

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Moving between *what-is* and *what-might-be*?

Sustainable international partnership in higher education:
perspectives from England and China

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by

Jie Ma (B.A., M.A.)

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For my family

Abstract

One of the ways in which universities relate to the world in the context of internationalisation is through partnership. However, many university partnerships either do not reflect institutional strategic planning, or do not make good use of the individual contingent networking. Higher education institutions across the world engage enthusiastically in developing inter-institutional partnerships but reluctantly invest in nurturing inter-personal relationships, which are central to sustainable relationship building. This thesis attempts to explore what constitutes sustainable international partnership in higher education, and sets its focus on England and China, given the strong belief in internationalisation to achieve particular national agendas in both countries.

In order to explore what is perceived to be desirable and worth attaining in sustainable partnership for a given set of participants, the concept of the *imaginary* is incorporated in this research to connect *what-is* with *what-might-be*. Two strands of data were collected from each case university (one in England and one in China) relating to the policy constructions and the staff perceptions. The university strategic policy discourse indicated how institutions project constructions of sustainable partnership in each institution. The 35 semi-structured interviews with staff at either the institutional level or the disciplinary level from both countries demonstrated how individuals respond to policy constructions and also ‘imagine’ alternatives.

The thesis presents a shared imaginary across two institutions in England and China, within which, sustainable partnership is constituted by either strategic planning or contingent networking, and this seems to create an illusion of sustainability for both institutions and individuals. Furthermore, the findings from this study suggest sustainable partnership is constituted by the coordination between strategic planning and contingent networking. The key is to embed partnership emerging in the contingent networking and then situate strategic planning in the context of partnership, nurturing and flourishing interpersonal relationships, and, not vice versa. This thesis not only contributes to a holistic imagining of what might constitute sustainable partnership, but also creates an imaginative space from which sustainable partnership might be attainable between universities even with divergent strategic agendas.

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my original work, except explicit attribution is made. None of this thesis has been previously submitted for any other award.

Signature: Jie Ma

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This study is concerned with exploring the construction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across a range of differing contexts, and will consider the implications for developing sustainable international partnerships between universities operating in different political, economic and cultural contexts. To this end, it will move beyond previous literature, which largely dealt with partnerships as individual cases, to examine the sustainability of specific international partnership programmes or activities between universities. The study aims to contribute to a wide-ranging visualisation of what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education. It also creates an imaginative space from which sustainable international partnerships might be attainable between universities - even those with divergent strategic agendas. This introductory chapter starts with a personal reflection addressing the motivation behind my research and my reasons for undertaking the study. It will then sketch an outline of emerging international strategic partnerships in the context of internationalisation in higher education, with the aim of further illustrating how differing national internationalisation strategies impact on partnership trajectory. The chapter will then argue that the missing elements in this emergent strategic picture of international partnerships are the interpersonal relationships between individuals, which are central to sustainable partnership building. This will lead to an explanation of how the research questions of this study are framed. The chapter ends with a brief overview of the research design and structure, providing readers with an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Feeling unconnected in this ‘connected’ world

This study emerges from a personal reflection upon the disjuncture between institutions and people. I was studying at a university which was relating to the rest of the world through a multiplicity of partnerships while at the same time I, conversely, did not feel like relating to the world. The ‘reality’ may be that the way in which universities relate to the world is problematic. I wondered how many partnerships had been undertaken to make people feel connected to the world, and why institutions were enthusiastically engaging in pursuing partnerships if those within the institutions did not feel like relating to such partnerships. I also wondered if alternative partnerships existed that people rather than institutions were passionate about. I have never been in a position to actually develop

any partnerships with international universities but I have a feeling that there might exist an underlying disjuncture between the institution and the individual. However, such reflection did not lead me anywhere until I came to the UK and started this PhD journey.

In September 2014, I crossed the border to England to pursue my PhD. Two experiences of being involved in multilateral networks during the first year of my PhD seemed to further arouse my initial interest in exploring international partnerships in higher education. The first experience was my involvement in the launch of the *East Asia Research Collaboration Network* by the Faculty of Education at the University of Hull, which aimed to draw in high quality institutions across East and South East Asia to forge research partnerships between the UK and Central and Northern European higher education institutions. I witnessed a dialogue between a Vietnamese and English group in which their respective expectations of such partnerships were discussed. I could not help but imagine what form any future partnerships through this network would take, and whether unexpected difficulties caused by political, cultural or intellectual differences might potentially derail any carefully planned initiatives. Would such partnerships sustain, and in what way?

The second experience was my engagement in an international seminar '*Rethinking Internationalisation in Higher Education*', held by the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University, aimed at bringing fresh perspectives to the field of international higher education previously dominated by recruitment and performativity agendas. The introduction of the *Comparative Education and Pedagogy* module is an example of how to pursue sustainable internationalisation or ethical internationalisation by influencing the core areas of higher education (i.e. research, teaching, and learning) despite tensions within neo-liberal, liberal and critical discourse, and the continuing focus on both international and home students' voices added a fresh perspective to the purely economic agenda previously favoured. I was inspired and encouraged by those scholars' great efforts in making the world a better place through calling for sustainable, ethical and responsible internationalisation, even though they may merely constitute a small ripple compared to the huge currents increasingly created by the global aspiration for revenue, prestige and talent within the competitive international higher education landscape.

These two experiences, coupled with my initial reflection, cause me to ponder: we seem to live in a connected as well as unconnected world, one in which we have always been linked to each other but which seems to need a trigger to make that link happen. Once it happens, it still might not mean we are connected. There has to be something or someone able to sustain them. But what are they, or who are they? Those doubts and questions come together and contribute to the primary concern of this thesis: “What constitutes a sustainable international partnership in higher education?”

1.2 An emergent picture of international strategic partnership

Over the last three decades, internationalisation has become “a mainstream notion” (Jones & de Wit, 2012: 35) in the higher education sector, a ‘central lever’ in national higher education policy, and has moved “from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core” (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). The most recent IAU (International Association of Universities) 4th Global Survey, based on responses from 1336 higher education institutions located in 131 countries, also reveals that internationalisation has been gaining increasing attention from higher education institutions worldwide, with over half of the respondents reporting that they already have an institutional policy or strategy to implement internationalisation (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). In this sense, internationalisation in higher education institutions across the world has become “an agenda of growing strategic importance” (Wihlborg & Robson, 2018: 8).

Among the wide range of international activities that constitute internationalisation in higher education, partnerships appear to be coming to the fore. In the future, higher education institutions will be urged to “engage as global citizens through partnership, collaboration and authentic dialogue” (Sutton & Deardorff, 2012, cited in Deardorff et al., 2012). A report from the European Association of International Education (EAIE) reveals that international strategic partnership is a growing activity and improving international strategic partnerships has become one of the main challenges emerging for EHEA countries (Engel et al., 2015; O’Malley, 2015). Similarly, interviewees and correspondents from University College London (UCL), UK Higher Education sectors, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) indicate there is a gradual shift to strategic, niche, sustainable and multifaceted partnerships and networks, in which teaching, research,

business, industry and public engagement will be involved, with top-down strategies for centralised institutional commitment to international partnerships also required (Lawton et al., 2013).

Such shifts to or calls for strategic and sustainable partnerships indicate that partnership development is problematic and the solution to this problem is to shift partnership development patterns (Bacchi, 2009). This echoes Sutton's (2010: 61) criticism that many existing partnerships are "lasting only as long as the original proposers are interested, and often (sometimes immediately) sitting idle thereafter", and such partnerships "do not reflect strategic planning and are not seen as integral to institutional mission" (ibid). Put another way, partnerships can be sustainable if they reflect strategic planning and are embedded in the institutional mission. Moreover, international strategic partnerships are not developed in a vacuum. Instead, national states could exert an influence over partnership trajectory through making particular internationalisation policies and strategies.

1.3 The contrasted policy contexts between England and China

To date, a growing number of countries are engaging in the process of internationalisation in higher education; not just the Western capitalist societies, but also the emerging Eastern powers, such as the BRICS nations. The traditionally western dominated discourse on internationalisation of higher education seems to be shifting and a new landscape of international higher education is emerging, which can be termed "globalisation of internationalisation" (Jones & de Wit, 2012; de Wit et al., 2017). Existing in such a rapidly changing landscape of global higher education, international partnerships can become more complex given that different policy contexts are inextricably interwoven in the relationships between universities. This study therefore sets out to explore such complexities through focusing on two countries - England and China. Those two countries, with one from the Anglo-American group and the other from the emerging powers of BRICS, present striking contrasts in their societal contexts and national policy strategies relating to internationalisation of higher education. Such contextual differences might present more challenges in constructing a sustainable partnership between universities. However, as Oleksiyenko & Yang (2015) note, there has been a dearth of research on partnerships and their associated policies and challenges, particularly with regard to the

emerging global and economic powers of China and the BRICS nations.

In England, internationalisation of higher education appears to be embedded in a profit-seeking business logic within the British higher education system, which can be observed from the introduction of charging international students full fees (Humfrey, 2011), a policy later applied to home students also (Walker, 2014). In that case, internationalisation appears to be a track to marketisation, which is taken from a series of governmental initiatives; for example, *Prime Minister Initiative (PMI)*, *Prime Minister Initiative 2 (PMI2)* and the most recent *International Education Strategy (IES)* constituting part of industrial strategy. Those initiatives have appeared to centre on the goal of branding UK education internationally with the expectation that cross-border activities would bring revenue to the government. Such national agendas can also impact on the way in which higher education institutions engage in internationalisation. Under huge financial pressures, higher education institutions rush to internationalisation with “marketised, competitive and unethical interpretations” instead of “ethical and cooperative development policies and programmes for mutual learning and benefit” (Khoo, 2011: 350). Such economic-driven internationalisation strategies are increasingly criticised (Bone, 2008). The Bone Report - *Internationalisation of HE: a ten year view* – has called for a shift from the obsession with student recruitment to the construction of long-term partnerships given the facts of instability in the student recruitment market share from demographic pressures - Japan, Korea, Singapore and Malaysia for example (Bone, 2008). However, within a context of disinvestment by government in higher education in the UK, it appears to pose challenges to framing partnerships beyond the economic narrative as universities are “encouraged to participate in international education in marketised ways, to gain income” (Lomer et al. 2018: 145). Consequently, those partnership which do not generate income might not be favoured and prioritised by the university.

In China, internationalisation of higher education seems closely linked to modernisation. The modern Chinese higher education system still bears western scars from different foreign models of higher education systems which were introduced into China (Hayhoe, 1984). For a long time internationalisation of higher education functions as a vehicle of narrowing and bridging the gap with western education in the developed countries (Wang, 2014; Yang, 2017). Despite the fact that the Chinese government has not published an internationalisation strategy in written form, the attention paid to internationalisation is

growing. This can be observed from the Wang's (2014) discourse analysis of the Chinese guideline, a series of comprehensive and landmark policies on education issued between 1980 and 2010, including 'Decision on Educational System Reform' in 1985, 'Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China' in 1993, 'Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the Twenty-First Century' in 1999, '2003-2007 Action Plan for Revitalization of Education' in 2004, and 'The National Outline for Mid- and Long-term Education Planning and Development' in 2010. Those policies are comprehensive ones but reflect a change of emphasis in internationalisation within them. Over the past three decades, the policy focus pertaining to internationalisation has shifted from "introduce[ing] the world to China" in the 1980s to "promot[ing] Chinese model and values" in the 2000s (Wang, 2014: 16). However, a further reading of the aforementioned policies finds that in order to improve international competitiveness and thus establish global influence, the Chinese government encourages the development of partnerships with world-class universities. In that case, partnerships not ranked among the best might not be favoured and prioritised by some universities, especially China's 'prestigious' universities.

1.4 A missing link in sustainable partnership building

As mentioned above, partnerships have become one of the key constituent elements of higher education internationalisation strategy (Knight, 2004, 2012) and research literature tends to frame it through the lens of 'inter-institutional relationships' (Klasek, 1992; Neave, 1992; Beerkens, 2002; Eddy, 2010; Sutton et al., 2012; Kinser & Green, 2016; Mwangi, 2017) against the convergent global trend in pursuing international competitiveness, either for market position or for reputation. However, the role of inter-personal human relationships in strategic partnership construction and development seems to be fading in significance; such relationships, however, appear to be central to sustainable partnership building (Denman, 2004; Eddy, 2010; Hayhoe et al., 2013; Leng, 2014). This is because the process of cooperation will always boil down to individuals, and the informal links between academics are "probably the oldest and still most important form of international cooperation and are apparent in all fields and disciplines" (Beerkens, 2002: 298). Such absence of inter-personal relationships from partnership constructions appears to be a missing link in the process of constructing sustainable international partnerships in higher education, given both the field of institutional

structure (Sutton, 2010) and the site of individual agency (Leng, 2014) exert their particular influence over sustainable relationship building.

To address such a gap, this thesis proposes to consider partnerships as networks of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals, and attempts to explore the extent to which the field of institutional structure and the site of individual agency exert influence over constructions of sustainable international partnership in higher education. Given the two sharply contrasting and strikingly different political cultures - England and China, one from the Anglo-American group and one from the emerging powers of BRICS, it is interesting to see the convergence and divergence regarding constructions of sustainable international partnerships across and between England and China.

The main research question (MRQ) therefore is:

- MRQ: What constitutes a sustainable international partnership in higher education across and between England and China?

To provide a full answer for the MRQ, two sub-research questions (SRQs) are needed:

- SRQ1: How is sustainable international partnership in higher education conceived by institutions in England and China, and what are the implications for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China?

SRQ1 is framed to explore how sustainable international partnerships in higher education are constructed in the field of institutional structure in both England and China, what are the similarities and differences in the way in which institutions construct sustainable international partnerships in higher education across international contexts, and thus what the implications are for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China.

- SRQ2: How is sustainable international partnership in higher education perceived by individuals in England and China, and what are the implications for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China?

SRQ2 is framed to explore how sustainable international partnerships in higher education are constructed in the site of individual agency in both England and China, what are the similarities and differences in the way in which individuals construct sustainable international partnership across international contexts, and thus what the implications are for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China.

The relationship between SRQs and MRQ is illustrated in *Diagram 1.1*. By answering the above two SRQs, it enables us to understand the complexities of constructing sustainable international partnerships between institutions and individuals across England and China, and also between England and China. These SRQs are principally informed by the literature review and will be further answered in the empirical data chapters. By answering the above SRQs and thus the MRQ, this thesis is expected to offer a theoretical construction of what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education across England and China, and the possible areas where universities with divergent strategic agendas can construct sustainable partnerships between England and China. By doing this, the thesis not only contributes to a wide-ranging visualisation of what might constitute sustainable international partnerships in higher education, but also creates an imaginative space from which sustainable international partnership might be attainable between universities - even those with divergent strategic agendas across a range of differing contexts.

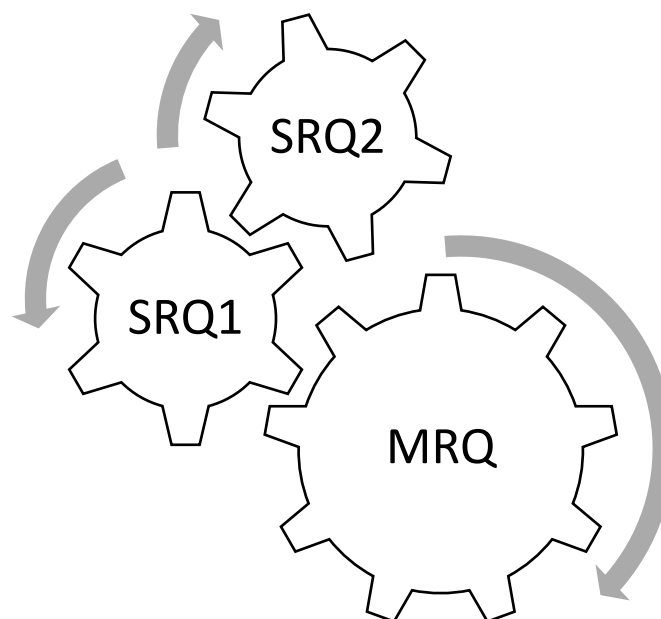


Diagram 1.1 The relationships between SRQs and MRQ of this thesis

1.5 Setting out on an exploratory study

Diagram 1.2 outlines the research design of this thesis, illustrating the relationship between each parts; for example, the literature review justifies the research questions which guide the data collection and analysis. The findings are further discussed and theorised in order to answer the research question, which then contribute to the pool of knowledge, returning us again to the literature. More specifically, based on the literature review, this thesis proposes considering partnerships as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals. By thinking of partnerships in this way, it attempts to examine the extent to which the field of institutional structure and the site of individual agency exert influence over the construction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across and between England and China.

Correspondingly, two strands of data were collected from both England and China. One strand explores how sustainable international partnerships are constructed in the field of institutional structure across England and China. This data was collected and analysed through a textual analysis of emerging themes from university policy texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. In so doing, it shows how institutions project sustainable international partnerships in England and China, and how the two countries differ in their institutional conceptions. The other stand of data explores the way in which sustainable international partnerships are constructed in the site of individual agency in England and China. This data was collected and analysed through a repertoire analysis of a total of 35 (4 from the pilot phase) semi-structured interviews with staff who were closely engaged in international partnerships in both countries, at either institutional or disciplinary level. In so doing, it shows how individuals respond to policy constructions of sustainable international partnerships and imagine alternatives in England and China, while at the same time examining the similarities and differences in their respective perceptions.

This paves the way for engaging in a discussion on *what-might-be* a sustainable international partnership between England and China given those complexities and even contradictions. Moreover, it provides a theorisation of *what-might-be* a sustainable international partnership in higher education. The thesis ends with the conclusion that what constitutes sustainable international partnerships is the coordination between

strategic planning in the field of institutional structure and contingent networking in the site of individual agency. By doing this, the thesis addresses the gap in existing research literature and thus contributes to the wider field of internationalisation in higher education.

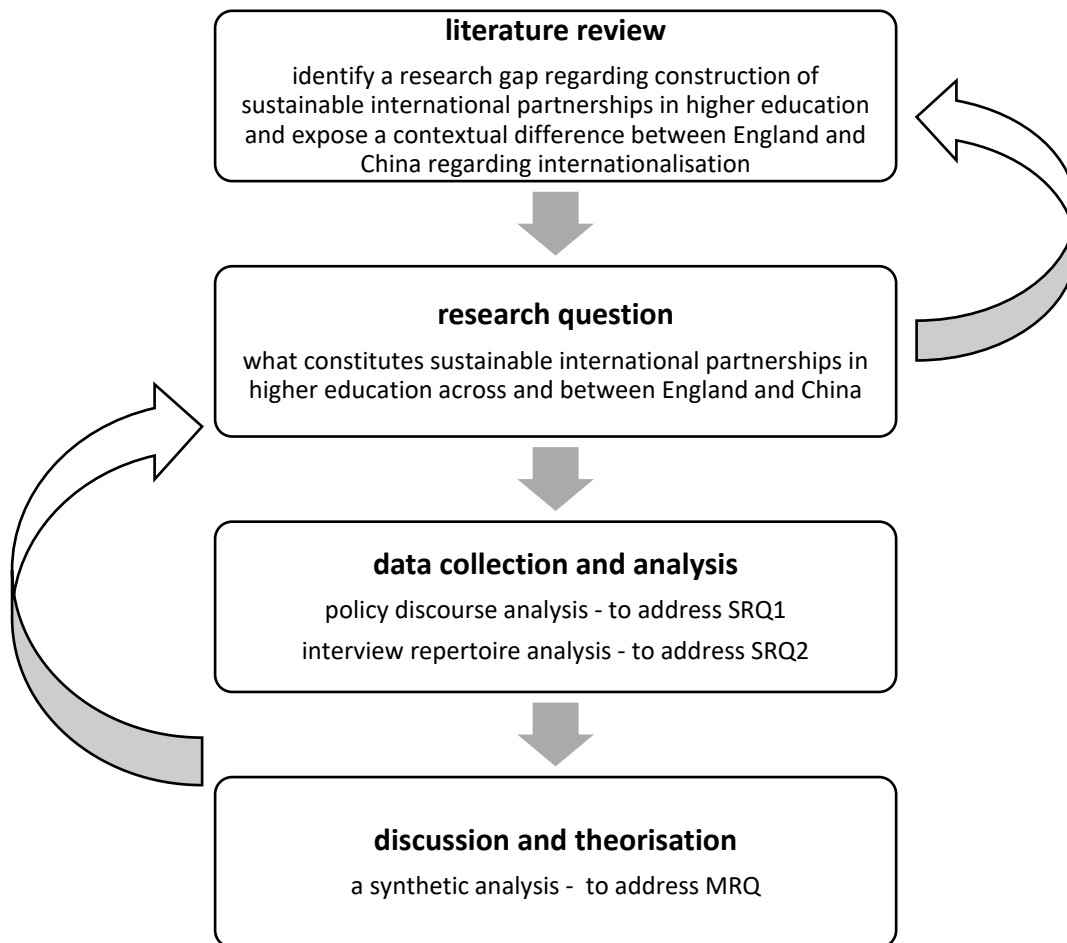


Diagram 1.2 The research design for this study

To structure such a research design, 8 chapters are organised into this thesis.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 2, 3 locate the conceptual framework of this study.

Chapter 2 offers a contextual literature review regarding how partnership is contextualised in internationalisation of higher education in England and China, and the implications for the construction of partnerships in each context. To grasp the rapidly changing landscape of global higher education, the chapter places partnership within a globalisation of internationalisation; including not only the Western capitalist societies,

but also those Eastern emerging powers engaging in higher education internationalisation. To exemplify how globalisation of internationalisation is reflected between West and East, the chapter then focuses on English and Chinese policy contexts to illustrate how nation states respond to this landscape through adopting different internationalisation policies or strategies. These differentiated internationalisation policies or strategies are argued, setting out the underlying trajectories which make it possible for higher education institutions to pursue international partnerships between universities.

Chapter 3 provides a conceptual literature review regarding how sustainable partnerships in international higher education are currently addressed and can be better addressed in order to for this study to establish a conceptual territory for researching sustainable international partnership in higher education. It starts by examining how partnerships are constructed in the context of internationalisation in higher education, identifying the conceptual gap which occurs when considering partnerships as networks of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also individuals. Next, the chapter draws upon relevant literature to investigate how and to what extent institutions and individuals affect sustainable relationship building, which justifies the significance of incorporating institutions and individuals as two significant theoretical components in this study's research into sustainable international partnerships in higher education. In order to explore what is considered desirable and worth attaining in sustainable international partnership for institutions and individuals, the concept of '*imaginary*' is incorporated into this research to connect *what-is* with *what-might-be*, which indicates *what-is* considered a sustainable partnership by institutions as opposed to *what-is* considered a sustainable partnership by individuals, and also *what-is* considered to be a sustainable partnership by the English side as opposed to the Chinese side. Through the lens of the '*imaginary*', the complexities of constructing sustainable international partnerships between institutions and individuals, and between England and China, are expected to be sketched.

Chapter 4 addresses the research methodology in order to navigate *what-is* with *what-might-be* sustainable international partnerships in higher education. It starts by navigating a constructionism paradigm that underpins the research design of this study. Next, the chapter introduces a multiple-case (embedded) design to locate the different units of analysis or 'cases' of this study. Some projected challenges are addressed in the pilot

phase of the study. Then, the chapter explains the two strands of data obtained from both England and China. One strand was collected from university policy documents produced over the past few decades. It was analysed through a textual analysis of emerging themes from university policy texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. This data indicated how institutions conceive *sustainable international partnerships* in higher education across England and China. The other strand of data was collected from a total of 35 (4 from the pilot phase) semi-structured interviews with staff who were closely engaged in international partnerships in both countries, at either institutional or disciplinary level. It was analysed through identifying interpretative repertoires of sustainable international partnerships in higher education. This demonstrated how individuals respond to policy constructions and also ‘imagines’ alternatives of sustainable international partnership across England and China.

Chapter 5, 6 trace the empirical work of this study.

Chapter 5 addresses SRQ1. It presents institutional conceptions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across England and China through the analysis of policy documents, which is discursively constructed as a ‘strategic’ relationship contributing to particular institutional interests. Regarding institutional conceptions of sustainable international partnerships, the chapter pinpoints the similarities and differences between England and China. It argues that these differences might present a challenge to the pursuit of sustainable partnerships between England and China, given the two countries’ divergent ‘strategic’ discourse concerning any sustainable international partnerships constructed between them.

Chapter 6 addresses SRQ2. It presents individual perceptions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across England and China. On the one hand, it shows how the ‘strategic’ discourse on sustainable international partnerships functions as a ‘repertoire’ upon which individuals draw to construct what should be sustainable international partnerships in higher education. On the other hand, it presents an alternatively ‘contingent’ discourse or repertoire, expressing the view that that sustainable international partnerships are constructed by means of inter-personal human relationships through contingent networking. This ‘contingent’ discourse or repertoire is contradicted but can be inextricably linked to the ‘strategic’ one, depending on interpretation or context.

As regards individual perceptions of sustainable international partnerships, the chapter pinpoints the similarities and differences between England and China. It argues that the similarities provide a possible opportunity for pursuing a sustainable partnership between the two countries, given the convergent ‘contingent’ discourse on sustainable international partnerships constructed between them.

Chapter 7 presents the ‘thesis’ of this study. It brings together the empirical work to engage with a synthesised discussion on the findings resulting from the policy analysis, as well as the interview analysis from both England and China. The chapter discusses a shared imaginary across both institutions in England and China within which a sustainable partnership is constituted, either by strategic planning or contingent networking, and this seems to create an imaginary of sustainability for both institutions and individuals. Findings from this study therefore suggest that sustainable international partnerships in higher education need to be developed through the coordination between strategic planning and contingent networking, and that it is situating strategic planning within contingent networking, not the other way round, that would make partnerships between England and China sustainable. The key is to embed partnerships emerging in the contingent networking and then situate strategic planning within the context of partnerships, nurturing interpersonal relationships and encouraging them to flourish.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter, offering a review of how this thesis starts, progresses and ends. It also addresses how it contributes to the wider field of international higher education, and what the limitations of the thesis are. Based on this, the chapter puts forward some theories on future directions.

Chapter 2 Contextualising partnership in the globalisation of internationalisation in HE in England and China

This chapter situates partnerships in a rapidly changing landscape of international higher education - “globalisation of internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017) in which “traditional forms of cooperation and exchange increasingly are conflicting with more commercial forms of internationalisation - such as the recruitment of students, competition for talent and scholars, the emergence of franchises and branch campuses and the influence of international university rankings” (Altbach & de Wit, 2015: 261). At the same time, developing countries are also engaging in the current moves towards globalised internationalisation. These include not only Western societies, but also the emerging powers from other parts of the world, who are “beginning to challenge the dominance of Western discourse on internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017: 221). This creates a challenging new environment for partnership construction to adapt to.

The chapter starts by reviewing the conceptual development of higher education internationalisation, arguing that internationalisation has largely been framed by the Anglo-American perspective, and thus fails to hear what internationalisation means elsewhere in the world. To exemplify how higher education internationalisation is imagined similarly and differently across geographical, historical, and cultural contexts, the chapter then focuses on two sharply contrasting and strikingly different countries - England and China – and outlines their respective interpretations of internationalisation and the corresponding implications for constructing partnerships in two such contexts.

2.1 Globalisation of internationalisation in HE: a rapidly changing landscape

We continue to talk as though we share the same understanding, but in fact there are many different interpretations of ‘internationalisation’. It is timely to consider whether this variety of interpretation is a barrier or a benefit and to question whether we are learning sufficiently from other global contexts (Jones & de Wit, 2012: 35).

This section offers a critical review of the conceptualisation of higher education internationalisation. It argues that internationalisation of higher education in itself has become globalised but the way in which it is conceptualised has still been largely dominated by the Anglo-American perspective and, as a consequence, taken other global contexts (where internationalisation can be interpreted alternatively) for granted (de Wit et al., 2017). The section uses the most recent conceptual development of international higher education - “globalisation of internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017) - to highlight the significance of understanding how internationalisation is conceptualised differently in a global context, as such differentiated interpretations of internationalisation are argued to have an impact on engagement in cross-border activities, including partnerships.

Internationalisation is not a new term or concept. Its popularity in the field of (higher) education has soared since the 1980s, and “is being used more and more to discuss the international dimension of higher education” (Knight, 2012: 28). At the same time, new terms to describe the international dimensions of higher education have been emerging; for example: globalization (Scott, 2000; Maringe & Foskett, 2010; Mitchell & Nielsen, 2012), transnational education (Knight, 2005, Hou et al., 2014), internationalization ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’ (Knight, 2008, 2012), education hubs (Knight, 2011, 2013), global citizenship (Clifford and Montgomery, 2014), and global rankings (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007). As we have seen, internationalisation has been thematically structured during the past three decades (Jones & de Wit, 2012) and as one of the changing agent forces, it is changing global higher education (Rumbley, et al. 2012), “creating a sense of ‘global’ in higher education” (Soilemetzidis, 2011 quoted in Rumbley et al., 2012: 4). In that case, the conceptualisation of internationalisation itself appears to have become globalised (de Wit et al., 2017), presenting increasing complexities with regard to understanding the international dimensions of higher education.

In order to move beyond such complexity and thus reach a shared understanding of higher education internationalisation across contextual differences worldwide, Knight (2004: 11) has attempted to provide a working definition, one that identifies internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function or delivery of post-secondary education”, which is argued to be “internationally a neutral definition of internationalisation” (Knight, 2012: 29). However,

despite its assumed neutrality and cited popularity, the definition conceptualised by Knight (1994, 2004, 2012) is criticised as “only based on and thus suitable for Western experience” (Yang, 2014: 153) and it is further argued that what this definition lacks is “an appropriate combination of the international and the local” (ibid). Put another way, such a definition - seeking a wide applicability and neutrality - will inevitably fail to grasp the differentiation, contradiction and tension inherent in higher education internationalisation processes across historical, geopolitical and cultural contexts. Similarly, Marginson (2014: 171) also criticises the concept of internationalisation imagined by Knight (1994, 2004, 2012) as “benign”, asserting that “cross-border engagement in China is always deeply subversive of national/local tradition”, which does not voluntarily integrate international features into Chinese higher education. For China, “internationalisation has rarely been peaceful and pleasant” (Yang, 2017: 143), instead, “the process has been shot through with intense ideological and cultural conflicts” (ibid). Indeed, internationalisation can be interpreted and practiced differently in this globalised context (though it is not always seen as subversive to local culture, as it is in China). The world’s emerging economies are growing and ‘beginning to challenge the dominance of Western discourse on internationalisation’ (de Wit et al., 2017: 221). In this sense, the work of internationalisation could be more “complex, multifaceted and fraught with power relations” (Fanta, 2017). Now is the time to rethink internationalisation in a global perspective.

To grasp this rapidly changing landscape, the “globalisation of internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017) is used in this chapter to expand the awareness and understanding of internationalisation from other contexts (Jones & de Wit, 2012). This particular conceptualisation, as Egron-Polak & Marmolejo (2017: 7) argue, “marks or at least signals a certain shift in the conceptual discussion about internationalisation of higher education (HE) that has been going on for close to 30 years”. The “globalisation of internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017) brings globalisation and internationalisation to the forefront of a new landscape of international higher education (Egron-Polak & Marmolejo, 2017). On the one hand, the “globalisation of internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017) requires readers to take into account how globalisation fashions internationalisation practices worldwide in a similar way. For instance, the UK is learning from the Australian good practice of “international education as a business”, which is especially apposite at a time when government funding for universities is in decline (Jones

& de Wit, 2012: 42). Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand now brand themselves as education “hubs” in attempt to recruit students globally (ibid). Not coincidentally, Russia and China are investing in higher education by pursuing world-class universities (de Wit et al., 2017). In this case, as is argued, “[t]hrough many countries have different starting points, the same trends are apparent everywhere; there is increasing global convergence in aspiration, if not yet in actions” (de Wit et al., 2015 quoted in Egron-Polak & Marmolejo, 2017: 10). The key milestones demonstrating such global convergence includes:

a system, and at least one institution within the system, becoming globally competitive; attractive on the international scene; focused on research excellence as measured by indexed journals; enjoying prestige and reputation, which are measured by world institutional rankings; and having a solid track record of graduate employability in an increasingly globalised local as well as international context (Egron-Polak & Marmolejo, 2017: 10).

On the other hand, the “globalisation of internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017) invites readers to rethink the way in which globalisation shapes internationalisation practices worldwide in a differentiated way. Regarding the global debate on higher education internationalisation, as Jones and de Wit (2012) reflect; the UK links multiculturalism and global citizenship to internationalisation in response to the diversity of both international students and home students; the USA places much emphasis on intercultural competence and campus internationalisation given its homes students’ “immobile” status and the infusion of international students; Europe appears to be defined by its mobility and cooperation, facilitated by, for example, the Bologna Process and the Erasmus Programme. Given such differentiated internationalisation practice globally, it is more necessary than ever to learn from different global viewpoints, especially when countries traditionally underrepresented are now engaging in internationalisation as key players.

To sum up, the “globalisation of internationalisation” (de Wit et al., 2017) offers an opportunity to reflect upon perspectives on internationalisation that are traditionally dominated by the Anglo-American discourse, and hear voices on internationalisation from the emerging and developing world (de Wit et al., 2017). In the following sections I shall unpack the ways in which England and China - one from the Anglo-American group and one from the emerging powers of BRICS - define their own approach to

internationalisation. In so doing, I intend to illustrate the globalisation of internationalisation across contextual differences and outline the wider ramifications of constructing partnerships between and outside such two contexts.

2.2 Globalisation of internationalisation in HE in England: a track to marketisation

It seems clear that UK higher education in 2012 is in nearly every respect much more efficient, service-oriented and entrepreneurial than it was in 1979, and this must at least in part be due to the market-driven policies of successive governments (Brown & Carasso, 2013: 129).

This section unpacks the way in which internationalisation is approached in England, and discusses the specific role of partnership in the Anglo-Saxon context of internationalisation. More specifically, the section starts by giving a brief history of international higher education in the UK and traces the profit-seeking business logic in the British higher education system. It then introduces three significant policies on international higher education - *PMI (Prime Minister's Initiative)*, *PMI2 (Prime Minister's Initiative 2)* and *IES (International Education Strategy)* to illustrate how the current marketisation discourse on internationalisation in England has been constantly and consistently strengthened. The section argues that internationalisation in England is seen as a fast-track to marketisation, having been identified as the quickest route to generate income through marketising higher education internationally. Notably, the British approach to internationalisation is associated with international student recruitment. In spite of there being a shift from the short-term recruitment to the long-term partnership, the economic narrative of UK education, either in an overt or covert manner, permeates through British policies on internationalisation. Accordingly, partnerships tend to be constructed in association with recruiting more international students with the intention of bringing in income.

2.2.1 The business logic in the British higher education system

It is not possible to discuss the history of British international higher education without referring to international student recruitment. Interestingly, in the history of international higher education, the UK did not play as significant a role as Europe until the 19th century

(Lomer, 2016) when the UK hosted more international students from those countries it traded with, in order to “oil the wheels of British commerce” (Walker, 2014: 328). Since then international students seem to have become a major element of British international higher education. But international student funding has experienced a shift from government to students with the introduction of the differentiated fee of £250 for international students in 1969 (Humfrey, 2011), and later to full fees under the Thatcher Government in 1979 (Walker, 2014). This introduction of fees for international students was the precursor of the current marketisation discourse in British higher education as a whole, as the fees regime applies to all home students, given the strong political desire to create “a variable fees market” (Filippakou et al., 2012: 327). To date, universities can charge up to £9000 a year for home students.

At the same time, government funding in universities was substantially reduced. This austerity leads to the hypothesis that the revenue rationale will be rather more significant for UK HEIs than European HEIs in that “HEIs located in HE systems where competition for resources is stronger are more likely to adopt an economic rationale for internationalization” (Seeber et al., 2016: 689). Indeed, high tuition fees from international students have provided universities with income gains (Maringe & Woodfield, 2013) which clearly manifest themselves in the British higher education system. However, not until the *PMI (Prime Minister’s Initiative)* initiated by Tony Blair in 1999, did such profit-seeking business logic become incorporated into a comparatively comprehensive framework designed to benefit the UK higher education sector as well as the national economy.

2.2.2 Branding UK education internationally to bring in income

This section presents an overview on internationalisation policies - *PMI (Prime Minister’s Initiative)*, *PMI2 (Prime Minister’ Initiative 2)* and *IES (International Education Strategy)* - in the UK between 1999 and 2013, as they were the first comprehensive initiatives and policies in this area to be introduced in the UK. This will illustrate how the increased marketisation and pressure to increase income generation has become a consistent trajectory in British higher education.

Since 1999, the efforts made by the British government to promote international higher education increased in momentum, with the ultimate objective of matching its

competitors, especially Australia and the USA, both English-speaking countries in the international higher education market. To meet this end, three policies on higher education internationalisation were produced: The *PMI (Prime Minister's Initiative)* had the intention of promoting the UK education brand internationally and increasing the numbers of international students, and ran from 1999-2004 under the New Labour Government; The *PMI2 (Prime Minister's Initiative 2)*, aimed to refresh the UK education brand through improving the international student experience, thus sustaining international education growth, and ran from 2006-2011 under the New Labour Government; The *IES (International Education Strategy)* was the first industrial strategy intended to serve national economic growth, and was published in 2013 under the Coalition government. The following will focus on an analysis of how this marketisation discourse ensured consistency through those three policy eras and how such consistency possibly narrows the options for the construction of partnerships in England.

From the outset, increasing the number of international students constituted the main thrust of Tony Blair's *Prime Minister's Initiative*. The *PMI* set targets to increase the number of non-EU international students studying in the UK by 75,000 by the year 2005, 50,000 in Higher Education and 25,000 in Further Education. This was a great success as the targets were exceeded ahead of schedule, with an extra 93,000 in Higher Education and 23,300 in Further Education (Blair, 1999). Despite such success, the obsession with short-term massive international student recruitment was criticised (Bone, 2008). Sir Drummond Bone (2008: 3) argued that "the main problem with the UK is a perception that our universities are solely interested in international students as a source of revenue". In the Bone Report, *Internationalisation of HE: a ten year view*, there was a call for a shift from the obsession with student recruitment to the construction of long-term partnerships, given the instability in the student recruitment market share due to demographic pressures in Japan, Korea, Singapore and Malaysia, for example.

To secure and revitalise the UK education brand, the *Prime Minister's Initiative 2* addressed a wider internationalisation agenda. In addition to continuously placing student recruitment at the top of the agenda, it added to its focus quality of student experience, believing that "the UK's reputation for international education is defined by what students experience" (Archer et al., 2010: 2). To establish a perception that the UK provides quality of student experience, the British approach to branding UK education internationally

“focuses on the most renowned and prestigious institutions rather than the diversity of HEIs”, which is argued to be “in a highly reductionist and hierarchical manner” (Lomer et al., 2018: 143). In so doing, it creates an imaginary for international students to experience quality education in the UK. In addition to prioritising the student experience, partnerships were also put forward as a means of changing the previously criticised preoccupation with short-term massive international student recruitment: “[i]t is not just about getting students to choose UK universities and colleges. It’s about building sustainable partnerships between our universities and colleges and those of other countries” (Blair, 2006).

In spite of such efforts to incorporate partnerships into *PMI2’s internationalisation agenda*, these revisions to long-term sustainable relationships, as Sir Drummond Bone criticised, were still intended to generate revenue for the UK. Similarly, Lomer (2016) pointed out that the logic behind such a revision of ‘sustainable partnerships’ was to change the perception that the UK was merely financially focused in terms of international higher education and to refresh the UK’s education brand. One can argue that partnerships represent a different, more covert, approach to recruitment in the UK. That being the case, it may well pose a challenge to research-led partnerships as long as the underlying profit-seeking logic still plays a central role in the UK’s international engagement.

In 2013, the British policy on international higher education entered a new era as the Coalition Government initiated the *International Education Strategy* - the first industrial strategy for economic growth, wherein UK higher education appears to be clearly framed as an export industry, “bringing in significant income, not only through tuition fees, but also through partnership and TNE” (Lomer et al., 2018). In this sense, partnerships are framed as the vehicle for increased tuition fees or TNE as long as it functions as a conduit for income generation.

As can be seen from the previous discussion, the UK education brand, international student recruitment, partnerships, TNE, education exports and national economic growth are closely linked concepts in the British policy discourse on the internationalisation of higher education. While historically linked to hosting international students, the policy discourse has witnessed a shift in vocabulary, as emphasised by changes in the title and

the goal of the initiatives or strategies. Increasing the number of international students constitutes the main vocabulary of *PMI*, but since *PMI2* vocabularies such as strategic partnership, transnational education, and education export are mentioned and further consolidated in the following *IES*. Although there was seemingly shift from emphasising international student recruitment to a broader network of partnerships and transnational education, there was a significant continuity in stressing the importance of attracting and recruiting international students (Lomer, 2016). In other words, international student recruitment remains the priority of those policies, with all the other shifts in effect appearing to serve the intention of securing the market share of international higher education, particularly international student recruitment.

The timeline below further illustrates the political priorities in each period (see *Diagram 2.1*). Although the political priorities appear to change from an emphasis on student recruitment in the *PMI* (*Prime Minister Initiative*), student experience and strategic partnership in the *PMI2* (*Prime Minister's Initiative 2*), to TNE and education exports in the *IES* (*International Education Strategy*), they are framed within the ultimate objective of branding Education UK (i.e. subsumed under 'Britain is GREAT' campaign in 2011) internationally, and this branding serves "the sector's implied need for the income generated from international students" (Lomer et al., 2018: 145).

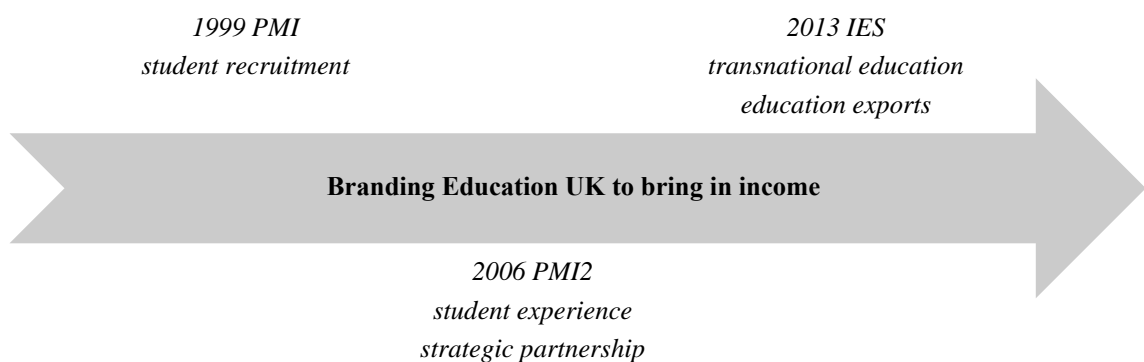


Diagram 2.1 Timeline showing British international higher education priorities

Source: This timeline is created from the author's reading of key policies with reference to Lomer's (2016) analysis on International students in UK policy from 1999 to 2013: rationales for recruitment and representations of students.

To sum up, the way in which globalisation of internationalisation is exemplified in England can be identified by the profit-seeking business logic since the 1970s and the following series of initiatives of branding UK education and later GREAT Britain as a product to match its competitors and secure the international market. Margaret Thatcher introduced full cost fees for international students and set the tone for marketing UK higher education. Then, Tony Blair explicitly articulated the importance of the global market and strengthened the marketisation discourse through initiating *PMI* and *PMI2* between 1999 and 2011 with the aim of recruiting more international students and exporting transnational education. Finally, the Coalition's *IES*, as the first industrial strategy published in 2013, further consolidated the marketisation discourse through prioritising TNE and education exports. Within such a context, it appears difficult to think of partnerships beyond the economic narrative because universities are “encouraged to participate in international education in marketised ways, to gain income” (Lomer et al., 2018: 145). Consequently, those partnerships not bringing income generation would not be favoured and prioritised by the universities. Similarly, Eddy (2010) cautions that such extrinsic rationale as economic motivation for income generation shakes the foundations of sustaining partnerships.

As argued at the beginning of this chapter, the landscape of international higher education is changing. Internationalisation has become globalised. Not only is it pervasive in the traditionally Anglo-American context; it is also prevailing in the emerging and developing world. The section which follows, therefore, unpacks the way in which internationalisation is approached in one of the key eastern emerging economies - China, and examines the specific role of partnerships within the Chinese political context of internationalisation.

2.3 Globalisation of internationalisation in HE in China: an engine of modernisation

China attaches high importance to achievements in the internationalisation of higher education. The achievements stretch far beyond higher education itself. As Yang Rui has pointed out, the internationalization of higher education in China has contributed to the current transformation of the Chinese system into one of the largest and arguably most promising ones in the world (Jiang, 2014:

Internationalisation of higher education in China has been considered to be “a survival tool since its earlier encounters with the West in the 19th century” (Yang, 2017: 142). It is one of the significant approaches towards modernisation, but such modernisation in China has been heavily scarred by western supremacy. The following section firstly presents a brief history of how the modern Chinese higher education system is scarred by western dominance and highlights the continuing struggle involved in being cracked by and cracking the western hegemony. The section then analyses the national policy developments relating to internationalisation (i.e. international cooperation and exchange), and their impact on the university partnership trajectory. It is argued that internationalisation is considered to be one of the significant approaches to modernisation. “As a latecomer to modernisation, China has had no choice but to chart a new path in catching up with the Western world and achieving a modern economy” (Cai, 2012: 67). To date, internationalisation of higher education in China, however, is “not only catching up with developed economies and becoming world-class, but exporting education services to less developed countries to expand China’s influence worldwide” (Wang, 2014: 15). In this sense, constructions of internationalisation are closely tied to economic development, achieving world-class status, national rejuvenation and extending international influence. Accordingly, partnerships tend to be constructed under an elitist discourse with the intention of fulfilling the China Dream of national rejuvenation and cracking the western hegemony.

2.3.1 The western scars on the modern Chinese higher education system

The birth of Chinese higher learning can be traced back to the Jixia Academy, where plural and even opposite ideas concerning engagement in public life were appreciated (Marginson, 2014b). However, as Marginson (2014b: 324) points out, “Jixia did not set the pattern for higher learning in China”. The modern Chinese university “has not developed as a result of a vertical inheritance” (Fan et al., 2017: 753), but rather “a lateral transplantation and imitation of the idea and model of the Western university” (Fan et al., 2017 quoted in Wang & Guo, 2014), modern universities in China were developed more through the constant negotiation and re-negotiation between Chinese traditional thought and western modern experience in the process of modernisation.

Modernisation in China, at least, was unveiled by the ‘Self-Strengthening Movement’ (1861-1895), which aimed to “employ western technology while retaining traditional Chinese values to meet the threat of Western imperialism” (Dobbs, 2013: 370). To address such a challenge, the Confucian scholar-official Zhang Zhidong in the late 19th Century proposed a philosophy of “Zhōngxué wéi tǐ, Xīxué wéi yòng 中学为体, 西学为用 (Chinese learning as the essence, Western learning for practical development)” (Lazich, 2013: 98). This philosophy attempted to detach *xī* (Western) *yòng* (means) from its intertwined ideologies and institutions without shaking ‘*zhōng* (Chinese) *tǐ* (essence), which “has in fact been shaken by it” (Cai, 2012: 66). Influenced by the European Enlightenment, science and democracy were introduced and worshipped by leading intellectuals such as Chen Duxiu during the Chinese first Enlightenment in 1919. At that time, Confucianism was completely repudiated for “its tendency to hierarchy, rigidity, conformism, and suppression of creativity” (Hayhoe, 2007: 5). With the slogan of ‘Down with Confucianism’, many Chinese Enlightenment-oriented intellectuals called for a whole embracing western culture (Fan et al., 2017), and advocated “a new Chinese culture based on Western-style (rather than Confucian) thought and ideals” (Yan, 2013: 104) in the early 20th century.

