before transferring to the higher education sector 8 years ago. Since joining the education sector, I have developed a strong interest in sharing my experiences in construction practices, besides maintaining a deep interest in the cultural differences that have enlightened me to conduct a research topic in the area of cross-cultural management. I previously worked with architects and engineers of different cultural backgrounds and knew of the value of relating such experiences within the context of an academic research project.

The journey of this academic exploration has opened up new horizons in my life. As an ex-practitioner in the HK construction profession and current practitioner in tertiary education, I have always believed that positive study could lead to more ‘scientific’ and new knowledge. The nature of this inquiry and the complex dimensions of intercultural learning in enhancing the practices of project management have made me aware of adopting other research paradigms. Indeed, the interpretivist paradigm was a challenge to me, in particular concerning the investigation of deeper aspects of the way in which construction professionals could be engaged in knowledge exchange and practices sharing (Park et al., 2014).

During the research process, I met different groups of construction practitioners of different cultural and professional backgrounds. As an inside researcher, my professional background
and experiences provided me invaluable insight and professional knowledge in defining the scope/boundary and handling the data.

I would like to conclude that this study with 3 of my previous construction projects inspired me greatly. I was involved in construction work on those 3 projects from 2000 to 2003. At that time, I was the Technical Director of a listed construction company in HK. Within the process of managing these construction projects, I had encountered the cross-cultural issues identified at the beginning of this thesis. And, as a practitioner, I began to reflect on the differences in the construction industry among HK and other countries. The project management experiences gained while working on these projects had enabled me to learn the intercultural and professional context from fellow engineers and architects of different cultural backgrounds. Those projects also inspired me to re-think the necessity of the development of the knowledge and practice required to enable multicultural team members to engage in intercultural learning and share practices for the benefit of the construction sector at large.

Construction of Building 5, Phase 1B, Science Park, Pak Shek Kok, Shatin. (Circa 2001-2003)
The whole journey of this research was approximately 8 years. During this period, I changed jobs and had gradually developed a career in higher education. Moreover, health issues have contributed to making my academic explorations difficult. There were challenges throughout this journey, particularly with regard to combining a full-time job with my role of part-time
researcher. This research, on the one hand, concludes the first stage of my academic exploration; on the other hand, it also opens up a new chapter in my life.
REFERENCES


60. Hancock, B. (2002), *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, Trent Focus Group, University of Nottingham.


Appendix A  Invitation Letter to Participating Companies

Dear Sir,

DBA Research “Developing Intercultural Learning for Construction Professionals in Multinational Enterprises: A Case Study in Hong Kong”

My name is Gary Tse, I am a part time student studying Doctor of Business Administration at Southern Cross University, Australia. I am currently doing a survey for my thesis, the topic of which is “Developing Intercultural Learning for Construction Professionals in Multinational Enterprises: A Case Study in Hong Kong”

Integrating the cultural differences is an essential management tasks for project managers who work for international construction projects, which involve a wide range of professionals with different cultural background. Most often such differences have created a lot of conflicts and problems for the progression of these projects. As far as the opening of Chinese market is concerned, there will be increasing international projects, and it is essential for the Hong Kong project managers to develop stronger awareness and intercultural competence in handling intercultural interaction and how they can be managed to enhance corporate efficiency. The above is the key rationale for the proposed research to take place.

The research attempts to provide insights for both academics and practitioners on how the management of international construction projects can be enhanced.

In this context, we would like to invite your company to participate in this research, upon your agreement; a research coordinator will contact the designated person of your company to make arrangement for data collection. Please note the attached process for your reference.

Please be absolutely assured that all the information obtained will be kept totally confidential and used entirely for academic & research purposes.

I am sure that your company and staff will also benefit from this meaningful research as this project is likely to bring out more insights into ways of increasing efficiency in cross-cultural international projects.

Upon completion of the Study, we send you a confidential copy of the report, which you might find useful in enhancing the business operation of your company.
Thank you very much for your kind attention and look forward to your favourable reply.

Yours faithfully,

Tse, Shing Chun Gary
Appendix B  Information Sheet to Participants

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NS)
Chapter 2.2

Guidelines

2.2.1 The guiding principle for researchers is that a person’s decision to participate in research is to be voluntary and based on sufficient information and adequate understanding of both the proposed research and the implications of participation in it.

2.2.2 Participation that is voluntary and based on sufficient information requires an adequate understanding of the purpose, methods, demands, risks and potential benefits of the research.