With regard to the modern Chinese higher education system, Hayhoe (1984) has sketched out the chain of events leading to the introduction of foreign educational institutions in China: firstly, the Japanese model was emulated in the first two decades of the 20th century; then American influence was strongly felt in the twenties; from the early thirties European solutions to China’s education reform were proposed, the Soviet model prevailing with the success of the Communist Revolution in 1949 serving socialist modernisation; and finally, the Cultural Revolution’s repudiation of the introduction of foreign education institutions. All those models in some way demonstrate how the Chinese higher education system has been cracked by western supremacy in the early stages of modernisation. There is a sense, however, that China has been pulling together to crack the western hegemony, thus successfully developing a hybrid model. For instance, as Hayhoe et al. (2014) reflect, during the civil war a good example was the Southwest Associated University in Kunming, which successfully integrated Western American values and Chinese shuyuan tradition under conditions of extreme poverty and chaos. Such negotiation between Chinese traditional thought and western modern experience is still continuing. As Marginson (2014a: 171) argues: as opposed to a voluntary

internationalisation of higher education, Chinese higher education internationalisation is “being layered onto something already both local and international at the same time”. But such a combination of local and international is built more upon “economic and political realities” than “cultural perspectives” (Yang, 2017: 152).

2.3.2 Exposing China’s international status to crack western hegemony

It is worth noting here that the term ‘international cooperation and exchange’ is favoured in official Chinese educational policies, at the expense of the term ‘internationalisation’. Mr. Zhang Jinfeng, the Vice President of China Association of Higher Education and official at Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE), once argued in an interview with Pinna (2009: 510) that the term ‘internationalisation’ “has a deep economic connotation”, arguing instead that the term ‘exchange and cooperation’ “describes the academic relations between China and other countries”. This reluctance to use the term ‘internationalisation’ in Chinese official documents reflects not only the determination to “preserve Chinese cultural and educational identity” (ibid) but also an appreciation of valuing academic and cooperative internationalisation. However, it seems that such interpretations of internationalisation still fail to break the spell of western education supremacy. When international cooperation and exchange is constructed in association with world-class and international standards, it implicitly indicates a kind of obsession with the western template of higher education, specifically the American one. Indeed, as Marginson (2008) argues, it is the American universities with their hegemony that set a perfect example of ideal practice for other higher education systems. In this case, the way in which internationalisation is constructed in the Chinese policy context still seems bounded to western education supremacy. But China, just as it did in the early stages of modernisation, never appears to stop engage with the world, as Yang (2014: 154) has argued that “the most striking feature of China’s strategy for internationalization” is “vigorous engagement” with the world.

It wasn’t until after Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door policy in 1978, one of the most profound decisions in the twentieth century, that Chinese universities were significantly encouraged to cooperate with their counterparts worldwide (Yang, 2014). Since then, the attention paid to internationalisation is growing, though no internationalisation strategy exists in written form apart from one policy relating specifically to the regulation of transnational education in China (Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools). To understand

how and to what extent the Chinese government respond to internationalisation, Wang (2014) offered a content analysis on the changing discourse of internationalisation in higher education since the 1980s. With reference to Wang's (2014) work, I trace back to the policy documents to look into the connections, in particular between international cooperation, exchange and other concepts. It details when and how the construction of international cooperation and exchange started to be associated with a knowledge-based economy, national rejuvenation, international influence and world-class status in the comprehensive and landmark policies since 1978 when China started opening up to the world (See *Box 2.1*).

- *Decision on Educational System Reform (Decision)* in 1985, during the transition from the planned economic to the market economy: encouraging universities to carry out international cooperation and exchange (self-funded);
- *Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China (Reform and Development)* in 1993, concerned with deepening the open-door policy: continuing to promote international cooperation and exchange and starting to express an aspiration to establish 100 universities reaching world status and a group of labs and engineering research institutes ranked among the best in the world;
- *Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the Twenty-First Century (Action Plan)* in 1999, against the backdrop of knowledge-based economy and the dream of Chinese national rejuvenation: funding academic intellectuals to attend overseas world-class universities or inviting academics with reputation (especially from the world-class universities) to be guest professors in the home universities;
- *2003-2007 Action Plan for Revitalization of Education (2004 Action Plan)* in 2004, with the aim of national capacity building and achieving the dream of Chinese national rejuvenation: enhancing all-dimensional, multi-field and high-level international cooperation and exchange; continuing to promote substantial international cooperation with high-level universities in terms of research and talent cultivation;
- *The National Outline for Mid- and Long-term Education Planning and Development (Mid-Long-term Plan)* in 2010, under the aim of national

capacity building and achieving the dream of Chinese national rejuvenation: carrying out multi-level and wide-ranging international cooperation and exchange; encouraging the establishment of joint R&D centres with oversea high-level institutes regarding education and research.

Box 2.1 Background, events and international cooperation and exchange

Source: this box comes out of the author's reading of key milestone policies with reference to Wang's (2014) analysis on the changing discourse on internationalisation.

The *Decision* in 1985 articulated the government-encouraged international cooperation and exchange but did not provide any funding due to the initial transition from the planned economic to the market economy. Therefore, those universities wishing to engage in internationalisation had to be self-funded.

As with deepening the open-door policy, the *Reform and Development* in 1993 started to express an aspiration to establish 100 universities reaching the world-status and a group of labs and engineering research institutes ranked among the best in the world. A desire for international influence started to emerge in the 1990s.

The *Action Plan* in 1999, as Wang (2014: 14) argues, “went further in its quest for world-class status”, not just ‘world-class university’, ‘world-class discipline’, ‘world-class level’, but also ‘international leading status’, suggesting “a new interpretation of internationalisation”. The *Action Plan* was set in the context of a knowledge-based economy, and connected to the dream of Chinese national rejuvenation. More importantly, government-sponsored international exchange and cooperation started to appear in national policy, and international academic mobility in particular was sponsored, but this sponsorship was limited to activity with world-class universities.

The following *2003-2007 Action Plan* in 2004 emphasised all-dimensional, multi-field, and high-level international cooperation and exchange, including both research and talent cultivation. It mainly consolidated the previous initiatives.

The Mid-Long-term Plan in 2010 aimed to build national capacity and achieve the dream

of Chinese national rejuvenation. To this end, research and development is further prioritised, and in particular the establishment of joint R&D centres with overseas high-level institutes regarding education and research.

The timeline constructed below further foregrounds the key events with relevance to international cooperation and exchange, and visualises the changing discourse on internationalisation. It demonstrates how international cooperation and exchange moves to a new phase when the search for high-level and substantial relationships with overseas partners is prioritised. As shown in the timeline, since the 1990s the Chinese government has expressed its aspirations for world-class status by setting up specific funding for selected universities to rank among the best (*Action Plan 1999*). As is argued, “[t]he development of world-class universities has been a dream of the Chinese people since the end of the nineteenth century” (Liu & Wang, 2011: 4). To rank among the best, partner institutions are selected according to their institutional status and research capacity (*Action Plan 2004*). Also, research is the key theme in building national capacity and achieving the dream of Chinese national rejuvenation, as evidenced by the encouragement to establish joint R&D centres and high-level institutes.

(*Mid-Long-term Plan 2010*).

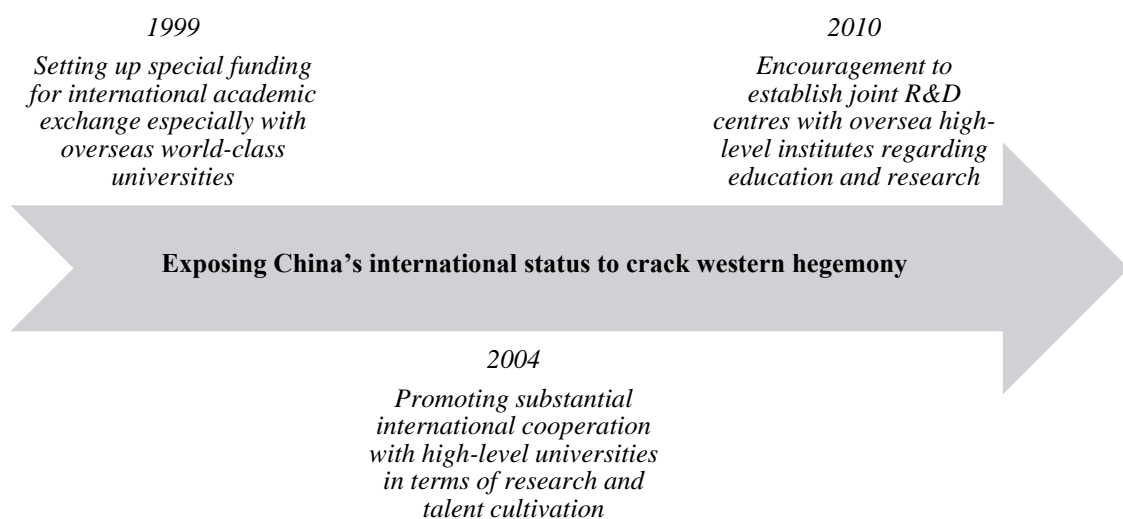


Diagram 2.2 Timeline for the changing discourse on Chinese internationalisation

Source: This timeline is created from the author's reading of key milestone policies with reference to Wang's (2014) analysis on the changing discourse on internationalisation.

In summing up, globalisation of internationalisation is exemplified in China through the

continuing struggle of seeking a distinctly Chinese way of rejuvenating China and challenging western hegemony. Scarred by western education supremacy in the modern Chinese higher education system, higher education internationalisation in China appears to be continuously oscillating between being cracked by the western hegemony and cracking the western hegemony. Internationalisation, more often than not, is regarded as a vehicle for narrowing and bridging the gap with western education in developed countries. In order to crack the western hegemony, the Chinese government encourages the development of partnerships with world-class universities. In addition, the Confucius Institute and China's international assistance in Africa are in some way regarded as demonstrating an ambition for a significant role in connecting the world to China. Consequently, partner institutions not ranked among the best might not be well favoured and prioritised by the universities, especially China's 'prestigious' universities.

2.4 The comparison of partnership contextualisation between England and China

This chapter has sought to appraise readers of the rapidly changing landscape of international higher education in which partnerships are situated. The "globalisation of internationalisation" (de Wit et al., 2017) offers a dynamic lens through which the chapter is able to paint a globalised picture of international higher education, featuring not just the dominant Western discourse from Anglo-Saxon cultures, but also including the voices of those emerging powers now challenging such dominance. The chapter argues that globalisation of internationalisation is shaping both integrated and differentiated landscapes worldwide, and regions, countries and institutions need to adjust. To exemplify how the globalisation of internationalisation is reflected and thus impacts on partnership construction between the West and East, the chapter has focused on England and China to present two contrasting scenarios.

In England, internationalisation appears to be defined as a track to marketisation. A strong market narrative is interwoven into the discourse of branding the UK's education; central to this narrative is the process of attracting and recruiting more international students to secure the international market share, thus financially benefiting higher education institutions and the nation as a whole. Although there has been a shift in vocabularies, going beyond short-term income driven international student recruitment towards a broad

network of sustainable relationships, the generation of income still appears to be a mainstay of the UK's political interpretation of internationalisation. Under the economic rationale for internationalisation, the way in which partnerships are constructed and sustained might be challenged.

In China, internationalisation seems to be considered as an engine for modernisation. During the past decades, the process of internationalisation has echoed the continuing struggle of being cracked by and cracking western education supremacy and hegemony. Internationalisation, or in Chinese terms, international cooperation and exchange, is framed in association with its world-class aspirations, resulting in a specific focused investment in partnerships with overseas world-class universities. The assumption behind those initiatives can still be partly related to the implicit acknowledgement of the supremacy of western universities, though China's internationalisation strategies have moved towards exporting its culture and influencing the world; for example, the establishment of Confucius Institutes across the world. In this case, the way in which partnership is constructed and sustained might well be underpinned by Western supremacy to some extent.

By focusing on England and China, I have attempted to exemplify how internationalisation is interpreted similarly or differently in a globalized context. The contrasting political interpretations on internationalisation between England and China appear to set out underlying trajectories for higher education institutions to pursue their respective international partnerships. Before exploring the implications for universities in constructing partnerships, I shall firstly explore how partnerships are constructed in the context of international higher education and how they are currently linked to sustainability.

Chapter 3 Establishing a conceptual territory for exploring sustainable international partnership in higher education

The previous chapter has shown how partnerships are contextualised within the globalisation of higher education internationalisation (de Wit et al., 2017) in England and China, outlining the contrasting policy contexts where partnerships lie and the corresponding political implications for developing sustainable partnerships between the two countries. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the missing link in constructing sustainable partnerships amid an increasingly strategic international higher education landscape, thus establishing the conceptual territory for this study to explore what constitutes sustainable international partnership in higher education. The chapter criticises the research literature for failing to incorporate both the institution and the individual into the construction of partnerships in international higher education (argued to be the missing link in understanding sustainable international partnerships in higher education), given that both the institution and the individual have, in their own ways, proved to be significant forces affecting sustainable relationship building. That being the case, the chapter proposes considering partnerships as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals. To explore the complexities of sustainable partnership construction between the institution and the individual, and also between England and China in this study, the concept of *imaginary* is introduced to capture such complexities, such as *what-is* conceived to be a sustainable partnership by the institution *might* not be *what-is* perceived by the individual, and vice versa; and also *what-is* constructed to be a sustainable partnership in an English context *might* not be considered sustainable in a Chinese context, and vice versa. In this sense, the *imaginary* connects *what-is* with *what-might-be*, setting out a theoretical perspective for this study to explore the construction of sustainable partnerships in the context of international higher education. In so doing, the thesis attempts to contribute to a holistic imagining of what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education, and also between England and China.

3.1 How are partnerships constructed in international higher education?

Situating in the debate on both the strategic and ethical dimensions of higher education internationalisation, partnership is argued to be a constructive approach to the ethical and responsible internationalisation. To explore how partnerships are actually constructed in international higher education, this section reviews the various ways in which partnerships are constructed in the context of international higher education. In so doing, it offers both theoretical justifications and practical pointers in constructing partnerships as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals. To this end, the section firstly reviews how partnerships differ from and relate to networks, illustrating how slippery the process of defining partnerships actually is (Neave, 1992; Beerkens, 2002; Grant, 2013). This, in turn, provides some theoretical justifications as well as practical pointers on how partnerships can be constructed differently, as a network of relationships in the context of international higher education. Further reading reveals that partnerships, more often than not, appear to be framed as inter-institutional relationships (Klasek, 1992; Beerkens, 2002; Sutton et al., 2012; Kinser & Green, 2016; Mwangi, 2017). Moreover, the strategic importance increasingly attached to inter-institutional relationships is a response to global competition (Lawton et al. 2013; Engel et al. 2015; O'Malley 2015). This, however, overshadows the role of inter-personal human relationships, although such relationships are argued to be central to sustainable partnership building (Denman, 2004; Eddy, 2010; Hayhoe et al., 2013; Leng, 2014). To better explore what constitutes sustainable international partnership in higher education, the section thus proposes considering partnership as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals, given the fact that both institutions and individuals affect sustainable relationship building in their own way.

3.1.1 The ethical dimension of international higher education

The international dimension of higher education is embracing the strategic side of internationalisation that underpins strategic agendas driven by global competition. Internationalisation for higher education institutions across the world has become “an agenda of growing strategic importance” (Wihlborg & Robson, 2018), and globalisation is bringing about a convergent trend in “policy mimicry among both national policy-

makers and institutional leaders worldwide” with the intention of establishing and improving national competitiveness in the global Knowledge Economy (Egron-Polak & Marmolejo, 2017). That being the case, universities worldwide are “trapped in a competition fetish”, evidenced by either economic competition, geo-political rivalry, “government-sponsored competition” termed by “excellence policies”, or status completion (Naidoo, 2016). It is those institutions that may produce and reproduce the global competitive patterns for strategic relationships, with the aim of procuring revenue, prestige, or talent.

However, there always appear to be small tides of opinion emerging from higher education researchers who constantly call for a more ethical approach to internationalisation. They are trying to identify “the intersections of internationalisation and equality and diversity” (Caruana & Ploner, 2010). They emphasise that internationalisation should not be considered as a goal as of itself but a means to improve the quality of higher education (de Wit & Hunter, 2015). They argue that there is a need for “an intercultural dialogue approach in internationalisation (Castro et al., 2016). They argue that higher educational institutions seeking greater international student numbers or higher global ranking positions “do not necessarily reflect a high degree of beneficial intercultural interaction” (Young et al., 2017). They “work strategically with existing referents and possibilities and to examine the limits of those references and possibilities and to experiment with new referents at the edges of what is currently possible” (Stein & Andreotti, 2017). They ask questions like “[h]ow might the world be imagined differently?” (Kamola, 2014). It is those individuals who constantly interrogate the global competitive patterns on internationalisation and imagine alternatively in the interstitial spaces who may bring fresh perspectives on sustainable partnerships.

In response to the ethical and responsible dimension of internationalisation, “[c]ooperation and partnership on equal terms” are argued to play an important role (de Wit, 2016). However, it seems the construction of partnership is still framed within the strategic side of internationalisation in higher education, strengthened by institutions and strategies, rather than individuals and ethics, which can be seen in the following review.

3.1.2 The slipperiness of defining partnerships in international higher education

Partnerships have been extensively studied across a wide range of fields, i.e. business, management, organisational, health care and education (Bordogna, 2017). However, as Ling (2000: 82) reflects, in the public sector “partnership is seen, generally as a ‘good thing’ although very little empirical work has been done to justify either the claim that policies in the past failed because of a lack of partnership or that new partnership arrangements have demonstrably improved outcomes”. Despite the aforementioned ambiguities regarding the benefits of partnerships, the trend for pursuing partnerships does not appear to be declining; as Williams (2013: 18) argues, “levels of cooperative and collaborative arrangements between people and agencies are likely to persist in the future”. In the meantime, partnership itself is still a loose, ambiguous and slippery term, often conflated with terms such as cooperation, collaboration, coalition, alliance, joint working and networking (Dhillon, 2009; 2013; 2015). This thesis is focused on international higher education partnerships, meaning the construction of partnerships are reviewed in the field of international higher education. In terms of partnerships, this field appears to be no different from any other, thus helping to reach a definitive interpretation of partnerships.

Partnerships, together with terms such as linkages, alliances, coalitions, networks, consortium and associations, have been used to describe the process of international cooperation in higher education, and little agreement appears to have been reached on which term is more accurate or appropriate. Consequently, they are often used interchangeably. Although the narrative regarding international cooperation in higher education has been inconsistent, considerable intellectual efforts have been made to identify and differentiate the different forms of international cooperation in higher education (Neave, 1992; Beerkens, 2002; Grant, 2013). Those studies with particular emphasis on differentiating partnerships from other forms of international cooperation in higher education are reviewed. Although they fail to provide a definite interpretation of partnerships, they offer theoretical justifications for how partnerships can be alternatively constructed in the context of international higher education in this study.

The first attempt at differentiating different forms of international cooperation in higher

education was made by Neave (1992). Considering how many participants and disciplines were involved, and whether central administrative structure was involved in international cooperation in higher education, Neave (1992) positioned linkages, partnerships and consortia within network development and defined five different forms of international cooperation as the five stages of network development: monodisciplinary linkages, exchange partnerships, network partnerships, multidisciplinary networks and consortia. With particular relevance to partnerships, for example, the change from linkages to partnerships required the involvement of a formal administrative structure operating at institutional level. But partnerships can move beyond the classical bilateral relationships to network relationships, which, as Beerkens (2002) argues, is a 'multi-institutional' partnership. In this sense, partnerships can be constructed as a network of multi-institutional relationships but with the involvement of the university's central administrative structures.

In addition to Neave's (1992) efforts, another notable contribution was made by Beerkens (2002) who drew upon other studies (Neave 1992; Ginkel 1996; Wächter 2000; Harman 1988; de Wit 2002), and developed a systematic and multidimensional typology of international inter-organisational cooperation in higher education regarding partnerships, networks and associations. Within this typology, unlike Neave (1992), Beerkens (2002) limited partnership to a bilateral relationship but did not put much emphasis on the role of formal administrative structures operating at institutional level in distinguishing partnerships from other forms of international cooperation in higher education. An administrative structure can be involved in different forms of international cooperation in higher education, contingent upon on the intensity of collaboration therein, which varies from loose voluntary cooperative arrangements to a complete shift of ownership to a new organisation. It seems that partnerships are situated in a continuum from a form of loose cooperation without much formal administrative structure involved to a form of tight cooperation with a newly established arrangement to coordinate inter-institutional activities. In this sense, a partnership can be constructed as an inter-institutional relationship but without much requirement for the involvement of the central administrative structures of the university.

In contrast to both Neave (1992) and Beerkens' (2002) attempts to differentiate partnerships from other forms of international inter-organisational cooperation in higher

education, Grant (2013) tends to view all international higher education engagement under the umbrella of ‘multilateralism’ due to the blurring dividing line between bilateralism and multilateralism in a ‘multi-contextual’ world, or, in Castells's (2010) term, ‘networked society’. In a stimulus paper series published by *The Leadership Foundation*, Grant (2013: 4) suggests two types of multilateralism: loose multilateralism and tight multilateralism and thus proposes “a multilateral approach to partnership that goes beyond bilateral connections and sees internationalisation as a holistic enterprise, cutting across existing functions and their demarcations and also building coherence within and between institutions”. In this sense, partnerships can be constructed as multi-engaged relationships within and beyond institutions. Despite the reductionist classification, Grant (2013) captures a networked relationship within and between institutions in a networked society, which offers a particular heuristic for this study to reconceptualise partnerships by incorporating both institutions and individuals in the context of international higher education.

Although those studies have failed to provide a defining interpretation of partnerships in the context of international higher education (given the ‘slipperiness’ of partnership) they offer several practical pointers as well as theoretical justifications for constructing partnerships differently. Firstly, the term partnership can be constructed as a multilateral relationship, and not necessarily be limited to a bilateral relationship (Neave, 1992). Secondly, the term partnership can be constructed either loosely or tightly, and does not necessarily require the involvement of the administrative structure operating at the central level of the university (Beerkens, 2002). Thirdly, the term partnership can be constructed as a series of multi-engaged relationships within and beyond institutions (Grant, 2013). An example of the alternative construction of partnerships in an educational context can be observed from an empirical study of an inter-organisational partnership comprising over 30 organisations involving 103 individuals. Dhillon (2015: 318) indicates inter-organisational partnership can be conceptualised as “a continuum of weak to strong form of partnership” to explain how social capital affects the sustainability of partnership. In this conceptualisation, partnership is constructed in a continuum, both loosely and tightly.

The reason for this study to require an alternative construction of partnerships is because the current ones fail to address adequately what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education. As we shall see, despite the slipperiness of defining

partnerships, the current constructions of partnerships in the context of international higher education tend to be bound up in inter-institutional strategic relationships, thus overshadowing the role of inter-personal human relationships, which appear to be central to sustainable partnership building (Denman, 2004; Eddy, 2010; Hayhoe et al., 2013; Leng, 2014). This is argued to be a conceptual gap in constituting sustainable partnerships in the context of international higher education.

3.1.3 A gap in constituting sustainable partnerships in international higher education

Despite the looseness, slipperiness and ambiguities of the term partnership itself, many studies, including those reviewed above, tend to frame partnerships as inter-organisational relationships in the context of international higher education (Klasek, 1992; Neave, 1992; Beerkens, 2002; Eddy, 2010; Sutton et al., 2012; Kinser & Green, 2016; Mwangi, 2017). Moreover, the past two decades have witnessed an emerging picture of international strategic partnerships in higher education (Lawton et al. 2013; Engel et al. 2015; O'Malley 2015), which seems to suggest an approach of shifting partnership development away from “plenty in number but thin in substance” (Sutton, 2010: 61). Such strategic representation of partnerships reflects a growing influence of the field of institutional structure in constructing partnerships in the context of international higher education. Arguably, partnerships have become one of the key constituent elements of institutional internationalisation strategies (Knight, 2004, 2012). Scholarship on international higher education partnership tends to be framed by strategic management and also organization theories (Mwangi, 2017).

Although it is encouraging to see the strategic importance attached to partnerships in the context of international higher education, current constructions of partnerships focusing on inter-institutional strategic relationships are argued to be flawed in their attempts to address the issue of what constitutes sustainable international partnership in higher education as they fail to incorporate inter-personal human relationships. Such relationships in the site of individual agency, however, appear to be central to the process of sustainable relationship building (Denman, 2004; Eddy, 2010; Hayhoe et al., 2013; Leng, 2014). Brandenburg (2016) even points out that “good university partnerships did not depend on rational management decisions so much as human emotion”, and those

emotional factors hold as much significance as rational factors, despite not being prioritised. Instead, the role of inter-personal human relationships is overshadowed by the increasing attention paid to inter-institutional strategic relationships in the context of international higher education.

This is argued to be a missing link in the process of constituting sustainable partnerships in the context of international higher education, given that both the field of institutional structure and the site of individual agency both exert their own particular influence over sustainable relationship building. To address such a gap and look for better answers to the question of what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education, the section thus proposes to take into account the role not just of institutions, but also of individuals, in constructing partnerships. Partnership is therefore conceptualised in this study as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals.

As we shall see, institutions and individuals are both intertwined threads within the same fabric of partnerships. Moreover, they simultaneously appear to represent two group forces that affect partnership development. As Williams (2013: 18) has summarised, a body of literature has studied the factors that affect the progress of partnership and collaboration, and those factors are broadly categorised into two groups: one group consists of “structural factors” such as “social, economic and environmental context, institutional and organisational configurations, cultural and collaborative capital, resource, accountability and planning frameworks”; and the other group consists of “agential factors” such as “leadership, management, professionalism and personal capabilities”. The following sections explore how ‘partnership’ is linked to ‘sustainable’ through reviewing the role of institutions as “structural factors” and individuals as ‘agential factors’ in sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education.

The section which follows first explores how the institutional structure affects sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education.

3.2 How do institutions affect sustainable partnership building in international higher education?

The way in which universities relate to the world is directly as an “institution” (Marginson & Sawir, 2006). The “institution” not only presents the identity of a university as an institution but also indicates the role of institutional structures within that university. The reason that the “institution” as a force exerts an increasing influence over partnership development in the context of international higher education seems to be ascribed to the increasing numbers of inter-institutional agreements which require institutional governance (Klasek, 1992). Since the 1990s, universities have started to formalise their international arrangements. Documents like *Memoranda of Understanding*, *Sister Institutional Affiliations*, *Letters of Intent*, *Inter-Institutional Agreements*, have since been formalised to tie higher education institutions together worldwide (ibid). Ironically, such institutionally governed partnerships, however, still appear to be failing to build sustainable relationships in the context of international higher education. This is why Sutton (2010: 61) criticises the fact that many colleges and universities are “finding their existing partnerships are plentiful in number but thin in substance” as those partnerships are “sending a few students and faculties back and forth, occasionally engaging in joint projects lasting only as long as the original proposers are interested, and often (sometimes immediately) sitting idle thereafter” (ibid). In this case, the way in which the “institution” interferes in international partnership development is more like to govern quantity rather than quality. Such partnerships, as Sutton (2010) further criticises, “do not reflect strategic planning and are not seen as integral to the institutional mission” (ibid), which explains why partnerships cannot be sustainable despite the involvement of the institutional structures. Put another way, partnerships can be sustainable if they are embedded in the institutional mission and reflect strategic planning.

This partly explains why there has been witnessed a new emerging picture of international strategic partnerships in the higher education landscape worldwide (Lawton et al. 2013; Engel et al. 2015; O’Malley 2015), and why strategic partnerships and linkages have been identified as the collaborations of the future (Sutton et al. 2012). A report from the European Association of International Education (EAIE) reveals that international strategic partnerships are a growing activity and that improving international strategic partnerships has become one of the main challenges coming to the fore for the European

Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries (Engel, Standström, van der Aa, & Glass, 2014; O'Malley, 2015). Similarly, interviewees and correspondents from University College London (UCL), UK Higher Education sectors, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) indicate that there has been a gradual shift to strategic, niche, sustainable and multifaceted partnerships and networks in which teaching, research, business industry and public engagement will be involved, and that top-down strategies for centralised institutional commitment to international partnerships are also required (Lawton et al., 2013).

The shift to international strategic partnerships appears to be a deliberate choice that universities have to make, as Chan (2004: 52) points out “given resource limitations, universities will be well advised to heed the advice of theories and make sure their international engagement are in line with their missions and objectives and supported by appropriate infrastructures”. Similarly, Leng (2014) suggests that institutions in developing countries need to have a clear understanding of their own visions, demands, capacities and limitations to successfully engage in partnerships in the context of international higher education. Those arguments set out an explorative path for this section, which explores how the “institution” affects sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education via institutionalising partnership as a strategic practice. However, research also indicates that those institutionalised practices on partnership development may pose further challenges to sustainable relationship building due to the contradictory goals of central institutional management and individual engagement on the ground (Turner & Robson 2007; Turner & Robson 2008; Turner & Robson 2009; Oleksiyenko 2014; Hunter 2018).

To offer a theoretical understanding of how institutions affect sustainable relationship building, the section starts by drawing upon insights from Althusser's (1971) work on “institution” to argue that the way in which universities as institutions affect sustainable relationship building is through producing and reproducing particular practices - international strategic partnerships - within particular apparatuses. To maintain such particular practices, the university embeds partnerships into its institutional internationalisation strategies and establishes special units (e.g. an international office) as partnership apparatuses to produce and reproduce international strategic partnership as a normative practice. Such institutionalised practice on partnerships, however, also

indicates potential tensions between the administrative group and the academic group within the institution.

3.2.1 An institution's imaginary relationship to the world

Althusser (1971) offers a theoretical explanation on what is meant by “institution”. For Althusser (1971), institutions operate as “Ideological State Apparatuses” which function “by ideology”. In this sense, institutions are ideological, and can produce and reproduce particular practices organised within particular apparatuses. The idea of ideology is “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (ibid: 158). Moreover, ideology is represented by Althusser (1971) as an imaginary relationship to the real relations to the existence. However, instead of being virtual, an ideology or an imaginary relationship to the world has “a material existence” (ibid: 165). In the empirical list of “Ideological State Apparatuses” proposed by Althusser (1971), churches, schools and family are all institutions operating as “Ideological State Apparatuses”. Universities, as well as their specialised units attached to the central management of the university, operate in a similar way. They can produce and reproduce particular practices by ideology.

To further illustrate the material existence of ideology, Althusser (1971: 168) references the words of Pascal, a churchgoer, who says “[k]neel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe”. This picture vividly illustrates how the churchgoers’ imaginary relationship to God is produced and reproduced by material practices such as kneeling down, moving their lips and making the sign of the cross governed by religious ritual. As Kamola (2014: 522) further interprets, the churchgoers’ imaginary relationship to God is “not some preexisting faith in God that provokes these very real activities, nor an externally imposed ideology designed to dupe the proletarian masses, but rather the practices themselves, as organised by the apparatus of the Church, which produced belief in God”. It is those material practices organised within particular apparatuses shape how subjects imagine their relationships to the world. Using a more Marxist vocabulary, Althusser (1971: 169) argues that the churchgoer believes in God because “his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject”.

This Althusserian sense of “institution” offers a material explanation of why and how universities relating to the world through international strategic partnerships can be produced and reproduced through particular material practices organised within their particular apparatuses. An emerging picture of international strategic partnerships illustrates universities’ imaginary relationships to the world. Such particular practices are produced and reproduced by universities and their specialised units (e.g. their international office) attached to the central management of the university. Those particular apparatuses have the power to change the way in which partnerships are constructed and pursued by the university in the context of international higher education, which is argued to further affect sustainable relationship building in certain ways.

The sub-section which follows explores how international strategic partnership as a specific ideology is embedded in the institutional internationalisation strategies to indicate how such texts produced by universities construct and shape the understanding of the idea of partnership in the context of international higher education. For example, strategic plans or strategies are used to insert ideology into the texts and thus construct a specific interpretation of international higher education partnerships, implementing, regulating and thus emanating from the specialised units (e.g. the international office) to the whole university. Institutions such as universities and international offices can promote particular ways of looking at partnerships and sustainable relationship building.

3.2.2 Institutional internationalisation strategies

If the churchgoer’s relationship to their God is governed by religious ritual, contemporary universities’ imaginary relationships to the world through international strategic partnerships appear to be governed by “competition fetish” (Naidoo, 2018), which believes “competition will provide the solution to all the unsolved problems of HE” (ibid: 2), for example, increasing equity, enhancing quality, leading to efficiency, or protecting against risk. Governed by such “competition fetish” (Naidoo, 2016, 2018), partnerships in the context of international higher education appear to have become one of the key constituent elements of institutional internationalisation strategy (Knight, 2004, 2012). It is argued that this transformation is informed by the changing nature of internationalisation in higher education (Sutton et al., 2012). In that case, one cannot bypass the maturity of institutional internationalisation in higher education in discussing the twists and turns of partnership development.

Internationalisation is largely defined by “integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003: 2). However, the term internationalisation is not as neutral as the working definition suggests. On the contrary, internationalisation is argued to be an intentional process of “integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education”. It is ideological in effect. Although this intentional process is suggested to “enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (de Wit & Hunter, 2015: 3), one should also note that the intentional process of internationalisation could also be manipulated by different agents, each having different goals. In that case, partnerships are “a major testing ground for institutional effort connecting with an increasingly global system of higher education” (Sutton et al., 2012: 151), and the goal of partnerships for higher education institutions is to position these institutions within the global academic system, and even to shape the system.

The strategic significance, especially in terms of the contribution to global competitiveness and positioning, is often prioritised when considering the development of an international partnership (Zhuang, 2009; Sakamoto & Chapman, 2011) against the background of a global trend of craving enhanced international competitiveness (Egron-Polak & Marmolejo, 2017). International competition and market characterise this orientation towards cooperation (Yang, 2014). Inter-institutional partnerships are typically expected to enhance international engagement and thus improve institutional performance (de Wit, 2015). To advance their institutional ranking, institutions partner with respected collaborators (Chan, 2004; Knight, 2008) as, through joining a partnership, institutions have opportunities to strengthen their international visibility through profiling and branding (Klemenčič, 2017). To profile and brand, the global rankings in turn can be considered to be a major reference in partner selection, having an influence on choice of partnership (Locke, 2014). Universities would prefer to partner a smaller number of institutions which they believed to be of the same or better peer status, rather than institutions considered to be of lower status (Taylor, 2010). In this sense, global ranking is a typical yardstick to help decide which partner institution would be included and which would not. Consequently, partnership constructions could be narrowed down into particular relationships favoured by a university’s strategic priorities. In addition, revenue

generation has also “become the major incentive for international university partnerships around the globe” (Leng, 2014: 86).

It is encouraging to see such great efforts in emphasising the significance of internationalisation through a strategic sense; however, such a strategic transformation could swamp partnerships with self-serving institutional agendas aimed at responding to global competition, and designed accordingly. Djerasimovic (2014) argues that if the primary motivation of establishing partnerships is to generate revenue or raise an institution’s international profile, it will lead to neglect of the sustainability, quality and equity of partnerships. Similarly, Eddy (2010) also cautions that such extrinsic rationale as economic motivation for income generation shakes the foundations for sustained partnerships. As with Eddy (2010), Hayhoe et al. (2013) points out that such short-term commercially motivated collaboration is likely to fall short of expectations by drawing lessons from the legacy of previous Canada-China university linkages. Despite reflection and criticism, partnerships serving a particular institutional interest are still produced and reproduced. This ideology reflects the institution’s imaginary relationship with the world. But the ideology is not virtual; it has a material existence, represented by particular values and reproduced through special apparatuses such as international offices and daily practice within the university.

3.2.3 Partnership apparatuses and practices

Kehm and Teichler (2007: 270) argue that there is a growing influence from what could be called the ‘periphery’ on international higher education activities; for example, institutional management and international offices at higher education institutions with management support and service functions which “are trying more than before to shape the international profile of higher education institutions”. One phenomenon arising from the comprehensive approach to university internationalisation is the increasing involvement of the professionalised administrative community; these particular agent groups exert as much influence as academic groups (Hunter, 2018). In these cases, functional departments such as International Offices act as a special institution attached to the central management of the university, shot through with professionalised administrators and managers specialised in engaging with international partnerships, could systematise ideas and practices of promoting a particular way of understanding internationalisation and partnerships. Evidence shows that there is an increasing trend

towards formalising, centralising and professionalising internationalisation in higher education institutions (Stensaker et al., 2008).

Based on an analysis of twelve case institutions in Nordic countries, Stensaker et al. (2008) identifies signs relating to “formalised” development in the establishment of separate and special offices for internationalisation, and the emergence of specific institutional plans for internationalisation; a typical example of “centralised” development is the abandoning of exchange agreements at department/study programme level in favour of institutional agreements at the top level; another example of “professionalised” development is the replacement of autodidactic practices by a skilled and trained specialist who knows how to set up a proper institutional exchange agreements or how to acquire international research funding. Nowadays, the establishment of special units, for example, the International Office, the International Relation Office, or the Office for International Exchange and Cooperation, are manifested in the institutional structures of universities to fulfil the institutional interest in international engagement. In the UK, for example, many higher education institutions establish international offices fulfilling their dual interest in overseas recruitment and supporting staff and student mobility, particularly across Europe (Turner & Robson, 2008).

3.2.4 The tensions within the institution

Rather than claiming to make rational choices regarding partnership selection, universities may select partners ideologically and normatively. One can argue that internationalisation seems to be institutionalised in the sense of normalization and regularization, rather than the sense of cognition shared by both administrative group and academic group. In this sense, as Stensaker et al. (2008) further argues, institutionalisation can be technical rather than substantial; it will not bring about stability or embeddedness. Such unsatisfactory institutionalisation is manifested in the challenges faced by the administrative and managerial agents, including the contradictory goals of central management and the faculties/schools, and also between the administrative group and the academic group, as well as miscommunications between different administrative units, and excessive bureaucracy (Hunter, 2018).

In an institutional case study on a British university, Turner and Robson (2007) have discussed how the emergence of institutional internationalisation strategy for commercial

internationalisation impacts upon the academic community, arguing that linking to an income generating approach to internationalisation may further disengage academics from institutional internationalisation, potentially obstructing the management intention for internationalisation. Later, Turner and Robson (2009) also highlight the contradictions and tensions between the intensified organisational processes of characterising internationalisation and the lived experiences and identities of academics. Similarly, Eddy (2010) argues that traditional practices and policies on reward systems regarding joint working between individual collaborators is diminished in the academic hierarchy, which could discourage individual academics to engage in partnership activity.

Therefore, tensions in values, visions and goals can place partnerships at the centre of power struggles, thus becoming obstacles to collaboration (Oleksiyenko, 2014). If shared belief and understanding is not reached, partnerships are at risk of unravelling, given that the sustainability of partnerships “ultimately depends on the active involvement of all partners” (Klemenčič, 2017: 104). Furthermore, those involved partners need not only to refer to each involved institution but also to those individuals engaged therein. In that case, as Denman (2004: 80) points out, institutional leadership, at the very least, should make an impact “in allowing individual faculty to foster and forge inter-institutional collaboration”.

In a nutshell, the reason why institutions might also fail to build sustainable relationships through pursuing international strategic partnerships can be ascribed to the neglect of various contingency factors in the site of individual agency. The tensions between the institution and the individual can potentially risk making partnerships unsustainable, or at the very least, not as sustainable as imagined by the institution.

The section which thus follows explores how individual agency affects sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education.

3.3 How do individuals affect sustainable partnership building in international higher education?

Despite the formal linkages increasingly institutionalised in the field of institutional structure, one should never ignore the informal links traditionally practiced in the site of

individual agency. This is because universities relate to the world not only directly, as ‘institutions’, but also through ‘disciplinary networks’ (Marginson & Sawir, 2006). The disciplinary orientation of individual academics are able to “provides links with others, creating a network upon which collaboration can be built” (Eddy, 2010: 63). Those informal links or academic communities of individuals are “probably the oldest and still most important form of international cooperation and are apparent in all fields and disciplines” (Beerkens 2002: 298). These initial links between individual academics play a major role in the genesis of sustainable partnership building.

Many studies have also suggested that interpersonal human relationships between individuals affect sustainable partnership building (Denman, 2004; Eddy, 2010; Hayhoe et al., 2013; Leng, 2014). Those deep human connections developed voluntarily by individuals are able to foster mutual understanding, respect and trust between partnership participants (Leng & Pan, 2013; Leng, 2014; Mwangi, 2017), which are key features in ensuring that there is enough “glue” to hold partnership participants together (Spencer-Oatey, 2013). Therefore, as Leng (2014: 86) suggests, to ensure successful and sustainable partnership, “more attention should be paid to building human relationships”. Therefore, it is important to explore how individuals affect sustainable partnership building in the context of international higher education.

The site of individual agency where informal links are performed has been substantially transformed. Powered by the global flow of information, technology, finance, people and ideas (Appadurai, 1990), the world has become an open, fluid and plural world. In this world, individual academics may be more inclined to move, thus creating unprecedented opportunities for fostering inter-personal contacts. Correspondingly, the patterns of crossing international borders have shifted; in addition to traditionally mobile academics accruing social capital through international mobility as initial champions (Eddy, 2010), transnational academics crossing international borders and then working overseas (Kim, 2017) as a particular diaspora could also contribute to sustainable partnership building. In addition, individuals with a dedicated role or responsibility in a collaborative environment can also play a significant role in building sustainable partnerships as they may enhance partnership participants’ social capital (Bordogna, 2017). It can be argued that the way in which different individual academics contribute to sustainable relationship building is through their social capital accrued from international mobility (Bauder et al.,

2017). Such social capital is made up of networks, trust and shared norms and values, thus influencing the sustainability of partnerships (Dhillon, 2009, 2013, 2015). However, research literature also warns of uncertainties concerning the sustainability of partnerships should the champions' involvement end (Amey, 2010), or if individual academics transfer institutional allegiances (Appadurai, 1990; Marginson & Sawir, 2006; Tapper & Filippakou, 2009).

This section links ideas of mobility, network and capital to explain how individuals affect sustainable partnership building in the context of international higher education. The section starts by explaining how the site of individual agency is transformed by drawing on Appadurai's (1990) work on flows and scapes, and in so doing suggests unprecedented networking opportunities contingent upon to what extent individual 'imagined worlds' are fluid, irregular or multiplex in the context of international higher education. Next, it introduces the three different roles of individual academics, which are faculty champions (Eddy, 2010), transnational diaspora (Yang & Welch, 2010; Kim, 2017), and boundary spanners (Williams, 2013; Bordogna, 2017), and reviews the ways in which they contribute to sustainable partnership building respectively. Then, the section builds on work applying capital to international academic mobility and partnerships (Eddy, 2010; Yang & Welch, 2010; Kim, 2010, 2017; Bauder et al., 2017), and illustrates the relationship between mobility, social capital, network and trust, explaining how interpersonal human relationships contribute to sustainable partnership building. The section ends by describing challenges raised in the literature regarding individual influence over sustainable relationship building (Appadurai, 1990; Marginson & Sawir, 2006; Tapper & Filippakou, 2009; Amey, 2010).

3.3.1 An individual's 'imagined worlds'

Appadurai's (1990) vision of contingent cross-border flows offers an opportunity to imagine the global higher education landscape as fluid, irregular, plural and multiple worlds. Certain studies have already applied such possibilities to the field of higher education (Marginson & Sawir, 2005; Marginson, 2008; Jokila, 2015). In this study, Appadurai's (1990) work helps to imagine a transformed site of individual agency for sustainable partnership building in the context of international higher education. More specifically, the way in which the world is imagined by individuals could transform their identities, helping create a desire in them to move; the contingent cross-border flows

could create unprecedented networking opportunities for different individual academics, equipping them with different forms of capital, especially social capital; and, in the meantime, due to the transformed individual identities, a loose institutional allegiance can be generated and strengthened, creating a stronger allegiance to the disciplinary networks, which, in turn, would affect the sustainability of partnerships. In short, when individuals desire to move, the story about developing and sustaining relationships begins to unfold.

Having extended Anderson's notion of imagined community into a national concept, Appadurai (1990) places the term 'imagined worlds' within a globalised context as a way of understanding the world. For Appadurai (1990), the globe is not imagined to be a closed, structured and singular world; instead, it is constructed as an open, fluid and plural imagined world constituted by "historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (Appadurai, 1990: 297). In this sense, the way in which the globe is constructed could be subject to the imagination of individuals, which is further powered by the constantly contingent flows of people, media, technology, finance and ideas, or in Appadurai's (1990) words, the five building blocks of landscapes - ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, finanscapescapes and ideoscapescapes. These "scapes" are used to describe different disjunctive landscapes in relation to people, media, technology, finance and ideas. For example, the term ethnoscape is translated as "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world" (Appadurai, 1990: 297). As Appadurai (1990) argues, those scapes are "not objectively given relations" but "deeply perspectival constructs" (ibid: 296), and "the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations" (ibid).

Situated in this disjunctive "imagined worlds" scenario, the individual actor or, more specifically, the mobile academic, constitutes a particular moving group, or an essential feature of the global higher education landscape: ethnoscapescapes. The extent to which individuals want to move is subject to how they deal with repertoires of images and narratives disseminated from the technoscapescapes or mediascapescapes. One could argue that those disjunctive techno/mediascapescapes provide messages which make individual academics want to move, network and even transform their identities. As Marginson and

Sawir (2005: 304) further argue, “if techno/mediascapes are the more ubiquitous, ethnoscapes offer the deepest possibilities for self-transformation, opening educational travellers and temporary migrants to hybrid and multiple identities”. Those transformed individual identities, together with other forms of social capital accrued through international academic mobility, contribute to a transformed site of individual agency where sustainable relationships are built and strengthened.

3.3.2 Different identities of key ‘individuals’

The more “imagined worlds” are perceived to be fluid, irregular, plural and multiplex, the more individual academics might want to move (Appadurai, 1990). Correspondingly, unprecedented networking opportunities can be created due to the increasingly contingent cross-border mobility. Individual academic identities can be transformed and thus contribute to sustainable relationship building in varied ways. They can be “faculty champions” who make good use of their social capital and thus continuously act as the nexus of a partnership (Eddy, 2010); they can be “transnational academics” who cross international borders and then work overseas with transnational capital (Kim, 2010, 2017), and also they can be “boundary spanners” who enhance social capital, building coherence and communication among partnership participants (Williams, 2013; Bordogna, 2017).

Individuals as faculty champions play a critical role in forming and sustaining partnerships between institutions. Faculty members are the initial champions of partnerships (Cooper & Mitsunaga, 2010). They often “serve on the front line as initiators of partnerships” (Eddy, 2010: 63). In a study of partnership and collaboration in the context of higher education, Eddy (2010: 27) defines the faculty champion as “an individual who advocates for the development of a partnership and who brings together others to engage in the project” and also as someone “not necessarily located in leadership positions”. With particular relevance to partnerships, those faculty champions are argued to possess certain types of power; for example, they create disciplinary networks upon which collaboration can be built; they can act as a node to connect disparate networks; and they provide “ground-level” work to bring partners together, which is argued to be fertile space for partnerships to emerge (ibid). However, the sustainability of partnerships formed by those individual faculty champions can be challenged due to the lack of a reward mechanism in their institution, which could adversely affect the enthusiasm of individual academic engagement in partnerships (Amey, 2010; Eddy, 2010). Conversely,

Cooper and Mitsunaga (2010) draw upon faculty perspectives in their involvement in international collaboration work at the individual, classroom and programme level, arguing that faculties are able to build and sustain long-term collaborations because the motivation of individuals in doing international collaboration work goes beyond the extrinsic. Such intrinsic motivation to do “heart work” (Cooper & Mitsunaga, 2010) motivates individuals to seek a continuation of a partnership even when they run into fiscal difficulties. In the context of international higher education, those faculty members constitute traditional faculty collaborators, outreaching, linking and building relationships internationally. Apart from those traditional faculty collaborators and champions contributing to forming and building sustainable relationships, there are more mobile academics who cross international borders and then settle there. Those particular academics are also considered as contributing to sustainable partnership building.

Individuals as transnational academics cross international borders and then work overseas (Kim, 2017). The academics who move to a new country and then work or settle overseas constitute a particular “ethnoscape” (Appadurai 1990) - the diaspora population - in the contemporary world of higher education. It seems very common for a foreign research student, after completing their degree, to become a member of the research academic staff in their host country (Kim, 2010). Those mobile academics not only acquire as much capital as those traditional mobile academics, but also carry a hybrid identity and transnational capital. The transnational mobile academic plays a role as international knowledge broker, knowledge trader and institutionalised local career adapter (Kim & Brooks, 2013). Those with diaspora knowledge may contribute to developing and sustaining an international higher education partnership between universities. Wider research on the high-skilled diaspora population has shown their great influence on strengthening the connections between their host and home countries (Yang & Welch, 2010). There is also some evidence to suggest that the Chinese knowledge diaspora, with their strong attachment to their home countries, maintain strong academic links with the homeland (Hugo & Dasvarma, 2008 in Yang & Welch, 2010). This suggests that a mobile academic who has settled overseas can be an underexplored asset in forming and strengthening links between the home institution and the host one, as diaspora communities “straddle multiple societies and have vital social networks connecting them to home and host cultures” (Fanta, 2017: xxiii). However, as with faculty champions, the sustainability of partnerships can be challenged when such individuals change their

institutions. In that case, partnerships might move with individuals.

Individuals as boundary spanners are thought to reduce the risk that partnerships move with either faculty champions or transnational academics. The boundary spanner is portrayed as a “network manager” who is able to build “effective personal relationships with a wide range of other actors”; manage “in non-hierarchical decision environments through negotiation and brokering”; perform “the role of ‘policy entrepreneur’ to connect problems to solutions” and “mobilise resources and effort in the search for successful outcomes” (Williams, 2002: 121). The process of boundary spanning is meant to “build a bridge between two different organisations or between two or more different people coming from different cultures” (Newman, 1992: 149). Recently, Bordogna (2017) in a study of two long-term Sino-British transnational partnership programmes highlighted the role of boundary spanner as a network manager in developing and enhancing social capital among faculty members involved in programme delivery. In Bordogna's (2017) study, the involvement of boundary spanners in the partnership programme proved to be more effective and successful as the boundary spanner played a significant role in building communication, mobilising resources and strengthening mutual understanding and trust, thus enhancing social capital among partnership participants. In that case, the agency of boundary spanner is significant in building sustainable partnerships between institutions in the context of international higher education. Identifying and nurturing such boundary spanners as network managers, however, poses another challenge.

As is reviewed above, the aforementioned individuals appear to be the key stakeholders regarding partnership development. But as is to be addressed in the following section, the extent to which international partnerships sustains also depends on how the social capital is strengthened within the institution through building intercultural communication, thus enhancing mutual understanding and relationship building within the institution.

3.3.3 Social capital and intercultural communication

Research has shown that there is a close relationship between international mobility, experience and capital (Bauder et al., 2017). The mobility of both students and staff help to gain international experiences and thus develop “international competences and social networks abroad”, which are considered to be “important drivers of internationalisation within home institutions” in that those people “bring with them knowledge, cultural and

social capital and former institutional associations that can boost international engagement” (Klemenčič, 2017: 106). In this sense, academics crossing international borders can be considered an important factor in producing knowledge and acquiring capital. Of all forms of capital, social capital is thought to be the central facet, not only in developing partnerships but also in institutionalising them (Bordogna, 2017). Given that partnerships formed by faculty champions or transnational academics can move from one institution to another, institutionalising social capital appears to be important. As Eddy (2010: 50) argues, social capital has “moved beyond individual partners and organisations and become a different contrast, namely partnership capital”. To further understand what constitutes social capital, Dhillon (2009, 2013, 2015) draws upon both empirical work on inter-organisational partnerships and social capital theory to explore the key dimensions of social capital in sustaining partnerships in an educational context. It is observed that networks, trust and shared norms and values are the key dimensions of social capital affecting the sustainability of inter-organisational partnerships. These dimensions provide more concrete terms in order to understand how social capital affects the sustainability of partnerships.

However, to nurture and institutionalise such social capital within the institution in order to build sustainable relationships, there is a need to ensure effective intercultural communication as different identities of individuals (e.g. faculty champions, transnational academics, boundary spanners, and faculty members) with their accumulated social capital may “entail inherited frameworks infused with differing perceptions and values” (Wang, 2005: 59). Those different perceptions and value may reflect deep-seated assumptions regarding particular issues, leading to conflict during the collaboration, and this is where intercultural communication comes in to achieve mutual understanding. Previous studies have identified key factors that affect effective intercultural communication, for example common language issues (e.g. Spencer-Oatey, Işık-Güler, & Stadler, 2011) and intercultural communicative competences (e.g. Byram, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1999). In addition, Spencer-Oatey (2013: 256) also reported that unnecessary ‘extras’ such as “having meals together, going on sightseeing trips, meeting each other’s families and chatting about a wide range of topic” were identified as a key factor to enable individuals work through conflicts during their collaboration. This highlights the relations between effective communication and relationship building. It is significant to spend time on relationship building through continuous human touch between individuals in case for

smoothing communication among participants in the future.

Unfortunately, those relationships built upon mutual understanding and trust still run risk of unravelling partnerships between institutions when individuals choose to move to other institutions due to their transferred institutional allegiances.

3.3.4 Transferred institutional allegiances

It is through “disciplinary networks” that institutions indirectly partner with foreign institutions, and this approach is based upon a strong attachment to the relationships between individual academics and their “disciplinary networks”. In that case, the relationships between the individual and the institution they serve may correspondingly become weak. This raises the question of how much institutional loyalty mobile academics have and to what extent individual academics may change their personal institutional allegiances (Tapper & Filippakou, 2009). It seems that the greater the academic’s desire or need to move, the less stable the communities and networks become (Appadurai, 1990). Through “disciplinary networks” individual academics become mobile (Kim 2014), and the mobile academic is ‘the synthesis of the totally uprooted wanderer and the totally rooted individual’ (Kim, 2017: 986). Their experiences of crossing borders can generate knowledge as capital for facilitating the development of international higher education partnerships between institutions, and yet also transform their personal identity from that of a traditional academic owing more allegiance to their affiliated institution to that of a mobile academic who may feel more of an attachment to their professional disciplinary networks.

As Marginson and Sawir (2006: 346) argued, “cross-border association and loyalty can be powerful”, therefore, mobile academics may demonstrate more loyalty to their “imagined communities of the disciplines” than their affiliated institutions. Such an argument appears to prove the prediction made by Levine (2000) that faculty members inevitably become increasingly independent of higher education institutions. One can argue that the global cultural flow is a process of disconnecting individuals from the institution, but it seems also to be a process of reconnecting individuals to the “imagined communities of disciplinary networks” (Marginson & Sawir, 2006). In other words, instead of being institutionalised within the institution, inter-personal relationships appear to be institutionalised within individual environments which are irregular, plural and

beyond organisational boundaries. In this sense, their acquired knowledge as capital increases the possibility of academic mobility and decreases the stability of their institutional allegiances. Accordingly, the acquired social capital allows the mobile academics to gain more individual agency than traditional academics in terms of choosing and changing the professional networks they serve. That being the case, partnerships developed by mobile academics run the risk of being uprooted from the institution where worked if they are not sufficiently embedded within that institution.

3.4 How is sustainable partnership explored in international higher education?

As reviewed above, both the institution and the individual exert their own influences over sustainable relationship building in international higher education. As regards institutions affecting sustainable relationship building in international higher education, the chapter has drawn on Althusser's (1971) insights on “institution” operating as “Ideological State Apparatuses” to set out a theoretical foundation for understanding why international strategic partnerships can be institutionalised as a particular practice for sustainable relationship building, and outline the potential tensions inherent in the institutionalisation of particular partnership practices within the university. Regarding individuals affecting sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education, the chapter has drawn on Appadurai's (1990) insights on “flows” contributing to “imagined worlds” to set out a theoretical foundation for understanding why international personal relationships can be an underexploited resource in terms of sustainable relationship building due to the transformed site of individual agency in the global cultural flows. In so doing, the chapter has explored how ‘partnership’ is linked to ‘sustainable’ through the roles of institutions and individuals in affecting sustainable relationship building in international higher education.

This section offers a brief review of how current studies on sustainable partnerships in international higher education are explored, with particular attention being paid to the methodological approach. In summary, the section argues that current literature on sustainable partnerships in international higher education share some methodological preferences. Firstly, case study appears to be the most common approach in the current research literature on sustainable partnerships. Secondly, partnerships that are considered

as cases and, more often than not, long-term partnerships are selected as cases to investigate the sustainability. Thirdly, those studies seek participants' perspectives on the targeted partnership programmes from both sides of the partnership. Fourthly, those studies identify both successful experiences as well as the potential challenges faced by those partnerships in isolating the aspects that contribute to sustainable partnership building.

Much research literature has been produced investigating how sustainable partnerships are built through examining different partnership cases (e.g. Hayhoe et al., 2013; Leng & Pan, 2013; Mwangi, 2017; Ng & Nyland, 2018). For example, Hayhoe et al. (2013) examine three national level Canada-China university linkages covering different disciplines such as management education, education, engineering, agriculture, medicine, environment and law. Those linkages were the result of development agreements between governments lasting more than 10 years. According to their studies, sustainable partnerships with time frames of between 5 and 15 years are suggested, which is in line with King (2009) and Jackson (2003)'s emphasis on time spent developing understanding among partnership participants. Meanwhile, a number of reports have highlighted best practices for engaging in international higher education partnerships (e.g. Helms 2015; Banks et al. 2016). In 2016, the Institute of International Education (IIE) in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) produced a guide, from a wide range of geographical locations and institutional types, to building sustainable academic linkages through a global perspective on strategic international partnerships (Banks et al. 2016), within which there is a close link between strategic partnerships and sustainable linkage. As such, partnerships are selected as particular cases to be examined and thus best practices are extracted in terms of building sustainable partnerships in international higher education.

All such aforementioned studies and reports provide insights into targeted programmes and valuable lessons from which to learn how long-term sustainable partnerships are built. However, studies on sustainable partnerships in international higher education have paid more attention to investigating particular partnerships, thus extracting factors or lessons that contribute to effective, efficient, successful and sustainable experiences, but paying less attention to how sustainable partnerships are constructed and negotiated through a holistic imagining within a range of differing contexts – international, institutional and

individual. Few studies address the methods in which sustainable international partnerships in higher education are constructed by both institutions and individuals within the universities, or explore the similarities and differences, in an international context, regarding the construction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education. Moreover, among studies on sustainable partnerships in international higher education, there is a sense that ‘partnership’ and ‘sustainable’ are linked naturally through such expressions as success, effectiveness and efficiency, without much interrogation of what ‘sustainable’ means and thus its impact on the construction of sustainable partnerships. Those studies fail to interrogate who defines best practice and what counts as success, effectiveness and efficiency. In other words, the question of ‘sustainable for whom’ tends to be underrepresented.

The methodological and conceptual analytical gaps are argued to be deficiencies in thinking and reflecting on what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education, especially in globalised internationalisation in higher education which requires an understanding of different voices and perspectives and learning from other contexts (de Wit et al., 2017). This thus sets the agenda for this study to suggest a different explorative path to observe constructions of sustainable international partnerships, portraying the tensions between the institution and the individual within the university, and also between international contexts. Unlike previous studies, which assumed sustainability corresponded to effectiveness, efficiency and success, without much interrogation of who defines best practice and what counts as effectiveness, efficiency and success, ‘sustainable’ in this study is intended to define those elements deemed to be desirable and thus worth attaining in constructing partnerships in international higher education for a given subject, as *what-is* conceived by the institution *might* not be *what-is* perceived by the individual, and vice versa; and also *what-is* constructed in the English context *might* not be *what-is* constructed in the Chinese context, and vice versa.

To further capture the complexities regarding what is conceived to be desirable and worth attaining in constructing long-term effective, efficient and successful partnerships in international higher education for a given subject (in particular the administrative/managerial group and the academic group in different contexts), the concept of *imaginary* is incorporated into this research to explain why and how sustainable international partnerships can be constructed and enabled in certain ways, and

not others. The term *imaginary* was first coined by Cornelius Castoriadis and appeared to enter the social sciences largely due to Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor in his study of modernity (Kamola, 2014). For Taylor, “social imaginary’ refers to ‘not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society” (Taylor, 2004: 91). It creates the “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor, 2004: 23). In this sense, the concept of *imaginary* functions not only as a discursively cognitive framework explaining how a particular understanding is constructed, but also as a structurally organising force legitimising the way in which particular understanding ought to be constructed.

Drawing upon the work of Charles Taylor in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, I use the term *imaginary* specifically to assist in understanding why sustainable international partnerships are constructed and enabled in certain ways and not others (1) because this thesis does not aim to present sustainable international partnerships as a *de facto* reality; it does not aim to explore the sustainability of a particular international partnership between two higher education institutions based on a successful example and thus offer a model or a prescription for developing a sustainable international partnerships. Instead, it aims to explore what is considered desirable and worth attaining for those pursuing long-term effective partnerships in the context of international higher education. It is also the case that (2) this study largely draws upon data that presents how international partnerships develop, stagnate, unravel or flourish based on the participants’ perceptions and experiences, which is “often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends” (Taylor, 2004: 23). It is worth noting, however, that *imaginary* in this study does not constitute a universal truth of what a sustainable partnership should be but rather it presents a chosen story told by two universities about what a sustainable partnership could be. Therefore, I distinguish *imaginary* in the singular as an abstraction from *imaginaries* in plural as multiple interpretations across place-specific contexts. The concept of imaginary used in this study is intended to capture the complexities of sustainable partnership construction between the institution and the individual, and also between England and China.

3.5 A brief summary

This chapter has attempted to establish a conceptual territory for this study to explore

what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education.

Firstly, the chapter has reviewed the ways in which partnerships are constructed and their alternative constructions within the context of international higher education. In so doing, it offers both theoretical justifications and practical pointers in constructing partnerships as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals.

An examination of previously published literature failed to reveal a definitive interpretation of partnerships. However, despite the looseness and slipperiness of the term partnership, current literature, more often than not, constructs partnerships through the lens of inter-institutional relationships. Moreover, a picture appears to be emerging of international strategic partnerships in the global landscape of higher education, and such linkages tend to be considered as “collaborating on the future” (Sutton et al., 2012: 147). Although it is encouraging to see the strategic importance attached to partnership construction in the context of international higher education, the role of inter-personal human relationships in this international strategic partnership construction seems to be overlooked; such relationships however, appear to be central to sustainable relationship building. This absence of inter-personal human relationships from current constructions of partnerships is argued to be the missing link in understanding sustainable international partnerships in higher education, given that both the institution and the individual have been shown to exert significant force in the relationship building process. To address such a gap, the chapter thus considers ‘partnership’ as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals.

Next, the chapter has reviewed the ways in which this alternative construction of ‘partnership’ is linked to ‘sustainable’ through reviewing the role of institutions as well as individuals in affecting sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education.

Regarding the role of institutions in affecting sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education, the chapter has drawn upon Althusser’s (1971) insights on “institution” operating as “Ideological State Apparatuses” to set out a theoretical foundation for understanding why and how international strategic partnerships as a particular practice organised within specialised apparatuses can be produced and

reproduced. It argues that partnerships have been identified as one of the key constituent elements of institutional internationalisation strategies and have become an institutionalised practice organised within specialised units such as international offices attached to the university's central management. Such institutionalisation, however, is also argued to raise challenges and tensions between central management and the faculties/schools, and also between the administrative group and the academic group regarding international engagement. In this sense, it is as likely to create unsustainability as sustainability regarding sustainable partnerships. This thus sets the agenda to further explore the tension between the institution and the individual regarding the construction of sustainable partnerships in the context of international higher education.

With reference to the role of individuals in affecting sustainable relationship building in the context of international higher education, the chapter has drawn upon Appadurai's (1990) insights on individually constructed disjunctive "imagined worlds" to set out a theoretical foundation for understanding why and how international personal relationships can be an underexploited resource contributing to sustainable partnership building between universities. It argues that the disjunctive flow of people, technology, media, finance and ideas empower individuals more than ever before to look beyond the nation and even want to move, creating unprecedented networking opportunities for individual academics to develop international personal relationships. In addition to traditional faculty collaborators such as champions forming and sustaining partnerships between universities, those transnational academics who cross international borders and then work overseas as a diaspora are identified as playing an important role in maintaining academic links with home countries. Moreover, boundary spanners, who build communication and mobile resources, and strengthen mutual understanding and trust among partnership participants, are shown to reduce the risk of partnerships moving with either faculty champions or transnational academics due to loose institutional allegiance. These different individuals carry with them differentiated social capital, exerting a particular influence over sustainable relationship. In this sense, it is important to explore how different individual academics affect sustainable relationship building from their own perspectives and experiences.

On this point, the chapter has explored how 'partnership' is linked to 'sustainable' through examining institutions and individuals as two significant forces affecting sustainable

relationship building. However, the way in which ‘sustainable’ is linked to ‘partnership’ appears to be built upon a preconstruction of ‘sustainable partnership’ as ‘long-term’, ‘successful’, and ‘effective’ (or ‘efficient’), without much interrogation of its ideological connotations; for example, ‘sustainable for whom’. In this sense, ‘sustainable’ is a value-laden concept. What constitutes a ‘sustainable’ partnership depends on what is constructed to be desirable and worth attaining by institutions, individuals, England and China in pursuing long-term effective partnerships. For example, *what-is* constructed to be desirable and worth attaining for institutions *might not be* the same as *what-is* for individuals, and also *what-is* constructed to be desirable and worth attaining in an English context *might not be* the same as *what-is* constructed in a Chinese context.

To connect *what-is* with *what-might-be* and thus capture the aforementioned complexities of sustainable partnership constructions between the institution and the individual, and also between England and China, the concept of *imaginary* is thus incorporated into this study. In the next chapter I shall explain how such complexities can be approached through a focus on research methodology.

Chapter 4 Navigating *what-is* with *what-might-be*: research methodology

As proposed in the previous chapter, this study considers partnerships as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals. In that case, both institutions and individuals are the critical components that inform the construction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education. To further explore how institutions and individuals affect this construction, the concept of *imaginary* is incorporated to help give an understanding of the ways in which sustainable international partnerships are constructed. The methods through which this research topic is ‘seen’ is supported by the researcher’s worldview and by the philosophical stance of the research. Those perspectives have a significant effect on the design and conduct of this research, carried out as it is within a specific framework.

This chapter traces the research methodology that I have chosen in order to navigate *what-is* with *what-might-be* regarding the construction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education. Section 4.1 explains how I arrived at my research paradigm and how such a paradigm informs the research design which follows. Section 4.2 addresses how the multiple case (embedded) study design links the research questions to the data. Section 4.3 describes the pilot phase of the study and aims to reveal some initial ideas and themes, thus refining the inquiry strategy before engaging with the main phase of the study. Section 4.4 offers a detailed explanation of how I collect and analyse both staff interviews and policy documents. Section 4.5 provides some ethical considerations relevant to this study.

4.1 The philosophical stance

This study is based upon the assumption that *what-might-be* sustainable international partnerships can only emerge from the negotiation of *what-is* a sustainable international partnership constructed by all parties. Such an oscillating sense of understanding is supported by the particular philosophical stance, which is intertwined with the researcher’s worldview.

4.4.1 Locating the researcher: a ‘cross-cultural’ inquirer

The researcher’s belief system defines how they see the world. However, such a system of beliefs can be challenged whenever an individual encounters new and conflicting ideas. Each time I leave somewhere, having stayed a long time, and settle somewhere new, my worldview experiences a corresponding cultural shock, further transforming the way I see the world. This section provides a profile of the researcher, giving a brief reflection on how my personal worldview informs the way I investigate the research topic through exploring *what-is* with *what-might-be*.

I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth and my parents did not come from a well-to-do family. My hometown was not a big city but competition for its limited educational resources was fierce. My parents believed that performing well in school represented the only path to success. I believed what they believed. I went to school, gained high marks and attempted to become the best among my peers. Unfortunately, this approach led me nowhere; it did, however, lead to a personal obsession with performance. I did not know where my future lay after failing in my initial pursuit.

It was not until I left my hometown of nearly 20 years and went to college that I started to think differently. I studied in a university that was not well-established; such an institution, however, allowed me to interact with people from totally different backgrounds to my own; for example, a girl with a talent for writing, and another girl who was a gifted actor; They may be not have been ‘winners’ in an academic sense, but they were winners in the sense of pursuing their diverse ambitions. That was the first time I felt that life could be alternatively interpreted and pursued. We may never truly discover these alternatives until we encounter cultural contexts that are different from our own; such cultural contexts are not limited to the international, but extend to every single person we interact with. The world could become so different as if we adopted a different train of thought.

However, our worldview could still be restricted by our own pre-constructed ‘world’, even if we are able to see differently. I see the world differently but my views are still influenced by my own culture. This is why any transformation of ourselves will be slow and, to some extent, conditional in this respect.

Such a belief system echoes the philosophical paradigm of constructionism, which embraces multiple ‘realities’ constructed not only individually but also socially. It also informs the way I interpret the data, as my own Chinese identity could possibly affect the presentation of perspectives from other cultures.

4.1.2 Locating the research: a constructionism¹ paradigm

The term ‘paradigm’ was brought into collective awareness by Kuhn (1970) in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, but appears problematic due to a lack of further clarification. However, as Guba (1990) argues, a pragmatic consideration of the term ‘paradigm’ allows for the possibility for it to be reshaped as we develop a better understanding of it. For now, I align myself with Guba (1990: 17) who defines the ‘paradigm’ in its most common sense, as referring to “a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry”.

In order to characterise “those paradigms that guide disciplined inquiry” (Guba, 1990: 18), Guba (1990) encapsulates them into three basic questions which are ontological, epistemological and methodological. Ontology inquires as to what the nature of ‘reality’ is. Does this ‘reality’ exist? If so, does it exist in an objective or subjective way? Epistemology inquires as to how the nature of ‘reality’ is known or, rather, what is the nature of the relationship between the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’? Can we really know ‘reality’ if all knowledge is subject to infinite justification? If so, under what conditions can we claim that we have knowledge of ‘reality’? For Plato (Plato & Waterfield, 1987: 201c-d), knowledge is the “true belief accompanied by a rational account”. In this sense, knowledge is dependent on a justification that any evidence is relevant and worthy of belief. This leads to the question of which evidence can be considered acceptable in forming such a rational account. Methodology deals with such inquiries. It inquires as to how the knower should find out knowledge about ‘reality’. Different combinations of ontology, epistemology and methodology form different sets of beliefs and thus guide

¹ Constructionism and constructivism are used interchangeably. This study distinguishes constructionism from constructivism by drawing upon Crotty's (1998: 58) insight that the term constructionism is used to include the focus of “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” while the term constructivism is used to focus exclusively on “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind”.

action, which can be termed ‘inquiry paradigms’ (Guba, 1990).

This study is informed by a constructionism paradigm which considers that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998: 42). The present study inquires as to the *construction* of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across a range of differing contexts - international, institutional and individual. It attempts to understand *what-is* sustainable international partnership alongside *what-might-be*, indicating that alternative *construction* is always possible (Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, there is a historical and sociocultural dimension framing this *construction*, as “[w]e do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language and so forth” (Schwandt 2000: 197). In this sense, instead of considering language as a directly transparent medium through which to gain subjective knowledge of sustainable international partnerships from both institutions and individuals, this study regards it more as a constituent power enabling sustainable international partnerships to be constructed through conversation or discourse. This echoes constructionism, which tends to not only embrace multiple and alternative ‘realities’, but also examines the way in which interpretations are socially constructed.

The section which follows explains how constructionism informs the research design through multiple embedded cases, with the intention of answering the research questions raised in this study.

4.2 A multiple case (embedded) design

A research design is “*a logical plan for getting from here to there*, where *here* may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and *there* is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions. Between *here* and *there* may be found a number of major steps, including the collection and analysis of relevant data” (Yin, 2014: 28). This research is designed by way of case study, which “is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, 2000: 435). Unlike previous research which largely dealt with partnerships as individual ‘*cases*’, this research places partnerships in

a range of differing contexts - international, institutional and individual, exploring how sustainable international partnerships are constructed in these contexts. In this sense, it is those differing contexts that constitute the ‘cases’ of this study.

The section which follows begins by studying research questions and rationales to justify the choice of case study and their implications for defining the boundaries of ‘cases’, with the intention of linking the questions to the data.

4.2.1 Studying questions and rationales

The research design starts by studying what types of research questions are posed. Regarding questions of ‘who’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’, the case study is argued to be more suitable for answering ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Yin, 2014), which is apposite to the present research that will explore how sustainable international partnerships in higher education are constructed across a range of differing contexts. However, as Yin (2014: 30) further argues, those ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions “do not sufficiently point to what you should study”, which is why studying ‘propositions’ is what should be followed, even for an exploratory case study, “[t]his same degree of rationale and direction should underlie” (ibid). Given that this research is an exploratory study, instead of propositions, rationales are therefore provided alongside the research questions to articulate what is expected to be examined in this study.

The main research question (MRQ) of this thesis is:

- MRQ: What constitutes a sustainable international partnership in higher education across and between England and China?

The MRQ expresses the aims of this thesis, which is expected to explore what constitutes a sustainable international partnership in higher education by drawing upon perspectives from England and China. Meanwhile, it aims to address the circumstances under which it is possible to pursue a sustainable international partnership between England and China. Notably, the MRQ is represented as a ‘what’ rather than a ‘how’ question and thus it seems inappropriate to approach by way of case study design; however, such a ‘what’ MRQ is argued to be best addressed by answering two ‘how’ SRQs which focus on exploring how sustainable international partnerships are constructed by both institutions

and individuals in England and China.

- SRQ1: How is sustainable international partnership in higher education conceived by institutions in England and China, and what are the implications for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China?

SRQ1 is framed to explore how sustainable international partnerships in higher education are constructed in the field of institutional structure in both England and China; what the similarities and differences are in institutional conceptions between England and China regarding constructions of sustainable international partnerships; and thus what the implications are for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China.

- SRQ2: How is sustainable international partnership in higher education perceived by individuals in England and China, and what are the implications for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China?

SRQ2 is framed to explore how sustainable international partnerships in higher education are constructed in the site of individual agency in both England and China; what the similarities and differences are in individual perceptions between England and China regarding constructions of sustainable international partnerships, and thus what the implications are for constructing sustainable partnerships between England and China.

By answering SRQ1 and SRQ2, it enables an understanding of the complexities of constructing sustainable international partnerships between institutions and individuals, and also between England and China. In this sense, this research will move beyond the literature that largely dealt with established partnership programmes as individual ‘cases’, to consider how a range of different ‘case’ contexts - international, institutional and individual – affect constructions of sustainable international partnerships. To this end, a ‘multiple-case (embedded) design’ (Yin, 2014) is adopted, which will be explained in detail in the following section.

4.2.2 Defining ‘cases’ or units of analysis

It is not easy to define “either the beginning or end points” of the ‘cases’ (Yin 2014: 31). The rationale of adopting a ‘multiple-case (embedded) design’ is two-fold:

- a multiple case design facilitates the international comparisons of research inquires between England and China.
- an embedded design in both *university cases* in England and China facilitates the comprehension of relevant elements within the universities, i.e. the institutional and individual perceptions.

Diagram 4.1 illustrates the ‘cases’ defined in this study, (1) the *international contexts* - England and China, (2) the specific locales - *university cases*, (3) the *embedded units of analysis* - *institutional conceptions and individual perceptions*. The dotted lines in *Diagram 4.1* indicate the implicit boundaries between contexts and ‘cases’, suggesting the close relationship between the contextual information and the *university cases* (Yin, 2014), which has been offered in Chapter 2 (cf. contextualising partnership in the context of internationalisation of HE in England and China). Those dotted lines in *Diagram 4.1* also indicate that the institutional conceptions and individual perceptions might be inextricably connected. For example, the individual perceptions of sustainable international partnerships might be affected by the institutional conceptions and the wider contexts including political, economic and cultural aspects. The arrows in *Diagram 4.1*, bridging between different layers of ‘cases’ or units of analysis, illustrate how the empirical data is linked to the research questions, outlining the implications of the similarities and differences in institutional conceptions and individual perceptions for pursuing a sustainable partnership between England and China.

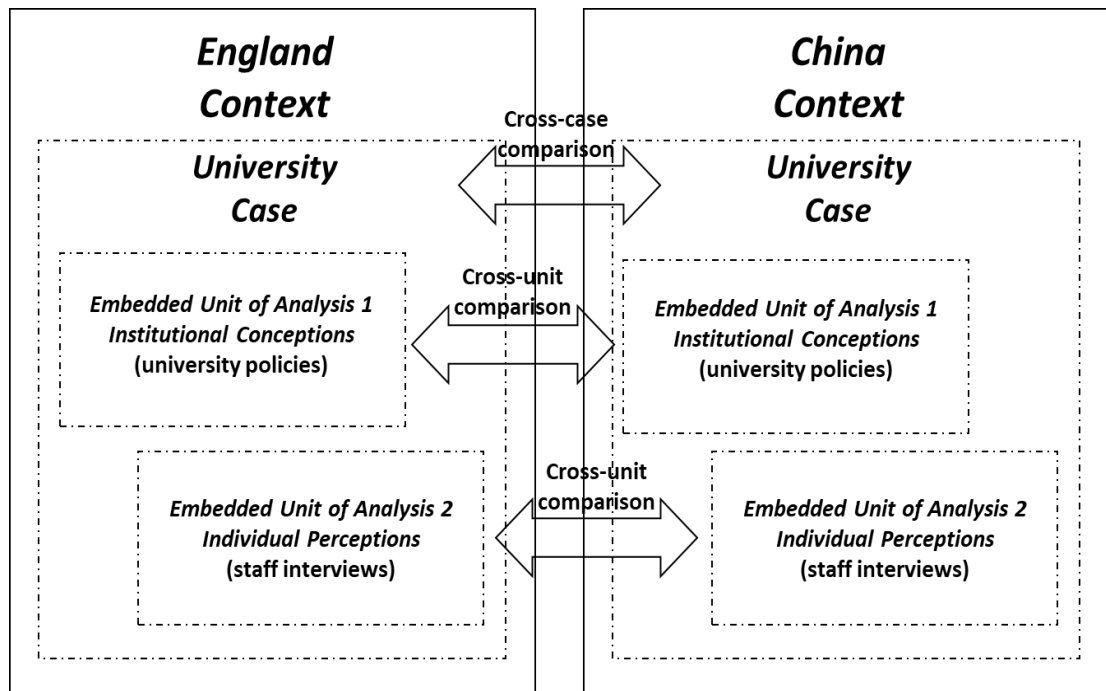


Diagram 4.1 A 'multiple-case (embedded)' design for this study

Source: The design is informed by Yin's (2014) multiple-case (embedded) designs but adapted according to this research questions and rationales.

To explore perspectives on sustainable international partnerships from both England and China, a multiple case design is used to address the MRQ.

International contexts inquires what constitutes a sustainable international partnership in higher education across contextual differences through focusing on two countries - England and China. These two countries constitute the first layer in identifying this 'multiple-case (embedded) design' (Yin, 2014). The reason for exploring the construction of sustainable international partnerships in England and China is that the two countries exhibit striking contrasts in their societal contexts and national strategies with regard to internationalisation of higher education; these contrasts may present more complex challenges in constructing a sustainable partnership between universities. The assumption behind this decision is that if the challenges and complexities posed by differing and contrasting contexts are not to prevent universities from constructing sustainable international partnerships, then it might open more possibilities in varied international contexts.

University cases constitute the second layer in this 'multiple-case (embedded) design' (Yin, 2014). Four criteria are employed to select the universities. Firstly, universities with

a history of international engagement are selected, with the exclusion of the newly established ones. This is because the establishment and development of international partnerships need time, and those well-established universities are more likely to produce policies or strategies with relevance to internationalisation and partnerships, laying the foundation for collecting policy data from such universities. Secondly, comprehensive universities covering varied academic disciplines are selected, with the exclusion of specialised institutions. This is because those comprehensive universities are able to condition the researcher to gain a wide range of perspectives on sustainable international partnerships at the disciplinary level, which paves the way for collecting interview data from such universities. Thirdly, universities partnering between England and China are selected. This is because the findings generated from the study are more able to provide practical advice for such universities in pursuing sustainable partnerships. Fourthly, the practicability of access constitutes the last but not the least criterion used to filter out qualified universities.

For both *university cases* in England and China, an embedded design is used to address the SRQs, which constitute the third layer of this ‘multiple-case (embedded) design’ (Yin, 2014).

Embedded units of analysis 1 - institutional conceptions are designed to address SRQ1, which foreshadows university policy documents as one strand of data used to explore the construction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education. Given that partnership has become one of the constituent elements of institutional internationalisation strategies (Knight, 2004, 2012), internationalisation strategies or policies are therefore collected, with the intention of exploring what is conceived to be desirable and worth attaining in pursuing partnerships through university policy discourse.

Embedded units of analysis 2 – individual perceptions are designed to address SRQ2, which foreshadows interviews with staff who are closely involved in international partnerships; this is the other strand of data used to explore the construction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education. Given that the rationales for international partnership activities between universities are strongly associated with the role of administrators or managers, and that the drive for international networking by faculty and researchers also reflects the significant role they play within the institution (Seeber et al.,

2016), academics from a wide range of disciplines and administrators/managers from institutional-level departments are therefore interviewed.

4.2.3 Outlining chronological process of research

After studying the questions and rationales, and defining the ‘cases’ of analysis, this section provides an outline of the chronological journey of the study and how the different data sets were related to each other, and have informed analysis, for example, the sequence of document analysis and interviews in the research process.

The journey of this study started from a small group of interviews in England with the consideration of convenience to surface some initial ideas of the topic. Informed by the surfaced theme of the topic, the research then moved on to the larger collection of interview data from both case universities in England and China, conducting a general reading and analysis of interview data, and meanwhile a comparison between the English interviews and the Chinese ones were made. During the interviews in the research sites, relevant documents in both universities in England and China were collected for the later reading and analysis. Therefore, the document analysis came after the interview analysis. The reason for doing this was also ascribed to the way documents were considered in this research. Rather than seeing document as a provider of contextual information, the study regarded it as a particular construction and representation of the ‘truth’. Hence, the sequence of document analysis after interview avoided setting pre-frameworks in case of leading interview questions, thus allowing ideas and themes to emerge from the participants’ perspectives rather than policy constructions. Meanwhile, this sequence of analysing data sets in turn made reading institutional documents more directive, for example, as to be addressed later, it conditioned me to seeing how the policy discourse informed the everyday discourse of sustainable international partnerships constructed by participants on the ground.

The following several sections will offer more details about each phase of the research in sequence.

4.3 The pilot phase of the study

The rationale of initiating a pilot study prior to engagement in the fieldwork is to explore

some initial ideas of sustainable international partnerships from the research subjects' perspectives. In so doing, it helps to reduce any inconsistencies arising between the researcher and the research subjects when the key concept - sustainable international partnership - is discussed in the main phase of study. This section starts with a description of the pilot, followed by a report of the emerging themes. It ends with a refinement of the interview schedule to be used in the main phase of the study.

4.3.1 Describing the pilot study

A number of issues were borne in mind during the design of this study; for instance, the discrepancies in conceptualising sustainable international partnerships between the researcher and the research subjects, between the institution and the individual, and also between the administrative/managerial group and the academic group. To explore such discrepancies, participants in the pilot phase included both academics and administrators/managers, who were closely involved in international partnerships at either university or disciplinary level. They were recruited from the English case university, given that the fieldwork started there. Correspondingly, two senior academics from the disciplines of Education and of Economics, one senior manager from the discipline of Economics, and one senior manager from the International Office of the university were contacted and interviewed (*Table 4.1*).

Interviewee	Site	Role	Department	Date
01	England	Dean	Education	November 4 th 2015
02	England	Administrative Staff	Business	November 16 th 2015
03	England	Director	International Office	November 17 th 2015
04	England	Associate Dean	Business	November 23 rd 2015

Table 4.1 A list of data from the pilot phase of the study

Hollway (2013) suggests the more open the interview questions are, the better the data produced by the interviewee's meaning-frame is. During the interview in the pilot phase, several questions were asked with the intention of gaining initial ideas on sustainable international partnerships from the perspectives of the research subjects (*Table 4.2*). For example, "how do you understand the role of partnerships in the context of the internationalisation of higher education?"; "could you tell me your views on international links with oversea higher education institutions?"; "what types of international

partnerships are there?"; "how did these links come about and develop?"; "when you hear the term 'sustainability', what does this mean to you in the context of international partnerships in higher education?"; "what lessons have you learnt from past experience in developing international partnerships?"; and "what opportunities and challenges do you see in engaging in future international partnerships?". The findings of the pilot study were then reviewed to offer a more feasible approach in the main phase of the study. They were not integrated into the presentation of the interview data generated from main phase of the study.

-
- Could you tell me your views on your university/department' international partnerships with other universities/departments?
 - Which countries does your university/department partner with? Why?
 - What kind of international partnerships are there in your university/department?
 - Could you tell me your experience of engaging in international partnerships?
 - How do these links come about?
 - How do these links sustain?
 - Could you tell me your views on sustainability?
 - Does the university support departments to develop international partnerships? In what way?
 - What can you learn from the past experience of engaging international partnerships? Any opportunities and challenges?
-

Table 4.2 The interview schedule for the pilot phase of the study

4.3.2 Surfacing the initial themes

As illustrated in the *Table 4.3*, seven themes emerged from the pilot phase of the study: *growth, longevity, activity, strategic, faculty, personal and equality*, which are further categorised into three constructed dimensions: conceptualisation of sustainable partnerships, development of sustainable partnerships and partnerships between England and China. Those surfaced themes are reported in the order of constructed dimensions,

within which, quotes from the interviewees are referenced to further illustrate how the idea of sustainable international partnerships is understood by the research subjects.

Constructed Dimensions	Surfaced Themes
<i>Construction of sustainable partnerships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>longevity</i> • <i>activity</i> • <i>growth</i>
<i>Development of sustainable partnerships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>strategic</i> • <i>faculties</i> • <i>personal</i>
<i>Partnership between England and China</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>equality</i>

Table 4.3 A list of themes and categorisations from the pilot phase

Construction of sustainable partnerships

Three surfaced themes constitute the construction of sustainable partnerships: *longevity*, *activity* and *growth*. The *longevity* dimension provides a time-frame to consider the sustainability of partnerships, while the *activity* dimension substantiates long-term partnerships. Both *longevity* and *activity* contribute to an understanding of continued growth in framing sustainable partnerships.

- *Surfaced theme – longevity*

For the *longevity* dimension, the interviewees agree that a sustainable international partnership is a long-term relationship. *Longevity* demonstrates the sustainability of partnerships. An international partnership lasting at least five years seems to demonstrate such sustainability. However, the interviewees are reluctant to put a specific length on sustainable partnerships. In other words, how long is counted as longevity is contested. For example, the Dean of Education reports that “*I don't think there is a length of time. I think a partnership is sustained as long as there is mutual activity, activity on both sides' partnerships*”. In this sense, a long-term relationship without mutual activity involved appears to be not that ‘sustainable’.

- *Surfaced theme - activity*

For the *activity* dimension, similar to the Dean of Education, the Associate Dean of the Business School reports that “*best way for me to define sustainability is mutual cooperation, the both universities mutually cooperative and both of them mutually benefit*” through developing “*a mutual programme together for both partners*”. In other words, sustainable partnerships are built upon mutual engagement by both parties. However, instead of dependence on one activity, the administrative staff from the Business School emphasise the significance of “*multi-level*” activity in sustaining partnerships. This “*multi-level*” activity indicates the sustainable *growth* expected from established partnerships.

- *Surfaced theme – growth*

For the *growth* dimension, the Dean of Education reports that it denotes “*something that we can build and strengthen over time*”. Similarly, the Director of the International Office in the university also says “*I don't want something which will, we put together, last two years, and not happen after that, and I want things to build, and for things to come off that, offshoots from that*”. For example, research partnerships can lead to teaching and learning partnerships, and vice versa, as is further reported by the Dean of Education, “*the way things are developing seems that we are developing comprehensive relationships that can cover both*”.

Development of sustainable partnerships

Three surfaced themes constitute the development of sustainable partnerships: *strategic, faculty, and personal*. Those themes illustrate not only the multiple approaches to developing international partnerships but also the intricate relationships between the institution and the individual as to development of sustainable partnerships.

- *Surfaced theme – strategic*

What type an international partnership is has an impact on the development of sustainable partnerships, which is also differs between countries and institutions. Regarding partnerships with China, the Dean of Education reports that Chinese universities prefer to establish research links with higher ranking universities, while teaching and learning links

tend to be established with lower ranking universities. As to exchange partnerships, nice destinations, quality teaching, rankings and financial support are taken into consideration by the university, as is stated by the administrative staff from the Business School. This indicates that partnership development appears to have moved beyond the ad hoc approach and towards a more strategic approach. The identification of “*right*” partners may avoid the risk of becoming unsustainable, as is stated by the administrative staff from the Business School when pointing out that “*identifying the right partnerships*” affects the sustainability of partnerships from the outset.

- *Surfaced theme - faculties*

To keep the partnerships working and sustain them, the Director of the International Office reports, “*it really comes down to the faculties to make it work and to make it develop*”. The significance of *faculties* in maintaining partnerships are further argued to be contingent upon *personal* relationships at the individual level.

- *Surfaced theme - personal*

The administrative staff from the Business School further emphasise that “*It’s a very personal thing*” and “*it’s really personal relationship between two people*” with contact on a regular basis to maintain links. With respect to research partnerships, “*it’s very much two people*” and “*you cannot force them to do research together*”.

Partnerships between England and China

One major theme defines partnerships between England and China, which is *equality*.

- *Surfaced theme – equality*

The Director of the International Office reports that partnerships between UK and China today are different from the ones in the 80s. He recalled the way partnerships developed then; “*China sought them and the UK reacted to them*”, and what a specific partnership between universities was actually like; “*the UK side was doing the teaching and the Chinese side was doing the learning*”. Today’s partnerships are “*much more equal*”.

Despite that fact, he also reports concerns with partnerships between international and Chinese universities - “one problem is that the international university are really seeking students” and “China is losing personnel if their students don't come back”. Although the Chinese government recognise this issue and want to become a “net exporter” through “teaching international students in China”, it still “needs international partners to help it teach those programmes”. In this sense, partnerships between England and China appears not that ‘equal’, and this may yet affect the sustainability of partnerships due to mismatched goals between partner universities..

4.3.3 Refining the inquiry strategy

As mentioned above, the purpose of this pilot phase is to glean some initial ideas on sustainable international partnership from the research subjects’ perspectives. Building on those themes emerging from the pilot, this section presents the adaptation of the interview schedule used in the main phase of the study.

Regarding the research subjects’ conceptual constructs of sustainable international partnerships, the themes which emerged from the pilot together construct an understanding of sustainable international partnerships from the interviewee’s meaning-frame. This could further constitute prompts developed in the main phase of data collection. For instance, when a sustainable international partnership is considered as something that can be built or strengthened over time, as is reported by the Director of the International Office: “I don't want something which will, we put together, very last 2 years, and not happen after that, and I want things to build, and for things to come off that, offshoots from that”, some follow-up questions could be framed as “what things do you think can be built, or can be strengthened”; “what is expected to grow, to develop or to come off”. This approach is also based upon time constraints due to the interviewees’ busy schedules. Prompts emerging or omitted from the pilot study are deployed to remind the interviewer of the angles from which the interviewees may approach the same question and to conduct the interview process in a limited time. Considering the diversity of potential interviewees, I developed an interview schedule with a proper adaptation in the main phase based on their job descriptions and experiences (*Table 4.4*).

-
- *Could you tell me your views on international partnerships between higher education institutions?*
-

PROMPTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>With Chinese/English institutions?</i>

- *When you hear the term “sustainability”, what does this mean to you in the context of international partnerships?*

PROMPTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Longevity (how long?)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Activity (what activity?)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Growth (what thing?)</i>

- *Tell me a bit of your role and responsibilities of engaging in international partnerships in the University/Faculty/School/Department?*
- *Tell me a bit of your experiences of engaging in international partnerships in the University/Faculty/School/Department?*

PROMPTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How to develop?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What aspects make it work?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What aspects make it collapse?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>With Chinese/English institutions?</i>

- *What lessons have you learnt from past experiences of developing international partnerships?*
 - *What do you see challenges of developing a sustainable international partnership in future?*
-

Table 4.4 The interview schedule for the main phase of the study

The section which follows firstly details how I collect interview data in the main phase of the study.

4.4 The main phase of the study

With the reflection from the pilot phase completed, I moved to the main phase of the study. Alongside the collection and reading of institutional documents to gain relevant contextual information, I did most of my fieldwork in England from 22nd February to 23rd March 2016; my fieldwork in China from 6th April to 17th May, and then part interviews in England between July and August after returning from China. In the end, 31 interviews - 17 from England and 14 from China - were conducted. Most of those interviews were limited to 40 minutes given their busy schedules. Before and after each interview, field

notes were made as a reflection. It is worth noting that the analysis of interview data and policy data were entwined in some sense, with the way of looking at interviews and documents changing throughout the journey of research. For example, the university policy analysis conditioned me to seeing how the policy discourse filtered into the everyday discourse upon which individuals drew to construct sustainable international partnerships from the interviews. In this section, I provide a detailed description of how I collected and analysed the data, coupled with the reflection upon the intersection of data collection and data analysis.

4.4.1 Interview data

Although access to elites would appear difficult, the pilot study proves it is not impossible. In response to the pilot, potential interviewees were recruited from a wide range of disciplines at different levels of the university. They were also invited to recall or provide other potential interviewees if possible. The table below lists all those who agreed to be interviewed (*Table 4.5*).

Interviewees	Site	Role	Department	Date
01	England	International Coordinator	Health	22 nd February 2016
02	England	Associate Dean	Education	22 nd February 2016
03	England	Professor	Engineering	23 rd February 2016
04	England	Head	Quality Office	24 th February 2016
05	England	Head of School	Language	25 th February 2016
06	England	Administrative staff	Business	29 th February 2016
07	England	Professor	Health	1 st March 2016
08	England	Lecturer	Language	4 th March 2016
09	England	Reader	Education	4 th March 2016
10	England	Deputy Director	Partnership Office	7 th March 2016
11	England	Head of School	Health	8 th March 2016
12	England	Deputy Director	International Office	18 th March 2016
13	England	Associate Dean	Science	23 rd March 2016
14	England	International Coordinator	Arts	24 th March 2016
15	England	Senior Lecturer	Environment	29 th March 2016
16	China	Associate Dean	Education	6 th April 2016
17	China	Dean	Education	14 th April 2016
18	China	Pro-Vice-Chancellor	University	15 th April 2016
19	China	International Coordinator	Engineering	20 th April 2016
20	China	Associate Dean	Health	27 th April 2016

21	China	Administrative staff	Economic	3 rd May 2016
22	China	Associate Professor	International Relation	5 th May 2016
23	China	Administrative staff	Economic	6 th May 2016
24	China	Director (China)	Confucius Institute	10 th May 2016
25	China	Professor	Ocean	11 st May 2016
26	China	Head of School (former)	Ocean	16 th May 2016
27	China	Associate Dean	Foreign Language	17 th May 2016
28	China	Deputy Director (former)	International Office	24 th May 2016
29	China	Deputy Director	International Office	26 th May 2016
30	England	Head of School	Engineering	8 th June 2016
31	England	Vice-Chancellor (former)	University	23 rd August 2016

Table 4.5 A list of data from the main phase of study

Recruiting participants: An excel contact sheet was developed to help me gather information about the potential interviewees, and thus rule out any who may not be relevant. This contact sheet was constructed by means of university departments, academic disciplines, job descriptions, personal international experiences, contact details, email responses and recommendation from the email responses. Based on this contact sheet, I sent invitation letters to the potential interviewees and gained positive responses from most. Some politely refused. Some kindly recommend more ‘appropriate’ ones for me to contact. With a type of nominated or snowball sampling, a total of 17 from England and 14 from China participated this main phase of the study.