Therefore, participants must be presented with an information sheet about the research and a consent form, if written consent is necessary.

Consent can be written and can also be implied or verbal. When consent is implied (e.g. by return of a completed questionnaire) or verbal, then a written consent form is unnecessary.

Information sheets and consent forms MUST be separate documents.

The information sheet is kept by the participant.

The consent form is returned to the researcher. A copy of the participant’s consent form can be provided to the participant, if requested by the participant.

Please ensure that the Information Sheet and Consent Forms are designed to suit your individual research. Do not just copy everything on the sample forms as some sections may not apply to your research. The information sheet should be polite, fully informative, while also being as concise and brief as possible, and in language that is understandable to the participant.

The following give an idea of how researchers can structure their information sheets and consent forms.
INFORMATION SHEET

Name of project – Developing Intercultural Learning for Construction Professionals in Multinational Enterprises: A Case Study in Hong Kong

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Gary Tse, I am a DBA student of Southern Cross University, Australia. I am a Chartered Builder and Safety Auditor by profession, also I am a director of a HK construction company. Within my DBA research, I am interested in studying the cross-cultural management issues in Hong Kong’s construction industry. The major aim of the research is to investigate how construction professionals can be engaged in intercultural learning in multinational enterprises, it is expected that the findings of these issues could have certain contribute towards the enhancement of the current management practice for international construction projects within Hong Kong context.

The research will involve the following data collection process:

1. Several cases studies will be conducted in Hong Kong to investigate the details. The target cases will be project management consulting companies with experiences in handing international construction projects. Within the case studies, we will organise separate focus group meetings and individual interviews:

   2  Focus Group: focus group discussion will be conducted within the participants workplace, for each focus group, there will be one meeting which will last about 60-90 minutes. The purpose of the focus groups is to investigate to a deeper extend, the current issues and practice within the international construction projects.

   3 Interviews: followed by the focus group discussion, individual interviews will be conducted with relevant project management staff to investigate their personal views in certain issues and practice.

My responsibilities to my participants:

This research is classified as a “low” risk research as the research involves only the collection of personal opinion and does not aim to work with any vulnerable individuals. However, within the Australian “National Statement of Ethics Conduct in Human Research”, I would like to provide the following details regarding what will be provided to the participants within the research process:
Participants are able to access the result of the research, which aims to provide some form of guidance framework to enhance the current awareness of the cross-cultural issues in construction industry, hence to benefit the industry in a long term.

All the data and opinions will be collected in strict confidence.

Refreshments will be provided during the focus group meetings.

**Participants’ responsibilities.**

Participation in any data collection process within this research is completely voluntary. Here are the requirements for different groups of participants:

1. **Focus group interviews:** employees from selected organizations will receive separate invitation to participate a focus group interview. The interview will be conducted in a group of no more than 10 people and will be conducted within the premises provided by the organization. The interview will last between 60-90 minutes, participants will be asked to present their views and experience regarding the current issues within international projects.

2. **Individual interviews:** followed by the focus group interviews, senior management staff from the selected organizations will be invited to attend individual interviews, the interview will last for 30 minutes, participants will be asked to discuss their own experience and opinions with regard to some management issues around the management of international construction projects.

**The likelihood and form of dissemination of the research results, including publication.**

The results of this research will contribute to the final thesis of the Doctoral study, only group data will be reported in the thesis.

The research materials will be stored within the researcher’s filing system and will be stored and handled separately with the other personal storage.

Please note that a retention period of 7 years applies to University research material.

**Participant’s Consent**

Participants consent will be obtained via the following:

For participants of focus groups and interviews, invited participants will receive and invitation package including a consent form via emails, they are required to return the consent form via the researcher’s email address before the commencement of the data collection process.
Inquiries

Participants can make any inquiries about the research by contacting the researcher at the following details:

Researcher:
Mr. Gary Tse
k.tse.17@scu.edu.au

Supervisor of the project:
Professor Louis Lock
Dr.lolock@gmail.com
Professor Ian Eddie
i.eddie@scu.edu.au

Feedback

All participants are entitled to feedback from the Study. If any participants are interested to receive a summary of the results by email, please provide your details of contact on the consent form.

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Southern Cross University.

Complaints about the research/researchers

If you have any concern about the ethical conduct of the research or the researchers, you are able to complain via the SCU complaint mechanism, please refer to http://www.scu.edu.au/complaints/index.php/3/ for details.