Conducting interviews: A total of 31 interviews in the main phase of the study were conducted in the targeted universities both in England and China. Those interviews were designed through semi-structure questions with prompts based on the pilot study, with the intention of gathering effective information in a comparatively limited time due to the interviewees’ busy schedules. The interview questions revolved around (1) perceptions of sustainable international partnership, (2) how international partnerships initiate, stagnate, flourish or unravel, and (3) what aspects they think would make international partnership work or collapse. In conducting every interview, I tended to follow a reflection scheme that took note of the identified key themes, interesting ideas and technique problems from the last interview and then conduct the next interview.

Producing transcripts: transcribing the interviews is the first step in data analysis. Moreover, some of the most revealing analytical insights tend to come during the

transcription due to the profound engagement with the interview (Potter, 1996). In this sense, the researcher - as a transcriber - gained a particular advantage, as the transcription process offered the opportunity for insights to emerge. I transcribed the interviews in a word document, wrote memos while transcribing to record the inspiration, adding comments whenever particular insights emerged. Some of those insights constitute the main themes in the following coding process; for example, 'strategic relationships', 'human relationships', 'people' and 'senior academics'. After transcribing each interview, I formatted the transcripts and transcribed the notes and comments into field notes located in the end of each transcript. Then I imported all the transcripts into NVivo Pro for the further theme coding.

Coding themes: The approach to decoding interviews is firstly to develop codes and categories. Miles et al., (2014: 56) argue that "codes are categories. They usually derive from research questions, hypotheses, key concepts, or important themes. They are retrieval and organising devices that allow the analyst to spot quickly, pull out, then cluster all the segments relating to a particular question, hypothesis, concept or theme". I coded in two rounds. The first round of coding was to read, identify, extract and label sections from the transcripts. In the first round of coding, extracts were coded based on their relevance to the three dimensions of interview questions, i.e. (1) how is sustainable international partnership perceived; (2) how do international partnerships develop; and (3) what factors affect international partnership development. Each code was labelled directly from the language used in the transcripts themselves and simultaneous coding was allowed to allocate to different codes if it incorporated several themes. The second round of coding was to revisit, merge, rename and create hierarchies. In this round, each code was revisited individually and the relationships between different codes were visualised through creating hierarchies by merging and renaming codes. During this revision, simultaneous coding is merged into one code. In the end, all the codes were categorised into two broad themes: 'strategic relationships' and 'human relationships', with sub-themes describing how those two kinds of relationships develop, stagnate, flourish or unravel.

Identifying repertoires: Wetherell and Potter (1988: 172) considers repertoires as the "building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena". The identification of repertoires is not easy initially, and this idea

was developed at a late stage when the transcripts were completed, meaning that detailed conversational analysis could not be done based on the existing transcripts. However, repertoire analysis was still possible, especially after completing the university policy analysis, as it conditioned me to seeing how the policy discourse filtered into the everyday discourse upon which individuals drew to construct sustainable international partnerships on the ground. It also enabled me to see how alternative repertoires emerged, which individual drew on to resist the one constructed by the policy discourse.

The section which follows details how I collected the policy data in the main phase of the study.

4.4.2 Policy data

Although documents constitute a major part of most of qualitative research, the role of documentary analysis seems to be easily overlooked. As (Silverman, 2014: 276) points out, “where documents are analysed, they are often presented as ‘official’ or ‘common-sense’ versions of social phenomena, to be undercut by the underlying social phenomena apparently found in the qualitative researcher’s analysis of their interviewees’ stories”. In this sense, qualitative researchers are inclined to neglect the weight of documentary data. In effect, documents can “construct particular kinds of representations using literary conventions” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011: 79), and these representation should be understood “not as a true and accurate reflection of some aspect of an external world, but as something to be explained and accounted for through the discursive rules and themes that predominate in a particular socio-historical context” (Prior, 1997). The task for the researcher is to show how these particular representations are produced. In my case, policy texts not only construct the meaning of sustainable international partnerships but also the practice and function of any sustainable international partnerships in which the university is involved. This construction is an indication of past experience, present situations and future possibilities. The policy documents collected in this study, therefore, are used to show how what is written and produced and under what conditions what is written is considered to be the ‘truth’.

Case university policies in England	Case university policies in China
Strategic Plan 2007-2012 (SP, 2007)	The 11st Five-Year Plan (11st-5P, 2006)
Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (SP, 2011)	The 12nd Fiver-Year Plan (12nd-5P, 2011)
Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (SP, 2016)	The 13rd Five-Year Plan (13rd-5P, 2016)

Table 4.6 Selected university policy documents

Selecting policies: Table 4.6 lists the selected university policy documents in each case university in England and China. The reasons that those documents were selected from the period between 2006 and 2016 were as follows: Firstly, those documents were selected from each case university as they are similar in nature, reflecting an overall change of institutional positioning, visioning and planning regarding discursive construction of sustainable international partnerships. Secondly, the documents' ten year time-frame provided a lens through which to examine the changing construction of *sustainable international partnerships* within university policy discourse. Thirdly, 2006-2016 was the only period where policy documents were publically available from both England and China, bearing in mind the intention to create a parallel structure. Notably, one Chinese document <Strategic Plan on Open up and Cooperation 2016-2021> was also included as it demonstrates some specific strategies for reference, despite such a specific policy on partnership not being publically available from the English case university website.

Coding themes: To extract meaning out from the aforementioned institutional policy documents, I read the first round manually (for familiarisation) and then imported them to the NVivo Pro to run the text search queries about *partnership*, *international* and *sustainable* within the policy documents studied through a strategy of finding stemmed words (e.g. 'partner') and of spreading to a broad context (e.g. giving a context of 'partnership' and avoiding misunderstanding the concept by detaching it from where it is embedded). By doing this, it locates the related sections detailing how *partnership* is constructed in association with other concepts, and how *internationalisation* and *sustainable* interrelate with constructions of *partnership*. To gain an in-depth analysis on the above broken-down texts, I undertook a Fairclough-inspired discourse approach, as "[d]iscourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions" (Fairclough, 2003: 124).

Identifying discourses: Fairclough (2003) engages with detailed textual analysis, through

which one can identify the main parts of the world which are represented - the main 'themes', and the particular perspectives from which they are represented. Different perspectives lead to different representations and thus different discourses to structure the world differently. To identify these different discourses is to identify the features of vocabularies and semantic relations, assumptions and the grammatical features as well. Informed by the work of Arnott and Ozga (2010) and Hyatt (2013) who have offered practical insights on implementing Fairclough's discourse analysis, this study analysed university policy discourse through policy contextualisation (a chronological reading of how relevant constructions change over time) and policy deconstruction (an intertextual and interdiscursive analysis of how existing discourses on *partnerships*, *internationalisation*, and *sustainability* combine to form a new one).

4.5 Ethics

The identification of ethical issues aims to clarify rights and the responsibilities within the research context. The British Educational Research Association implies rights and responsibilities both on the part of researchers and the participants. For the researchers' part, they have the responsibility of minimising the impact of their research on the participants' normal working (British Education Research Association, 2011). The university studied in this thesis were not approached until I was granted permission from the university Pro-Vice-Chancellors, both in England and China. To anonymise the institutional information, these universities were not named and the background information was generally sketched without containing information that was liable to identify the university, such as year of founding, specific locales and university rankings. Once the permission was obtained, I started to approach the potential interviewees. Potential participants in this study were contacted and invited via email inquiry in the first instance. Before each interview the consent form was given to the participant and each interview was not conducted until written, informed consent was obtained from that participant. Each copy of the consent form was kept, both by the researcher and the research subjects. During the interview, the participants were permitted to withdraw any data offered at any time.

Chapter 5 *What-is sustainable international partnership in England and China: institutional conceptions*

This chapter attempts to explore how institutions conceive *sustainable international partnerships* in England and China respectively, and the differences and similarities in the English and Chinese approaches. It argues that what institutions conceive to be desirable and worth attaining in developing partnerships constitutes sustainable relationships. To this end, the institution creates discursive frameworks through which *sustainable international partnership* is projected in particular ways. Such discursive frameworks here refer to the ‘*strategic*’ discourse of partnership, which represents particular tendencies of partnership from an institutional perspective. Despite the ‘*strategic*’ discourse on partnerships identified in both England and China, the way in which ‘*strategic*’ is represented and narrated differs between both countries. In England the ‘*strategic*’ partnerships are represented as ‘*winning*’ partnerships that are expected to contribute to the institution’s continued financial growth, academic excellence and thus, international stature. Whereas in China the ‘*strategic*’ relationships are represented as ‘*stable*’ partnerships with the ‘best’ universities in the world and are therefore expected to contribute to the institution’s continued demand for building internationally benchmarked capacity and thus improved international competitiveness. Those divergent narrations of ‘*strategic*’ discourse of partnerships not only reflect institutional reflexivity in a wider societal context, but also present a challenge in developing a *sustainable international partnership* between England and China.

The term *sustainable international partnership* here is italicised as it does not manifest itself in the university policy documents (*Table 5.1*); instead, it is discursively constructed through the textual analysis of policy texts on *partnership, internationalisation and sustainability*. To gain an in-depth analysis on the above broken-down texts, a Fairclough-inspired discourse analytical approach is adopted. Although discourse is decisively influenced by Foucault (1972), the analysis of discourse for Foucault, however, is not much concerned with, as Fairclough (2003) argues, ‘*detailed analysis of texts*’, but ‘*rules*’ that govern groups of statements. Instead, Fairclough (2003) is concerned with textual analysis, through which one can identify the main parts of the world - the main ‘*themes*’ and the particular perspectives from which they are represented. Different perspectives

produce different representations and thus different discourses to structure the world differently. However, '[d]iscourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions' (Fairclough, 2003: 124). This applies in the case of the 'strategic' discourse of partnership which not only represents processes and tendencies of partnership, but contributes to shaping particular aspects of partnership in particular directions. In this chapter, discourse is considered not only as the domain of statements at an abstract level - the university policy discourse, but also as groups of statements at a concrete level - the particular discourses, such as the 'strategic' discourse of partnership.

Case university policies in England	Case university policies in China
Strategic Plan 2007-2012 (SP, 2007)	The 11st Five-Year Plan (11st-5P, 2006)
Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (SP, 2011)	The 12nd Fiver-Year Plan (12nd-5P, 2011)
Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (SP, 2016)	The 13rd Five-Year Plan (13rd-5P, 2016)
---	The Strategic Plan on Open up and Cooperation 2016-2021 (SPOC, 2016)

Table 5.1 Selected university policy document between 2006 and 2016

Table 5.1 Selected university policy documents between 2006 and 2016 in each case university and the way of them being referenced in parenthesis. Those documents from each case university are selected as they are similar in terms of reflecting an overall change of institutional positioning, vision and planning regarding discursive constructions of *sustainable international partnership* in the past decade - except for one Chinese document <Strategic Plan on Open up and Cooperation 2016-2021> which is also included as it demonstrates some specific strategies for reference.

Two main sections constitute this chapter: one concerns the English institution and the other deals with the Chinese institution. Each section is operated at two levels. The first level presents the findings of the textual analysis on the main 'themes' emerging from policy texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. In order to ground the projection of *sustainable international partnership* in the data and avoid a decontextualised presentation of findings, direct quotes are frequently used and in vivo codes are headlined. The second level presents an integrated analysis of how those 'themes' work together to project *what-is a sustainable international partnership* for each case institution and some corresponding implications. The chapter concludes with a juxtaposition of institutional conceptions of *sustainable international partnership* between England and China.

5.1 *What-is sustainable international partnership in England: institutional conceptions*

Sustainable international partnerships are projected as a 'strategic' relationship contributing to the institutional continued growth in financial returns, academic excellence and thus international stature (Headline finding, England).

This section explores how the English institution conceives *sustainable international partnerships* in higher education, or what is conceived by the English institution to be desirable and worth attaining in developing partnerships. It argues that *sustainable international partnership* is projected as a 'strategic' relationship contributing to the institution's continued financial growth, academic excellence and thus international stature. Such a projection is argued in the context of a national defunding environment in which English higher education institutions are encouraged to seek other revenue sources while at the same time operating in an increasingly competitive international higher education market (cf. Chapter 2). In order to secure international competitiveness, there is a need to ensure continued financial growth and international stature in this particular national and global context. Accordingly, a focused investment return strategy for some academic disciplines to ensure financial returns as well as international reputation is justified and considered to be 'natural'. This naturalness does not manifest itself in this English university's policy texts but is discursively constructed through combining the existing discourses on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. The first sub-section which follows presents findings of the textual analysis on the main 'themes' emerging from discourses on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*, illuminating the intertextuality of those inter-related 'themes'. The second sub-section offers an integrated analysis of how those 'themes' work together to project *what-is a sustainable international partnership* for this English institution and the corresponding implications of such a projection.

5.1.1 The textual analysis of *sustainable international partnerships: emerging themes*

The textual analysis of policy texts on *partnerships* finds there are signs that the construction of partnerships is more local and business driven; however, as with the

changing positioning of university to be *'an internationally engaged anchor institution'* (SP, 2016), the international reach of partnerships is encouraged and strengthened, and the *'strategic'* discourse of partnerships is becoming evident and expressed by building *'high-quality'* and *'winning'* partnerships with *'prominent'* or *'leading'* (educational) institutions in the UK and abroad. This shift can be argued to be a response to the increasingly competitive international higher education landscape (SP, 2011; SP, 2016) where there is a demand for securing or ensuring *'continued growth in stature and reputation'*, and *internationalisation* is constructed to play a significant role in satisfying such demand (SP, 2007; SP, 2011; SP, 2016). To manage and enhance international stature and reputation, pursuing *'academic excellence'* supported by *'investment-driven'* strategies is emphasised, but those invested academic areas are expected to generate *'ultimately financial returns'* as well.

The *Diagram 5.1* below visualises how *'partners'* are constructed and navigated in a quadrant divided by *'International-Local'* reach, and *'Education-Other'* sector. It situates *'partners'* into different scalers and moves the changing construction of *'partnership'* towards the most recently highlighted one - *'strategic'* partnerships. The following presents the findings of the textual analysis on the main *'themes'* emerging from *partnership, internationalisation* and *sustainability*, illuminating how those *'themes'* work together to represent and justify the *'strategic'* discourse of partnerships.

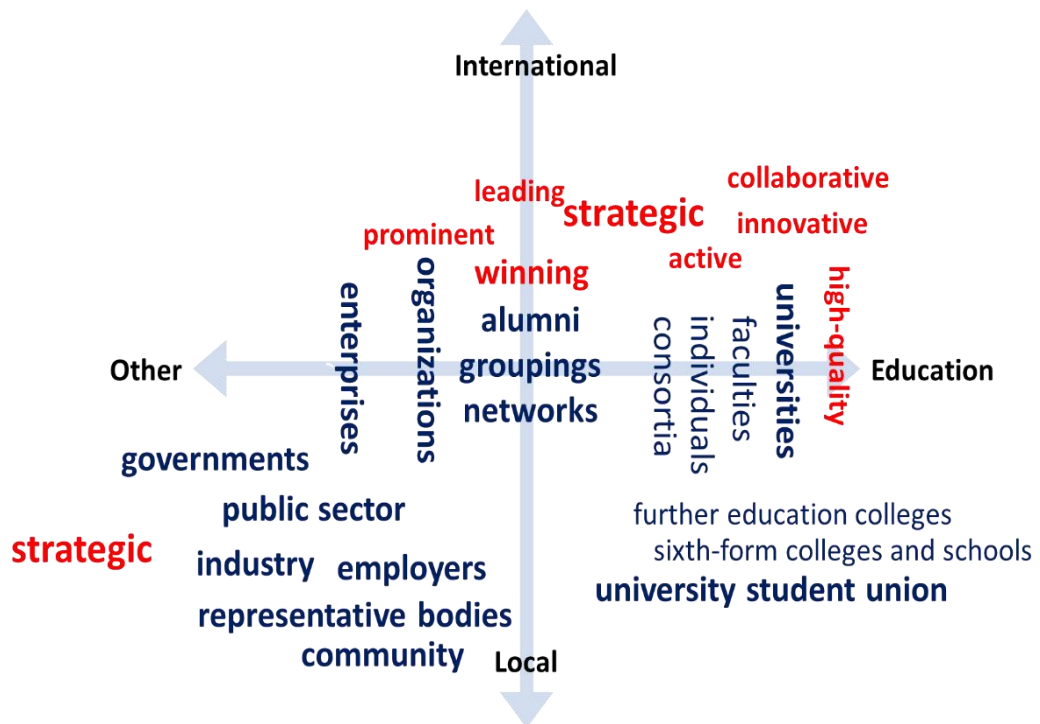


Diagram 5.1 Partnership constructions in the English case university

Source: This diagram is drawn by analysing policy texts on *partnerships* with particular relevance to its horizontal (from education to others) and geographical (from local to international) reach. It presents the construction of partnerships across English institutional documents over the examined period between 2006 and 2016.

5.1.1.1 ‘Partnership working’

One interesting finding regarding the construction of partnerships in the English institution is the idea of *‘partnership working’* used across English university policy documents (SP, 2007; SP, 2011; SP, 2016). It argues that partnerships work not only through a formal agreement but are also enabled by their collaborative nature. In terms of engagement in the wider community, partnerships are considered the preferred approach; for example, *‘increasing engagement in Europe...through partnership working, such as the Utrecht network’* (SP, 2007); *‘influencing broader outcomes’* by *‘place[ing] a new emphasis on partnership working’* (SP, 2011); *‘...we will consider extending our footprint to other regions of the UK, with a preference for a partnership approach’* (SP, 2016). In addition to approaching the regions of the UK and engagement in Europe, *‘partnership working’* seems to be considered as a university’s favoured approach in engaging students through working together with the student union; for instance, *‘in a spirit of partnership’* (SP, 2007); *‘We will extend and deepen partnership working with the student body’* (SP, 2011); or *‘continue to build on our strong partnership with our award winning [Student Union] so that together we create an ever better student experience’* (SP, 2016). Those examples not only illustrate the wide geographical reach of *‘partnership working’*, but also indicates the broad range of ‘stakeholders’ able to be considered as partners by the university.

5.1.1.2 A wide range of ‘stakeholders’

A wide range of partners are able to constitute partnership, from institutions to individuals, from the education sector to the private sector; all of whom can be classified as *‘stakeholders’*. In this sense, partnerships tend to be viewed as a network of relationships with a range of ‘stakeholders’, both internally and externally. Such constructions can be observed from how *‘partners’*, together with students, staff and alumni, are constructed in association with *‘other stakeholders’*, as is stated, *‘connecting internally and externally with our students, staff, alumni, partners and other stakeholders’* (SP, 2011). Here, *‘partner’* is juxtaposed, alongside *‘students’*, *‘staff’* and *‘alumni’*, with *‘other stakeholders’*. In this sense, *‘partner’* is considered as one of the *‘stakeholders’*, and is

expressed by a business term. However, there are signs that such *'stakeholders'* as students, staff and alumni can also be considered as *'partners'*, both internally and externally.

Within the university, *'partners'* can refer either to academic departments or individual academics, as is observed; *'Develop a systematic framework for the identification, selection and provision of learning resources, based on partnership between academic departments, individual academics, Library and Learning Innovation, and other relevant support services'* (SP, 2011). Besides, as presented above, *'partner'* can also refer to the student body for example, working together with which the university is able to *'create an ever better student experience'* (SP, 2016).

Outside the university, *'partners'* can reach into local, regional and international areas, as is stated, *'Work in partnership with other institutions, internationally, nationally and regionally'* (SP, 2011); *'alumni groupings and networks'*, the graduate student body, with which to partner in order to *'maintain lifelong relationships with alumni, friends and supporters of our University'* (SP, 2016). However, despite the wide reach of partnerships, local partners across and beyond education sectors appear to be placed at the heart of the institution, specifically in the early documents. For instance, partnering with other universities, further education colleges and schools within the educational sector, and with employers and representative bodies outside the educational sector such as *'NHS'* (SP, 2007; SP, 2011) *'Sector Skills Councils'* (SP, 2007), as is stated: *'Our strategy will require partnership working within the education sector, as well as engagement with employers and their representatives and with those involved in public affairs'* (SP, 2007). The university builds on partnership relations with stakeholders in the regions, participating in local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and liaise with other LEPs. However from then onwards, there appears a growing emphasis on the international reach of partnerships (SP, 2011; SP, 2016).

Partnership therefore, could refer to the relationship with individual networks (i.e. the student body within the university, alumni groupings and networks beyond the university); the relationship with educational sectors (i.e. higher education institutions, further education colleges and schools); the relationship with other sectors (i.e. employers, industry and representatives involved in the public affairs). In that case, a variety of

'*stakeholders*' across local, national and international areas could be considered as partners working through a partnership approach.

5.1.1.3 Towards 'strategic', 'high-quality' and 'winning' partnerships

Although there is a wide range of '*stakeholders*' reaching across local, national and international areas, some '*stakeholders*' are becoming highlighted and are receiving increasing attention within the institution's documents. In other words, a focused approach to constructing partnerships is becoming evident over time. This focus is expressed by such modifiers as '*key*', '*strategic*', '*high-quality*', '*prominent*', '*leading*' or '*winning*' being attached to partnerships or partners, which seems to indicate a more reputation-driven approach. For example, the significance of a *key* representative in a partnership, as is emphasised, '*Membership of key representative groupings can enable our voice to be heard, strengthen our reputation and provide competitive advantage*' or '*form partnerships with prominent national and international organisations*' (SP, 2011); '*Focus on high-quality collaboration and strategic partnerships with leading educational institutions, funders and other organisations abroad*' or '*Focus on building winning partnerships which support our aims, and seek opportunities to cooperate and collaborate with other institutions, organisations and individuals*' (SP, 2016). These '*winning*' partnerships refer to academic, research and business and community partners (SP, 2016).

Those modifiers such as '*prominent*' or '*leading*' attached to partners, and '*strategic*' or '*high-quality*' attached to partnership, seem to create further problems in the construction of partnerships, as argued by Johnstone (2002: 48) that "[c]hoices about naming and wording, [i.e.] deciding what to call something can constitute a claim about it". Such naming and wording of partnerships appears to narrow down its choice of international partners and also the types of international partnerships the university value and pursue. By modifying partnerships, it can limit the sense of partnership and thus set a particular direction for partnership trajectory. However, this internationally stretched and reputation-driven construction of partnership does not manifest itself instantly, but is simultaneously informed by the change in other policy texts, in particular *internationalisation* and *sustainability*.

5.1.1.4 'Being an internationally engaged anchor institution'

The discourse on *internationalisation* has experienced a shift from the fixation on international student recruitment to the branding of universities internationally via reference to a historically and geographically grounded relationship between the locality and internationality. There has been observed a changing discourse on *internationalisation*, i.e. from '*embedding international perspectives across institution*' (SP, 2007) largely through international student presence, to repositioning the university as '*an internationally engaged anchor institution*' (SP, 2016) by branding a university internationally; not just exposing internationally, but benchmarking internationally. To achieve this position, marketing and communication play a key role in presenting the voice of the university (SP, 2011; SP, 2016).

An increasing emphasis on continued growth in stature and reputation has been observed (SP, 2007; SP 2011; SP, 2016). Evidence of this is to be found in the university's policy texts, where stature and reputation are always highlighted at the start of the section on '*Internationalisation*' (SP, 2011) or '*International engagement*' (SP, 2016). In the strategic plan (2011-2015), internationalisation is constructed as a significant tool in the university's branding, as is stated in the first place of emphasising the importance of internationalisation: '*Promoting the stature and reputation, image and brand of the University in the international arena*' (SP, 2011). Such international branding is constructed by linking to the historical legacy and geographical significance of the city in which the university is located, as evidenced from the beginning of the section on *Internationalisation*, '*...have for centuries been locations with a seafaring tradition, reaching out to the world as well as being a destination for visitors and immigrants*' (SP, 2011). Apparently, this discourse refers to a traditional and historically grounded relationship between the city and the rest of the world. Related to this is a reference to the current geographical significance of the city, which functions as '*Gateways to Europe*' (SP, 2011). It is interesting to notice the change in emphasis in university policy texts over the last decade when referring to the construction of internationalisation. Compared to internationalisation constructed largely through student recruitment and international branding developed mainly by maintaining a presence and reputation in the students' home country (SP, 2007), here, in the strategic plan (2011-2015), internationalisation is constructed via a broader international branding through referencing relationships

between the locality and the wider world.

Over the past decade, the university has shown itself to be constantly scaling and rescaling itself in the international higher education landscape. The vision of *'being an internationally engaged anchor institution'* (SP, 2016) was not apparent in policy texts from the outset. Instead, it begins with an implicit articulation of *'serv[ing] the needs of communities as a broad subject-based institution'* and *'promot[ing] international engagement'* as its mission (SP, 2007). One example of promoting international engagement can be observed from the university's statement of *'establishing new alumni networks in key markets such as China, the Middle East and West Africa, all linked to our aim to internationalise the University'* (SP, 2007). This indicates that the university's aspirations for internationalisation are in some way intended to raise its profile internationally through partnerships with alumni networks. Then, the vision moves to an explicit expression of *'an engaged university'* (SP, 2011), and thus *'an internationally engaged university'* with a particular profile as *'an anchor institution'* (SP, 2016). The combination between *'an internationally engaged university'* and *'an anchor institution'* (SP, 2016) indicates the emphasis on the university's global relationships. The international vision will facilitate the fulfilment of the regional mission, as addressed, *'only by being successful as a university that is recognised for excellence in the international and national areas can we be successful anchor institution'* (SP, 2016).

This changing position of the university expresses the institution's commitment to *'going beyond'* (SP 2011), which, in some ways, might push the institution to broaden the reach of partnership working from local to international, for example, *'[the university] will take a global view and strive towards having an international reach by actively participating in the international arena, engaging scholars, students and partners worldwide'* (SP 2011), *'The quality and impact of our research and enterprise will be benchmarked on an international level, and international collaboration and cooperation will be encouraged'* (SP, 2016). Such a change in position is argued to be an institutional response to the competitive international higher education landscape; *'International engagement is key to our sustained success as an academic institution operating in a global environment'* (SP, 2016).

5.1.1.5 Competitive international HE landscape

This changing position can be considered as the university's response to the competitive international higher education landscape, pushing it beyond. The significance of promoting the reputation of the university in the discourse on internationalisation can be detected by the fact that stature and reputation are highlighted at the start of the dedicated section on '*internationalisation*' (SP, 2011) or '*international engagement*' (SP, 2016). What kind of partnerships the university develop and build, in some way, demonstrates the image, brand, stature or reputation of the university itself, as is made explicit by the university's statement that, '*Stature and reputation are demonstrated by the standing of the University's staff and students, by the achievements of its alumni, and by the partnerships that the University forms*' (SP, 2011). The competitive international higher education landscape pushes the university to continually set itself targets internationally, thus ensuring continued growth in international stature and reputation. '*International engagement is key to our sustained success as an academic institution operating in a global environment*' (SP, 2016). The institutional success is achieved by '*continually monitoring the activities of key areas to ensure that they are meeting international standards of excellence*' and measured by the level of '*improving our national and international media profile*' (SP, 2007); '*Mechanism will be developed to track the growth in stature and reputation nationally and internationally*' (SP, 2011).

5.1.1.6 The demand for continued growth in reputation

Sustainability is defined by a sustainable performance improvement through investment-driven strategies aimed at pursuing academic excellence. This performative discourse on *sustainability* is derived from three key themes associated with particular discourses, i.e. reputation in competitive HE, pursuit of academic excellence and investment-driven strategies. Sustainable performance improvement is set out against a competitive higher education landscape where institutions have to seek improvement at a higher rate and ensure a continued growth in reputation. In order to achieve this, the pursuit of academic excellence is supported by investment driven strategies, which are highlighted as a key approach. Such an approach highlights an intricate relationship between academic excellence pursuit and financial investment strategies. Across the examined documents (SP, 2007; SP, 2011; SP, 2016), there emerges a consistent narrative depicting how academic excellence pursuit is driven and supported by financial investment strategies.

Informed by such discourse of *sustainability*, constructions of *sustainable international partnership* might ‘*only act within certain parameters and constraints*’ (Fairclough, 2006), which are intended to pursue excellence and thus ultimately revenues as well. The following analysis will present how such an approach has been achieved, maintained and consolidated over time, and detail its implications for the construction of *sustainable international partnerships*.

A sustainable performance improvement is set out against an increasingly competitive international higher education landscape (SP, 2011; SP, 2016). Within this competitive environment, a growing emphasis on ensuring a continued growth in stature and reputation has been observed in the examined documents (SP, 2007; SP, 2011; SP, 2016). To manage and ensure a continued growth in stature and reputation, excellence pursuit and investment return are considered essential. As is stated, ‘*only by doing things exceptionally well can we achieve our vision of being a university that is ever growing in stature and reputation in the world...Sustained growth in stature, reputation and influence requires simultaneous growth in our financial resources and revenue*’ (SP, 2011), or the most recent statement, ‘*ensure continued growth in its stature, reputation and influence, achieve a step change in its performance and safeguard its academic, financial and environmental sustainability*’ (SP, 2016). Those statements illustrate the significance of sustained revenue and excellence in sustainable performance improvement and thus continued growth in stature and reputation, which will contribute to the enhancement of institutional competitiveness.

5.1.1.7 Investment-driven-return strategies

Financial sustainability is seen as a key dimension of sustainability in the policy documents, as is emphasised, ‘*Our investment-driven strategy is designed to strengthen our sustainability, our ongoing capacity and our appetite for change and for growth*’ (SP 2016). The sustainability agenda is set in a ‘*competitive higher education landscape*’ (SP, 2011). To enhance international competition, ‘*We will have a sustainable investment strategy and must generate the resources needed to compete on quality, for without this nothing else is possible*’ (SP, 2016). To compete in quality and excellence, ‘*responsible financial and investment strategies*’ (SP, 2016) are considered to be essential to support excellence and sustainability. These responsible financial and investment strategies are largely framed by a focused investment strategy, as is stated, ‘*we have much to accomplish*

but recognise that we can only do what we can afford' (SP, 2016). This appears to provide a reasonable justification for the university to initiate a *'focused initiative on sustainability'* (SP, 2011) as sustainability has to be built upon what can be afforded by the university, and, *'It is only by making substantial strategic investments that we will be able to successfully achieve the sustainable step change in performance we desire'* (SP, 2016) This illustrates the intricate relationship between financial and academic sustainability. The university's limited budget appears to provide a convincing justification for the university to give priority to certain agendas over others; for example, a focused investment strategy based on those academic strengths which are expected to bring in financial investment returns. In this sense, academic sustainability appears not too far from financial sustainability.

5.1.1.8 Pursuing academic excellence

There appears to be a status gap between financial sustainability and academic sustainability. Financial sustainability is argued to be a core element in achieving academic sustainability; for example, *'Earning research income is not an end in itself, but is essential to sustain the University's research endeavours as well as to the University's standing and reputation'* (SP, 2011). The university's financial sustainability appears to hamper academic sustainability, not only through a focused investment strategy, but also through expectation of financial returns from those invested academic strengths, as stated thus, *'we will measure our success by increasing external funding for distinctive activities'* (SP, 2007); *'We will ensure that our investments bring an academic and ultimately a financial return'* (SP, 2016).

In order to achieve sustainable performance improvement, the policy documents indicated that the university feel they must continually improve and bring about *'a sustainable step change'*, but this sustainable step change means *'not only to keep up but to leap ahead'* (SP, 2016). To compete with other institutions, pursuit of academic excellence is highlighted; for example, *'continually monitoring the activities of key areas to ensure that they are meeting international standards of excellence'* in terms of developing a sustainable and distinctive academic provision (SP, 2007); *'The University's academic endeavours will always be characterised by quality and the maintenance of high, internationally recognised academic standards'* (SP, 2011).

The objective to '*develop sustainable and distinctive academic provision*' (SP, 2007) indicates a connection between sustainability and academic excellence. In other words, by establishing and maintaining institutional academic distinctiveness, a sustainable provision can thus be achieved. In order to 'establish greater institutional distinctiveness', the university claims to '*invest further in some distinctive academic strengths*' (SP, 2007), and the investment decisions are subject to a series of conditions such as '*breadth of engagement of staff and students*', '*significant opportunity for further development*', '*impact on student recruitment*', '*marketability and impact on institutional reputation*', '*significance for the region*', and '*opportunities to attract additional funding streams*' (SP, 2007). A sustainable academic provision is subject to its academic strengths and is a constant performance indicator with regard to meeting the above requirements. In other words, if '*some distinctive academic strengths*' are not able to demonstrate the potential for further development, impact on institutional reputation and student recruitment or funding attraction, those '*distinctive academic strengths*' might risk a loss of funding, which in turn would impact on their academic sustainability. In this sense, academic sustainability is informed by financial sustainability and associated with the discourse on performativity. This can be observed from how the success of '*develop sustainable and distinctive an academic provision*' is measured by '*achieving student number targets*', '*improving our national and international media profile*', and '*increasing external funding for distinctive activities*' (SP, 2007).

Consistent with how academic sustainability is informed by financial sustainability through investment in '*some*' academic endeavours in the strategic plan (SP, 2007), such *chosen* approach continues to drive the academic sustainability in the following university strategic plans (SP, 2011; SP, 2016). Yet this *chosen* approach seems to have gained a much broader interference in academic endeavours as it also explicitly articulates the right to make a decision as to whether other academic activities need to be phased out (SP, 2011; SP, 2016), as is claimed for example, '*...it must be prepared to make the necessary investments, but at the same time also have the conviction to phase out activities when appropriate*' (SP, 2011). In this sense, those '*chosen*' academic disciplines are the ones which are able to demonstrate academic performance in distinctiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and ultimately generate financial returns to the university, and those not chosen risk academic sustainability. In so doing, the university can ensure that the academic structure and the way they organise are '*effective, efficient and sustainable*' (SP, 2016). In

this sense, there is a constant evaluation of whether those invested academic endeavours should receive further investment from the university, as is stated, *'Identification of areas where investment will yield returns in the longer term, including emerging academic disciplines. At the same time, continued investment in research initiatives that are not viable or sustainable will need to be reassessed'* (SP, 2011). *'Our financial and investment strategies will be based on sound financial and business principles, and will be continually monitored according to a set of financial and sustainability metrics'* (SP, 2016).

Considering such a neoliberally performative construction of sustainability, partnership development appears to be dealt with by means of a 'focused' (SP, 2011) or 'targeted' (SP, 2016) approach with particular reference to investment returns. This is observed in the case that *'[n]ew revenue streams will include greater industrial collaboration and innovative approaches to enterprise, a more focused approach to funding from research councils, national and international academic partnership'* (SP, 2011), or as is the case that *'strive to increase our income significantly and diversify our revenue streams...with a focus on the development of national and international partnership'* (SP, 2016). In so doing, a narrative in which international partnerships are constructed in strategic terms seems to make sense. The appropriateness of a focused investment on strategic partnership is thus justified.

5.1.2 A projection of *what-is sustainable international partnerships*: some implications

The above presents a textual analysis on the main '*themes*' emerging from this English university's policy texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. This section offers an integrated analysis of how those '*themes*' work together to project *what-is a sustainable international partnership* for this English institution and the implications of such a projection.

As illustrated in the *Diagram 5.1*, the policy texts locate *partnership* largely in the lower quadrants of '*Other-Local-Education*' with different modifiers attached, such as '*strategic*', '*high-quality*' '*winning*', or '*prominent*', '*leading*'. This *partnership*, it is argued, is constructed in a more local and business sense, albeit with a sense that it

becomes more reputation-driven, something which is mainly expressed through ‘*strategic*’ relationship. This reputation-driven discourse is partly inter-related with the discourse on *internationalisation*, which is itself largely framed to contribute to the university’s branding. In that case, international partnerships appear to be tied to a project of pursuing such partnerships as high-quality collaborations with leading institutions abroad, enabling the creation of a positive image which is, in turn, expected to attract relationships with a myriad of stakeholders. The other discourse that informs *internationalisation* and *partnership* is discourse on *sustainability*. This discourse is placed within the context of fiscal austerity and reductions in government funding, thereby generating the financial sense of sustainability with a performative construct. Underpinned by this financially driven sustainability agenda, a focused investment strategy is chosen to support those academic strengths able to demonstrate excellent performance and thus investment returns. In summary, within those existing discourses on *partnership*, *internationalisation*, and *sustainability*, it is difficult for *sustainable international partnership* to go beyond such a ‘preconstructed’ framework; rather, it will be necessary to come to terms with it and operate ‘within certain parameters and constraints’ (Fairclough, 2006). In that case, whether partnerships are sustainable or not depends on their continuing ability to prove their productivity, effectiveness, efficiency and value for money and, more specifically, to provide both an academic and ultimately financial return for the university.

To sum up, the intertextual analysis of those policy texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability* suggests that *sustainable international partnership* is discursively constructed through intertwined discourses on education and neoliberalism and thus projected to generate financial returns to the university. Those features are in evidence in texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. In that case, *sustainable international partnership* is envisaged as a ‘*strategic*’ relationship contributing to the institution’s continued growth in reputation and financial investment returns. It seems constructed as a pragmatic approach for this English case university. Such a construction not only results from the policy deconstruction through which texts and discourse is analysed and combined; it is also affected by the particular context in which the university operates. The tightening of government spending on UK higher education forces both government and institution to seek alternative sources of revenue and the international higher education market is considered as a significant route to compensate for the limited budgets (Lomer, 2016).

Paradoxically, one can argue that such projection of *sustainable international partnership*, however, can be ‘unsustainable’ due to the partnership’s sustainability being dependent on its performance, which has the potential fluctuated and become volatile. The performative indicators can fluctuate and tend to be evaluated constantly by the institution. That is to say, if a partnership does not demonstrate excellence, effectiveness and thus ultimately financial returns to the university, it will risk the withdrawal of any further investment. Instead of being static, *sustainable international partnerships* are positioned and repositioned constantly, being sustainable in a pragmatic, financial way. In this sense, *sustainable international partnerships* are projected as a pragmatic move. It is constructed and deconstructed by the university’s fluctuating and volatile performativity, although one can argue that constant assessment and evaluation is vital if the university is to adapt and remain sustainable in an increasingly competitive environment. The point is that such an accountability warrant based on outcomes (i.e. financial returns), as Hyatt (2013) argues, runs the risks of the ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball, 2003). For example, there is a particular emphasis on ‘*sustainable in people terms*’ which is also framed to be ‘*sustainable yet adaptable*’ in order to ‘*flex and thrive in an increasingly competitive environment*’ (SP, 2011). This idea seems to present an interesting contrast to the emphasis of the Chinese institution ‘*We must put people first, pursuing comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development*’ (11st-5P), which will be presented in the next section.

5.2 *What-is sustainable international partnership in China: institutional conceptions*

Sustainable international partnerships are projected as a ‘strategic’ relationship contributing to the institutional continued demand for building internationally benchmarked capacity and thus improved international competitiveness (Headline finding, China).

This section explores how the Chinese institution conceives *sustainable international partnerships* in higher education, or, rather, what is conceived by the Chinese institution to be desirable and worth attaining in developing partnerships. It argues that *sustainable international partnerships* are projected as ‘*strategic*’ relationships which are represented

as *'stable'* partnerships with the *'best universities'* in the world; as such they are expected to contribute to the institution's continued demand for building internationally benchmarked capacity and thus improve international competitiveness. It is argued that such a representation should be viewed in the context of the long-term national dream for rejuvenating China through *'internationalisation'*. This, in turn, is closely linked to the discourse on modernisation or catching up with the *'west'* in the history of Chinese higher education (cf. Chapter 2). To speed up the fulfilment of this aspiration, a focused initiative based on developing selected partnerships with the aim of catching up and matching international competitors appears to be considered appropriate and *'natural'*. Yet this naturalness does not manifest itself in this Chinese university's policy texts. Instead, it is discursively constructed through combining the existing discourses on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. The first sub-section which follows presents the findings of the textual analysis on the main *'themes'* emerging from discourses on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*, illuminating the intertextuality of those inter-related *'themes'*. The second sub-section gives a brief summary of how *sustainable international partnership* is projected and the corresponding implications of such a projection.

5.2.1 The textual analysis of *sustainable international partnerships*: emerging themes

The textual analysis of policy texts on *partnerships* also identifies a *'strategic'* discourse of partnerships yet, unlike the English institution, it is constructed in a more educational and international sense, with *'strategic'* functions to establish *'long-term'*, *stable* and *'substantial'* relationships with selected partner institutions. Those partner institutions are selected based upon their institutional performance in the global ranking system and considered as a specific group with which the university wants to build close working relationships. Furthermore, this *'strategic'* discourse on partnerships is articulated by the quantifiable target-setting strategies, which is informed by the discourse on *internationalisation* that the university uses to improve its international capabilities, competitiveness and thus influence within a limited period. Arguably, the aspiration for *'becoming an internationally renowned high-level research university'* (11st-5P, 2006; 12nd-5P, 2011; 13rd-5P, 2016) drives the university to *'match its university disciplines, faculty, infrastructure and system with those of internationally renowned high-level*

research universities' (11st-5P, 2006). To achieve this internationally benchmarked capability, nurturing, attracting and keeping talent is considered a priority of the university, which is expressed through the principle of *'putting people first'*. Yet this principle is constructed in association with attracting, nurturing and keeping a particular group of *'people'* who are, or have the potential to be, internationally renowned, as they are expected to directly contribute to the institution's continued demand for building internationally benchmarked capacity and thus improved international competitiveness.

The *Diagram 5.2* below visualises how *'partners'* are constructed and navigated in a quadrant divided by the *'International-Local'* and *'Education-Other'* sectors. It situates partners into different scalers and moves the changing construction of partnerships towards the most recent favoured one - *'strategic'* partnerships. The following presents findings of the textual analysis on the main *'themes'* emerging from *partnerships*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*, illustrating how those key *'themes'* work together to justify the *'strategic'* discourse on partnerships which is thought to make them sustainable.



Diagram 5.2 Partnership constructions in the Chinese case university

Source: This diagram is drawn from reading policy texts on *partnerships* with particular relevance to its horizontal (from education to others) and geographical (from local to international) reach. It presents the constructions of partnerships across the Chinese institutional documents over the examined period between 2006 and 2016.

5.2.1.1 A selection of international partners

As is seen in the previous section, partnerships are constructed by the English institution as a network of relationships involving a wide range of *'stakeholders'*, but with local business partners placed at the heart of the institution, and moved mainly to the lower quadrant of *'Other-Local'* in *Diagram 5.1*. This makes a striking contrast to the Chinese institutional construction of partnerships. As is seen in *Diagram 5.2*, partners are situated largely in the *'Education-International'* quadrant, which demonstrates a dominant narrative of partnership with particular emphasis on internationality and education across all policy texts (11st-5P, 2006; 12nd-5P, 2011; 13rd-5P, 2016). Partnerships with other sectors such as enterprise and government, however, are also mentioned; for example, the *'Aviation Industry Corporation of China'* (13st-5P, 2016) and governmental authorities in the local and national areas are included as partners of the Chinese university.

5.2.1.2 Towards *'long-term'*, *'stable'* and *'substantial'* partnerships

As with the English institution, the way in which partnerships are constructed seems to be modified by different elements in the Chinese institution. For instance, *'close'*, *'substantial'* *'long-term, stable and substantial'* partnerships with *'word-class'* universities, *'internationally renowned'* academic departments and research institutes are expected to be established, and *'a group of strategic partners'* is highlighted (11st-5P, 2006); again repeatedly *'long-term and stable strategic'*, *'substantial'* partnerships with *'word-class'* universities, *'high-level'* academic departments and research institutes in the world (12nd-5P, 2011); and the most recent *'G50 Strategic Partners Plan'* which refers to the development of 50 partnerships with universities ranked among the top 200 in the world (13rd-5P, 2016). All those modifiers are reiterated and highlighted throughout the documents examined, but they are not limited to the education sector; other sectors such as high-tech enterprises and multinational companies are also featured, as illustrated in *Diagram 5.2*. Evidently, rhetoric such as *'close'*, *'substantial'*, *'long-term'*, *'stable'* and *'substantial'* demonstrates the depth of the partnerships the university aims to pursue. Whereas modifiers such as *'world-class'* and *'internationally renowned'* articulate who will be qualified to be the institution's partners. Such discourse on partnership suggests or implies that developing partnerships might have become a more deliberate practice. Yet unlike the English institution, a quantifiable approach to articulating the *'strategic'* discourse on partnerships is apparent throughout the Chinese institution's documents

(11st-5P, 2006; 12nd-5P, 2011; 13rd-5P, 2016).

5.2.1.3 Limited numbers of ‘strategic’ partnerships

Unlike England, the ‘strategic’ discourse on partnership in the Chinese policy texts is further articulated by quantifiable measures, as illustrated by *Diagram 5.2*. In other words, the university only intends to pay attention to a limited number of partnerships. As shown above, the ‘G50 Strategic Partners Plan’ (13rd-5P, 2016) clearly expresses the amount of partnerships for which the university will make specific efforts. This quantifiable target setting for developing limited numbers of partnerships applies in the case of both central university and academic departments. For example, ‘by 2010 the university is expected to have established substantial international exchange and cooperation with 20-30 universities ranked top 100 in the world (11st-5P; 2006); ‘by 2020...with 50 universities ranked top 200 in the world’ (13rd-5P, 2016). As to the academic departments, for example, ‘every school (research institute) is expected to add 2 partnerships with internationally renowned academic departments, research institutes or high-tech enterprises and multinational corporations’ (11st-5P; 2006); and ‘...to have 3-5 partnerships...by 2015’ (12nd-5P, 2011).

This focused approach to both qualifying and quantifying partners indicates a shift to strategically tight relationships. In this discourse, universities wishing to partner need to earn their qualification by climbing global league tables. In other words, the ‘strategic’ discourse on partnerships in this Chinese institution is comparatively ‘static’ as it is embedded in the global ranking system, compared to the ‘strategic’ discourse of partnerships in the English institution which seems more ‘fluctuated’ and contingent upon its financial performance. Unlike the English institution, such internationally focused constructions of *partnerships* form a consistent narrative throughout the policy documents as the discourse on *internationalisation*, originating from the global aspirations of the university, has continuously informed or consolidated this exclusive trajectory for partner selection.

5.2.1.4 ‘Becoming a world-class university’

The discourse on *internationalisation* is closely linked to the institutional global aspiration for ‘becoming an internationally renowned high-level research university’ and

thus for *'becoming a world-class university'* (11st-5P, 2006; 12nd-5P, 2011; 13rd-5P, 2016). Notably, and contrary to the changing positioning of the English institution, this aspiration for *'world-class university'* has become embedded in the examined documents over time (11st-5P, 2006; 12nd-5P, 2011; 13rd-5P, 2016). There is a consistent narrative of *'becoming an internationally renowned higher-level research university'* with a subtle distinction in the degree of fulfilment. For example, *'the goal of building an internationally renowned high-level research university is preliminarily attained by 2010'* (11st-5P, 2006); *'...is substantially attained by 2015'* (12nd-5P; 2011) and *'...is attained in all respects by 2020'* (13rd-5P; 2016). Modifiers such as *'preliminarily'*, *'substantially'*, and *'in all respects'* used one after the other depict a step change in fulfilling aspiration. But one can argue that the time limits put on each expected step change, for instance, *'...by 2010'* (11st-5P, 2006); *'...by 2015'* (12nd-5P; 2011); and *'...by 2020'* (13rd-5P, 2016), also imply a speeding up of the process for fulfilling the ambition to become an internationally competitive university. Such an ambition seems to explain why potential partners have to sift through their positions in the global league tables in order to stand out and become favoured by the institution. It reflects a strong desire to become a member of a world-class higher education group, the assumption being that only by working together with the 'best' would it lead the university to become among the 'best'. Such a 'solution' is proposed to change the current undesirable situation. One can argue that the premise behind such a 'solution' is that *'what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic'* (Bacchi, 2012). In the case of becoming the 'best' through working with the 'best', the implicit problem is that the Chinese institution lacks international competitiveness and cannot match their international competitors; for example, *'there exists a development gap between Chinese universities and high-level universities in the world'* (11st-5P, 2006).