If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research or the researchers, the following procedure should occur.

Write to the following:

The Ethics Complaints Officer
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore NSW 2480
Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

All information is confidential and will be handled as soon as possible.
Title of research project: Developing Intercultural Learning for Construction Professionals in Multinational Enterprises: A Case Study in Hong Kong

Name of researcher: TSE, Shing Chun Gary

Tick the box that applies, sign and date and give to the researcher

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand the information about my participation in the research project, which has been provided to me by the researchers. Yes ☐ No ☐

*I agree to be interviewed by the researcher. Yes ☐ No ☐

*I agree to allow the interview to be *audio-taped and/or *video-taped. Yes ☐ No ☐

*I agree to make myself available for further interview if required. Yes ☐ No ☐

*I agree to complete questionnaires asking me about ???(insert general topic) Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that I can cease my participation at any time. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my participation in this research is anonymous. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that any information that may identify me, will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data. Yes ☐ No ☐
I understand that all information gathered in this research is confidential. It will be kept securely for 7 years at the University.  

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am aware that I can contact the researchers at any time with any queries. Their contact details are provided to me.  

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee.  

Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant’s name: __________________________________________________________________________

Participant’s signature: ________________________________________________________________________

Date: ____________________

☐ Please tick this box and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive a summary of the results:

Email: _______________________________________________________________________________________

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Appendix D  Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

1. Target Interviewee: Senior project managers with experience in leading international construction projects

Each individual interview will take around 30 minutes to investigate

- the interviewee’s intercultural experience in leading international projects
- their experience in working with professionals from different cultures
- their process of handling conflict
- the course of development of Communities of practices
- the course of development of intercultural competence

2. Target participants for focus group: mid-level construction managers with some management experience with working with different culture professionals.

Each individual interview will take around 30 minutes to investigate

- the interviewee’s intercultural experience in leading international projects
- their experience in working with professionals from different cultures
- their process of handling conflict
- the course of development of Communities of practices
- the course of development of intercultural competence

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sessions</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Briefing and Introduction to the research (10 mins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Warming up and facilitation(5 mins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Open discussion (30-45 mins)</td>
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<td><strong>Interview topics</strong></td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Background and previous intercultural experience of the participants?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your role in the international projects and how do you communicate with the professionals from other cultural backgrounds to deliver the projects?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details of communications and interactions between professionals from different cultural backgrounds, do you interact on regular basis?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any conflict / how to manage?</td>
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<tr>
<td>[for expatriate professionals only] How do you interact with local professionals in Hong Kong and how do you find them different?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your personal experiences and practice in interacting with professionals with different cultural backgrounds?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your company provide any staff development and training to enhance intercultural competence of the staff? How and what type of training?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you and your colleagues from different cultural backgrounds develop handbooks, manuals and information package/documents to develop relevant work procedures for international projects?</td>
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</table>
Appendix E  Notes of Gathering for Further Improvement of the Thesis

1. Present: Ir Prof L Lock, Dr L Sham, Mr Gary Tse
2. Date: 30th September 2018
3. Time: 1400 to 1800
4. Venue: Room G4303, City University of Hong Kong
5. Summary:
To be a little bit specific/concrete, integration should be duly addressed during intercultural learning; there are primarily 3 aspects

a. Mutual Respect:
   - Multilingual induction processes
   - Multilingual provision of information about occupation health and safety
   - Multilingual job descriptions and specifications
   - Flexible working schemes to accommodate ethnic and religious beliefs and Worships
   - Incorporation of ethnic and ethnic awareness into overall management strategy
   - Career development programs (e.g. management skills courses) for ethnic groups that are under-represented in management
   - Incorporation of ethnic and ethnic awareness into overall management strategy
   - Celebrations of ethnic and religious festivals and events
   - Setting up links with local ethnic groups

b. Empathy:
   - Organizing social events after work
   - Assisting and encouraging non-English speaking professionals to improve their English
   - Provision of interpreters for professionals of non-English speaking background during training sessions and inductions
   - Incorporation of ethnic and ethnic awareness into overall management strategy
   - Mentoring programs between English and non-English speaking professionals

c. Training:
   - Training for professionals and management staff of different cultures that aims to reduce stereotyping and raise awareness of ethnic issues
   - Workshops for construction professionals’ teams of different cultures on topics such as interethnic communication, team-building, conflict resolution and ethnic diversity awareness
   - Career development programs (e.g. management skills courses) for ethnic groups that are under-represented in management