5.2.1.5 Matching international competitors to establish influence

The competitive international higher education landscape forces both the English institution and the Chinese university to improve their international competitiveness and influence. There are no exceptions among institutions operating in such a global environment. However, there is a subtle distinction regarding how the discourse on competition is framed between England and China. For the English institution, the deficiency in international competitiveness is a given assumption which drives it to ensure continued growth in reputation, because they claim *'an established international*

reputation for academic excellence' (SP, 2011); therefore, what the university needs to do is to manage and enhance it. Conversely, the Chinese institution does not have international recognition. This deficiency in international competitiveness is pervasive throughout all policy documents, therefore their priority is to establish an international reputation. Evidence of this can be observed from the discourse on 'catching up'; *'there still exists a gap between Chinese universities and fine universities in the world, which is expressed by people and resource'* (11st-5; 2006). In that case, to match international competitors and thus establish a reputation in the world, internationalisation strategy is considered as one of the significant strategies to *'match university disciplines, faculty, infrastructure and system with international renowned high-level research universities'* (11st-5, 2006). Besides, Confucius institutes are considered to be a bridge to establish international influence through offering the platform to enhance the dialogue between West and East, through which the university's academic strengths are expected to exert worldwide influence (12nd-5P, 2011).

5.2.1.6 Quantifiable target-setting and benchmarking in all respects

To become the 'best' or to match other 'best' universities in the world, there is a continued demand for building international benchmarked capacity and thus international competitiveness. Specifically, a quantifiable approach is adopted to measure the extent to which international competitiveness has been improved. Key performance indicators are used as a benchmark against 'best practice' in the world. This approach is increasingly seen in the case of statements within the Five-Year Plans and is becoming all-pervasive (11st-5P, 2006; 12nd-5P, 2011; 13rd-5P, 2016).

Using discipline construction, talent cultivation and staff development as examples:

With reference to discipline construction, international performance in research citation is measured in the context of position in the global rankings, which is also required to move up the league tables, as is stated, *'by 2015, around 10 disciplines are expected to be ranked among top 1% in ESI* (12nd-5P, 2011); *'by 2020, 12-15 disciplines are expected to be ranked among top 1% in ESI and 3-5 among top 1%'* (13rd-5P, 2016).

In the case of talent cultivation, student international vision, international experience and international competence is achieved by exchanging students with partner universities

having an international reputation; 50% of students are expected to have international experience by 2020, compared to 5% by 2010, as is stated: *'cultivating student international vision, increasing student international experience and enhancing international exchange and cooperation capacity through exchanging students with internationally recognised universities home and abroad'* with a goal of *'5% students having an international study experience'* by 2010 (11st-5P, 2006), *'20%'* by 2015 (12nd-5P, 2011), and *'50%'* by 2020 (13rd-5P, 2016).

With reference to international staff capacity, the university's policy documents confirm that every year 50-100 leading academics within a range of disciplines are sponsored for study visits to internationally recognised universities abroad ...with the aim of achieving the goal of *'70% of faculty capable of doing international academic exchange with peers'* by 2010' (11st-5P, 2006); *'Young scholar are selected and sent to the leading universities and research institutes for further study and collaborative research to improve the overall level of faculty international capability'* (12nd-5P, 2011); *'By 2020, all the faculty will be capable of doing international academic exchange with peers'* (13rd-5P, 2016).

As is shown above, such quantifiable target-setting is constructed with particular reference to international standards to further demonstrate improved international competitiveness. In this sense, internationalisation seems considered by the university as a particular strategy for building capacity through achieving international benchmarks in terms of discipline, research, students and staff, with the aim of improving competitiveness and establishing influence in the world. Notably, all those capacity building strategies are focused on *'people'*. It is through nurturing, attracting and retaining *'people'* who match their international competitors that institutional international competitiveness and thus influence will be enhanced. In this sense, it is *'people'* that need to be sustained. However, the principle of *'putting people first'* does not apply to everybody.

5.2.1.7 Putting a specific group of 'people' first in order to build capacity

Contrary to the investment-driven-return strategies that support the demand for continued growth in stature and reputation in England, sustainability is expressed in terms of *'people'*, as is stated, *'We must put people first, pursuing comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development'* (11st-5P, 2006). This emphasis on people can be traced back to

the *'The Scientific Outlook on Development'* <report to the 17th National Congress of the CPC (The Communist Party of China)>, which constitutes a scientific approach to development. The university regards *'The Scientific Outlook on Development'* as one of the significant guiding principles, and adherence to the leadership of Chinese Communist Party will enhance the sustainable development of the university, as is in the case of *'enhancing the leadership and construction of the Chinese Communist Party will make sure the university towards comprehensive, healthy, coordinated and sustainable development'* (13rd-5P, 2016). Under the guidance of *'The Scientific Outlook on Development'*, the way in which sustainability informs international partnerships identifies people or, more accurately, brain gain. In order to be sustainable in people terms, the university develops strategies for attracting, nurturing and retaining exceptional talent through partnering with the world's top universities and jointly cultivating future talent, as is stated:

Establish a base for attracting and keeping talents with universities ranking top 200 in the world; attract talents through a range of relationships including teacher-student relationships; alumni, Confucius Institutes, and part-time faculty...Encourage and select excellent undergraduate students to study abroad in the collaborative base with our partnered universities, forming a virtuous cycle for cultivating and storing international talents in store for the university (SPOC, 2016).

As is presented above, this newly developed strategic plan outlines more specific strategies for putting a particular group of people first. It suggests the university mainly intends to develop the established 'prestigious' relationships which create strategic partnerships out of sustainable partnerships. Despite the association with *'comprehensive'*, *'healthy'*, and *'coordinated'* as it is stated in the *'The Scientific Outlook on Development'*, sustainability is underpinned by the pursuit of excellence which serves the institutional interest in aiming for acclaim from world-class universities. Therefore sustainability is also associated with terms such as *'efficiency'*, *'competitiveness'*, *'excellence'* and *'world-class'*, as is in the case of *'enhance the core competitiveness and sustainable development of disciplines'*; *'improve the fund management and efficiency...and ensure the finance towards healthy and sustainable development'* (11st-5P, 2006); or *'we do what we are able and what we can afford...offering strong support for the university towards*

sustainable development and enhanced capacity' (12nd-5P, 2011).

In sum, the idea of sustainability appears to be closely linked to the *'people first'* principle which constitutes the core of *'The Scientific Outlook on Development'*, the leadership of the Communist Party and benchmarked performance. People are valued, but the way in which *'people'* are valued seems informed by their benchmarked performance; for example, whether they are academic intellectuals who are at the cutting-edge of their disciplinary field; whether they are able to build internationally renowned lab and research institutes; whether they have gained experience or degrees from internationally renowned universities. In that case, it is those particular groups of *'people'* who appear to be more valued and need to be sustained by the university as they tend to more directly contribute to the institutional goal of improving its international capabilities and competitiveness, thus *'becoming a world-class university'*.

5.2.2 A projection of *what-is sustainable international partnerships: some implications*

The above has presented a textual analysis on the main *'themes'* emerging from the Chinese university policy texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. This section offers an integrated analysis of how those *'themes'* work together to project *what-is a sustainable international partnership* for this Chinese institution and the implications of such a projection.

As illustrated in the Diagram 5.2, the policy texts on *partnerships* find them largely positioned in the right upper quadrant of *'International-Education'*, with different modifiers attached such as *'long-term'*, *'close'* *'stable'*, *'substantial'*, or *'internationally renowned'*, *'world-class'*. This, it is argued, is because partnerships are presented more as *'strategic'* relationships with the *'best'* universities in the world. Such *'strategic'* discourse on *partnership* is consistent with the discourse on *internationalisation* and largely serves the long-term aspirations for *'becoming internationally renowned high-level research university'* and thus *'world-class university'*. To speed up the fulfilment of this aspiration, the institution methodically plans for building internationally benchmarked capacity and thus international competitiveness in all respects through quantifiable target-setting for either the institution or the schools, including discipline

construction, research performance, talent cultivation and staff development. All of those quantifiable performance indicators are expected to be achieved by nurturing, attracting and keeping a particular group of *'people'* who are internationally competitive. In this sense, the principle of *'putting people first'* embedded within the discourse on *sustainability* can be interpreted as *'putting talents first'*, which, it is assumed, will speed up the fulfilment of their *'world-class university'* aspirations.

To sum up, the intertextual analysis of those policy texts on *partnerships*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability* suggests that *sustainable international partnerships* are projected through a principal discourse on building national capacity and global competitiveness, which is evident in the texts on *partnerships*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. In that case, *sustainable international partnerships* are projected as a *'strategic'* relationship contributing to the continued institutional demand for building internationally benchmarked capacity and thus improved international competitiveness. As with the English institution, such discursive construction results not only from the deconstruction through which texts and discourses are analysed and combined, but also the wider contexts in which those texts are circulated. It is in consistent with the national dream of building world-class universities and thus improving national competitiveness in the global knowledge-based economy (Liu & Wang 2011).

Contrary to England, where *sustainable international partnerships* are likely to be situated in a rather fluctuating evaluative system driven by performativity, *sustainable international partnerships* in China appear to be situated in a hierarchical structure in which boundaries have been determined and established via a choice of international partners with reference to positions in the league tables, with demarcation and categorisation set accordingly. Seemingly, such a projection of *sustainable international partnerships* offers a sense of stability and thus tends to be more sustainable than those partnerships which depend on performativity (as with English institutions), but are embedded within more structured league tables within which position of the university is difficult to change in the short term. It is possible to envisage that such a deliberate choice of partner selection may disenfranchise other universities which could otherwise be considered as partners. However, it is difficult not to argue that this sensitivity to ranking is not running another risk of the *'terrors of performativity'* (Ball, 2003). When two *'terrors of performativity'* meet, they might either work together to enhance the

established power relationships or drift apart due to differing performance targets.

5.3 The comparison of institutional conceptions between England and China

Discourse, ‘*as ways of representing aspects of the world*’ (Fairclough, 2003: 124), not only structure the world, but also imagine the world and even, in some ways, change the world, pointing it in a particular direction. This chapter has made an attempt to understand how the various forms of discourse on *partnerships*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability* are represented and inter-related with each other in order to project a particular version of *sustainable international partnerships* in both England and China respectively. To this end, the chapter has broken down the term *sustainable international partnerships* into parts to examine how *partnerships* are constructed and informed by the discourse on *internationalisation* and *sustainability*.

Firstly, the way in which *partnerships* are constructed in the university’s policy texts differ between England and China. For the English institution, *partnerships* are constructed in a more business and local sense. Partners, together with students, staff and alumni, are considered as ‘*stakeholders*’ of the university, and partnerships are prone to be constructed as a network of relationships with a range of ‘*stakeholders*’ both internally and externally. Whereas for the Chinese institution, *partnerships* are constructed in a more education and international sense. Partnerships with higher education institutions abroad are given precedence over other relationships, which is contrary to the way in which partnerships are constructed as a broad network of relationships in the English institution.

A possible explanation for such a contrast between England and China may be ascribed to the wider national context in which the university operates and how the university re-scales itself in the international higher education landscape, within which global aspirations for economic benefit, capacity building and international reputation are spreading in diverse ways. In England, the university operates in an environment of fiscal austerity and reductions in government spending. Therefore the university aspires to be an anchor institution and an internationally engaged university. In order to do this, a broad network of relationships among stakeholders radiating from the locality it serves appears

to be their first consideration. In China, on the other hand, the university operates in an environment of accrued investment in targeted universities required for national capacity building. Therefore the university aspires to be an internationally acclaimed world-class university. In order to achieve this, a focus on international relationships between higher education institutions is prioritised.

Secondly, the way in which discourse on *internationalisation* and *sustainability* inform *partnerships* is expressed through justifying and consolidating the 'strategic' discourse of partnerships in both England and China. Both university policy texts stress a focused approach to *international partnerships*, seeking high-quality and substantial collaboration through 'strategic' partnerships. However, the way in which 'strategic' partnership is constructed in the case university policy texts differs between England and China with regard to how partnerships are evaluated or expected to contribute to institutional internationalisation. Within the English case university policy texts, 'strategic' partnership is informed by sustainable performance in academic excellence but ultimately financial returns; therefore the evaluation of how strategic partnerships contribute to institutional internationalisation tends to consider the business benefit more than any other broader outcomes. Within the Chinese case university policy texts, however, strategic partnership is informed by the sustainable capacity building objective for talent nurturing and retaining through partnering with top universities referenced in the league tables; therefore the evaluation of how strategic partnerships contribute to institutional internationalisation is measured quantifiably through key performance indicators in talent cultivation, for example.

Through such intertextual analysis of university policy discourse on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*, substantial differences emerge between England and China regarding *what-is sustainable international partnerships* projected in the field of institutional structure. For the English case university, sustainable international partnerships seem to be situated in a rather fluctuating evaluative system driven by performativity. Whether partnerships can be sustainable is subject to their performance in ultimate financial returns. If a partnership is evaluated as unable to bring in income to the university, it then risks termination. In this sense, partnerships are positioned and repositioned constantly, and thus sustainable in a pragmatic way. For the Chinese case university, however, *sustainable international partnerships* appear embedded in a rather

static hierarchical structure whereby partners are selected from league tables with long-standing categorisations of the 'best' universities which are not easy to be deconstructed in the short term. In this sense, partnerships are carefully selected and built up, and thus sustainable in an elitist way. Whether partnerships are sustainable is subject to their success (or otherwise) in fulfilling the university's capacity building; for example, in the extent to which international joint talent is nurtured and retained.

Despite the differing constructions of *'strategic'* relationships between England and China, broadly setting limits on what is possible by means of the specific discourse articulated in the university policy texts is a shared practice between England and China. The policy discourse constructs problems, proposed solutions and anticipated actions. In this sense, the construction of *sustainable international partnerships* cannot be defined within a neutral context; instead, it emerges through combining existing discourse in certain ways, thus reinforcing the established power relationships (Fairclough, 2003). Through the particular *'strategic'* discourse on partnerships, *sustainable international partnerships* can be structured and thus imagined into one particular version, which is seen to be an apparent, inevitable, and natural point (Foucault, 1972). Such manifested discourse can be further institutionalised and put into operation through various official mechanisms, including professional managers who engage in developing partnerships in the international office. In that case, the *'strategic'* discourse on sustainable international partnerships *'is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said'* (Foucault 1972: 28). In the next chapter, I shall present other possibilities for the construction of sustainable partnerships signified by inter-personal human relationships and framed by ethical discourse, outlining how this 'not-said' undermines from within all that has been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 6 *What-is* sustainable international partnership in England and China: individual perceptions

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.....

--- *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens

The previous chapter has presented a ‘*preconstructed*’ (Fairclough, 2006) framework, through which *sustainable international partnerships* are projected as *strategic* relationships in both English and Chinese institutions in this research, although, the way in which *strategic* is represented differs between the two universities. However, as Fairclough (2006) argues, even a ‘*preconstructed*’ framework is ‘*socially*’ and ‘*humanly*’ constructed. It is ‘*the outcome of past and continuing human agency, strategy and reflexivity*’ (Fairclough, 2006: 163). This means that whenever and wherever people engage in a social activity, the way they represent the social world may result from their strategic reflection upon and selection of the diverse shared ‘*discourses*’ (Fairclough, 2006) or ‘*repertoires*’ (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Such ‘*discourses*’ or ‘*repertoires*’ function as the interpretative resources from which people tend to draw to frame and justify their arguments². This chapter attempts to explore how the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* as a ‘*preconstructed*’ framework is consolidated and stabilised as one of the diverse shared ‘*discourses*’ or ‘*repertoires*’ which people draw from or is tied in with their engagement in constructing sustainable international partnerships in both England and China. Meanwhile, it also explores how alternative imaginaries of sustainable international partnerships are constructed by individuals in response to that ‘*preconstructed*’ framework, either similarly or differently, in both universities. Those individuals include academics as well as non-academics, who have engaged or are engaging in international partnerships from different levels of the university and with a varied range of disciplines including Engineering, Sciences, Social

² There is a sense that discourses and repertoires function in the same way as interpretive resources. The deliberate use of repertoires in this chapter aims to emphasise more an everyday construction of sustainable international partnerships from individuals than a policy construction presented in the previous chapter.

Sciences, Humanities and Arts in both universities featured in this research.

During the interviews, the majority of my participants in both England and China have left me with the impression that both perceptions and sensations are influencing the negotiation through which sustainable international partnerships are constructed. Their contradictory feelings and perceptions of sustainable international partnerships led me to draw upon some Dickensian phrases from *A Tale of Two Cities* – ‘*the worst of times*’, ‘*the best of times*’, ‘*the winter of despair*’, ‘*the spring of hope*’, ‘*the epoch of incredulity*’ and ‘*the epoch of belief*’. Those striking quotes have constantly come to mind when reflecting upon on the stories told by my participants from the two institutions in this research. I find those terms provide a medium through which I could connect the interviewees, myself and the readers, with both perceptions and sensations telling a tale of two higher education institutions regarding construction of sustainable international partnerships. Although this literary approach might be criticised as being slightly polarising and also caricaturing the data, its purpose is to serve the particular aims of this chapter, namely highlighting the contrasts and their corresponding implications for further reflection and interrogation. Moreover, the question mark following each quote in the headline of this chapter is also employed to invite readers to constantly reflect upon the interpretation of the data.

Two main sections constitute this chapter. Each section presents two ‘*discourses*’ or ‘*repertoires*’ upon which individuals draw to construct sustainable international partnerships in both universities in this research: one is the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships, and the other is the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships, albeit temporarily omitting some of the more subtle distinctions between specific elements in their respective logics. The *strategic* repertoire mirrors how *sustainable international partnerships* are projected in university policy discourse in England and China in the previous chapter. The *contingent* repertoire demonstrates the agency of people to crack that imaginary situated in the policy discourse, presenting an alternative method of achieving sustainable international partnerships. To illustrate what is referenced as constituting both *strategic* and *contingent* repertoires, in vivo codes are sub-headlined as much as possible, supported by direct quotations from participants. Each participant is numbered, followed by their academic title and broad disciplinary background, whilst still retaining the participants’ anonymity in this research.

The chapter concludes with a comparison of individual perceptions of sustainable international partnerships between the two institutions in this research.

6.1 *What-is* sustainable international partnership in England: individual perceptions

This section explores how the English participants in this research perceive sustainable international partnerships in higher education, presenting two repertoires. On the one hand, it presents how the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* becomes a repertoire upon which English participants draw and thus construct *what-is* sustainable international partnerships from a realistic and pragmatic perspective. On the other hand, it presents how the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships functions as a response to resist the *strategic* one, representing an alternative imaginary of sustainable international partnerships via human relationships. Such two divorced repertoires have left me with an impression of disconnection between the institutional structure and the individual agency, peppered with negativity, disbelief and even some resistance.

In order to sketch such a dreary and conflicted snapshot, I draw upon Dickensian phrases from *A Tale of Two Cities* - '*the winter of despair*', '*the epoch of incredulity*' and '*the worst of times*' to evoke the sense of frustration, distrust and contradiction expressed by many English participants, and the power struggles between the institutional structure and the individual agency within the institution. Specifically, '*the winter of despair*' is used to highlight how English participants feel frustrated but to develop partnerships driven by income generation in a context where the English university in this research is perceived to be struggling financially, outlining how the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* is institutionalised in this particular context, which contrasts with the Chinese story in which participants (especially administrators) feel confident and pride, thus actively thinking differently of developing partnerships; '*the epoch of incredulity*' is drawn to capture individuals' (especially academics) cynicism and doubt about university relationships driven by the economic rationales, causing a sense of disconnection between the institutional arrangement and individual engagement, which illustrates how English participants respond with a sense of disbelief to the *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships*, thus producing a *contingent*

repertoire of sustainable international partnerships via human relationships; and *'the worst of times'* is drawn to indicate that if the frustration, cynicism, doubts and disconnection between the institution and the individual continues, construction of sustainable international partnerships might be just a disjunctive imaginary for the English institution in this research.

6.1.1 The *'winter of despair'*? The *strategic* repertoire of sustainable partnerships in the context of austerity

...Institutions want money because they want capital to fund the administration themselves, because that's the way we work in this country...we have to earn money ourselves as an institution...

(Interviewee 3, Professor in Engineering, England)

As shown above, the accounts from most of my English participants have left a deep impression that the university in this research has to *'earn money'* in a context of austerity, which seems to be the *'winter of despair'* for the institution having to *'earn money'*, for the managerial group to give priority to nothing but consider income generation as the *'first drive'*, and also for the academics to bear on pressure to *'bring in money'* and thus be accountable to the institution. Such lived reality not only unleashes a torrent of negativity, frustration and even resistance on the ground; it also creates a disconnection among individual academics in the engagement in partnerships developed by the institution.

The following sections draw upon the interview data, presenting how the *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships* filters into an everyday repertoire upon which English participants draw to construct *what-is* sustainable international partnership in this context of austerity. Specifically, from a realistic and pragmatic perspective, the priority in constructing sustainable relationships seems be making them manageable and affordable, demonstrating a high-level commitment to *'want these relationships to work'* (Interviewee 17). Such a high-level partnership arrangement assumes there would be a continuity of engagement from top to bottom. However, this assumption fails to consider the discontinuity of senior managers' visions and the pressure of *'bringing in money'* (Interviewee 15) experienced by individual academics, all of which

affect the institutionalisation of the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships*. Tensions between institutional internationalisation strategies driven by income generation and the lived reality of individual academics required to ‘*make the contribution to the central [university]*’ (Interviewee 12) might disconnect individual academic interests from engaging in partnerships developed by the university. That being the case, what is desirable and worth attaining in constructing sustainable partnerships might be limited to the institutional imaginary.

6.1.1.1 Making a list of partnerships intentional and substantial

Many colleges and universities find their existing cooperation agreements are ‘*plentiful in number but thin in substance*’ (Sutton, 2010). In other words, not all partnerships are filled with substantial activities; instead, they are simply signed agreements, as is observed from the following testament:

...when I arrived I asked for a list of the universities with which the university collaborated and had an agreement, and I was given a list which was more than a page of the institutions. I looked down at it, what we're doing with this institution? Nobody to tell me. What we're doing with this? Nobody to tell me (Interviewee 17, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the university, England).

In this sense, those signed agreements appeared to function as empty gestures because ‘*nobody*’ seemed to know what was happening in such partnerships. It indicated a particular position of this English university, which was experiencing some turbulence in its management structures. Apparently, such an approach is not considered to be the ‘*the right way to go*’, instead, it has to go beyond ‘*superficial relationships*’ and ‘*deliver everything behind it*’, as is argued by the Deputy Director of International Office:

...not just some superficial relationships, a real tendency I think, it's to have MOU signed and all the documentation in place and then deliver everything behind it. So the intention in the MOU should be the intention to do something, and not just saying, oh, yeah, we'll think about it (Interviewee 12, Deputy Director of International Office, England).

From this account, if a partnership does not have ‘*the intention to do something*’ and to ‘*deliver everything behind it*’, it is suggested to remove it from the list, thus making room

for *'those we are using and develop those more'*, a view shared by the International Coordinator in the School of Arts:

...otherwise I would get rid of those partnerships, because some on the books we just haven't used, maybe some with orders, a piece of paper, both institutions, but it might be, if we are not using it, we can get rid of that, focusing on those we are using and develop those more, like I say, make these more sustainable (Interviewee 14, International Coordinator in Arts, England).

Here, it is interesting to notice that there are signs of constructing sustainable partnerships by *'focusing'* on a group of relationships, as is reported above, *'make these [they are using] more sustainable'*, because a long-list of partner institutions which does not *'deliver anything behind it'* cannot be a testament to the sustainability of partnerships. On the contrary, *'focusing'* on a specific group of relationships with *'the intention to do something'*, and actually *'deliver everything behind it'* seems to be an indicator of sustainable partnerships. A focused approach to partnerships demonstrates a sense of commitment to *'want these relationships to work'*, as is explained by the former Vice-Chancellor of the university:

...you can't have, you cannot have significant relations with all of these institutions. They are just on the list. But when you have a list, maybe you know, 10, I mean, oh, well, this institution is clearly wanting these relationships to work (Interviewee 17, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the university, England).

In that case, the concentration on a specific group of relationships appears to demonstrate the commitment to make substantial relationships rather than the superficial ones happen, as is expressed, *'this institution is clearly wanting these relationships to work'*. But such a specific group of relationships tend to be constructed in a structured and hierarchical way, as is framed by *'a top tier'*:

I think you can have a good stretched partners, but you have to have a top tier of partners where you work and look deeper when you're with them (Interviewee 12, Deputy Director of International Office, England).

In addition to demonstrating the commitment to *'want these relationships to work'*, stretching the range of partners and thus deciding which ones are worth *'look[ing] deeper'*,

another factor in justifying the necessity of selecting a specific group of partnerships concerns the resources that the university have available for partnership development, because partnership is prone to fail if the university does not calculate how to back up and sustain its development financially, as the Deputy Director of International Office further explains:

We've got resource here to do that. So it's being selective...we need to make sure we concentrate on a few good ones that we can actually resource, we talk about, having a few strategic partners that we do things very well (Interviewee 12, Deputy Director of International Office, England).

Therefore, strategic relationships are based upon deliberate selection rather than ad hoc practice. Before establishing any partnerships, the university tends to do due diligence, which includes researching the context in which partnerships operate, the benefits which the university can gain and the availability of any resources the university needs to invest. Those factors are used to narrow down partnerships to a list of relationships developing in substance rather than in gesture.

6.1.1.2 Assuming a continuity of engagement from top to bottom

In addition to the realistic consideration of intentionality, substantiality and affordability, the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* functions as a repertoire because it is underpinned by an assumption that there would be an automatic individual engagement on the ground, as is observed:

...so find institution that have maybe research interests that would be the same so academics could use the relationship to foster maybe new research interest, maybe they haven't, didn't know about what was going on. They could see there were opportunities there, maybe to have people, again, academics go and maybe give a short course for a couple of weeks at the time and vice versa, and then to encourage, you know, students to be exchanged (Interviewee 17, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the university, England).

Such planning on strategic relationships is a high-level arrangement. It is a senior leader's vision in the university that informs a decision on which institution is included and excluded with regard to planning on strategic relationships. Although it is good that a

high-level agreement is created first which allows individuals in both partner institutions to explore collaborative activities, partnerships tend to unravel simply because of the discontinuity of the senior leader's vision, as is argued:

And in some cases, it can boil down just to a change in vice-chancellor, or president, or whatever the equivalent, you know, maybe you have a relationship with an institution, a new vice-chancellor, or a new season team comes in, the previous one, and sometimes it comes down to the previous one graduate from a British university, but the new one graduates from a American university, so they shift from a UK based collaborative arrangement to a Canadian, or a American, or whatever, could be simply that. So sometimes it's not sustainable, not because it's not sustainable, it's just overtaken, individual preferences come to play and things change. Then the question is whether you accept (Interviewee 4, Head of Quality Office, England).

According to this manager, it is common to encounter a discontinuity of partnerships with regard to leader's individual preferences, which could be affected by their own study or work experience. Similarly, a professor in language and Head of School suggests the significance of ensuring continuity in terms of the people within the institution:

It doesn't have to but continuity is in terms of people. It's enormously important. If you have someone leaving or taking a step back, and they have a successor and they hand over project properly. That's OK. It's a risk but it usually works out, but more often than not, in the case of an external change you forget about your outside links. Change everything around for three months and then you come up for and notice that your international partners have since walked away because you were not communicative. That's always, I think that's the key element (Interviewee 5, Professor in Cultures, Head of School, England).

Therefore, the discontinuity in term of people who are involved in the ongoing partnerships in the institution may lead international partnerships to stagnate in the case of an unsatisfactory handover between predecessors and successors. This is echoed by another senior academic argument:

A properly sustainable partnership shouldn't be one who resets the partnership when I left, should be one that somebody comes in and takes over (Interviewee

11, *Professor in Nursing, Head of Department, England*).

This indicates the role of senior academics in arranging successors to make sure the partnership continues within the institution. In addition to this discontinuity of engagement from senior leaders, partnerships tend to unravel if there is no real interest from individual academics on the ground. A top-down approach to partnerships might be what the institution wants, but it will fail if the individual does not commit. If no interest comes from the ground, then nothing happens on the ground. Whether the partnership can be sustained is subject to whether engagement from top to bottom is ensured, instead of assuming the implementation is automatically happening *'in a downwards and hierarchical fashion'* (Williams, 2013), as the Deputy Director of International Office argues, *'you've got buy-in and people actually want to do it'*:

...you have to make sure the engagement is from top to the bottom really. You've got buy-in and people actually want to do it. It's not going to be the sheer commitment to do it and the staff feel like they are forced to do it. It's never going to sustain self at all (Interviewee 12, Deputy Director of International Office, England).

Notably, there is an awareness of the role of individual academic interests in making partnerships work and sustainable. Although many interviewees see funding as important in ensuring there is a continuity of engagement in partnerships, it is argued that it also serves the goal of *'keeping the continuity of the star'* (Interviewee 16). That is to say, money is valued when it is used for keeping the expertise of the people involved in the partnerships, as is argued by a professor in engineering:

...the funding is not valued itself, it's valued for what you can buy with it and what you buy with it is to keep to work with you, and the collaborations you get with those people (Interviewee 16, Professor in Engineering, Head of School, England).

However, as we shall see, having income generation as the *'first drive'* tends to make the institution rush into *'everything'*, which possibly disconnects individual academic interests from institutional international engagement because the pressure on individual academics to *'bring in income'* to the institution appears to water down their enthusiasm about engagement in international partnerships.

6.1.1.3 Income generation as the '*first drive*' rushing into '*everything*'

League table and income generation appear to function as the main rationales for the university to engage in '*everything*'. In this sense, partnerships are no exception, as a Professor in Engineering in an English university argues:

Universities, Vice-chancellors, so universities are driven by money, and league table, right, those two thing, what else, ok, because everything is defined by that. Because the league tables mean that universities are doing better or not so well, and the money means they need to get more money to be able to grow the development and so on. This is the day by day activity (Interviewee 3, Professor in Engineering, England).

However, in the case of the English institution in this research, between the league table and money, money seems to be the '*first drive*', although, sometimes it is considered as the '*hidden agenda*'. This is contrary to the Chinese side where league table appears to come first. The financial return is suggested to be the main drive against which to measure the qualification and the continuity of most proposed partnerships, as is observed from the following account:

I mean, that's the drive, first drive, it's got to be. We could make other arguments. The principle drive must be the student numbers, i.e. finance (Interviewee 4, Head of Quality Office, England).

The following account provides an example of how other arguments are made around income generation as the '*first drive*'. A Lecturer in Language involved in a partnership with China points out how the money as the '*top*' agenda drives the university to engage in partnerships.

At the top, at the top it would be money. There are all other things related obviously that student numbers coming in, exchange, research projects, the good name of the university, reputation, but the thing that supporting all of that is the fees that they bring (Interviewee 8, Lecturer in Languages, England).

Income generation appears to be the vital nexus on which partnerships are defined and constructed and, around which, arguments are framed under the discourse on '*money*', in

an either overt or covert way. Without embedding income generation in any type of international engagement, partnerships are considered unsustainable, as is argued:

You just go down the recruitment route, that's not sustainable. You just go down the research route, that's not sustainable either, because you are not generating income. So you spent a lot of time doing lots of research and start building research partnerships, stuff like that. But where is the tangible benefit to the university? So if you put into money to do something, there has to be a return. So business is always there (Interviewee 12, Deputy Director of International Office, England).

Although partnerships driven by income generation are established, such an international approach to international engagement does not bring about coherence and consistency, especially when an overall supportive mechanism for sustaining those relationships has not yet been established within the university. That being the case, all the activities appear to be in a rush, as the manager further points out:

At the moment, it's kind of like, let's do it, rushing to it, and then it's like there is no support coming to help to maintain that relationship (Interviewee 12, Deputy Director of International Office, England).

Moreover, this particular rush for generating income can also lead to a fragile engagement in partnerships between different specialised units (i.e. international office, quality office and partnership office) within the institution. A school manager reveals the misunderstanding between people who work for the different departments within the university. As is suggested by the data, there is a conflict of interest between different functional departments in the central university:

That we [Quality Office] know they [Partnership Office] are going to come and say this is a fantastic partner in x country. And you look at the programmes, they are not just qualified to come here. No, but you know a million pounds. But they are not qualified. That's going to be a difficulty (Interviewee 4, Head of Quality Office, England).

Or the misunderstanding between the central university and the school engagement:

There are the assumptions in the Quality Office that everybody does business around the world, but we don't' (Interviewee 6, Marketing and Business Strategy, Business School, England).

As is seen from above, centring on income generation, the engagement in partnerships between different specialised units can be fragile, and even chaotic. Moreover, such a financial-driven approach to partnerships also puts pressure on individual academics to 'bring in the money' to the institution, thus disconnecting from individual academic interests on the ground.

6.1.1.4 Disconnecting institutional engagement from individual interest

There is a discourse on accountability emerging from the interview data that centres on the individual academic's responsibility for bringing financial benefit to the institution, as is seen from the following argument:

You have to make the contribution to the central [university]...business...academics need to aware of their responsibilities. They've got to do stuff as well to contribute to... (Interviewee 12, Deputy Director of International Office, England).

One of the possible impacts on individual academics is that support from the central university will naturally lead to partnerships which can bring benefit to the university, as those partnerships would be considered more 'reliable' by the institution due to such 'tangible benefit', as a Senior Lecturer in Environment suggests partnership development goes to who is 'more reliable in bringing in the money':

I think what would happen is the people who they see as being more reliable of bringing in the money would get the money (Interviewee 15, Senior Lecturer in Environment, England).

In that case, individual engagement on the ground might be challenged due to the financial pressures on each academic. Due to such pressure it might not be able to stir up interest on the ground to engage in partnership initiated by the institution, as is argued, for academics, '[t]hey are not creating the interests', instead, 'they are doing the administration':

...I really don't believe the high level with this. Because in the international office, I'm talking about the international office, that's not the high level necessarily. International office is the facilitator. It's making it possible for students to exchange. They are doing the administration. They are not creating the interest. The interest is created by the individual departments, not the university, the individual departments, yeah? Then they come to tell the international offices and then it goes... If you don't have academics doing that for best ability, you don't have it. So you make anything you want out of inter-university cooperation, but you will fail as a university if you don't do it at the level of individual academics, you know. I rest my case (Interviewee 3, Professor in Engineering, England).

There is a sense that individual academics might distrust institutional international engagement. Similarly, a Reader in Education also shows little belief in institutional effort in sustaining partnerships:

I think some of the networks can be great artificially. You can have an institutional network. But often I found my experience that they don't sustain because there is no really interest from the ground (Interviewee 9, Reader in Education, England).

As is presented, the university appears to encounter trust issues from individual academics on the ground, which therefore frustrates the individual academic passion for engaging in partnerships developed by the institution. That being the case, constructing sustainable partnerships by strategic relationships can be problematical.

6.1.1.5 A brief summary

This section has outlined a *'winter of despair'* for the institution in this research struggling with finance, for the participants from the central university having to regard income generation as the *'first drive'* (Interviewee 4) or the *'top' agenda* (Interviewee 8); and also for the individual academics on the ground having to demonstrate they are *'mak[ing] the contribution to the central [university]'* (Interviewee 12) through generating income from their partnerships. Centring on income generation, the institution is perceived as rushing into everything, causing a fragile engagement in partnerships between different functional departments within the university, such as the quality office, international office and

partnership office. In this case, the challenge of sustainable partnerships constructed by strategic relationships are twofold; one comes from the different areas of power struggles in the institutional structure, and the other is from disengagement on the ground due to individual academics' lack of faith in the institutional approach to partnerships. In response with cynicism and doubt about university relationships driven by the economic rationales, or in some sense 'with incredulity' to this *strategic* discourse on sustainable international partnerships, as we shall see, a *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships via human relationships is referenced and favoured. It is those inter-personal human relationships between people that are strongly believed to make partnerships sustainable. In this case, an '*epoch of incredulity*' in the institution and an '*epoch of belief*' in the individual seem to co-exist within this English university.

6.1.2 The '*epoch of incredulity*'? The *contingent* repertoire of sustainable partnerships via human relationships

...it would be nice to say that partnerships develop along some kind of scientific arrangement, but they don't. At the end of the day, it's people to people. They are not academics. They are not professors. They are just people like anybody else...

(Interviewee 1, International Coordinator in Nursing, England)

As exemplified above, there is a sense of cynicism and doubt about university relationships developed along '*some kind of scientific arrangement*', causing a sort of disconnection between the institution and the individual regarding what makes partnerships sustainable. The account introduces a different interpretive repertoire, i.e. the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable partnerships constructed by human relationships between '*people*', contrary to the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships. During the interviews, it seems to me that most English participants distrust the inter-institutional relationships developed alongside '*some kind of scientific arrangement*', especially those driven by student numbers and thus financial returns. Instead, they hold a strong belief in the inter-personal relationships developed after a chance encounter between '*people*', as stated above, '*at the end of the day, it's people to people*'.

The following sections presents how English participants react with cynicism and doubt to the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships, thus imagining alternatives drawn from a *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships via human relationships between *'people'* (Interviewee 1), and the logic working inherent in their way of thinking. It argues that human relationships are considered *'a strong basis'* (Interviewee 2) for sustainable partnerships because there is a built-in *'trust'* (Interviewee 2) within the established human relationships. To foster such human relationships, instead of some sort of *'scientific arrangement'* (Interviewee 1), a series of contingent events such as attending conferences or visiting abroad are considered, where human relationships emerge after a chance encounter. However, those human relationships are perceived to be embedded through individual networks instead of the institutional structure, thus risking an end to partnerships when people *'leave the institution'* (Interviewee 9).

6.1.2.1 Human relationships as *'a strong basis'* for sustainable partnerships

The construction of sustainable partnerships through human relationships seems to be evoked by a professor's distrust and criticism of university relationships defined by commercial considerations, citing that such relationships are *'not really a strong basis for anything'*, as is argued:

...a lot of international university relationships are about how we can make more money, we can get more students by doing this, which is not really a strong basis for anything, seems to me. Because you are not actually developing what I would call a human relationship. You're developing a commercial relationship, and that's based purely on self-interest...And I'm not sure how many university relationships actually get to that level, but I think you have to move through the commercial...You have to try to get as near as you can. And that means you have to know the person in the other end (Interviewee 2, Professor in Education, Deputy Head of School, England).

This professor has built up longstanding relationships with colleagues in Hong Kong and good working relationships with colleagues at Australian and American universities. He suggests that the sustainability of partnership relies on an ethical relationship or *'human relationship'* rather than on a *'commercial relationship'* which is driven by self-interest.

For this professor, if a partnership aims for sustainability, it has to go beyond a 'commercial relationship', moving towards a 'human relationship', as is emphasised, 'you have to know the person in the other end'. Such distrust in the institution is also expressed by another academic in education:

I still have sneaky feeling or suspicion that sustaining the relationship will come down to the individuals, not what institutions do (Interviewee 9, Reader in Education, England).

Either way both academics academic argue that it is human relationships and individuals rather than university relationships and institutions that make partnerships sustainable. This is because, as an International Coordinator points out, it is those human relationships which make partnerships 'meaningful' and thus 'sustainable':

I have found that the most meaningful, the ones we have been able to sustain, tend to be from the staff member that worked with other universities, you know. We have very, very close contacts with whether as students, or PhD students, or as member staff... Again speaking from my experiences the most successful element has been the relationships between member staff here and member staff there (Interviewee 14, International Coordinator in Arts, England).

Such arguments as 'hav[ing] close contacts' indicate a 'meaningful' relationship, which is echoed by a senior lecturer in environment pointing out there is a 'commitment to the other person' with regard to developing an 'enduring' relationship, 'not just we'll be friendly today and forget about it tomorrow':

...it's not just we'll be friendly today and forget about it tomorrow, or we'll do something specific and then, you know, look around, start again with someone else. There's some sort of commitment to the other person (Interviewee 15, Senior Lecturer in Environment, England).

In common with the majority of academics, some managers with the specific role of developing partnerships also express the significance of human relationships in constructing sustainable partnerships. Taking partnerships with Chinese institutions as an example, a manager responsible for marketing and business strategy in the business school references a typical Chinese term 'guanxi' (relationship, here, in a good way) to

explicate the importance of having a deep relationship on developing sustainable partnerships, as is illustrated:

Chinese institutions are quite unique because China, the culture in China, is very much the guanxi, so it's all about the relationship. And if you don't have the relationship, you don't really have the partnership. So you can have a partnership, a formal partnership, it can be signed, it can be agreed, but nothing is going to happen unless you have that deeper relationship in China...you have to have these relationships, and then from those relationships you can get a much broader partnership (Interviewee 6, Manager in Marketing and Business Strategy, Business School, England).

According to this manager, 'guanxi' or 'relationship' is indicative of a deep human relationship between individuals and they are believed to be vital to whether partnership emerges, develops and thus sustains. Such an argument seems to result from their practical knowledge that people simply like to work with whom they know because, as we shall see, there seems a built-in 'trust' within the established human relationships.

6.1.2.2 A built-in 'trust' within the established human relationships

Although whether a partnership develops may be subject to future events, from the accounts of most English participants, those established human relationships are strongly believed to be able to trigger a future partnership, as 'people want to partner with people they were seeing before', which is pointed out by the international coordinator in Nursing:

They work with people they like working with... Basically, fundamentally, it's difficult to do unless you know them. People want to partner with people they were seeing before (Interviewee 1, International Coordinator in Nursing, England).

Therefore, meeting people before developing partnerships seems important. Without knowing each other before, partnerships tend to be fragile and risky, as is recalled by an academic in Environment explaining how frustrating it was to work with an individual academic whom she never met before, arguing:

If you never meet them, a bit risky (Interviewee 15, Senior Lecturer in

Environment, England).

Their accounts and experiences of *'partner[ing] with people they were seeing before'* seem to demonstrate an unspoken norm that there is a built-in *'trust'* within established human relationships. Having those relationships appears to indicate having earned trust from each other, thus leaving a legacy for future partnerships, as is argued by a manager of marketing and business strategy in the business school:

The only way that it is sustainable is through those personal relationships that you built, on the trust that you built. Um, I have developed a number of partnerships in China. I also now have a number of people I counted them as my friends, not just, not just business associates (Interviewee 6, Manager in Marketing and Business Strategy, England).

Some participants go even further by highlighting that trust may be the most crucial quality of human relationships, and thus able to sustain partnerships:

I think the most sustainable relationships are actually built on human qualities, and probably the critical one is trust...the sustainability of the relationship depends upon whether you get along with other people or whether you can trust them (Interviewee 2, Professor in Education, Deputy Head of School, England).

As is seen from above, in the eyes of many English participants in this research, it is those who have established *'human relationships'* or *'friendships'* built upon ethical trust between each other that are able to move beyond those *'commercial relationships'* which are considered *'not really a strong basis for anything'*, thus making sustainable partnerships. However, contrary to strategic relationships based on *'some kind of scientific arrangement'*, those human relationships are mainly built upon shared research interest, developed via professional engagements such as being students abroad, supervising students, visiting abroad, attending conferences, or even from an introduction from a friend; all those unplanned activities where human relationships can begin after a chance encounter.

6.1.2.3 The *contingent* occurrence of human relationships development

A common means for individual academics to develop human relationships is through

research networking based on their shared interests. That being the case, conferences appear to be the perfect venue from which human relationships develop. As is addressed, people can just click with each other when they meet in a conference:

The meeting of individuals in a conference, for example, can spark off a relationship, so quite often they are not things that are looked for a planned but an opportunistic (Interviewee 7, Professor in Nursing, Head of Department, England).

In addition to such chance encounters as a ‘meeting of individuals in a conference’, visiting abroad appears to offer similar opportunities for developing relationships between people, as is illustrated:

...or they went abroad and visited somewhere and they met somebody (Interviewee 1, International Coordinator in Nursing, England).

Therefore, not all relationships are always strategically pre-planned, and also, not all relationships emerge from a clicking between two academics in a conference. Some may emerge from established relationships; for example, meeting friends through friends, as a Reader in Education, who has developed partnerships with universities in Europe and Australia, Egypt and Hong Kong through established human relationships, reflects:

When I look back, why did that happen? Most of them come down to the individual who I met or I was introduced to any element of chance in that and then you build on that (Interviewee 9, Reader in Education, England).

Similarly, a manager in marketing and business strategy working in the Business School gives a specific example of how a Chinese colleague helped to develop partnerships through their established human relationships or friendship:

...a Chinese colleague called Dr. Mei, and 15 years ago, she and I became friends. She took me to China. She taught me the Chinese culture. She taught me the Chinese way. She introduced me to the right people in China (Interviewee 6, Manager in Marketing and Business Strategy, Business School, England).

As we have seen, the way in which the Chinese colleagues engage in developing

international partnerships is to forge human relationships between people who do not know each other. They appear to function as a nexus of trust building and cultural communication between people who work in potential partner institutions. Having staff with cultural knowledge could warm up a relationship before potential partners actually enter into the partnership, and the trustworthiness seems transferable, as is further explained:

She [Mei] would bring me most of the partnerships. Then I would trust her but I would then have to make it happen. So she would give me the introduction (Interviewee 6, Manager in Marketing and Business Strategy, England).

The particular emphasis on Mei as a nexus of forging human relationships is not limited to one participant. This Chinese staff not only help the administrative staff engaging in international activities to understand the Chinese system of doing things, but also assist in developing links with Chinese universities. Meanwhile, such a staff with in-country knowledge could also facilitate individual academics to develop partnerships, as is explained by a Professor in Engineering:

When I spoke to Dr. Mei, we went for lunch, when she was here two weeks ago. She said, I am glad you're very involved in the South of China now. She said, leave away the North of China, because they are very competitive and she's right. And now I got thousand tons of fellowship in Shanghai, Shanghai X University, you never heard about that, it's not 985, it's not 211. It has a special purpose actually this university, you can imagine, and I got thousand tons of fellowship there and I'm going to concentrate on the, you know, sort of South of China, Shanghai. And I find it difficult to get anywhere with universities in Beijing. It's very competitive. Mei is absolutely right. She's right in many things because she understands the education system (Interviewee 3, Professor in Engineering, England).

Besides those contacts, developed through either an opportunistic clicking at a conference networking event or through an introduction by a friend, contacts developed through a teacher-student professional relationship could also play a vital role in helping to establish a new relationship. A Professor in Education, for example, says he got a research link in Hong Kong through his relationship with his student who could get in touch with and

introduced him to the Head of Centre in the university:

Because of course people know, you know, then you get to know their friends, you build up relationships in a variety of levels. So I did the research there (Interviewee 2, Professor in Education, Deputy Head of School, England).

It can be seen from the above that those partnerships developed by individuals through meeting at conferences, student contact or friends made during their research work, are personal and professional relationships. Those personal and professional relationships, in the eyes of this professor, appear to have some sense of potentiality to grow into a long-term partnership. The established human relationships function as the legacies for sustainable relationships, as is evidenced by the testimony below:

...I think some of the longest collaborations I've been involved with have been based on personal relationships, professional relationships, I should say, with PhD students who've then gone to an area become a senior themselves, developed a link, and started off with a visit and then it developed into the development of joint program, or research, or joint publications, so it's often out of those very small conversations or professional relationships the bigger things arise (Interviewee 11, Professor in Nursing, Head of Department, England).

Notably, for most individual academics, research appears to be the vital nexus embedded in their academic life. A variety of research activity either through attending a conference or supervising a research student can trigger a potential partnership which may further possibly spread the network of contacts built by academics throughout their research careers. In this case, partnerships emerging from human relationships are embedded strongly in the individual networks rather than in the institutional structure. That being the case, as we shall see, such partnerships could become unsustainable when those carrying their human relationships move to new institutions.

6.1.2.4 Embedding human relationships in the individual networks

Human relationships are carried by people. When people distrust the institution, they may thus be unwilling to embed their human relationships within the institutions, as is explained by a professor in engineering, '[t]here is no other reason that we go on today'

when the person is gone.

This is about a strong personal friendships and activity that has gone on for years until the professor died, then it stopped. There is no other reason that we go on today. When individuals go, it stops (Interviewee 4, Professor in Engineering, England).

Conversely, while human relationships function as ‘*a strong basis*’ for sustainable partnerships, it seems also that those very relationships can make partnerships ‘*fragile*’, as is argued:

Yeah, what cause it to fail, people retiring, yeah, retiring, dying, that's very inconvenient. Um, it is that, it's that. We've had partnerships that sort of suddenly failed, because somebody no longer works there. We've had partnerships that've depended on one person. You know, they are always fragile (Interviewee 1, International Coordinator in Nursing, England).

Those partnerships are fragile because they are embedded enough in the individual networks but not adequately within the institution; the reason for that appears to be ascribed to a lack of interest in wanting their individual networks to ‘*have an impact beyond you as an individual*’, as is explained:

Because I don't think I've been embedded enough in the institution with other people. So that's what I was going to move on to say that as I grow older, I think I become more aware that if you really want a network to have an impact beyond you as an individual, you need to make sure other people involved with you from the start, and that you don't just call them in later when you need help. You actually try to build in their support. So increasingly, it's about team playing (Interviewee 9, Reader in Education, England).

In this sense, instead of individuality, ‘*it's about team playing*’, which suggests the significance of multiple engagement in sustainable partnerships building. However, to make such ‘*team playing*’ or multiple engagement happen, the institution has to work hard at building trust, thus regaining belief and engagement from individual academics on the ground.

6.1.2.5 A brief summary

This section has presented how the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships acts as an alternative imaginary for those English participants responding with cynicism and doubt to the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships especially when university relationships are driven by income generations in a context of austerity. For most individual academics, human relationships are considered ‘*a strong basis*’ for constructing sustainable partnerships because there is a built-in ‘*trust*’ within the established partnerships. Unlike strategic relationships - which are built on some sort of ‘*scientific arrangement*’ - human relationships are based upon familiarity between people after a chance encounter. It seems to me that the English participants in this research tend to make their human relationships more embedded in their individual networks than the institutional structures, given the pressure of income generation on individual academics and their distrust of the institution’s habit of rushing into ‘*everything*’ regardless of individual academic interests.

6.1.3 The ‘*worst of times*’? An English imaginary of sustainable international partnerships

The sections above have presented how and to what extent the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* as a ‘*preconstructed*’ framework informs individual reflection and perception of *what-is* sustainable international partnerships within the English university. During the interviews, the English participants’ comments regarding the construction of sustainable international partnerships were characterised by a sense of negativity, distrust and even some resistance between the institution and the individual. With this in mind, some Dickensian phrases from *A Tale of Two Cities* struck me as appropriate, such as ‘*the winter of despair*’, ‘*the epoch of incredulity*’, ‘*the epoch of belief*’ and ‘*the worst of times*’. These phrases were employed as media to convey the English participants’ perceptions and sensations regarding the construction of sustainable international partnerships.

The ‘*winter of despair*’ has attempted to capture a particular context in England when English universities struggling financially have to ‘*earn money*’ (*Interviewee 3*) themselves due to the national disinvestment in higher education, as is outlined previously in this thesis (cf. Chapter 2). Within this particular context of austerity, the managers seem

to have to give priority to nothing but consider income generation as the *'first drive'*, therefore partnerships have to be manageable and affordable in order to be sustainable. A top-down logic that involves constructing sustainable partnerships by strategic relationships therefore makes sense, assuming there would be a continuity of engagement from top to bottom. However, this assumption is challenged by the discontinuity of a senior leader's vision and the disconnection from individual academic interests on the ground, especially when income generation is perceived as the *'first drive'* informing and directing nearly every institutional engagement in internationalisation. Correspondingly, individual academics distrust the way that the institution pursues partnerships, feeling frustrated as they bear on pressure to *'bring in money'* and thus be accountable to the institution. Instead, they strongly believe that it is their own inter-personal human relationships built upon trust that make partnerships sustainable. Those human relationships are developed after chance encounters through varied professional networks. In this case, individuals tend to embed those human relationships in the individual networks rather than in the institutional structure. It seems to me they seem to live in an *'epoch of incredulity'* when they show distrust in the institution, but in the meantime an *'epoch of belief'* when they hold strong belief in the individual.

Apparently, two divorced repertoires of sustainable international partnerships between the institution and the individual seem to be set out in the English university in this research. In this case, individual academics might show little interest in engaging in partnerships developed by the institution, but also make little effort in embedding their established partnerships in the institution they are working for. Similarly, the institution might not be interested in partnerships that are unable to generate income even while engaging individual academics on the ground. If such a disjuncture between the institutional structure and the individual agency continues to exist, the *'worst of times'* may be yet to come and the construction of sustainable international partnerships might be just a disjunctive imaginary.

6.2 *What-is* sustainable international partnership in China: individual perceptions

This section explores how Chinese participants in this research perceive sustainable international partnerships in higher education, presenting two repertoires. As with

England, the section on the one hand presents how the *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships* becomes a repertoire upon which Chinese participants draw and thus construct *what-is* sustainable international partnership. On the other hand, it presents how the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships coexists with the *strategic* one, presenting an alternative imaginary of sustainable international partnerships via human relationships. Unlike England, however, where the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships seems divorced from the *strategic*, there is a sense that the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships intertwines with the *strategic* in China. Notably, Chinese participants stress the significant role of ‘senior’ academics in developing and sustaining human relationships, indicating the intrusion of institutional power in the individual networks and thus contributing to sustainable partnership building within the university. Moreover, contrary to the English side where a sense of negativity, frustration and distrust spread during the interviews, I was left with an impression peppered with positivity, aspiration and pride, especially from senior managers from the central university in this research.

To illustrate such a seemingly lively and flourishing scenario, I draw upon Dickensian phrases from *A Tale of Two Cities* - ‘*the spring of hope*’, ‘*the epoch of belief*’ and ‘*the best of times*’ to evoke the sensation of positivity, aspiration and pride, mainly expressed by ‘senior’ administrative participants in the Chinese university studied. ‘*The spring of hope*’, specifically, is utilised to capture how Chinese participants (especially administrators) feel confident and pride, thus actively thinking differently of developing partnerships in a context where the Chinese university in this research receives continuous investment from the central government and its international competitiveness is being improved, thus raising confidence in its ability to engage with the world, which is contrary to ‘*the winter of despair*’ when English participants feel frustrated but to develop partnerships driven by income generation in a context where the university in this research struggles financially against a background of austerity; ‘*the epoch of belief*’ is drawn to depict a heavy reliance on a particular group of individuals-‘senior’ academics-in developing and embedding human relationships in the institutional structure, contrary to ‘*the epoch of incredulity*’ in England where participants in this research react with cynicism and doubts about university relationships driven by income generation, causing a sense of disconnection between the institutional arrangement and individual engagement, thus highlighting the role of individuals in developing and embedding human relationships in

the individual networks; *'the best of times'* is drawn to reflect whether it is actually the *'best'* when the institutional obsession with rankings 'strategises' academic communities on the ground, and also when 'senior' academics enjoy more opportunities and resources in developing and sustaining partnerships than 'ordinary' ones.

6.2.1 The *'spring of hope'*? The *strategic* repertoire of sustainable partnerships in the context of rejuvenation

...then we have money. We start to think differently. That is to say we are no longer just bringing the world in, we are engaging with the world...

(Interviewee 28, formerly Deputy Director of International Office, China)

As is shown above, such accounts from the former Deputy Director of the International Office give a real impression that Chinese participants, especially 'senior' managers, are confident in *'engaging with the world'* as they *'have money'* and, underpinned by government will, are able to *'think differently'* in a context of rejuvenation. The university seems to have by-passed the *'winter of despair'* when there was no much choice left but *'bringing the world in'*, moving towards a new period of *'engaging with the world'*, filled with different choices and possibilities. Such new-found confidence appears to unleash a torrent of positivity and pride in constructing an elite discourse on international partnerships and 'strategising' the central university and academic communities.

The following sections draw upon the interview data, presenting how the *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships* filters into an everyday repertoire upon which the Chinese participants draw to construct *what-is* sustainable international partnerships in this context of rejuvenation. Specifically, the infusion of resources in some ways lifts the university's confidence as well as its capability in *'engaging with the world'*. It appears to allow the university to pursue partnerships *'differently'*; one of the ways of approaching internationalisation *'differently'* is to construct and deconstruct partnerships with reference to league tables, thus deciding which university is *'out of our league'*. Apart from the ranking system, students studying in the Chinese university in this research are shown to be emerging as elite agents complicit in partner selection, contributing to a more hierarchical and stratified international higher education partnership landscape. Moreover, the institutional power attempts to institutionalise this

strategic discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* in the academic communities by setting quantifiable targets to every faculty or school. However, ‘strategising’ academic communities might fail due to a lack of engagement from individual academics on the ground. That being the case, like England, what is desirable and worth attaining in constructing sustainable partnerships through strategic relationships might be also just an institutional imaginary.

6.2.1.1 Towards equality and ‘*think[ing] differently*’

According to the accounts of most of the Chinese participants, especially those working in the central university departments, they feel proud of what they have achieved in shifting partnership development to a more focused, selective and strategic approach. This stands in stark contrast to their English counterparts, and may be because, for a long time, the Chinese side has been dominated by their partners. Consequently, it is considered impossible to guarantee a sustainable relationship, as is recalled by a Professor in Education:

It’s very hard to sustain if one partner is inferior to the other. Take our Institute as an example, back to 1980s, we were the disadvantaged party, due to our influence and status as a country in the world. So we were the disadvantaged party in the international exchange with Europe, America and Japan and the exchange then mainly referred to the import. We invited international scholars to come and sent people to study abroad, this kind of exchange. Actually, it was hard to sustain this kind of exchange because it needed us to provide more resources to maintain the continuity (Interviewee 16, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China).

In the eyes of this Professor, the benefit could not possibly be as mutual as it should, due to the unbalanced status and influence in the different developmental phases between partners. Going back to the 1980s, the benefit, for themselves, was importation, while for their partners it was exportation. It was a one-way instead of a two-way flow at that time. Throughout the interview data, there is a recurring sense of monologue instead of dialogue between partners, and it is hard to sustain a relationship built upon unequal status.

The shift to a more balanced relationship regarding international partnership development

for this Chinese university is perceived to be embedded in a context where a focused investment on a group of universities was initiated by the national government, as is addressed by the former Deputy Director of International Office who has engaged in international partnerships for more than ten years:

The 985 project is a shift, that is, the investment from the government on higher education. The government has committed to invest and thus the university has the finance to invest, then we have money, which is different from the way in which international partnerships develop in the past when a group of people from abroad came here with money, we welcomed and received, and then they were like let's do some student and faculty exchange, and we were like we accept charity...But then we have money. We have started to think differently. That is to say we are no longer just bringing the world in, we are engaging with the world (Interviewee 28, formerly Deputy Director of International Office, China).

From this account, the '985 project' marks a shift from ad hoc practice to deliberate arrangement on international partnerships. Interestingly, before '985 project', the expressions used here, for example, 'a group of people from abroad came here with money', 'we welcomed and received' and 'we accepted charity', seem to send a message of passive engagement in international partnerships and the accompanying deficiency in confidence in the international exchange and cooperation with partners. The reason for such a lack of confidence seems ascribed to the limited resources and capabilities, and in particular, 'money'. After the '985 project', there is a sense that the government's commitment to building world-class universities through focused investment into a group of universities appears to initiate a new chapter in 'engaging with the world' for internationalisation of higher education in China. This is why it seems to me there is a torrent of confidence in 'think[ing] differently' when they 'have money'. In this sense, one can argue the government commitment to investment in higher education has not just opened up a negotiating space for this Chinese university in developing international partnerships in terms of what and how, but also has built up a sense of confidence in 'engaging with the world', even though such an investment flows to a specific group of universities in the country. Due to the flow of the investment, partnership activities can be continuously sustained; for example, focused investment and support from the central university will back up those strategic relationships, as a manager points out,

To move forward this programme, you have to invest, the money [Laugh]. Internationalisation cannot be attained without money...we have chosen about 10 universities and set a one-million funding in each partner university, helping us cultivate, say 50-60 PhD students in the near five years. Then we can have 500-600 talents in total from the ten partner universities, which is a huge improvement regarding to our faculty (Interviewee 29, Deputy Director of International Office, China).

According to this account, continuous investment makes partnerships sustainable through 'mov[ing] forward' the programme. However, such investment is infused into a selection of partner universities, with the intention of building long-term capacity through cultivating and storing talents for the institution. As we shall see, league table is used as a recurring reference point by Chinese participants in selecting partner universities. In so doing, they are 'going global with a focus' on 'world-class'.

6.2.1.2 'Going global with a focus' on 'world-class'

Notably, the way of 'think[ing] differently' and 'engaging with the world' appears to be largely expressed by 'going global with a focus', and this focus is defined by 'world-class' universities and disciplines' represented by the league table, as is reported:

...we are not just going global but going global with a focus. So when I left the International Office, I set a goal entitled G50, focusing on 50 institutions ranking top 200 in the global league table, you know, that is to say, we will not develop international partnerships on an ad hoc basis, instead, with a goal and quality, focusing on the world-class universities and disciplines. So basically, we start from scratch, then go global, and now make some breakthrough with a focus on the international partnerships (Interviewee 28, formerly Deputy Director of International Office, China).

As presented above, league tables are considered as a major reference in selecting partner institutions. It seems to offer a transparent reference for the university in this research to identify themselves and compare with others. For higher education institutions, they not only know where they themselves are ranked in the world but also understand where their rival universities are ranked. This transparency would force higher education institutions to seek partners sharing similar status to them. For the higher ranked universities it seems

to be a selective action in developing international partnerships, but the lower ranked universities it appears to be a case of *'having no choice but to do'* response to participating in this intensified world university ranking game. In some sense, higher education institutions are 'naked' to each other in the global market, as the Pro-Vice-Chancellor points out:

League tables have become very pervasive, either in China or in the rest of the world. Everybody knows exactly where we are and where you are. So there is a built-in mechanism for institution to find partners who are evenly or equally matched, right? Like our university, no matter how desperately we want to sign an agreement with Harvard, we still cannot make it, right? But if you partner with a little bit lower ranked institutions, that would be much easier (Interviewee 18, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, China).

As presented above, the league tables denote institutional status and the equal status shared by partner institutions would affect the sustainability of partnerships. As the Pro-Vice-Chancellor further recalled, the unequal status among partner institutions would eventually compel the involved institution to remove itself from the partnership:

When I first became Pro-Vice-Chancellor, we established a network with other seven universities...Later on, one American university dropped out from the network because they think the involved institutions are not in the same league as they are (Interviewee 18, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, China).

In this sense, it appears to be important to select partners with equal status from the outset, which in turn appears to justify the value of league tables as the major reference. Driven by such excellence, aspiring to excellence and then climbing league tables may accelerate the established (or soon-to-be established) hierarchy of higher education systems in China. That being the case, these more hierarchically-oriented international inter-institutional relationships might grow in the future, narrowing the options for the selection of international partners. The effect of this would be to reinforce the established relationships through deepening multi-level cooperative arrangements with selected partners. In this sense, developing sustainable international partnerships seems to perpetuate the production of a hierarchical structure in international higher education.

6.2.1.3 Students' elitist preference for partner institutions

Apart from the administrative and managerial agents aforementioned with respect to constructing partnerships in a selective and exclusive sense, students are also complicit in partner selection through their elitist preferences. In the neo-liberal discursive configuration, unfortunately, as Ball argues, '*we are not simply victims here, we are complicit, indeed we are sometimes beneficiaries*' (Ball, 2015). Students are complicit in universities' partner selection through their particular choices in studying abroad. Those who prefer to study in the higher ranked universities, are fussy about what institutions they want to be associated with, as is illuminated:

...there is a value-laden choice in it. Students always want to go to Europe, to America, to world-class universities and they won't put another thought into universities which are not that good....So it's like the widening gap between the rich and the poor, or like digging gold, students are pretty much like good university digger, which is increasingly pervasive in the universities like us (Interviewee 18, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, China).

Similarly, a Vice Director of the Dean's Office in charge of international education and cooperation in this Chinese university also highlights the challenge of partnering with a university where students are willing to go:

One of the challenges, I think, how to find a partner institution which matches our students' expectations, because student in our school, you know, were recruited from the best ones who got the highest marks in this university. So they are actually very picky about the partner institution they are going to be exchanged (Interviewee 23, Vice Director of Dean's Office, International Education and Cooperation, Economic School, China).

In this sense, strategic relationships could emerge from students' preferred universities and be maintained by means of the students' word of mouth promotion, based upon their experience of studying abroad. Their particular choices could then influence other students. Those students with excellent experience in the partner universities may then return and spread his or her impressions among their peers, as is further explained:

Like a legacy, students who have been exchanged to the partner institution are

asked to share their experience with peers when they come back (Interviewee 23, Vice Director of Dean's Office, International Education and Cooperation, Economic School, China)

As is shown above, it is the agency of the administrators/managers' vision and students' preferences that informs which institutions are included and excluded from partner selection, thus constituting an alternative mapping of strategic relationships. However, the mapping of strategic relationships is not limited to the central university, instead, it is spreading into the academic communities, where every faculty or school is expected to establish and sustain certain number of strategic relationships with international partners. As we shall see, however, such a move also encounters challenges from individual academic engagement on the ground.

6.2.1.4 Failing to strategise academic communities

As well as strategising the central university, the administrative power also strategises the academic community in the faculties and schools, as is observed in the way that schools are informed by the university administration regarding strategic partnerships:

We have set an agenda that each school has to develop strategic partnerships with 3-5 institutions in a very close manner (Interviewee 29, Deputy Director of International Office, China).

However, such an agenda does not appear to help the Chinese university achieve its desired goals, because the university can succeed in strategising the way that partner institutions are selected but fail to strategise individual academic interests on the ground. Such 'intrusion' of institutional power into individual networks is criticised and resisted from individual academics on the ground because this top-down approach does not appear to be grounded in the individual academic's interests, from where it is considered networks are created and collaboration is built, as is illustrated:

I have visited UK with the vice-chancellor...but discovered that there is no interest that two professors share and thus like to move forward (Interviewee 20, Professor in Biochemistry, Associate Head of School, China).

A similar testament to the absence of interest on the ground is observed from the following

excerpt:

There is no way that partnerships can sustain if there is no academics who shared the vision and interest on the ground, even the university leaders [i.e. vice-chancellors, managers in the International Office] visit abroad and established the relationships between the institutions (Interviewee 16, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China).

In this sense, human relationships cannot be planned, and the role of the institution is considered more as a supporter rather than a planner. Without the individual academics sharing a similar vision and interest in each institution, partnerships cannot be sustainable. Similarly, the formerly Deputy Director of the International Office, who now works as Secretary of the Party Committee in the School in a Chinese university, addresses how those senior academics or leaders in the school with a vision for developing international partnerships could be discouraged by the lack of enthusiasm from individual academics on the ground:

Speaking of our School, I think we got a very good platform here, which is the language. We have a bunch of foreign languages like Germany, French etc. We really can do a great job. Of course, I cannot do much work due to my role, but I did push a little bit of the partnership with X University. For the rest, I do hope the faculty in this school could engage in it. Unfortunately, I feel everybody is busy with their own business. It would've failed if we had got this programme because not many people are able to or willing to do that (Interviewee 28, former Deputy Director of International Office, China).

It is evident above, therefore, that resistance to developing international partnerships among faculty staff within a school could possibly make international partnerships stagnate through shutting partners out. Similar testament to the absence of interest on the ground is observed from the following excerpt, but this account suggests that people are not interested in developing international partnerships due to concern about 'brain drain':

Some teachers are not willing to develop partnerships. We have some, including senior academics, reluctant to develop international partnerships, because they think through partnerships our excellent students go out and then never come back. Partners are taking our students away. Once we open the door then the

students are gone (Interviewee 25, Professor in Biology, formerly Head of School, China).

This data expresses not only the contradictory feelings about developing international partnerships among senior academics, but also a definitive interpretation of what international partnerships are about. It suggests that the notion of placing international partnerships on an equal footing with student recruitment tends to be based on self-interest rather than mutual benefit, as is stated in this example that '*[p]artners are taking our students away*'. Such an understanding about international partnerships also indirectly reflects a lack of engagement in international partnerships from individual academics on the ground. In this sense, one can argue that this also demonstrates some sense of disconnection between the institution and the individual.

6.2.1.5 A brief summary

This section has presented how the *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships* as a '*preconstructed*' framework informs Chinese participants' reflection upon and perception of *what-is* sustainable international partnership on the ground. Specifically, the section argues that this *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships is constructed in an interpretive context of rejuvenation, which appears to unleash a torrent of pride, raising confidence in engaging with the world. It seems to indicate '*the spring of hope*' for the university, as they seem to have passed the '*winter of despair*' when there is no much choice left for them to make and now they are gaining the ability to '*think differently*'. Now they are able to go global with a focus on '*world-class*' rather than '*receiving some charity*' from foreign universities, as in the past. By their own account, the Chinese participants feel pride in their achievement in shifting partnership development patterns. Such a pride in turn increases confidence in engaging with the world's best universities and disciplines.

Furthermore, this elite discourse is further consolidated and strengthened by the students' particular preference regarding partner institutions enjoying world reputation. However, like the English university in this research where the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* disconnects institutional international engagement from individual academic interests on the ground, the Chinese participants also express their concerns about strategising academic communities in the schools and show little trust in

such top-down logic. As we shall see from the accounts of the Chinese participants, albeit situated in a different cultural context, their strong belief that it is human relationships that make sustainable partnerships appears to go beyond international and institutional differences, but with more emphasis on the agency of ‘senior’ academics in the Chinese university, contrary to the English story highlighting role of individuals in developing and embedding human relationships in the individual networks.

6.2.2 The ‘epoch of belief’? The *contingent* repertoire of sustainable partnerships via human relationships

...either top-down or bottom-up approach to international partnerships can be both effective and ineffective...But all the international partnership programmes take root in the schools and faculties...To this end, there’s a need to have Dean[s] or Deputy Dean[s] with such vision in those schools and faculties...The effectiveness is not subject to the approach, instead, it depends on the constituents of the approach, including people and resource.

(Interviewee 16, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China).

As exemplified above, unlike the English participants who expressed a strong sense of disconnection between the institution and the individual regarding what makes partnerships sustainable, most Chinese participants instead gave an impression of interrelation between the institution and the individual through highlighting the vision of ‘senior’ academics in embedding partnerships in the schools and faculties. They highlight the particular roles of ‘people’ such as ‘Dean[s] or Deputy Dean[s]’ in making use of the legacy of human relationships for building sustainable partnerships in the schools and faculties, contrary to English participants emphasising the agency of ‘people’ going beyond ‘academics’, ‘professors’ or any other titles in developing and embedding human relationships in the individual networks. This appears not that surprising when one considers that Chinese higher education is an administration-led system. Therefore, the Chinese participants in this research seem more reliant on academics with administrative posts, living in a time of holding strong belief in a particular group of people rather than ordinary people - the ‘epoch of belief’ in ‘senior’ academics regarding sustainable partnerships building. Those ‘senior’ academics include those working in the home institutions as well as those who settle abroad, all of whom play a vital role in connecting

and maintaining academics links between the home and partner institutions. Such a picture mirrors the increasing global flow in international higher education, and the active role China is playing therein.

The following sections present how the Chinese participants respond to the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships, thus imaging alternatives drawn from a *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships via human relationships through the agency of particular *'people'*, showing how their logic works through their ways of thinking. It argues that human relationships function as a legacy for developing and sustaining partnerships, within which, *'mutual understanding between individual academics'* (Interviewee 16) goes beyond cultural differences, or *'mutual trust and respect'* is perceived as *'the rule of playing game'* (Interviewee 28) for managers engaging in international partnerships. Such an understanding mirrors the argument made by the English participants in this research that there is a built-in 'trust' within the established human relationships which functions as *'a strong basis'* for sustainable partnerships (Interviewee 2). Similarly, to foster human relationships, instead of *'some kind of scientific arrangement'* (Interviewee 1), it is thought that human relationships develop from contingent occurrences such as attending conferences or visits abroad. However, unlike England, where there is a strong sense of disconnection between institutional networks and institutional structure, those human relationships appear to be more developed and embedded in the institutional structure, at least at the disciplinary level, due to the agency of 'senior' academics in the schools and faculties.

6.2.2.1 Human relationships as *'a very good basis'* for sustainable partnerships

The argument made by English participants that sustainable partnerships are constructed by human relationships starts from their distrust in university partnerships mainly being commercial relationships, and not perceived as *'a strong basis for anything'* (Interviewee 1). Although Chinese participants do not show as strong sense of incredulity as English participants in the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships, they hold as strong a belief as English participants in the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships via human relationships, because it is those human relationships that provide *'a very good basis'* for sustainable partnerships. This can be observed from the statement made by an associate professor, recalling how partnerships in his school have benefited from human relationships developed earlier by individual

academics:

We have a very good basis for international partnerships. Tracing back to professor Huang who worked together with the American counterparts, followed by professor Zhang, the formerly Head of our school, who has just retired, we have done a pretty good job in terms of partnerships in the university (Interviewee 22, Associate Professor in History, China).

As is addressed above, those human relationships established by Professor Huang and Professor Zheng have provided ‘a very good basis’, or a legacy, for future partnerships to emerge and flourish. Through close working relationships between individuals, such as *Professor Huang* with his American counterparts and continuous subsequent enhancement by successors such as *Professor Zhang*, ‘a very good basis’ for future partnerships has been built and ‘a pretty good job in terms of partnerships’ thus can be done. Conversely, the absence of such a good basis or legacy appears to affect the commitment made by people to partnerships, echoing the English participants’ claims that ‘people want to partner with people they were seeing before’ (Interviewee 1); as has been argued, partnerships emerging from established relationships between people tend to make people commit to work rather than ones emerging from relationships where the participants have little prior knowledge of each other:

Without knowing each other, they bear little relationship between each other. If they know each other, then they tend to commit to work together (Interviewee 28, formerly Deputy Director of International Office, China).

In this sense, knowing each other before could at least warm up a relationship before both institutions enter into a partnership. This appears to be because such established human relationships within each institution indicate that mutual understanding, mutual trust and mutual respect have been already built. Such qualities, as we shall see, are further perceived as ‘the rule of playing games’ beyond cultural differences. In other words, the value placed on human qualities such as trust and respect goes beyond institutional and international differences, affecting sustainable partnerships building.

6.2.2.2 ‘Mutual trust and respect’ as ‘the rule of playing game’ beyond cultures

Echoing the argument made by English participants that human relationships are

perceived as *'a strong basis'* for sustainable partnerships because there is a built-in *'trust'* within the established human relationships, a similar argument is made by the Chinese participants, as expressed here:

...the rule of playing game, either in the education field or any other fields, I think, is mutual trust and respect. That's the most important one (Interviewee 28, former Deputy Director of International Office, China).

According to this account, *'mutual trust and respect'* constitute a significant *'rule'* of engaging in *international partnerships*. Like an unwritten code of practice, partners have to comply with the *'rule'* whenever they engage in developing international partnerships. Moreover, the role of the game players practicing the *'rule'* of engaging in *international partnerships* is best taken by individual academics on the ground, as a professor in Education argues:

To sustain a partnership, the key is mutual understanding, which actually refers to the mutual understanding between individual academics...therefore, we need such academics with their research areas and visions being international (Interviewee 16, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China).

In the eyes of this professor, mutual understanding is rooted in the relationships between individual academics, and such mutual understanding is based upon shared research interests and visions *'being international'*. Echoing this point, another professor in Education draws upon his experience, also emphasising the significance of research areas or the research topic being *'internationally interested'* to ensure a continuity of practice, as is addressed:

The most important thing is the issue or the topic is internationally interested. That is to say, if it is only us who are interested in the issue while the international counterparts are not, that will not be sustainable (Interviewee 17, Professor in Education, Head of School, China).

In this example, the continuity in jointly holding a series of international academic conferences is subject to *'the issue or the topic is internationally interested'*. This also indirectly points out where human relationships tend to emerge. It is through contingent activities such as attending conferences where individual academics gain mutual

understanding, respect and trust between each other, that human relationships are established and a 'good basis' for developing future international partnerships is built.

6.2.2.3 Making use of the 'good basis' to develop international partnerships

Similar to the story told from the English participants regarding the construction of sustainable partnerships via human relationships enabled by contingent activities, a range of personal relationships are developed through various international experiences such as attending conferences, visiting, studying or working abroad, according to the accounts of the Chinese participants. As a Professor in Biochemistry and Associate Head of School in the Chinese university mentions, partnerships in his school were mainly established through the friendship network built by the former Head of the school (as well as himself) while working in America:

We actually partner through friends and then (...). Before I came to this school, about 5 years ago, there is a Professor in charge of international exchange and cooperation. He worked in NIH for several decades before he came here when he retired, so he knew a lot of people. I was in America for 22 years and worked in Merck for 15 years, so I also know a lot of people (Interviewee 20, Professor in Biochemistry, Associate Head of School, China).

Similarly, the Vice Director of the Dean's Office who is in charge of International Exchange and Cooperation in the School, mentions how the connection introduced by their academic colleague who had worked in X University stimulated a better understanding between each other and gave the partner more security:

There are some partnerships made by our teachers, by their connections. They introduce this link to us. As I mentioned before, X University, one of our teachers came from X University. He had worked there for 10 years and now he teaches here. When he got to know how both schools operate, he introduced us to X University, which not only helped them to understand us better but also helped us to gain more credits. Then the connection was established (Interviewee 23, Vice Director of the Dean's Office, International Education and Cooperation, Economic School, China).

However, unlike the greater emphasis placed on the agency of individual academics from

the English participants in this research, the Chinese participants place a strong emphasis on ‘senior’ academics regarding the chances of developing personal relationships through networking. One of the reasons that senior academics exert more influence is given by a Professor in Education:

...the senior academics exert more influence than the faculty staff because they have more opportunities of visiting abroad and networking (Interviewee 17, Professor in Education, Head of School, China).

In addition to developing international partnerships, as we shall see, there is a recurring sense that the Chinese participants place more emphasis on the agency of ‘senior’ academics in sustaining international partnerships through embedding human relationships in the institutional structure, thus sustaining partnerships.

6.2.2.4 Depending on ‘senior’ academics to sustain international partnerships

It is those personal relationships that trigger partnerships and also those personal relationships that cause partnerships to unravel when such relationships are not sufficiently embedded within the institution. Colleagues may move, retire, or even die, and if that person is the only nexus of the partnership, then partnerships tend to unravel once the nexus of the human relationships leaves the institution. However, unlike the great emphasis on the agency of individual academics from the English participants in this research, academics with administrative posts seems to be indicated to exert more agency, as is emphasised:

The sustainability of partnership has to come down to the level of school and there has to be an academic leader in the school, otherwise partnership cannot be sustainable (Interviewee 16, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China)

Similarly, an international coordinator also emphasises:

She or he has to be a professor, and with an administrative role for the best... (Interviewee 25, Professor in Biology, International Coordinator, China).

However, if such senior academics did not embed the established relationships in the institution, and if that senior academic is the only nexus of the partnership, then

partnerships tend to unravel once the nexus of the human relationships leaves the institution, as a professor points out,

There is not much exchange between our Institute with L University since the Head of School has retired (Interviewee 17, Professor in Education, Head of School, China).

Such a failure raises the issue of the academic manager minimising the risk of overly depending on just one person, as is addressed by a professor in language and also associate head of school:

Every Head of School has to have the awareness of nurturing a team instead of relying on just one person in the partnership...If one person leaves and thus the program is gone, then as a leader, you have to reflect on yourself because you haven't done your job properly (Interviewee 27, Professor in Languages, Associate Head of School, China).

In this sense, 'senior' academics, either in the home or partner institution, exert equal influence over sustainable partnerships building. To embed the established human relationships in the schools and faculties, there are corresponding strategies aimed at consolidating the established links, such as sending individuals abroad to strengthen the established partnerships between institutions. This in turn highlights the role of continuous human contact in sustaining international partnerships between institutions.

6.2.2.5 Sending individuals abroad to strengthen the established relationships

Through the continuity of human contact between individuals, the established human relationships are further consolidated. It is through embedding partnerships in those established human relationships that partnerships develop and thus sustain, as an associate professor recalls how their partnership with L University has sustained through being sent to study abroad:

I was sent to L University to pursue my PhD in 2001. After I finished my PhD I came back and worked in this department. My supervisor in Leiden University then was planning to sustain this PhD program or this partnership, so from a sustainable point of view they expected us to come back to China after we

finished our PhDs and to continuously develop this programme through selecting and sending excellent student there...In this sense, our partnership sustains and become a virtuous circle (Interviewee 22, Associate Professor in History, China).

Sending individuals abroad, however, does not always reap the corresponding benefit, as a Professor in Education and Associate Head of School in a Chinese university recalled how their initial expectation of strengthening the established link between two institutions failed:

I give you an example. Our relationship with B College is very interesting. We have established a link with them in the 1980s and sent a teacher there for study in order to strengthen this link. Unfortunately, this teacher didn't come back after gaining the PhD degree and our relationship with B College seemed to be gone (Interviewee 6, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China).

According to this professor, sending a teacher to study abroad with the aim of strengthening the established link turned to nothing. This result was unexpected and may damage the partnership in the short-term, but this setback did not frustrate him as a senior academic. Instead, it is perceived to be natural and will not destroy the partnership in that the established link has provided a basis for future opportunities, even though it is uncertain at present whether the legacy will be picked up by someone else at some point in the future, as the professor further argues:

But because the link has been there, we picked up the linkage in a couple of years and started exchanging and interaction again. We now have been keeping contact between each other. This is a sustainable case (Interviewee 6, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China).

This data also indirectly reflects the significance of 'senior' academics with a sustainable vision for partnerships, instead of pursuing instant results or benefits from established partnerships.

6.2.2.6 Relying upon Chinese transnational academics to sustain partnerships

It is not just 'senior' academics working in the home institution who are believed to exert

more influence by sending individuals abroad to develop and strengthen human relationships. Another professor, with experience in coordinating international exchange programmes in a Chinese university, emphasizes the significance of Chinese academics with managerial posts working in partner institutions abroad in sustaining the partnership through continuous human contact:

...to be honest, a lot of international exchange programmes are made because of the Chinese within them as the nexus. That is to say, if this professor is out from Mainland China, he will always visit back, which could create exchange opportunities, say, in different conferences. And this professor has to be a one with a managerial post. If he or she is just a professor, it may not be that helpful. Say America, the credits in American universities are very expensive, so we really appreciate our partner. It's him who helps us make this exchange program possible with 7500\$ waiver per student per semester, which is very difficult in America, and then we make it up with around 3000-4000\$ (Interviewee 25, Professor in Biology, International Program Coordinator, China).

This focuses attention on the significance of the Chinese academic diaspora as the vital nexus in sustaining partnerships. A Professor in Education and Associate Head of School at a Chinese university comments on how their partnership with C University sustains through a Chinese professor working there:

Our relationship with that American university, has mainly depended on a Chinese professor who is working there (Interviewee 16, Professor in Education, Associate Head of School, China).

It seems to me that these Chinese diaspora academics are making a significant contribution to maintaining the academic links between the home and overseas institution, and this has become apparent in the literature. As de Wit, Gacel-Avila, & Jones (2017) argues, the increasingly complex global mobility flows offer '*new opportunities for those able and willing to access them*'. Such opportunities make it possible for a growing group of Chinese academics to not only study and visit abroad, but also to work abroad as a Chinese diaspora to maintain academic links with the home institutions. Due to the increasing global flows in terms of technology, media and people, a new '*ethnoscape*'

(Appadurai, 1990) of world higher education is also emerging, in which the Chinese diaspora could contribute to a particular mosaic and exert their special influence over maintaining academic links between home and overseas institutions. As it stands, with the aid of both money and networks, it appears to predict the *'best of times'* for this Chinese institution to construct sustainable partnerships, but such *'best of times'* can just as easily be deconstructed when the *strategic* discourse on sustainable international partnerships in the central university penetrates into academic departments. This might reduce any opportunities for alternative imaginaries of sustainable partnerships; for example, by constructing partnerships through using league tables rather than individual networks.

6.2.2.7 A brief summary

This section has presented the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships as an alternative imaginary that the Chinese participants refer to in responding to the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships. Unlike England, where the *contingent* repertoire is interpreted in a context where there is a clearly expressed disconnection between the institution and the individual, the Chinese participants did not appear to express such disjunctive feelings, although some do not place much trust in the *'top-down'* in spite of *'successful cases'*. Instead, they believe in *'bottom-up, grassroots, point to point, people to people'* (Interviewee 20). However, given the administration-led higher education system, the Chinese participants appear to hold a stronger belief in the power of 'senior' academics in developing and sustaining partnerships. Those 'senior' academics are, in the main, professors with managerial posts either in the home or the partner schools and faculties, who are believed to have more opportunities and capabilities. However, such a strong belief in the role of 'senior' academics may discourage other individual academics in networking and thus developing partnerships between institutions. In some ways, the choice of faculty champions appears to be limited to 'senior' academics as opposed to a broader base of academics. That being the case, this might not be *'the best of times'* for the Chinese university in this research.

6.2.3 The *'best of times'*? A Chinese imaginary of sustainable international partnerships

The sections above have presented how and to what extent the *strategic* discourse on

sustainable international partnerships as a *'preconstructed'* framework informs individual reflection on, and perception of, *what-is* sustainable international partnerships within the Chinese university in this research. During the interviews, the accounts regarding construction of sustainable international partnerships from the Chinese participants were characterised by a sense of positivity, pride and confidence - especially those of the Chinese administrators or managers working in the central university. Thinking of how to put this into context, some Dickensian phrases from *A Tale of Two Cities* sprang to mind, such as *'the spring of despair'*, *'the epoch of belief'* and *'the best of times'*. These phrases were employed as media to convey both perceptions and sensations about the construction of sustainable international partnerships from the Chinese participants in this research.

The *'spring of hope'* has attempted to illustrate a particular context in China when a specific group of universities have received significant financial investment from the government with the intention of improving national competitiveness in the global arena through building world-class universities, as is outlined previously in this thesis (cf. Chapter 2). Within this particular context of government-sponsored pursuit of excellence, Chinese administrators or managers engaging in international partnerships in the central university, from their own accounts, felt pride in, and were excited by, the strategic shift in constructing partnerships in a selective and exclusive sense. In some ways, they seemed confident in cracking the western hegemony traditionally dominated by the English-speaking countries. Such an elite discourse on partner selection seems further consolidated by students' elite preference for the partner institution. Moreover, there is an attempt to strategise academic communities by setting targets of developing strategic partnerships to schools and faculties. Unlike the *'epoch of incredulity'* in the institution felt by the English participants, the disconnection between the strategy and the contingent side is not that strong. Instead, there is a sense of interrelation between the strategy and the contingent side through the emphasis on 'senior' academics. In this sense, Chinese participants seem to be living in the *'epoch of belief'* in 'senior' academics. Whether partnerships are sustainable depends on the extent to which 'senior' academics embed human relationships within the schools and faculties.

Seemingly, it is *'the best of times'* for the Chinese university in this research due to national investment; however, squeezing itself into the crowded landscape of world-class

universities, thus making the dream come true, could also lead in other less fruitful directions, especially when an institutional obsession with league tables in the field of institutional structure becomes institutionalised in the academic communities. Moreover, when ‘senior’ academics enjoy more opportunities and resources in developing and sustaining partnerships than ‘ordinary’ ones, *‘the best of times’* might, ultimately, apply only to some elites and those relationships developed by them.

6.3 The comparison of individual perceptions between England and China

Thinking of how to tell a tale of two higher education institutions regarding individual perceptions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education, I hit upon the classic excerpts from *A Tale of Two Cities* written by Charles Dickens - *‘the winter of despair’*, *‘the spring of hope’*, *‘the epoch of incredulity’*, *‘the epoch of belief’*, *‘the worst of times’* and *‘the best of times’*. Those quotes have helped me to connect perceptions to the sensations I read and felt during the interviews in this research. The question mark following each quote in the headline of this chapter has also attempted to invite readers to constantly reflect upon the interpretation of the data. As is presented in this chapter, *what-is* sustainable international partnerships perceived by the English participants might not be the same as *what-is* perceived by the Chinese participants. All those perceptions turn out only one *what-might-be*, which is represented as *what-is* through people drawing upon diverse shared discourses or repertoires as interpretive resources to justify their own arguments. This concluding section provides a brief summary by juxtaposing the two repertoires of *what-is* sustainable international partnerships perceived by individuals across England and China – *strategic* and *contingent*.

Regarding the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships across England and China, the chapter has presented how the *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* is consolidated and stabilised as a shared repertoire for individuals in each case university to draw upon and thus justify their perceptions of sustainable international partnership in higher education. As presented in Section 6.1.1 and Section 6.2.1, the strategic partnerships indicate an institutional imaginary relationship to the world, produced and reproduced through university daily practices in both England and China. However, there is a discrepancy in the context in, and the

rationale behind, which strategic partnerships are situated and informed between England and China.

In England, the context appears to be *'the winter of despair'* for the English university struggling with austerity; for managers to give priority to nothing but consider income generation as the *'first drive'*; and also for the academics feel frustrated to bear on pressure to *'bring in money'* and thus be accountable to the institution; therefore *'money'* is placed at the centre of almost any partnership construction in this particular context. Such a finance-driven approach to partnerships disconnects institutional engagement from individual academic interests, situating English participants in *'the epoch of incredulity'* with cynicism and doubt about institutional approach to university relationship driven by income generation and imaging alternatives of sustainable international partnerships embedded in the individual networks. It also may meet with resistance from some Chinese participants, as is criticised that *'education is a marketable industry in the UK'* (Interviewee 27). That being the case, the *'worst of times'* may yet come if the disjuncture between the institution and individual does not end.

The context seems to be that of a *'spring of hope'* for the Chinese university as they university appear to have by-passed the *'winter of despair'* when there was no much choice left but *'bringing the world in'*, moving towards a new period of *'engaging with the world'*, full of different choices and possibilities, for example, selecting exclusive partnerships against a backdrop of continuous investment from government and their aspiration for building world-class universities, *'Ranking'*, therefore, is regarded as the major reference in constructing strategic relationships with the best universities in the world in this particular context. Such a reputation-driven approach to partnerships in China, with an extreme fixation on league tables, tend to strategise academic communities by setting specific targets for schools and faculties. It is also thought by some English participants to be *'a narrow view'* (Interviewee 6) to squeeze into such a *'crowded landscape'* (Interviewee 17) constituted by the *'best universities'* (Interviewee 17). That being the case, *'the best of times'* may not be the *'best'* when sustainable partnerships are constructed only in those *'crowded landscapes'*.

These mismatched strategic intentions regarding mapping partnerships could exclude any possibility of developing and sustaining partnerships between the two case universities

from the outset, as their imaginary relationships to the world differ so fundamentally.

As to the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships across England and China, the chapter has presented how the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships is resisted or complemented by a *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships in both case universities. As presented in Section 6.1.2 and Section 6.2.2, there is a subtle distinction in the way that individuals respond to the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships between England and China.

In England, the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships seems constructed in *'the epoch of incredulity'*, a time when English participants respond with cynicism and doubt about the institutional approach to partnerships driven by income generation, causing distrust and disconnection between the institution and the individual, thus arguing that it is human relationships between *'people'* that make partnerships sustainable and thus embedding their partnerships in the individual networks rather than in the institutional structure. In China, meanwhile, the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships is constructed in *'the epoch of belief'*, a time when Chinese participants place a heavy reliance on the particular roles of *'people'* – 'senior' academics - in embedding partnerships within the institutional structure, considering this to be an administration-led higher education environment.

Although the Chinese participants hold a stronger belief in the role of 'senior' academics working in either home or partner universities in developing and sustaining partnerships, both the English and Chinese participants in this research have strongly expressed the view that it is those inter-personal human relationships built upon shared interests and ethical qualities that make partnerships sustainable. This particular repertoire is argued to go beyond any international and institutional differences between England and China and thus may create an attainable space for universities with divergent agendas to pursue sustainable international partnerships between the two countries.

In the next chapter, I shall pull those ideas, stories and arguments together to navigate the possibilities and complexities involved in constructing *what-is* sustainable international partnerships in both England and China, presenting the thesis of this study: *what-might-*

be sustainable international partnerships between universities with divergent agendas in England and China.

Chapter 7 *What-might-be* sustainable international partnerships between England and China: presentation of the ‘thesis’

...in analysing any social activity or social processes, we need to be mindful of both its preconstructed structural characteristics, and of the strategic action of groups of people to change it in particular directions, which inherently includes discourses which represent and imagine and narrate the social activity or process in question in particular ways...(Fairclough, 2006: 163).

To explore what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education, this study has considered partnerships as a network of relationships interwoven not just by institutions but also by individuals. The previous data chapters have analysed how both institutions and individuals construct sustainable international partnerships in higher education, and also considered how the construction of the ideas diverge and converge between England and China. The main findings suggest that *what-is* sustainable international partnerships are complex and situated between institutional structure and individual agency in both England and China. This chapter attempts to present the ‘thesis’ of *what-might-be* sustainable international partnerships between England and China.

Briefly, the ‘thesis’ argues that sustainable international partnerships are constituted by bringing together and co-ordinating institutional arrangements and individual networks. The data suggests that in order to develop a sustainable international partnership between the two universities in England and China, there is a need to situate institutional strategic arrangements in the networks of individuals through the agency of ‘senior’ academics in both England and China. Those ‘senior’ academics are suggested to be the change agents, or the ‘boundary spanners’, who can link institutional strategic arrangements in the context of partnerships, nurturing and supporting interpersonal relationships and embedding human relationships not just in individual networks, but also in institutional structures.

The findings of this study suggest that the failure to develop sustainable international partnerships through *either* institutional arrangements *or* individual networks might be

ascribed to the conflict between two *imaginaries*. One is *strategic*, enabling a particular thinking that sustainable international partnerships are constructed by inter-institutional strategic relationships arranged in the field of institutional structure, but this *imaginary* does not appear to engage individual academics on the ground. The other *imaginary* is *contingent*, enabling a particular way of thinking that sustainable international partnerships are constructed by inter-personal human relationships built in the site of individual agency, but failing to embed individual engagement within the institution. To move beyond such *imaginaries* and thus challenge the limits of thinking, the ‘thesis’ proposes that there is a need to reconstruct sustainable international partnerships by bringing together and co-ordinating the *imaginaries* of institutions and individuals. By doing this, it is possible to bridge the disjuncture between individual engagement and institutional embeddedness, with the potential to build sustainable international partnerships between not only HE institutions in England and China but also between HE institutions across the world.

Diagram 7.1 illustrates the complexity of constructing sustainable international partnerships situated between institutions and individuals across England and China, and also between England and China. *Diagram 7.2* theorises a reconstruction of sustainable international partnerships in higher education beyond England and China. To further explain the arguments and the diagrams, I shall build it up by introducing the series of diagrams step by step in the following two sections.

Diagram 7.1 What-might-be sustainable international partnerships between England and China

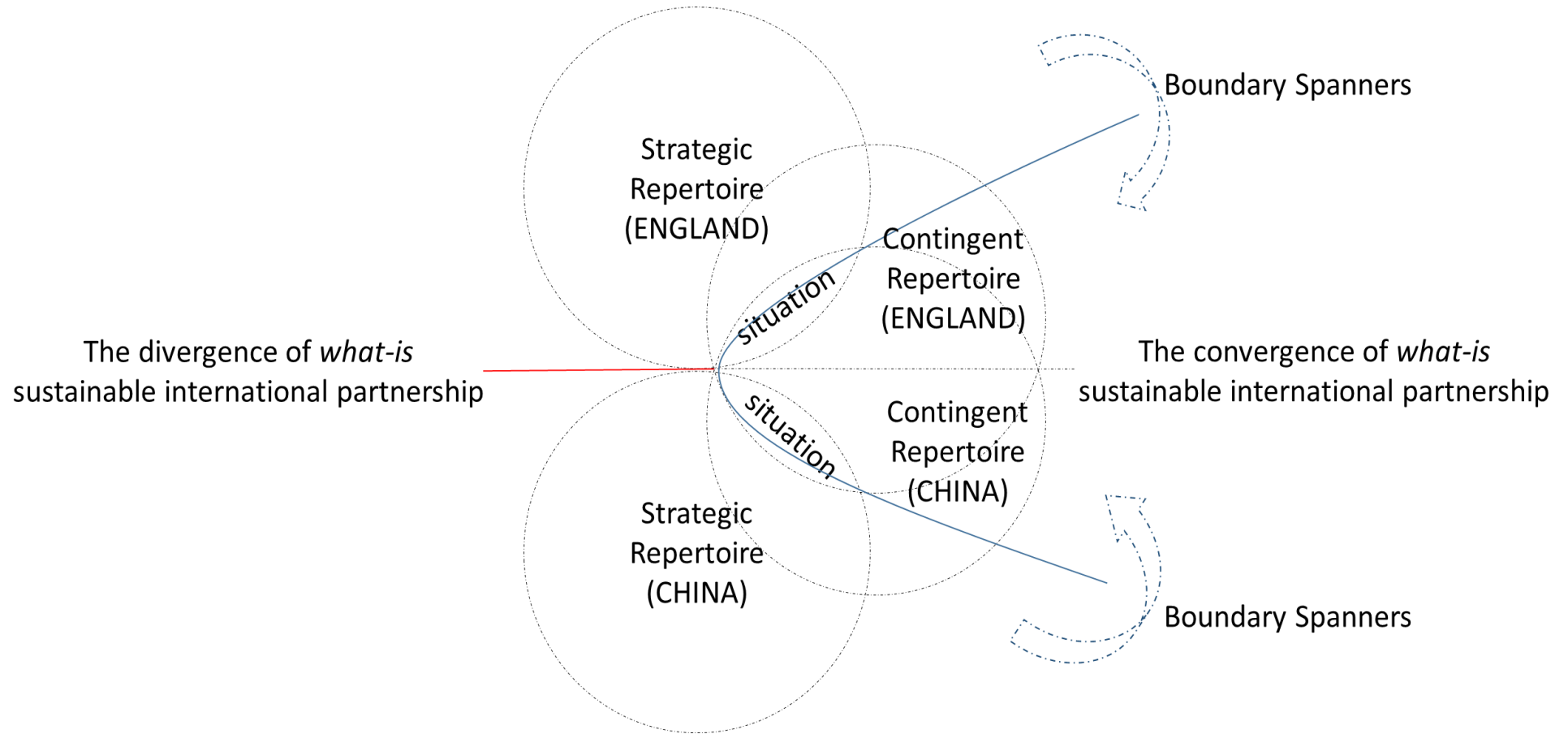
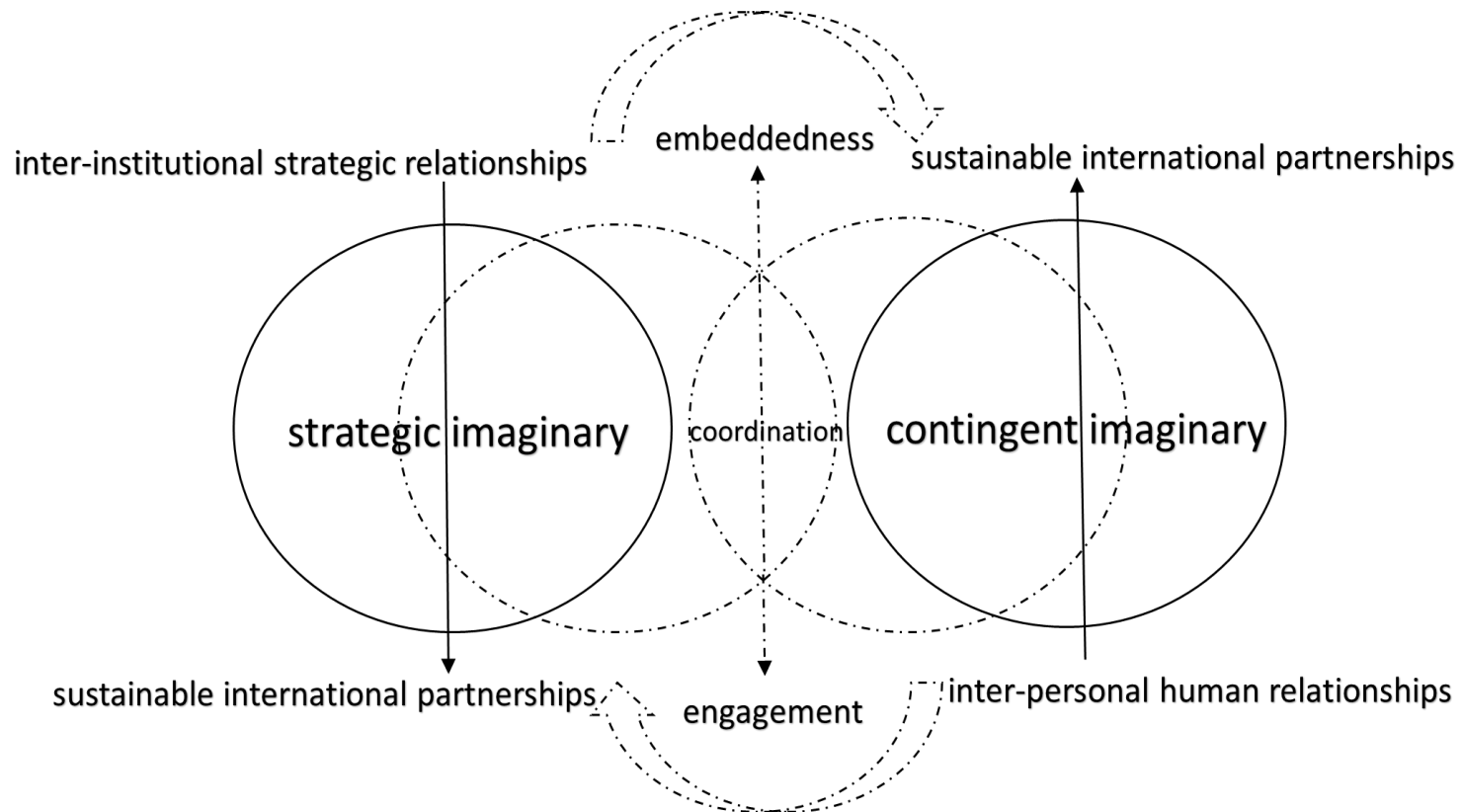


Diagram 7.2 What-might-be sustainable international partnerships in higher education



7.1 *What-might-be* sustainable international partnerships between England and China

This section attempts to discuss and explain why sustainable international partnerships between the two universities in this research need to be developed by situating institutional strategic arrangements within the networks of individuals engaging in contingent activities, and not the other way round. Firstly, the policy data has revealed areas of serious disagreement between the two universities regarding institutional conceptions of *what-is* sustainable international partnership, indicating the difficulty in developing a sustainable international partnership between the two universities through institutional arrangements on strategic relationships. Secondly, the interview data has presented certain agreement between the two universities regarding individual perceptions of *what-is* sustainable international partnership, suggesting some possibilities of developing a sustainable international partnership between the two universities through human relationships embedded in the networks of individuals. Thirdly, despite the possibilities suggested above, the interview data has also indicated the risk that a sustainable international partnership constructed by human relationships between the two universities might yet fail due to an inadequate embedding of interpersonal relationships within the institutional structures. Therefore, the ‘thesis’ proposes that sustainable international partnerships between the two universities must be created by situating institutional strategic arrangements within the networks of individuals engaging in contingent activities. To make such a situation happen, the findings of this study suggests that it is ‘senior’ academics acting as ‘boundary spanners’ who are able to nurture and support interpersonal relationships, embedding human relationships not just in individual networks, but also in institutional structures. In the following sections, I shall unpack how this thesis’ argument is built up step by step by introducing the series of diagrams.

7.1.1 The divergence of *what-is* sustainable international partnerships between England and China

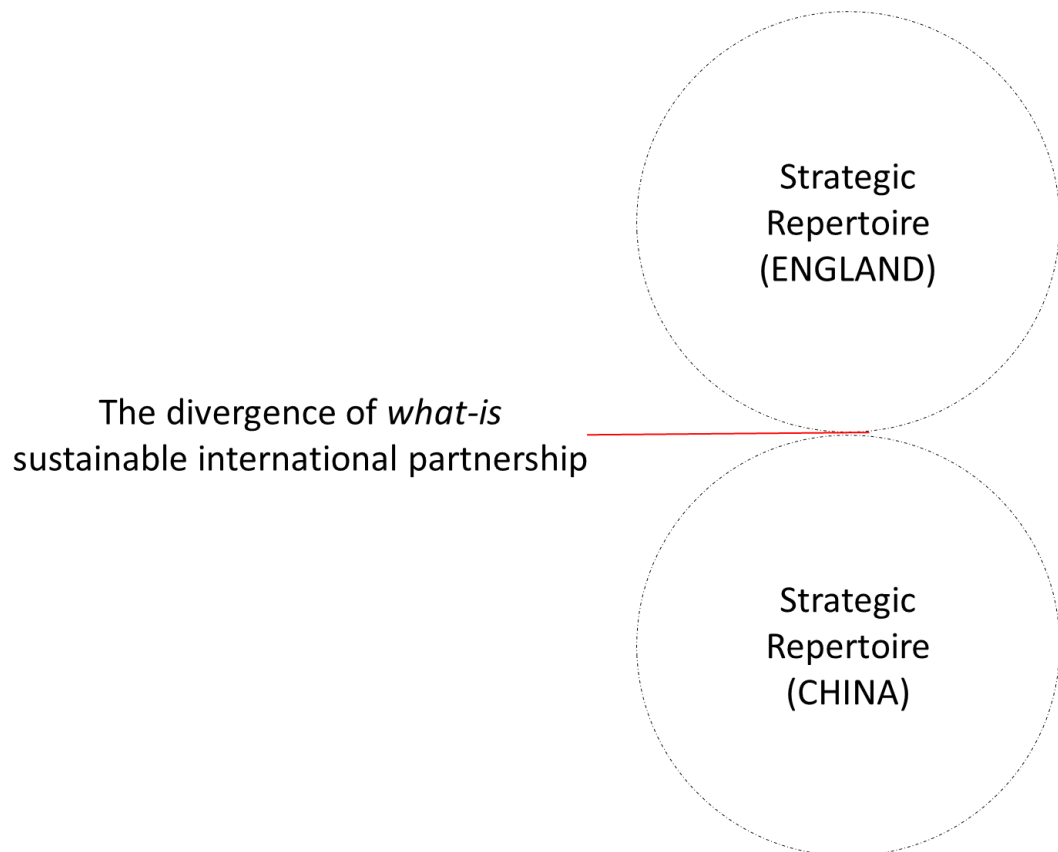


Diagram 7.1-1 The divergence of what-is sustainable international partnership between England and China

As is illustrated in *Diagram 7.1-1*, the first conclusion drawn from this study is that the *strategic* discourse or repertoire of *what-is* sustainable international partnerships differ between the two universities in this research, indicating the difficulty of developing a sustainable international partnership between the two universities through institutional arrangements on strategic relationships. The policy data from both universities has presented evident distinctions between England and China regarding *what-is sustainable international partnership* represented by means of ‘*strategic*’ relationships. Such distinctions are reflected through the textual analysis of university policy discourse on *sustainable international partnership* in both England and China. Specifically, for the English university, *sustainable international partnership is projected as a ‘strategic’ relationship contributing to the institutional continued growth in financial returns, academic excellence and thus international stature*; while for the Chinese university in this research, *sustainable international partnership is projected as a ‘strategic’*

relationship contributing to the institutional continued demand for building internationally benchmarked capacity and thus improved international competitiveness (cf. Chapter 5). This *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships* is further institutionalised as a shared repertoire upon which some individuals in both universities draw to consolidate *what-is sustainable international partnerships* via institutional arrangement on strategic relationships.

More specifically, the English university operates in an environment of national disinvestment in higher education. Within this context of austerity, the *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships* is framed by financial returns as well as academic excellence. They are tacitly linked together, as is claimed, *'we have much to accomplish but recognise that we can only do what we can afford...we will ensure that our investments bring an academic and ultimately a financial return'* (SP, 2016). In that case, it seems that *sustainable international partnerships* are constructed as a pragmatic move. Whether an international partnership can be sustainable is likely to depend on its performance in purely financial terms. *Sustainable international partnerships*, instead of being static, are positioned and repositioned constantly, and thus sustainable only in a pragmatic way. In this sense, it is the rationale for generating income that drives the English university in this research to make a partnership roadmap. Should the outcome be financially unsatisfactory the university may lose interest in the established relationships and turn to a new customer who can promise better financial returns, as is reported, *'I think what would happen is the people who they see as being the more reliable of bringing in the money would get the money'* (Interviewee 15).

The Chinese university, conversely, operates in an environment of accrued investment in a focused group of universities with the mission of improving national capacity building. Accordingly, construction of *sustainable international partnerships* seems embedded in a rather static hierarchical structure, as partnerships are carefully selected and built with particular reference to their position in the league tables; for example, a quantifiable target has been set for the institution to develop international partnerships, entitled the *'G50 Strategic Partners Plan'* which refers to the development of 50 partnerships with universities ranked in the world's top 200 (13rd-5P, 2016). In this sense, it is the rationale for capacity building that drives the university to partner with the world's higher-ranked universities. Such partnerships appear to enter an exclusive terrain in which boundaries

have been determined and established. The students are also seen to be complicit in this elitist discourse. The interview data suggests that students are acting like ‘gold-diggers’ (淘金者), for example, ‘they are actually very particular about the partner institution they are going to be exchanged’ (Interviewee 18). In other words, students are fixating on those partner institution with excellent global reputations. Students studying in these ‘prestigious’ institutions may then develop into elitist agents, exerting more influence on partner classification and selection. In that case, one could infer that any future partner institutions emerging from these students’ preferred universities likely to be exchanged are likely to be aligned with the ranking positions of the institutions to be partnered.

Such a divergent *strategic* discourse or repertoire of sustainable international partnerships between these two universities could foster mismatched expectations between partners in terms of pursuing a sustainable relationship. That being the case, the established partnerships might risk becoming unsustainable in the future. The question then arising is: would there be an alternative path for the two case universities which involved going beyond their institutional differences and developing a sustainable partnership despite the mismatched configuration of institutional arrangements on strategic relationships? This brings us to the following discussion on the convergence on *what-is* sustainable international partnership identified in the *contingent* repertoire between England and China.

7.1.2 The convergence of *what-is* sustainable international partnership between England and China

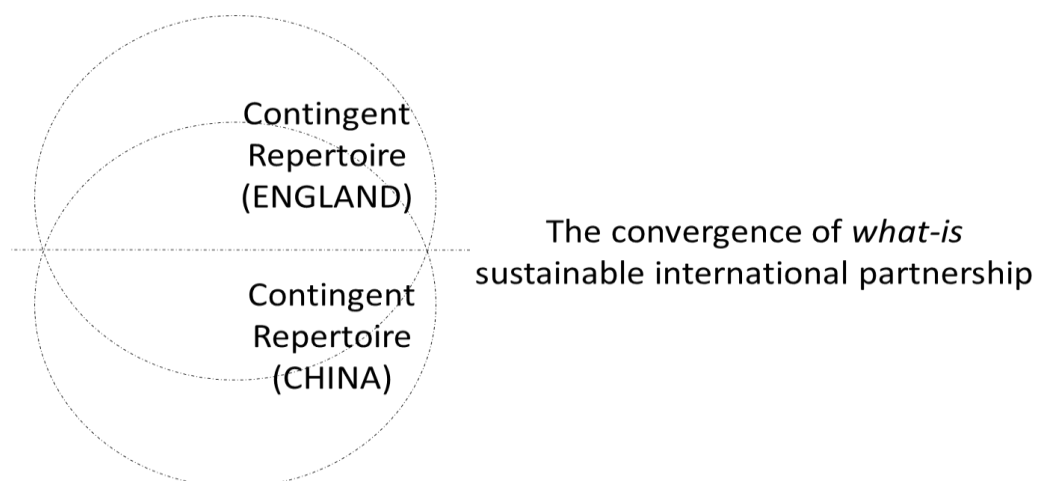


Diagram 7.1-2 The convergence of *what-is* sustainable international partnership between England and China

Contrary to the serious disagreement between the two universities on *what-is* sustainable international partnership constructed by strategic relationships, there seem to be certain areas where the two institutions agree on *what-is* sustainable international partnership constructed by human relationships, as is illustrated as the overlap in *Diagram 7.1-2*. This overlap appears to open an alternative space for developing a sustainable international partnership between the two universities, given the mismatched institutional arrangements on strategic relationships. This section will offer more evidence drawn from the data which will illustrate such possibilities of developing a sustainable international partnership between the two universities through human relationships embedded within networks of individuals.

The interview data in this study from both English and Chinese participants indicates that, based on the shared interests (especially shared research interests) individual academics develop a range of inter-personal human relationships through various professional experiences such as attending conferences, studying or visiting abroad. Those human relationships, usually developed after a chance encounter, may not initiate a partnership immediately. Instead, they may leave a legacy for a future connection in that *people want to partner with people they were seeing before (Interviewee 1)*. The established interpersonal relationships are thus able to warm up the relationships before universities enter into a partnership, as is reported, *'[w]ithout knowing each other, they bear little relationship between each other. If they know each other, then they tend to commit to work together (Interviewee 28)*. Therefore, it is through the agency of individual academics on the ground who have developed human relationships built upon personal affection and trust that *'a strong basis' (Interviewee 2)*, or *'a very good basis' (Interviewee 22)* for enabling sustainable international partnerships is forged. However, whether and to what extent the established human relationships have a chance to exert influence over future contacts is contingent upon future events, which in turn underpins the argument that sustainable international partnerships are constructed through a series of contingent events.

This convergent belief in inter-personal human relationships embedded in the networks of individuals might open an alternative space for constructing a sustainable international partnership between the two universities in this research. However, this is not the end of

the story because one problem has not been fixed: what happens if people, together with their relationships, ‘leave the institution’ (Interviewee 9), as is reported, ‘the individuals you work with is no long there, maybe they retire, or they move somewhere else’ (Interviewee 1), and if that person is the only nexus of the partnership, then partnerships tend to unravel once the nexus of the human relationships leaves the institution, as is observed, ‘[w]hen individuals go, it [partnership] stops’ (Interviewee 4); similarly, ‘there is not much exchange between our Institute with L University since the Head of School has retired’ (Interviewee 17). Therefore, partnerships built upon those human relationships can unravel if they are embedded enough in the network of individuals but not enough in the institutional structure. This highlights the importance of compensating for the deficiencies in sustainable international partnerships constructed by interpersonal human relationships. As we shall see, the findings of this study indicate ‘senior’ academics as boundary spanners able to embed international partnerships built upon human relationships within the institution.

7.1.3 The situation of institutional strategic arrangements in individual networks in England and China

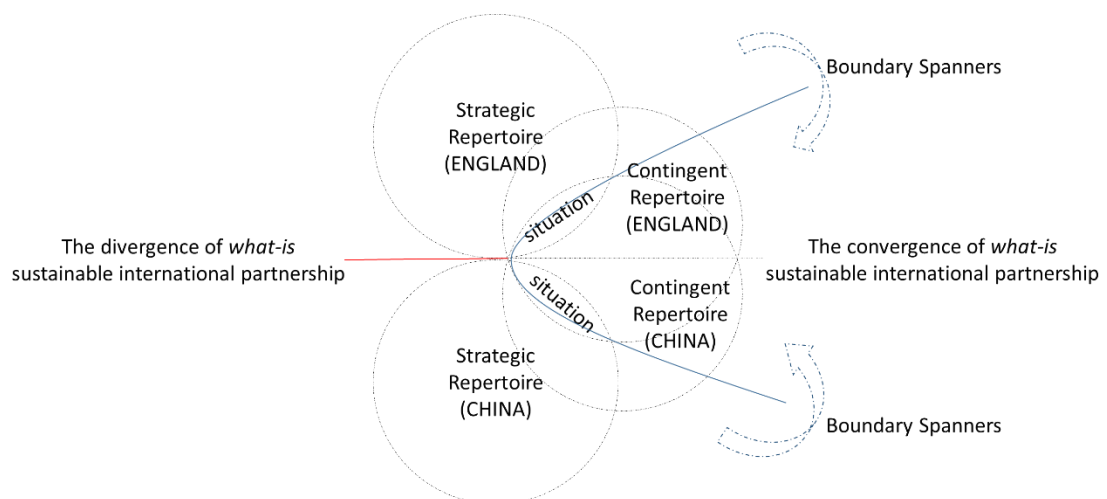


Diagram 7.1-3 The space and agency of what-might-be sustainable international partnerships between England and China

It is helpful to apply the idea of ‘boundary spanners’ (Williams, 2013) in discussing the particular power and agency through which international partnerships built upon human relationships could be embedded within the institution. This is because the idea of ‘boundary spanners’ places a specific emphasis on the role of agency in the context of

joint working, integration, collaboration and coordination. The ‘boundary spanners’ are ‘the individual actors engaged in boundary spanning activities, processes, and tasks’. They can be ‘a dedicated cadre of boundary spanners’ such as ‘entrepreneur, ‘interpreter/communicator’ and ‘coordinator’ working at senior, middle and frontline level of organisational hierarchy, or ‘practitioners, managers and leaders involve[ing] cross boundary working as an integral part of their job functions’ (ibid: 18-19). The ‘boundary spanners’ in this study, however, are indicated to be the ‘senior’ academics in the schools and faculties serving their disciplinary development. They could be considered as a particular kind of ‘boundary spanner’ who are not a dedicated cadre but engage in boundary spanning activities as an integral part of their professional, managerial and leadership roles.

As illustrated in *Diagram 7.1-3*, the blue curved line cut through overlaps between strategic planning and contingent networking in both England and China, suggesting it is this kind of ‘boundary spanner’ who have the power to situate strategic planning in contingent networking in the site of individual agency between England and China. Those ‘boundary spanners’ bridge, negotiate and build multi-engaged relationships in the established partnerships, thus reducing the risk of becoming heavily dependent on one key person to sustain partnerships, as is argued, ‘*It’s enormously important. If you have someone leaving or taking a step back, and they have a successor and they hand over project properly*’ (Interviewee 5). Many interviewees have suggested that the leadership of academics with administrative or managerial roles in the schools and faculties has both the power and the responsibility necessary to embed partnerships in the institution through involving multiple people in the established relationships, as is reported, ‘*it is senior academics’ responsibility to involve multiple people in the established partnership otherwise they are not doing their duty, if from a perspective of entrepreneurial management*’ (Interviewee 27).

Not just situating strategic planning in the context of partnership management, the interview data from the Chinese university appears to offer an example of how to make use of strategic planning in the context of partnership emergence, allowing interpersonal human relationships to develop by contingent networking in the site of individual agency. The administrative and managerial group engaging in international affairs in the central university seem to start becoming aware of how the established interpersonal

relationships as legacies can reduce partnerships' future trust building work. In that case, although the contingent networking is 'interfered with' by the institutional strategic arrangement, mainly through attracting strategies either adopted in the university or the schools, such 'interference' is more like building a 'hatchery' in which more interpersonal relationships are expected to emerge and partnerships develop, as is recalled by the pro vice chancellor in the Chinese university in this research, '*...people do not believe when you introduce to them however good your university is, but if you invite them to come, for the conference, or for the forum of presidents, you will see a lot of people coming to us for the partnerships*' (Interviewee 18). Through such 'interference' by means of institutional strategic arrangements, potential partner institutions appear to have a warming up process and work at trust building through contingent networking in the site of individual agency before both sides are brought to the negotiation table. In one sense, those strategies are built to cater for all possible contingencies with regard to future cooperative opportunities.

7.2 *What-might-be* sustainable international partnerships in higher education

Built upon the discussion above, this section attempts to go beyond the specific experiences emerging from the two universities, engaging in a wider theoretical discussion on *what-might-be* sustainable international partnerships in higher education. To offer a theoretical explanation of why sustainable international partnerships in higher education need be constituted by bringing together and co-ordinating institutional arrangements and individual networks, I connect *imaginary* to *strategic* and *contingent* and thus develop the concepts of *strategic imaginary* and *contingent imaginary*, explaining how such separate mind-sets fail to sustain international partnerships in either way. By doing this, it challenges the limits of thinking and proposes reconstructing sustainable international partnerships by moving beyond *imaginary* of *strategic* and *contingent*, bridging the disjuncture between individual engagement and institutional embeddedness. In the following sections, I shall present how this theory is built up step by step by introducing the series of *Diagram 7.2*.

7.2.1 The *strategic imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships and its failure to engage individual academics on the ground

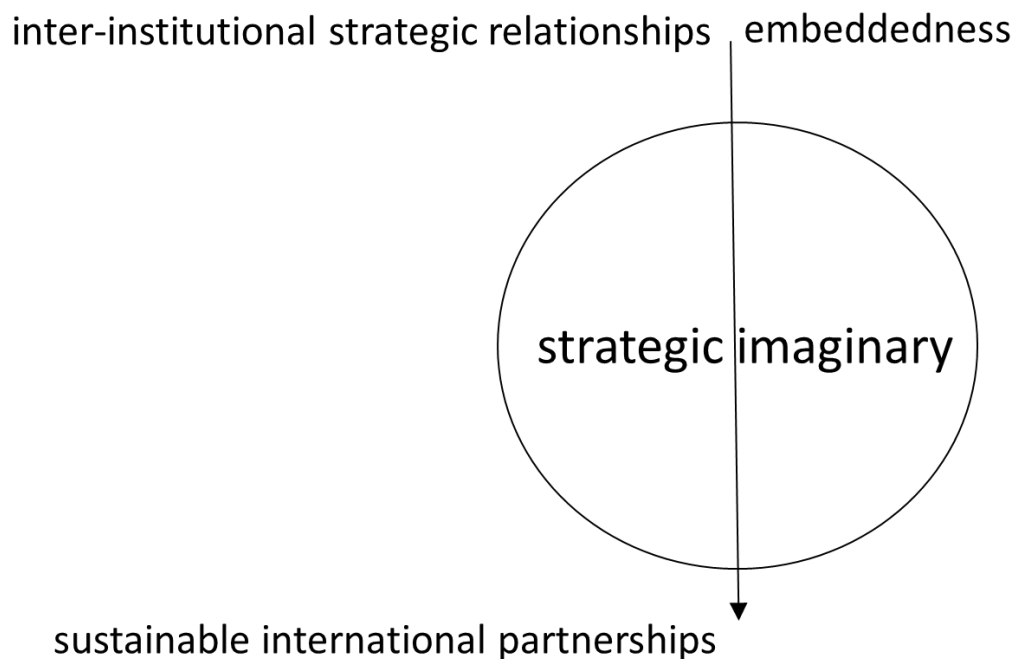


Diagram 7.2-1 The *strategic imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships in higher education

In this section, I connect *imaginary* to *strategic* and thus develop the concept of *strategic imaginary* to further explore the meaning of the findings, and here in particular the *strategic* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships in both England and China, mapping a *strategic* scenario of how different elements, i.e. institution, competition, revenue and prestige work together to construct sustainable international partnerships in a structured way. The word *strategic* informs a systematic arrangement strategised by the central university. *Strategic imaginary*, in this case, signifies an *imaginary* that carries within it an image of sustainable international partnerships made up of a series of institutional strategic arrangements, in contrast to the contingent activities engaged by individual academics on the ground (which I shall discuss in the next section). Such an image of sustainable international partnerships emerges from, and is embedded in, the practices of systematic planning of strategic relationships, and the accompanying beliefs in performance, efficacy and efficiency. Within the bounds of the *strategic imaginary*, strategic decision makers in the institution may not know their counterparts in the other institution very well but in the minds of each lives an image of which institution should be included in, and which should be excluded from, strategic relationships through

rationale planning and utilitarian management.

With this in mind, what is the mechanism through which strategic relationships become institutionalised as a shared common understanding of enabling sustainable international partnerships, if the mechanism is not free-floating? Certain conditions need to prevail in order to make it happen. A social formation has to be able to reproduce the conditions of its existence in order to exist and, ultimately, last. For strategic relationships to be reproduced, the first priority appears to be identifying what material conditions can produce and reproduce such relationships. Informed by the work of Althusser's (1971) on the idea of 'institution', the strategic partnership represents an imaginary relationship to the world. Such an imaginary relationship (or ideology, in Althusser's words), can be produced and reproduced as a result of the daily practices of university life organised within distinct and specialised institutions. The emergence, existence and prevalence of mapping and developing strategic relationships is evidence of the subtle mechanism which exists alongside the structural transformation within and beyond the university. Universities institutionalise ideas and practices of developing strategic relationships through establishing particular institutions, such as the international office, promoting a particular way of imagining sustainable international partnerships. They establish a normative framework of thinking what a sustainable international partnership should be and create corresponding structures to organise such practices within it. In so doing, a circumscribed thinking process of sustainable international partnership is able to be produced and reproduced.

Earlier in this study, we saw evidence of the institutional concepts of *sustainable international partnerships* through the subtle mechanism framed in the university strategic policy discourse. Policy as a particular discourse can not only project and construct *what-might-be* sustainable partnerships through associating with other dominant discourses (in this case competition, revenue and prestige), but also represent and reproduce *what-might-be* as *what-is*. By doing this, the institution constructs a circumscribed thinking process of *what-is* sustainable international partnership, and other alternatives are not considered desirable or worth attaining. In addition, through university strategic policy discourse, the specialised institution attached to the university (the international office, for example) institutionalises the policy discourse and reproduces it through the daily practice of selecting and developing partnerships, as is

reported from the administrative and managerial agents engaging in international affairs, ‘...you cannot have significant relations with all of these institutions...you have to have top tier partners where you work and look deeper when you are with them’ (Interviewee 17), or ‘...we will not develop international partnership on an ad hoc basis, instead, with a goal and quality, focusing on the world-class universities and disciplines’ (Interviewee 28). The classification of international partnerships - strategic partnerships and others - appears to establish a hierarchical difference in power between the administrative group and the academic community and, in this case, such power can legitimise what is considered to be valuable knowledge in terms of the kind of relationship constructed in order to enable sustainable partnerships. Kress (1989: 63) indicated that “the powerful can and do enforce their classification as knowledge”. Arguably, the institution could embed partnerships within the field of institutional structure in order to favour and prioritise certain relationships. This, however, has the potential of disconnecting partnerships from the site of individual agency if such partnerships as an institutionalised practice are not embedded enough in the intrinsic interests of individual academics on the ground.

Accordingly, the *strategic imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships might distance and thus disengage individuals on the ground, especially the individual academics within the university. In that case, the individual’s concept of *what-is* sustainable international partnership may not correspond with *what-is* constructed by institutions. In some cases, the *strategic imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships can be challenged and thus deconstructed through resistance from individual academics within the university, as is reported, ‘if you don't have academics doing that for best ability, you don't have it. So you make anything you want out of inter-university cooperation, but you will fail as a university if you don't do it at the level of individual academics (Interviewee 3). Even though academic leaders in the schools and faculties accompany the vice chancellor in seeking partnership opportunities abroad, ‘it turns out to be no such point [academic interest] to collaborate’ (Interviewee 20). In that case, due to the deficiency of individual academic engagement on the ground, the *strategic imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships can be merely an institutional imaginary.

7.2.2 The *contingent imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships and its failure to embed individual engagement in the institution

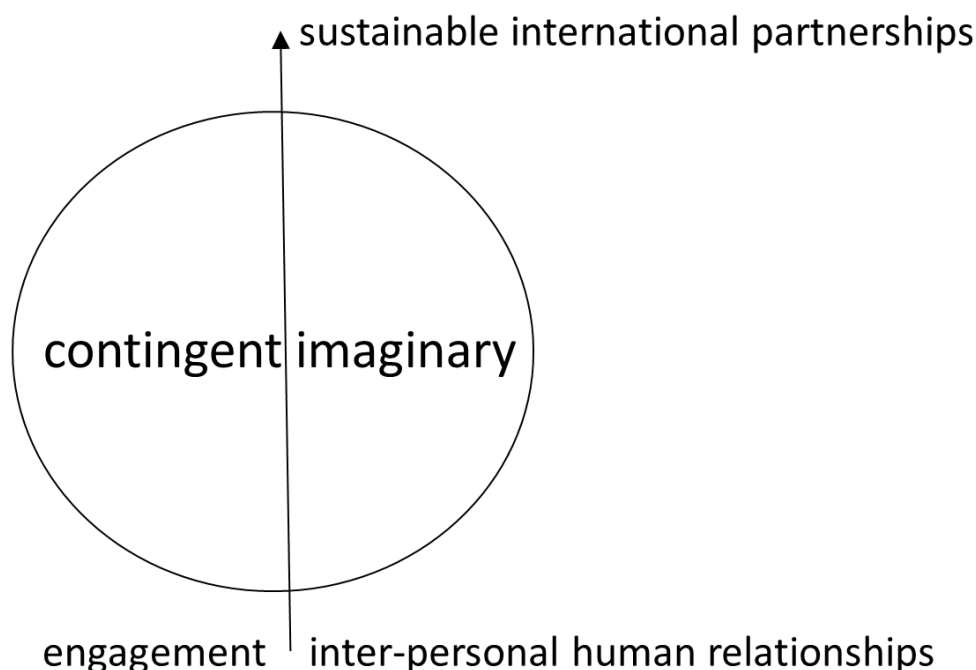


Diagram 7.2-2 The *contingent imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships in higher education

In this section, I connect *imaginary* to *contingent* and thus develop the concept of *contingent imaginary* to further explore the meaning of the findings. Here, in particular, I focus on the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships in both England and China, mapping a *contingent* scenario of how different elements, i.e. academics, mobility, interaction and relationship, work together to construct sustainable international partnerships in an unstructured way. Contrary to the word *strategic* informing an intentional, systematic and efficient arrangement strategised by the central university, the word *contingent* informs an unexpected, irregular and uncertain encounter between individuals on the ground. By using the term *contingent imaginary*, I mean an *imaginary* that carries within it an image of sustainable international partnerships constituted by a series of contingent activities. Such an image of sustainable international partnerships emerges from and is embedded in the development of inter-personal human relationships, and the accompanying belief in people, trust and friendship. Those human relationships are largely developed unexpectedly and accidentally between individual academics through various professional events, and considered as legacies which may exert influence in future. Whether it impacts, however, is contingent upon future events

which cannot be controlled. Within the bounds of the *contingent imaginary*, sustainable international partnerships are imagined to be enabled through inter-personal human relationships developed by contingent occurrence. Individual academics in different higher education institutions may not know each other very well but each of them has an image in mind of who can be involved in their collaborative activities in future. As academics they believe they belong to their research and knowledge community and are therefore able to sustain these inter-personal relationships and transform them into partnerships (contingent upon future events).

In a similar vein, what is the mechanism through which human relationships - and not other relationships - become institutionalised as a shared common understanding of enabling sustainable international partnerships by individual academics? A possible explanation for this might be found as a result of the increasing global flow featured by contingency and irregularity (Appadurai, 1990). Such an irregular global landscape makes it possible for individual academics to gain an unprecedented opportunity of imagining beyond the institutional and the national, especially due to the changing landscape in technology and media, or in Appadurai's (1990) words, 'technoscapes' and 'mediascapes', which are 'the most universal in reach of all the scapes' (Marginson & Sawir, 2005). One could argue that it is these disjunctive techno/mediascapes that help create a desire in individual academics to be mobile, to network, and even transform their identities. Mobility can help both students and staff to develop 'international competences and social networks abroad', and individuals can "bring them with knowledge, cultural and social capital and former institutional associations that can boost international engagements" (Klemenčič, 2017). Traditionally, mobile academics cross international borders and then return to their affiliated institutions. Contemporarily, there are more mobile academics who cross international borders and then work overseas (Kim, 2017). Those mobile academics not only acquire as much capital as those traditional mobile academics, but also carry a hybrid identity and transnational capital. They are playing a significant role in developing and sustaining partnership between institutions due to the international or transnational capital accumulated during contingent networking. Such a chance encounter between individuals and the subsequent human contact appears to constitute a normative practice in the day-by-day academic life.

As illustrated in this study, human relationships can start from meeting individuals in a

conference, from visiting abroad, from studying abroad, from supervising PhD students and from meeting friends of friends. Those occasions help to build interpersonal human relationships between people, and thus unleash the potential for the growth of further partnerships in that *'people want to partner with people they were seeing before'* (Interviewee 1). Among varied contingent occasions, the academic conference, organised by either the international association or national higher education institution, is frequently suggested by most interviewees as offering a platform for individual academics from all over the world to meet with each other; sharing, facilitating and consolidating professional practice among academics, as is observed, *'[the] meeting of individuals in a conference...can spark off a relationship, so quite often, they are not things that are looked for a planned but an opportunistic'* (Interviewee 7). Compared to such specialised institutions as a mission statement, university strategies and the international office within the university, those international academic organisations or institutions may go beyond the specific mission of a university and empower individual academics to establish relationships and create legacies for future partnerships.

In addition to the familiarity, the shared *'common interest'*, *'trust'*, *'respect'* and thus *'getting along'* are strongly felt to be the crucial qualities in constructing a sustainable relationship. Such institutions and values are actively supporting academic life to produce and reproduce contingent networking between individuals and thus develop and strengthen human relationships. However, another possible explanation for keeping and enhancing human contact could be attributed to the contingency and uncertainty about the future, or in Axelrod (1990)'s words, *'shadow of the future'*. Informed by Axelrod, it is the contingency and uncertainties that could create dependency between individuals to consciously keep and enhance the human contact between each other, because if individuals anticipated they would continue to benefit from interaction with each other in future they would chose to adopt cooperative strategies (ibid see also pp. 173-174), as is reported, *'this is going to sound bad, but you could use them or they know they could use you...to keep the relationship active all the time'*.

Therefore, it is argued that individual academics, and in particular mobile academics, carry with them the possibilities of forming and sustaining relationships between institutions. In the course of movement across international borders, mobile academics establish interpersonal relationships based on similarity, familiarity and liking through

their professional disciplinary networks, and thus accumulate capital from their international experiences. The capital carried by mobile academics can be used to spark off new partnerships between institutions, but the increasingly disjunctive cross-border flow of mobile academics also seems to loosen the relationship between the academic and the institutions. In that case, due to the deficiency in embeddedness in the institution, the *contingent imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships can only exist as an individual imaginary.

7.2.3 The move beyond *imaginary of strategic and contingent* and its space to reconstruct sustainable international partnerships

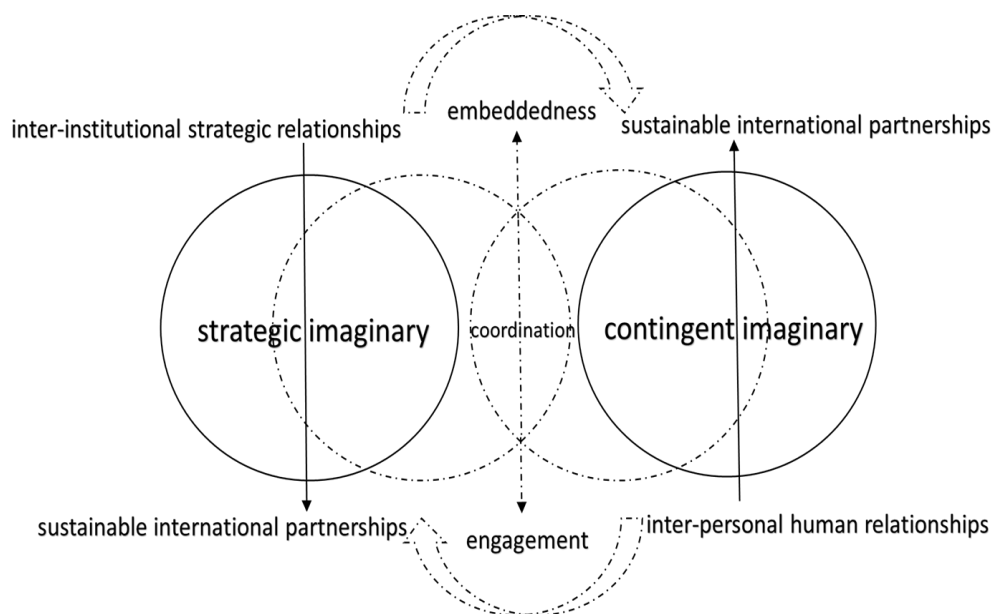


Diagram 7.2-3 The move beyond imaginary of strategic and contingent to bridge the disjuncture between individual engagement and institutional embeddedness

Built upon the arguments presented in Section 7.2.1 and Section 7.2.2 that sustainable international partnerships are enabled either by *scientific imaginary* or *contingent imaginary*, this section argues that conflict is evident between the *two imaginaries* of sustainable international partnerships, which is expressed by the institutions' and individuals' strong disparate beliefs with regard to the construction of sustainable international partnerships. Such a disparate belief system seems to foster a sense of mistrust between the institution and the individual. In other words, either the institution or the individual tend to validate *what* they believe *is* sustainable international partnership and thus devalue the other's belief and judgement of *what-is* sustainable international

partnerships, frustrating other possibilities of *what-might-be* sustainable partnerships. Those separate beliefs, in some ways, appear to reveal two divergent relationships on which social agents focus: the connection between objects and the connection between people. Within the *strategic imaginary*, the focus is on the connection between objects and the instant outcomes that connection will bring about, while within the *contingent imaginary*, the emphasis is on the connection between people, with the subsequent outcomes not appearing to be particularly important.

As evidenced in this study, within the *strategic imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships, in either England or China, the institutions seem to articulate it as a strategic relationship in any policy discourse concerning sustainable partnership. The central universities' administrative and managerial agents engaging in international affairs believe the possible solution to make partnerships sustainable lies in the construction of strategic relationships, because partnerships emerging from those strategic relationships are able to be embedded in the institution due to the *'high-level commitment alongside the allocation of plentiful resources'* (Interviewee 16). In that case, other possibilities, for example, the sustainable partnership *might-be* enabled by human relationships, tend to be glossed over. The contingent capital accumulated by academics might not be recognised even if the associated contingent gain is probably likely to exert a transformative influence in the future, because for the university, *'business is always there...you have to pay your contribution to the centre'* (Interviewee 12); or *'there is a built-in mechanism [league tables] for institution to find partners who are evenly and equally matched...the university will not sign any agreements with institutions out of Top 200 in the world, at least at the university-level'* (Interviewee 18).

Conversely, within the *contingent imaginary* of sustainable international partnerships, in either England or China, individuals argue that it could *'be nice to say that partnership develop along some kind of scientific arrangement, but they do not, and at the end of the day, it is people to people'* (Interviewee 1). The academic group do not place much trust in the *'top-down'* in spite of *'successful cases'*, instead, they believe in *'bottom-up, grassroots, point to point, people to people'* (Interviewee 20). It is those human relationships developed by contingent networking between individuals, rather than rational planning and scientific statistics, which are strongly believed to be the agency for sustaining a relationship and thus the partnership. In that case, the academic community

may be reluctant to engage in a partnership initiated and developed by the institution, because they believe *'the best international partnerships are based on individuals, and not on universities'* (Interviewee 3). Therefore, *'there is a disconnection between the senior managers' perceptions and the perceptions of academics'* (Interviewee 7). *What-is* sustainable partnership constructed in the field of institutional structure might not correspond with *what-is* imagined in the site of individual agency.

Notably, neither the *strategic imaginary* nor *contingent imaginary* models of international partnerships are perfect, as deficiencies exist within each. Through the *strategic imaginary*, sustainable international partnerships are enabled by institutional arrangements, and there seems to be a tendency for adequate embeddedness in the institutional structure but inadequate engagement from the individual academics. Through the *contingent imaginary*, sustainable international partnerships are enabled by human relationships embedded in the networks of individual academics, and there seems a tendency for sufficient engagement in the individual network but insufficient embeddedness in the institutional structure. In this sense, many interviewees have expressed the significance of multiple engagement in constructing sustainable partnerships because such arrangements might avoid the disjuncture between institutional embeddedness and individual engagement, which indicates an interactive zone, where the two *imaginaries* do not stand alone but communicate with each other, as is stated, *'you have to make sure the engagement is from top to the bottom really, you've got to buy-in and people actually want to do it'* (Interviewee 12), or *'if you want it to be sustained...I think you've got to think who could I get involved, who would be interested in getting involved, and take the one as equal partner; otherwise, it's the other end'* (Interviewee 9).

Those concerns indicate the two separate and conflicting *imaginaries* of sustainable international partnerships; yet they still seem able to conceive one conflated *imaginary* of sustainable international partnership, as illustrated as the cooperative vision overlapped by the two dotted circles in *Diagram 7.2-3*. When the two *imaginaries* of sustainable international partnerships are brought together, they produce an overlap that is able to make up for the deficiency in each *imaginary* - either the lack of individual engagement within the *scientific imaginary*, or the lack institutional embeddedness within the *contingent imaginary*. By doing this, the disjuncture between institutional embeddedness and individual engagement can be bridged, as presented as two curved arrows in *Diagram*

7.2-3.

Theoretically, there appear to be two directions in which such a conflation can be made to happen; either the *scientific imaginary* moves to the *contingent imaginary*, or vice versa. When the *contingent imaginary* moves to the *strategic imaginary*, as presented as the lower curved arrow in *Diagram 7.2-3*, it makes up for a deficiency in individual engagement within the *scientific imaginary*. In the similar vein, when the *strategic imaginary* moves to the *contingent imaginary*, as presented as the upper curved arrow in *Diagram 7.2-3*, it makes up for a deficiency in institutional embeddedness within the *contingent imaginary*. Either direction seems to be attainable. The findings from this study, however, suggest the *scientific imaginary* moves to the *contingent imaginary*, as illustrated as two blue curved arrows in *Diagram 7.2-2*, which would involve embedding institutional strategic arrangements in the networks of individuals engaging in contingent activities. Such a move might make sustainable international partnerships attainable between the two case universities in this research, given the *scientific imaginaries* are dissonant but the *contingent imaginaries* are consonant in some ways.

7.3 A brief summary

This chapter has presented the ‘thesis’ of the study through engaging in a discussion on the major findings from the data chapters. The ‘thesis’ argues that sustainable international partnerships between the two universities in this research can be developed by situating institutional strategic arrangements in the networks of individuals engaging in contingent activities through the agency of ‘senior’ academics. Those ‘senior’ academics act as ‘boundary spanners’, nurturing and supporting interpersonal relationships, embedding those human relationships not just in individual networks, but also in institutional structures. Following on from this argument, the thesis suggests that it is through bringing together and co-ordinating institutional arrangements and individual networks that sustainable international partnerships might be constituted in higher education, as it is the concentration on one at the expense of the other that may cause international partnerships to fail. Through institutional arrangements on strategic relationships, international partnerships might fail to engage individual academics on the ground, whereas through human relationships embedded in individual networks, international partnerships might fail to embed those human relationships within the

institution.

The failure to sustain international partnerships through *either* institutional arrangements *or* individual networks reflects the separation and conflict of the two *imaginaries*. One is *strategic*, enabling a structured thinking of sustainable international partnerships, constructed by institutional strategic arrangements on strategic relationships, thus failing to engage individual academic interests on the ground. The other is *contingent*, enabling an irregular thinking on sustainable international partnerships, constructed by interpersonal human relationships embedded in individual networks, thus failing to embed partnerships within the institution. This thesis aims to move beyond the *imaginary* of *strategic* and *contingent* and proposes that there is a need to reconstruct sustainable international partnerships by bringing together and co-ordinating institutional arrangement and individual networks, thus bridging the disjuncture between individual engagement and institutional embeddedness. In this sense, this study contributes to a holistic imagining of what might constitute sustainable international partnerships in higher education beyond England and China. Also, it proposes an imaginative space from which sustainable partnerships between England and China might be attainable, even for those universities with divergent strategic agendas.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

So should we approach collaborations between universities as individuals approach relationships? Individuals already act as agents on behalf of institutions to foster partnerships, after all. Perhaps we should go a step further and be more explicit about the human part of the process of building partnerships between these elaborate institutions: likes and dislikes, attractions, emotions and feelings...if we look at our university partnerships the same way we look at relationships in our private lives, it may be easier to identify what we want and what we need. Are we looking for a one-night stand (a single joint application for a grant), a fling (regular joint projects), or a marriage (key partners)? Each type of relationship between humans needs communication, recognition of different degrees of experience, trust and comparability as well as compatibility (Brandenburg 2016).

The thesis has come to its concluding chapter. Looking back, I came up with the title of this thesis - '*moving between what-is and what-might-be*' - based on an assumption that a definitive answer to the question of *what-is* sustainable international partnership in higher education might not exist; an answer can only come from a negotiation of *what-is* sustainable international partnership involving all parties concerned. On this point, it seems that such a negotiation should take place not only between international institutions and between institutions and individuals within universities, but also between the research and the researcher. The title of this thesis also perfectly captures my thoughts throughout the whole journey in exploring constructions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education. More specifically, it reflects my continuing struggle collecting, analysing, interpreting and presenting constructions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education between *what-is* and *what-might-be*. Therefore, I have concluded that this thesis is more like one point in a continuum in terms of the answer to the question of *what-is* and *what-might-be* in sustainable international partnerships. Beyond this, multiple answers could be given, from the contexts of both the research and the researcher. In this chapter, I give my final comment on the thesis, providing an echo of the earlier research, my contribution to knowledge, some limitations of this study and future research directions.

8.1 An echo

Ten years ago, Kehm and Teichler (2007: 270) argued that there was a growing influence of what could be called the ‘periphery’ on international higher education activities, for example, institutional management and international offices at higher education institutions with management support and service functions, “are trying more than before to shape the international profile of higher education institutions”, and they questioned whether this ‘periphery’ would be successful in influencing the core areas of higher education; what Burton Clark has called the ‘academic heartland’, such as research, teaching, and learning and thus academic staff and students.

Years later, a similar trend appears to hold true. In this study alone we have seen that there are strong indications that the ‘periphery’ with management function appears to exert an influence on international activities. The ‘periphery’ wishes to sustain a particular kind of partnerships - inter-institutional strategic relationship. Universities develop strategies to deliver their wishes. The *strategic* discourse of *sustainable international partnerships* seems to become institutionalised serving the ‘periphery’ strategic agendas for marketing, branding and profile building rather than inter-personal human relationships, ethical trust and legacy conservation. In this sense, it seems to move away from the inter-personal human relationships valued by the ‘academic heartland’. This study has indicated the inconsistencies and incompatibilities exist between the ‘periphery’ and the ‘academic heartland’ regarding their wishes for sustainability with regard to constructing sustainable international partnerships in higher education.

The major findings from this study have identified two contradictory discourses or repertoires of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across two institutions in England and China. One is the *strategic*. The other is the *contingent*. These two discourses or repertoires are argued to constitute two *imaginaries* of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across a range of differing contexts. However, given the differences in contexts, issues and agendas between the two universities studied, the key to constructing sustainable international partnerships is to embed partnership emerging from contingent networking. Strategic planning can then be placed in the context of partnership-nurturing and flourishing interpersonal relationships, embedding interpersonal relationships not just in the individual networks, but also in the

institutional structures.

8.2 The contribution

The thesis thus contributes to a holistic imagining of what might constitute sustainable international partnerships in higher education across England and China. It also creates an imaginative space from which sustainable international partnerships might be attainable between English and Chinese universities with divergent strategic agendas.

The contribution of this thesis is twofold:

It offers theoretical constructions of what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education by:

- conceptualising partnership as a network of relationships interwoven not just by the field of institutional structure but also by the site of individual agency.
- exploring the relationship between the field of institutional structure and the site of individual agency regarding constructions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education across England and China.
- identifying the *strategic* discourse on *sustainable international partnerships* constructed by inter-institutional strategic relationships across England and China, and the *contingent* repertoire of sustainable international partnerships constructed by inter-personal human relationships across England and China.
- connecting *imaginary* to *strategic* and *contingent*, and thus developing the concepts of *strategic imaginary* and *contingent imaginary* to sketch why and how the *strategic* and *contingent* discourses or repertoires construct sustainable international partnerships in higher education across England and China in specific ways.

It provides possible areas for constructing sustainable international partnerships between universities with divergent strategic agendas by:

- presenting similarities and differences in institutional conceptions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education between England and China.
- presenting similarities and differences in individual perceptions of sustainable international partnerships in higher education between England and China.
- identifying possibilities and complexities in the convergent space for constructing sustainable partnerships in higher education between England and China.
- suggesting through ‘boundary spanners’ how to situate strategic planning in contingent networking and thus building multi-engaged relationships to reduce the risk of depending on one key person to sustain the partnerships.

8.3 Some limitations

Research has its limitations and this study is no exception. With particular relevance to the research methods I have chosen for this study, coupled with the positionality of the researcher, some specific limitations are addressed here.

Firstly, regarding the selection of universities; I chose two universities with unbalanced status in their respective countries. That being the case, one of the key findings - that situating strategic planning in contingent networking to construct sustainable partnerships between England and China, and not the other way round - is built upon such *‘facts’* that those two particular universities functioned subject to particular issues, contexts and agendas . Therefore, different results would be generated if universities sharing similar or equivalent status were chosen. Also, there are divergences and stratifications in universities within the same national context. In England, for example, income generation would not be prioritised by universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. In a similar vein, across China with nearly 3000 higher education institutions, it is also difficult to generalise findings to include other universities such as newly established colleges without an established national reputation or specialised universities with a particular focus. In this sense, the findings are conditional.

Secondly, as to the identification of interviewees, I incorporated no students' perspectives on sustainable international partnerships in higher education. It might have been helpful if several students had been included to explore their expectations of international partnerships because, as emerging agents (as mentioned by the Chinese participants), students appear to be complicit in partner selection, contributing to an increasingly stratified hierarchical structure in the international partnership landscape. Perhaps a few interviews with students who have been involved in some partnerships, initiated either by institutions or individuals, would have enabled me to gain a greater insight into questions like 'sustainable for what and for whom'. Would their expectations of partnerships correspond with accounts given by the Chinese participants; and how and to what extent would their interests echo the institutional interests or individual academic' interests?

Thirdly, with regard to the interpretation and presentation of the policy data, the key concept in this study - 'sustainable international partnerships', instead of having been articulated in the university policies in either England or China, was discursively constructed through the reading of policy texts on *partnership*, *internationalisation* and *sustainability*. I analysed the data in this way because I developed a discourse analysis approach to processing and interpreting policy data at a late stage before I was aware whether or not the term *sustainable international partnerships* manifested itself in the university policy documents. Therefore, it would make a difference if the term *sustainable international partnerships* manifested itself in the policy discourse. As a result, the way in which institutions conceive *sustainable international partnerships* in this study was considered more as a projection, constituting a projective imaginary of *what-is* sustainable international partnerships for the institutions.

Fourthly, for the interpretation and presentation of the interview data, I introduced a concept of *repertoire* together with the usage of *discourse*. This was done in an attempt to see how the strategic *discourse* of *sustainable international partnerships* functioned as a *repertoire* upon which individuals tended to draw in different ways to construct what should be sustainable international partnerships. Also, it emphasised the reflexivity that individuals have when they drew upon and actively deconstructed the strategic *discourse* and presented their alternative *repertoire* through which sustainable international partnerships were constructed. Such repertoire analysis, however, was only based upon broad content themes rather than specific conversational features such as corrections or

hesitations (considered to have little impact on interpretative repertoire analysis), because such an approach was only developed after the transcription of the interviews without paying much attention to the conversational interactions in the interviews. For example, ‘strategic relationship’ and ‘human relationship’ were the two key themes emerging from the initial coding; however, thoughts of analysing and presenting them from the lens of repertoires came later. Those thoughts were developed alongside the constant reflection upon the data analysis and presentation, thus causing corresponding limitations in interpreting the data.

Finally, I was aware that my Chinese identity could bias the interpretation of the data. Such a bias could have been buried without comparison and contrast, which in turn highlights the significance of doing research across cultural contexts, as we may not fully understand the research subjects and the researcher until we are contrasted and challenged by the differences. In this study, for instance, I used some excerpts from *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens to polarise the perspectives between England and China regarding constructions of sustainable international partnerships (cf. Chapter 6), with the aim of creating a vivid and contrasting scenario between the two countries. This particular way of interpreting and presenting data, however, might potentially bias the interpretation of data between the two countries. Specifically, I might have narrated the Chinese story in a more positive voice (e.g. ‘*the spring of hope*’) and the English story in a more negative tone (e.g. ‘*the winter of despair*’). Although the data shows contrasts, my own Chinese identity might allow me to relate more to the Chinese side. Such a bias should be acknowledged as the researcher herself is also socially constructed. The way in which the researcher interpreted the data was marked by her own identity constructed in a particular cultural context, thus limiting the ‘objectivity’ of the research to some degree.

8.4 Future directions

This thesis is not the end of the story; instead, it might open up a discussion on what constitutes sustainable international partnerships in higher education across a range of differing contexts - international, institutional and individual - and the corresponding implications of multiple interpretations in those contexts for developing sustainable international partnerships in higher education. Identifying similarities and differences across contexts is argued to be particularly significant, especially in the globalisation of

internationalisation in higher education where concepts and terminology are culturally operated and embedded worldwide, helping to clarify misconceptions, misunderstanding and miscommunication between contexts. It is possible that the findings of this study on sustainable international partnerships in higher education might provide a platform for further research on this topic. In my view, there are three research agendas that should be given particular attention.

Contingency in relation to internationalisation strategy within institutional contexts - As a research agenda the topic emerges from the key findings of this study, arguing that sustainable international partnerships are developed through placing strategic planning within the context of contingent networking through 'boundary spanners', and not vice versa. This particular conclusion is gained from two particular universities with divergent agendas, generating differences in institutional concepts of sustainable international partnerships. Therefore it would be interesting to see whether it is possible to situate contingent networking within strategic planning when two universities share similar agendas. In that case, it would be interesting to see how the contingency in relation to internationalisation strategy is operated across a range of differing institutional contexts, among which special attention could also be paid to the role of 'boundary spanners' in embedding sustainable international partnerships in different institutional contexts.

Interpretations on sustainable international partnerships within national contexts - In response to one of the limitations of this study, and prompted studying two specific universities with particular contexts, issues and agendas, it would be interesting to see how sustainable international partnerships are constructed in other contexts, and how this relates to the findings generated in this study. Those contexts refer not only to different countries, but also varied institutions within the same national context where higher education institutions are increasingly stratified and diversified (China, for example). Different higher education institutions enjoy different reputations and resources, affecting their institutional visions and agendas with regard to international engagement. This would set an interesting agenda to investigate the extent to which different institutional contexts affect the framing of sustainable international partnerships in higher education.

Implications of sustainable international partnerships within a global context - If higher education is fulfilled to direct the human future, we have to ponder: what are the

implications of sustainable international partnerships for global higher education? Would sustainable international partnerships contribute to a more hierarchical and stratified global higher education system where the *strategic* discourse of partnerships is pervasive among institutions worldwide; would sustainable international partnerships contribute to a more intercultural and ethical higher education culture where the *contingent* discourse on partnership is valued by individuals; or, how and to what extent do sustainable international partnerships contribute to a more intercultural and ethical higher education culture in a more hierarchical and stratified higher education system, when *strategic* and *contingent* discourse are intertwined within university daily life. Those issues may need further examination in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 An extract from policy discourse analysis

the relationships between 'Partnership' and 'International'

The way in which 'International' informs 'Partnership' is the international reach of partnership is becoming encouraged and strengthened as partnership is largely constructed in a local sense.

the relationships between nodes within 'Partnership'

The way in which partnership is constructed changes over time. Early in 2007, the way in which partnership is constructed gains a sense of business with particular focus on locality rather than internationality (SP, 2007). The way in which partnership is constructed gains a sense of focus from a strategic viewpoint (SP, 2011).

'partnership working'

There are signs that partnership might not necessarily work through a formal agreement, instead, it is valued and enabled by its nature of working together.

-engagement with students

in a spirit of partnership (SP, 2007); partnership working with the student body (SP, 2011); build on our strong partnership with our award winning HUU (SP, 2016).

-engagement in local and regional areas

through partnership working (Utrecht Network) to engage in Europe (SP, 2007) (The **Utrecht Network** is a network of European universities. Founded in 1987, the network promotes the internationalisation of tertiary education through summer schools, student and staff exchanges and joint degrees.); university commitment to influencing broader outcomes places a new emphasis on partnership working (SP, 2011); partnership approach to extending university footprint to other regions of the UK (SP, 2016).

'stakeholders'

There are a range of participants constituting partners, from institutions to individuals, from education sectors to industry sectors, all of whom can be framed under the name of 'stakeholders'. There are a wide reach of partnership across local, regional, and international areas, but locality is placed at the heart of the institution (specifically in 2007, explains why there is an emphasis on increasing the number, and the quality, of

international partnerships

- form partnerships with prominent national and international organisations (SP, 2011).
- build on strong partnership with university union (SP, 2016)
- build on partnership relation with stakeholders in the regions (SP, 2016)
- participate in local enterprise partnership, liaise with other LEPs (SP, 2016)

In England, **local enterprise partnerships (LEPs)** are voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses set up in 2011 by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within the local area.

types of partnership

There are different types of partnership, manifested by research partnership and exchange partnership (SP, 2007). There are signs that partner selection is become more reputation-driven (SP, 2011). Partnership demonstrates the stature and reputation of the university (SP, 2011). There are signs that a focused approach to partnership is encouraged and thus partnership is foregrounded by a particular type, for example, strategic partnerships, active global research partnerships (SP, 2011). There are signs that strategic partnership is a significant approach to expanding transnational education (SP, 2016)

- research alliances, bilateral and multilateral research partnerships (SP, 2007)
- study abroad for a short term via partnership alliances (SP, 2007)
- distance education and strategic partnerships through which to offer flexible modes of delivery (SP, 2011)
- a more focused approach to national and international partnership (SP, 2011)
- foster research and enterprise partnerships nationally and internationally, with an emphasis on strategic partnerships with universities, industry, and employers (SP, 2011)
- focus on building winning partnerships (SP, 2016)
- pursue, benchmark and celebrate excellence in partnership (SP, 2016)
- develop new innovative and new partnerships to deliver our academic offer (SP, 2016)

rationales of partnership

The rationale for partnership is to attract investment (SP, 2007)

- attract inward investment (SP, 2007)
- increase learning opportunities, enhance research and deliver service across locality (SP, 2007)
- partnership demonstrates stature and reputation of the university (SP, 2011)
- contribute to the enhancement of university stature and reputation and thus become a university of preference for a wide range of students, staff and partners (SP, 2016)
- contribute to providing students with outstanding experience through collaborative partnerships (SP, 2016)

Linked Item

Cases\\Policies\Sustainable International Partnership\Partnership

the relationships between 'International' and 'Partnership'

the changing positioning of the university expresses the commitment that the institution to 'going beyond' (SP 2011), and in some ways, might push the institution to broaden the reach of partnership working from locality to internationality, as is stated, for example, '[the university] will take a global view and strive towards having an international reach by actively participating in the international arena, engaging scholars, students, and, partners worldwide' (SP 2011).

the relationships between 'International' and 'Sustainable'

The way in which 'International' informs 'Sustainable' is mainly expressed through the competitive international higher education landscape which pushes the university to continually benchmark internationally and thus ensures continued growth in international profile, image, stature and reputation. For example, 'International engagement is key to our sustained success as an academic institution operating in a global environment' (SP, 2016). The institutional success is achieved by 'continually monitoring the activities of key areas to ensure that they are meeting international standards of excellence' and measured by the extent of 'improving our national and international media profile' (SP, 2007); 'Mechanism will be developed to track the growth in stature and reputation nationally and internationally' (SP, 2011).

the relationships between nodes within 'Sustainable'

the competitive HE landscape->securing continued growth in stature, reputation and influence->achieving sustainable performance improvement->pursuing academic excellence supported by investment-driven strategies.

More specifically, sustainability is defined by a sustainable performance improvement through investment-driven strategies on academic excellence pursuit. This performative discourse of sustainability derives from three key themes associated with particular discourses, i.e. reputation in competitive HE, academic excellence pursuit, and investment-driven strategies. Sustainable performance improvement is set out in a competitive higher education landscape where institutions have to seek improvement at a higher rate and ensure a continued growth in reputation. In order to achieve this, academic excellence pursuit supported by investment driven strategies is foregrounded as a key approach. Such approach illuminates an intricate relationship between academic excellence pursuit and financial investment strategies. Across the examined documents (SP, 2007; SP, 2011; SP, 2016), there observes a consistent narrative of how academic excellence pursuit is driven and supported by financial investment strategies.

the relationships between 'Sustainable' and 'International'

Running text search on partnership within 'Sustainable', it returns no results, but on international and international partnership within 'Sustainable', it returns the same 8 references across the documents. This seems to indicate it is through inform international and thus inform international partnership. Also there appears an intricate relationship between 'Sustainable' and 'International'. The way in which 'International' informs 'Sustainable' is mainly expressed through the competitive international higher education landscape which pushes the university to continually benchmark internationally and thus ensures continued growth in international profile, image, stature and reputation. For example, 'International engagement is key to our sustained success as an academic institution operating in a global environment' (SP, 2016). The institutional success is achieved by 'continually monitoring the activities of key areas to ensure that they are meeting international standards of excellence' and measured by the extent of 'improving our national and international media profile' (SP, 2007); 'Mechanism will be developed to

track the growth in stature and reputation nationally and internationally' (SP, 2011).

Linked Item

Cases\\Policies\Sustainable International Partnership

Appendix 2 An extract from interview repertoire analysis

The strategic repertoire of sustainable international partnerships

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E03N03> - § 2 references coded [1.24% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.35% Coverage

I think there's always some common goal in the sense that some complementarity the different institutions involve have some clear complementary roles.

Reference 2 - 0.90% Coverage

Institutions want money because they want capital to fund the administration themselves, because that's the way we work in this country, not must in China, but in this country, well, it's also in China, but in this country, we are almost private, but not private, we are public, but we have to earn money ourselves as an institution. So each institution has some, usually financial goals.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E04N04> - § 1 reference coded [1.98% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.98% Coverage

And in some cases, it can boil down just to a change in vice-chancellor, or president, or whatever the equivalent, you know. Maybe you have a relationship with an institution, a new vice-chancellor, or a new season team comes in, the previous one, and sometimes it comes down to the previous one graduate from a British university, but the new one graduates from a American university, so they shift from a UK base collaborative arrangement to a Canadian, or a American, or whatever, could be simply that. So sometimes it's not sustainable, not because it's not sustainable, it's just [inaudible], overtaken. Individual preferences come to play and things change. Then the question is whether you accept.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E07N07> - § 1 reference coded [3.05% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.05% Coverage

No, not anything like that. Fairly enough, the only partnership that comes to an end is the one that is formal. I had a formal arrangement with the university in Taiwan, was with Mark, my colleague, who is in Hong Kong, and another colleague from Edinburg. And we have a very formal partnership with a university and our job was to support the staff with writing for publications. It did very well. We asked them to keep a record at all. It

was college as a single, wasn't a university department, and they became in that three years the top college of Nursing in Taiwan for publications in that type. But then the three years, goodbye, you know. We assume that will carry on but no. So it's really ironic because you asked the question. The only the arrangement that comes to an end was a formal arrangement, signed arrangement. Otherwise all the informal contacts have carried on.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E09N09> - § 4 references coded [3.31% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.74% Coverage

I think some of networks can be great artificially. You can have an institutional network. But often I found my experience that they don't sustain because there is no really interest from the ground.

Reference 2 - 0.87% Coverage

And I think it may be in another Faculty or in other universities, that the universities are more controlling and directive, you know, for example, they might say we've got a strategic drive to work with partners in America, not China.

Reference 3 - 1.06% Coverage

But in the initially setting up the partnership, it can be done through strategic partnerships, can be done through strategic drive, and that's how universities are. They see themselves now as an operator very much at a strategic level. So I think it's evitable that that's going to happen.

Reference 4 - 0.64% Coverage

But of course, it's a very competitive business in higher education, and I think increasingly most institutions realise we only to do this. So we're all doing the same thing.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E10N10> - § 3 references coded [10.25% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.80% Coverage

And again, we would have to have some sorts of shared interests or common interests will be institutions we were partnering with.

Reference 2 - 4.56% Coverage

I think it definitely has to be something more than income. So they can't be based on income generation. Anything that we have fold in the past, some of them were based on income generation, and there must be more to it done that. So there has to be relationships at all different levels in the institution, and has to be a shared interest. So again, maybe similar missions, similar strategies, or similar student market, so maybe focus on, I don't know, widening participation, or focus local students delivering some very tight and synergies in terms of disciplines, so if we got a strong maritime focus here, for example, it might be reduce partners with it, and the institution overseas has a similar focus on maritime issues.

Reference 3 - 4.89% Coverage

And again, what is a really key is the relationships at all levels, the senior management of the university having those relationship, but also the academic staff on their departments, that's, you know, the really core, as well as in the different service areas. So those involves admissions here. Every relationship can take part in the institution. The England Quality Office and other institutions talk to each other and are aware of the pressures and requirements on the each other. A partnership, is not, quite often the UK looks these relationships are very paternalistically, as it states the most important partners, and I think that is a difficult concern, cos it's very often not the case. And I think if you approach it from that point of view, it's not really a partnership.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E11N11> - § 1 reference coded [1.65% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.65% Coverage

I think the importance of an international strategy which links up throughout the university from the top to the bottom is really important. And the setting of strategic objectives and goals, you can't do internationally with every country in the world, so it's to identify where you links and where the potential partners are, and invest in those areas.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E12N12> - § 5 references coded [8.29% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.69% Coverage

But it has to be a whole, and you can't work with everybody, so you have to have some kind of hierarchy, have some kind of portfolio of partners that work different levels.

Reference 2 - 4.07% Coverage

I think sustainability is having that long term view but having those different types of engagement as well. So you are not just putting all your eggs in one basket. You say, ok, we'll going to do multiple things across multiple faculties. The difficulty obvious is that you can have a real top-down approach. Things like, you're going to work in China, and you're going to work with these partners, so you have that faculty work with this university, that kind of things does necessarily work either. So there's kind of things growing from both ends. It has to be kind of institutional strategy, but it has to be appetized, the department, the faculty level to get engaged. A lot of international partnerships definitely go very personal and they are not sustainable. So if you have just one person with that link to that institution, that person may leave in six months' time. And once she goes, it just collapses. So you have to have a real institutional level engagement, right from the top, right to foot basically.

Reference 3 - 1.02% Coverage

you have to make sure the engagement is from top to the bottom really. You've got buying and people actually want to do it. It's not going to sheer commitment to do it and the staff feel like they are forced to do it. It's never going to sustain self at all.

Reference 4 - 1.19% Coverage

I think it might be a bit more focused by having a strong strategy about what you want to do and understanding what you are as an institution, what your strengths are, understanding what is the unique about you, something you can go out and sell with people what attract them to the university.

Reference 5 - 1.32% Coverage

And sometimes it's all too easy to sign a piece of paper but then not be able to follow up, so there need to be clear engagement and operational plan behind every strategy. I think it has to be managed and dedicate time to do that because it is through personal contact and understanding. You got to work with the right people.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E13N13> - § 1 reference coded [1.92% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.92% Coverage

I don't know how much they support developing. They support maybe initial contact a

bit more. But as far as actually supporting the development of partnership agreements for example. They don't really do that.

<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\E16N30> - § 1 reference coded [1.60% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.60% Coverage

I'm very cynical about strategy actually. I think we have farting with strategies, and not enough getting operations right on the ground, I mean, go back to process. And actually it isn't real strategy, it's actually wishful thing, it's a wish list, it isn't strategy.

<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\E17N31> - § 4 references coded [7.93% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.75% Coverage

Certainly, we could start off by having what we might call institutional relationships, so we would have partnerships with other universities in other parts of the world. And that would be the basis upon which you could then explore various types of relationships, creating, first of all, a high-level agreement. We then give flexibility to other parts of the university to examine ways in which they would be able to use that to their benefit.

Reference 2 - 2.98% Coverage

Oh, I'm very clear about that. You have to have a lot of person involvement from the top. I mean I went to Xiamen every year for about five years six years, and met the president and senior staff. I would give one or two lectures myself both on the general higher education level in Britain, looking at what we do and what we could learn from China and gave lecture in a specific research area which might interest to students. You have to have the commitment from the top for that to work, and then you encourage all your staff to go. When I went, maybe about, you know, half dozens of people, maybe Head of a couple of departments or schools within the university to go. That's the way you develop. If you don't go from the top, it will rapidly fade away.

Reference 3 - 0.96% Coverage

And I guess thirdly you know I would work with other universities in Britain to understand where we might be able to work, to work maybe not just one and one, but maybe more of a group, and take this to a different sort of level of interaction.

Reference 4 - 2.24% Coverage

In regard to higher education and international dimensions, it is very difficult to know how we will develop the various parts of that, but I do not think it will make enormously difference, because in essence the relationships are there, almost with Britain and countries outside the European Union, they are there almost regardless of the European Union, they are because of research interests, they are because of these high-level agreements, and those agreements I do not believe are based upon and entirely dependent upon the federal of members of European Union.

The contingent repertoire of sustainable international partnerships

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E01N01> - § 17 references coded [18.90% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.83% Coverage

In the beginning, it's almost always started by two people who know each other in two institutions. Maybe it shouldn't be like that but it is usually.

Reference 2 - 1.74% Coverage

It usually starts in a small way and develop. Whatever kind of person you are, whatever kind of responsibilities you are, actually, you are to prefer to work with people whom you know. And so that's how it happens. It's quite difficult to start a partnership with an institution where you just don't know anybody.

References 3-5 - 1.63% Coverage

Well, they always, in all cases, they come about because there are alike mind of people in the two institutions. Usually they know each other somehow. Um, that's why conferences are considered so important because that's one way in which you can get to know people, in often all over the place.

References 6-7 - 0.92% Coverage

Um, yeah, so, um, they usually come about because two people, perhaps they know each other but they have the same interests. Um, that's almost always how it happens.

Reference 8 - 0.99% Coverage

A lots of them fail. And they fail, um, largely, in my experience, it's often because the individuals you work with is no longer there. Maybe they retire, they move somewhere

else

Reference 9 - 2.01% Coverage

I'm not sure there is a perfect partnership, um, while you can say a perfect partnership has this, this, and this. I don't think that's the case. I think it's one that it is strong and involves more than one person, because one person can retire and then you lost that. So we involve the whole team of people. That's a strong partnership and it's hard to achieve.

Reference 10 - 1.33% Coverage

People who, who a group of people both side work really well together, who know each other, and who gel as a team, just like any other team. And you have a common interest. So it doesn't really matter that they are in the two institutions.

Reference 11 - 1.69% Coverage

Yeah, what cause it to fail, people retiring, yeah, retiring, dying, that's very inconvenient. Um, it is that, it's that. We've had partnerships that sort of suddenly failed, because somebody no longer work there. We've had partnerships that've depended on one person. You know, they are always fragile.

References 12-14 - 1.98% Coverage

Well, sometimes, um, very often, the partnerships comes about just by a change of event. I mean nobody sits around and says, well, let's develop a partnership with this university, I mean, that never happens. Usually, it's just somebody met somebody in a conference, or they gone abroad and visited somewhere and they met somebody.

Reference 15 - 1.70% Coverage

I mean, really, you know, it would be nice to say that partnerships develop along some kind of scientific arrangement, but they don't. In the end of day, people and people. They are not academics. They are not professors. They are just people like anybody else. They work with people they like working with.

Reference 16 - 1.99% Coverage

I can understand it is happening in today's higher education sector. But it hasn't happened here. And actually I can't think, you know, um, I'm not sure how it would work if we just

chose a university and say we want to... [Laugh]. Basically, fundamentally, it's difficult to do unless you know them. People want to partner with people they were seeing before.

Reference 17 - 2.08% Coverage

As I say, people change. You may suddenly have to try to create a working relationship with somebody you don't actually know in the institution. That's really difficult. And it's for all those reasons that partnerships tend not to last forever. It's not because we get tired of them. We stumble over something in some point. It's difficult, very difficult to keep them going.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E02N02> - § 1 reference coded [0.23% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.23% Coverage

My relationship started from my supervising PhD students.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E03N03> - § 4 references coded [1.92% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.53% Coverage

Sustainability can be done through individuals. I really believe that. They may be misguided then they got wrong and then it may not work, you know. But for those where does work, it's through individuals not through institutions.

References 2-3 - 0.93% Coverage

This is something which really does work in my experience because I did this in York. For many years I've been involved in this. In effect, I led it. And in York, I had a lot, but I had individually with students from Germany coming to me, many many many, and always good activity and it spilt over into the research, because the professor I was linking with there, we were also doing research together.

Reference 4 - 0.46% Coverage

This is about a strong personal friendships and activity that gone on for years until the professor died, then it stopped. There is no other reason that we go on today. When individuals go, it stops.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E05N05> - § 4 references coded [1.92% Coverage]

References 1-2 - 0.56% Coverage

A good way for many projects you do academically is to find people who have similar interests in some questions, usually via research, and that is where academic conferences can be very helpful

Reference 3 - 1.09% Coverage

So the other way is actual to meet people at conferences and you listen to their paper, what you do, you see some developmental potential there. You talk to the person, and if you find that they are reasonable, they are interesting and they have in their own networks influence, and then you will try to stay in touch with and develop something. That usually works quite well.

Reference 4 - 0.27% Coverage

If their key people are not in the project, the project will likely to fail. That's obvious.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E06N06> - § 2 references coded [2.80% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.04% Coverage

Well, for instances, we got a very good relationship with Wuhan University of Technology, and one of professors there, I met him [here]. He was touring the UK, and he came here with Mei, and I met him [here], out for dinner with him, and we know, the relationship with, you know, just had a dinner, had a talk, discuss what we could do when I visited Wuhan. And we've now welcome many students from that university. We've had a, as thing's changed, as the teaching's changed, we've changed with them, so the agreement has changed. A number of their staff have been here, and some of them [inaudible], other of them does some teaching. That is continuing. That is been sustained now, well over ten years, well over ten years.

Reference 2 - 0.76% Coverage

the only reason I was doing [inaudible] Vietnam is I'm using my research colleagues to help me get the contact. They got me the contact. So without the research I could not have got the Vietnam. Then got in there, then being able to talk to them, and build the partnerships.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E07N07> - § 6 references coded [4.78% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.34% Coverage

I mean, I have to say, I think the best partnership often is on individuals, not on universities.

Reference 2 - 0.88% Coverage

but I think it's also based on the individuals as well. A properly sustainable partnership shouldn't be one who reset the partnership when I left, should be one that somebody comes in and takes over, but that's got to be the right person. They are fragile.

Reference 3 - 0.46% Coverage

my international partnerships have all been, I've always capitalised on opportunities that I've been given especially to going places.

References 4-5 - 1.28% Coverage

So for example, Hong Kong, in 2003 I was invited to be an external examiner in one of the universities, and I've been going every year for 14 years now. So the external examinership was finished in 2006, you know. When I was there during that time, I made contacts with other universities or key academics in my field, asking if there are possibilities for collaboration.

Reference 6 - 1.81% Coverage

Then if people are looking for keynote speakers in the conferences, for example in Rotterdam in October, I think it is, there is a conference there and come a lot of people, and it's in my area of research. Somebody asked me whether I know good international keynote speaker. My colleague from Taiwan would be the keynote speaker. You know, that kind of thing socially flows across. So I can go there and meet her. So I think it's just thinking all of these things you naturally do in the academic activity and keeping them.

<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\E09N09> - § 11 references coded [15.02% Coverage]

References 1-2 - 1.51% Coverage

I've been invited to be a visiting fellow a few times, Hong Kong University. I recently went to Macao University as well on my last visit. So it's very much a variety of reciprocal relationships because it's not just me going to Hong Kong, or to China. It is partners from there coming back. So we've hosted a number of visitors, individuals or groups of people,

and we developed research links accordingly.

Reference 3 - 1.52% Coverage

Well, I think the question how do you generate links and word of come about, um, I don't think it's a formula. That's the first thing. I don't think you could say to people if you do X, Y and Z, you'll generate links. I think what the most important feature I've recognised in my networking is your personal interest and willingness to pursue a network or a potential network beyond what other people might do.

Reference 4 - 1.74% Coverage

I actually started that particular relationship which goes back to 2005. That was, in a sense, it was a pure chance, because I've written an article about interacting wildwoods, and academic Australia had read it and was interested in it and was going to Britain to do some study leave. So She wrote to me and said, could we meet, and just talk about the article, and I said yes, and she came, and from this small opportunity, our full relationships develops to extend.

References 5-6 - 1.68% Coverage

Like, for example, the Egypt one, I think it was Catherine, who mentioned the British Council were advertising workshops, was I interested, I thought, yeah, it might be. And just by chance, I've previously done some work with an Egyptian academic on a totally different subject, and I just wrote to her and said, do you think you'd be interested, and she said yes. And that took off when we got the funding and we developed our partnerships, and so on.

Reference 7 - 0.64% Coverage

When I look back, why did that happen? Most of them came down to the individual who I met or I was introducing to any element of chance in that and then you build on that.

Reference 8 - 1.79% Coverage

And sometimes there've been networks where it just hasn't got off the ground at all, you know, potentially people meet. We had one here, actually. We had some Chinese visitors from Hong Kong again, back probably about 6 years ago, academics. We all met some. We had a very good time, but it didn't seem to generate any longer network. So I don't

think anybody is staying contact. And I think that was partly because we probably didn't have enough interests in common, deep interests.

Reference 9 - 5.15% Coverage

Because I don't think I've been embedded enough in the institution with other people. So that's what I was going to move on to say that as I grow older, I think I become more aware that if you really want a network to have an impact beyond you as an individual, you need to make sure other people involved with you from the start, and that you don't just call them in later when you need help. You actually try to build in their support. So increasingly, it's about team playing.

I think I've learnt now that if you want it to be sustained, because after all, you won't be around forever. Things happen. You might retire, you might go to different institutions. So if you really want it to be sustained, I think you got to think who could I get involved, who would be interested in getting involved, and take the one as equal partners. Otherwise, it's the other end.

Because in my experiences, this goes back to your first question, what makes it sustainable, one of the factors that often leads to a partnership breaking down, somebody leaves. They leave the institution. And you begin to realise that the whole thing has been depending on that one person. So it wasn't really embedded in the institution. So a good test of it would be, if you left, you are saying to people, if you left, would this activity, this network continue, or would it go with you because you might take it

Reference 10 - 0.50% Coverage

My instinct is to say that I think partnerships and links will develop primarily from individuals who's interested and wants to do this.

Reference 11 - 0.51% Coverage

But I still have sneaky feeling or suspicion that sustaining the relationship will come down to the individuals, not what institutions do.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E10N10> - § 2 references coded [1.16% Coverage]

References 1-2 - 1.16% Coverage

Most commonly, I think it's other institutions approaching us, or personal contacts, something like I have contact in another institutions, research purposes, or they met the conference.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E11N11> - § 9 references coded [8.61% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.47% Coverage

But I think there are also more informal links where groups of academics, so maybe individuals have colleagues with similar teaching or research interests, and they connect that way. And in my view actually a lot of those partnerships are more advantageous. They are more fruitful than the more formal arrangements.

Reference 2 - 1.21% Coverage

So someone can move and [inaudible] to the university, and then think I really enjoyed working with that university in the UK. I would try to developing a partnership with another university in the UK. So that could be a knock-on effect of short intervention.

References 3-5 - 1.33% Coverage

A lot of relationships in this institution are based on things that haven't been planned, just the coincidences. The meeting of individuals in a conference, for example, can spark off a relationship. So quite often they are not things that are looked for a planned but an opportunistic.

References 6-8 - 2.25% Coverage

And I think some of the longest collaborations I've been involved with have been based on personal relationships with, professional relationships I should say, with PhD students who've then gone to an area become a senior themselves, developed a link, and started off with a visit and then it developed into the development of joint program, or research, or joint publications, so it's often out of those very small conversations or professional relationships the bigger things arise.

Reference 9 - 2.34% Coverage

Yeah. So you know, for example, I've seen a situation where American academics visited a university. They've only given one seminar and then you haven't seen them for the rest of the week. Whereas I go and I'm saying them, tell the students I'm here, if they want to

talk to me, is my office. Staff, you know, I think it's been about open and approachable and friendly. And for me that's where partnerships develop. Got to have a business case as well, but that kind of human touch is really important.

<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\E13N13> - § 2 references coded [3.45% Coverage]

References 1-2 - 3.45% Coverage

we have a lot of informal partnerships, more often on research based, because they fall outside of our frameworks, so we have, yes, of course, individuals can have a lot of partners. They are going to be working with international, with partners across the globe on everything from this, you know, conferences etc. Many of them are not formalised without any paperwork really.

<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\E14N14> - § 8 references coded [9.80% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.30% Coverage

But even on a more individual level, it's good to be able to go over visiting another university, teaching, talking about your research and forming partnerships that way. And that is, certainly within our School, that's one of the majority of international activities taking place, with regard to student exchange.

References 2-3 - 1.50% Coverage

We tends to be the existing staff within this School who worked at other universities. All have research links with the universities when they went to the conference, or editor collection, or the article.

References 4-5 - 1.02% Coverage

Again speaking from my experiences the most successful element has been the relationships between member staff here and member staff there.

Reference 6 - 2.10% Coverage

So then the person in the other university has a direct connection and knows this is plausible relationship, this is worthwhile and there's going to be a lot of benefit from it because they know that person, specifically they may research, they may work together, and that is very important

Reference 7 - 1.86% Coverage

But I have found that the most meaningful, the one we have been able to sustain tend to be from the staff member that worked with other universities, you know. We have very very close contacts with whether as students, or PhD students, or as member staff.

Reference 8 - 1.02% Coverage

And secondly underneath of that, people who carry out their research, so presenting on conferences or research funding bid stuff like that.

<Internals\Interviews\Transcripts\E15N15> - § 6 references coded [6.91% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.50% Coverage

She's graduated now and is a lecturer in China. So I'm still in touch with her. We try to publish together, and think about things that we can do in the future.

Reference 2 - 0.33% Coverage

Then I have a couple of people I know through conferences who are in different universities in Hong Kong.

References 3-4 - 1.61% Coverage

That's not China. It's Malaysia. I'm part of a more formal partnership which again as coming into being because of the funding opportunity and sort of personal connections between other people who put us in touch with another university who were interested in this collaboration, jointly applied for some money which you know you are lucky you actually get so that's nice. So then we're sort of building connections with those people, getting to know them socially, which then helps when you are doing more formal things.

Reference 5 - 2.53% Coverage

They do generally, they do need to give us more money, because the important part of making this connections is going to conferences. With 400 pounds a year in the geography department to pay everything that we do. That's not enough to go anywhere. That's not enough to come to London. So you can bid for another 500 hundred, so if put them together then spend it all at once, you get one conference a year. So it's not really quite enough because there're other thing, you know, I might need to go to an industrial meeting, which I will do in a couple of weeks' time. That will be my own money that pays for that

because I've spent all the department money on the conference. So they should, I would say, if they give us 1000 pounds a year, then it would be more realistic. So we would be spending less our own money.

Reference 6 - 1.95% Coverage

Well, in some ways I would say, they are at early stages, so it's definitely worth having a good relationship however you meet and find that people that you know, people that you trust, as individuals really, and whose work is your respect, and you need to know people like that and it spreads around the world a bit [Laugh]. Then it helps. So two or three times I've been part of a European project that other people have led. And some of those are being funded but they thought of me when they needed someone in Britain and I got people that I might think of if I need someone in variously different countries. So that's all good.

<Internals\\Interviews\\Transcripts\\E16N30> - § 3 references coded [7.08% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.41% Coverage

I mean, I did my PhD partly in Belgium. I still have contact with some of those people. I'm not working with them at the moment. But you know, when I left there, that wasn't an end of any contact with those people I worked with when I was in Oxford, in London and places. So you stop something because it doesn't sustain necessarily as that fixed partnerships but you maintain, you may contact with people.

References 2-3 - 4.67% Coverage

Well, almost always with some sort of funding bid to support them. Well, that's not quite true. The European ones I had, about 13 years ago, I had a short, well, I had been working in a specific area, and it was an international conference that you need seeing people. I don't quite remember how it came about, but I discussed with some people who are in [inaudible] where I am going and having a period of study in [inaudible] and work with them. I went, for about 4 months, to [inaudible], I did some work with an amount of time, and we wrote a framework, an EU framework, and a proposal, which is funded. And so that collaboration grew and it didn't just involve there. It involved some companies. It involves some people in Italy with whom we submitted some later work. So it kind of built.

Reference 1 - 0.56% Coverage

I think academics will go down two parts. One is they will in their own research interest area develop their own collaborations with whoever.

Reference 2 - 2.24% Coverage

In regard to higher education and international dimensions, it is very difficult to know how we will develop the various parts of that, but I do not think it will make enormously difference, because in essence the relationships are there, almost with Britain and countries outside the European Union, they are there almost regardless of the European Union, they are because of research interests, they are because of these high-level agreements, and those agreements I do not believe are based upon and entirely dependent upon the federal of members of European Union.

Appendix 3 An example of interview transcripts and field note

Q

Could you tell me a little bit of your views on international partnerships in higher education?

A

Um, basically we have to have international partnerships. Um, because in a philosophical level, we are about education. Education shouldn't be limited in our own backyard. Um, it's appropriate that students are exposed to international issues, and the staff are as well. Um, in practice, again, of course, we don't have any choice. We have to be active in developing partnerships, and that's for all the rival reasons. It's because it's productive in terms of academic work, in research and authorship. It's also beneficial in terms of student experience, where for example student to exchanges can be in any border.

Q

Compare to other forms of international cooperation, how do you understand international partnership? Is it about the individual level or is it about the institutional level?

A

Well, it can exist in a number of levels. Usually, it usually starts out of the lower level and gradually develops, and sometimes it doesn't develop. In the beginning, it's almost always started by two people who know each other in two institutions. Maybe it shouldn't be like that but it is usually. And that is wished to do work together between the two institutions. It's often about authorship, sometimes about research, staff exchange. And when that gets going and carries on successfully for a while, then people begin to think what else can we do. But it doesn't usually start with everything going at once. It usually starts in a small way and develop. Whatever kind of person you are, whatever kind of responsibilities you are, actually, you are to prefer to work with people whom you know. And so that's how it happens. It's quite difficult to start a partnership with an institution where you just don't know anybody. It's quite difficult to do that. No impossible but quite difficult.

Q

At present, what types of international partnerships have you got in this School?

A

We got several, um, well, it's kind of two kinds of international partnerships, so the kind of the official ones, and the kind of unofficial ones. But we have Erasmus exchange partnerships, the student exchange partnerships, um, with four, five, six, I'm trying to remember, and six institutions in Europe. And then we have kind of slightly less official

ones with a number of other institutions, often, in the developing world. Because, I guess, because we are a Health Faculty and it is our interests to see what is going on, what is going on in the developing world?

Q

So among these partnership, which one do you think is more developed, and which one is less developed?

A

Well, most developed partnership is the most difficult to achieve. It's a partnership where there is an exchange of students, where student does credit bearing, um, modules, that's counting on the institution that is sending students, and that's the bilateral thing. Um, that's reasonably difficult to achieve. But there are also research collaborations that, I don't know, tend to, tend not to develop outside research collaborations, and sometimes can do.

Q

You mentioned official type and unofficial type, so I was wondering how they came about.

A

Well, they always, in all cases, they come about because there are alike mind of people in the two institutions. Usually they know each other somehow. Um, that's why conferences are considered so important because that's one way in which you can get to know people, in often all over the place. Um, yeah, so, um, they usually come about because two people, perhaps they know each other but they have the same interests. Um, that's almost always how it happens.

Q

Does this mean the international partnerships come about from the research?

A

From their work, whatever their work is. Um, I've never seen this institution approaches another institution just because they think they are similar or because they think the other one is slightly higher up in the hierarchy than we are. I've never known that happen.

Q

So when you hear sustainability, what does it mean to you in the context of international partnerships?

A

Well, if that is sustainable, it goes beyond whatever is being interested today. It carries on developing and growing, and that's what everybody wants. We don't want a partnership

that is just a flash in the pan. Something then happens, it just straight away and dies. But that does happen quite a lot. Um, but what we want is a sustainable project that keeps running and also keeps developing, isn't just about what it was initially about but now is about lot of other things. They are the best kind of partnerships obviously.

Q

From your experiences what aspect do you expect to grow once the international partnership establishes?

A

I don't think I expect anything. A lots of them fail. And they fail, um, largely, in my experience, it's often because the individuals you work with is no longer there. Maybe they retire, they move somewhere else, and then the institutions they were very much in favour of a project no longer is. Um, but that's not your question, what is your question?

Q

My question is that is there any specific aspects you expect international partnerships to grow?

A

No. I don't think so as long as somethings does. I'm not sure it's too important what it is. That grows and develops as long as something does. Because maybe in the long term, research will develop, or maybe that's the first thing that's happened. But, um, I'm not sure it matters too much that grows in any particular dimension. Maybe so, it's a relationship that is best stay with research. It doesn't have to develop anything else. There are some partnerships like that. And what you want there is it grows strong and it develops more research projects. Um, and there are others certain mainly about exchange. Maybe they begin with exchanges, staff going and interested, they will begin to think, maybe we can do some research. I'm not sure there is a perfect partnership, um, while you can say a perfect partnership has this, this, and this. I don't think that's the case. I think it's one that it is strong and involves more than one person, because one person can retire and then you lost that. So we involve the whole team of people. That's a strong partnership and it's hard to achieve.

Q

So apart from the growing aspects, what do you think aspects would limit the sustainability of international partnerships?

A

We, um, define our partnerships in terms of how long they are being existence and what

they have managed to achieve. That reflects whether they are worse.

Q

OK. Will you put a length on that, like how long is long term, something like that?

A

We have a partnership with a university in Uganda. This is being going on for 20 years.

Q

20 years.

A

Yeah, that's pretty good. Um, but you know, it's not just the length. It's the promise that it has as well, and that's hard to put your finger on it. Sometimes you can see it's got promise because, mainly because of the number of people interested.

Q

How many years do you think it demonstrates sustainability?

A

Um, maybe five years when it is beginning to get, this is, you know, we got something here, that's going to last. But you can never be sure. I have been involved in one occasion when we developed a partnership, the university in Taiwan I think, and it took so long to develop it. It does here. The processes we have to go through is really slow for sometimes a partnership. By the time we finished it, every single one of the people in the other university has retired [laugh].

Q

What do you think make international partnership sustainable?

A

People who, who a group of people both side work really well together, who know each other, and who gel as a team, just like any other team. And you have a common interest. So it doesn't really matter that they are in the two institutions. They could be in the same institution and they will be working just it well. Um, I think that's when it works it's because of that.

Q

So individuals are more important than institution when developing international partnership.

A

I would say in my experience absolutely always.

Q

Apart from making international partnership sustainable, what aspects do you think make international partnership collapse or fail to grow?

A

Yeah, what cause it to fail, people retiring, yeah, retiring, dying, that's very inconvenient. Um, it is that, it's that. We've had partnerships that sort of suddenly failed, because somebody no longer work there. We've had partnerships that've depended on one person. You know, they are always fragile. Um, good, really good partnerships involve multiple people, maybe more than one group, multiple groups of people. And that's really really difficult thing to achieve and it takes many years. (You can't just? something like that? takes many years).

Q

Yes. So have you got any international partnerships that can be labelled as sustainable international partnership in the School?

A

Yeah, I would say, um, the one we have with Uganda, I would say, it's sustainable, but it has been sustainable, but isn't perfect. It isn't perfect for a number of reasons. I would say it although has been going for a number of years, it could still fail. Does that answer your question?

Q

Could you detail a little bit more how do you think it is sustainable [but not perfect?]

A

It's sustainable because it serves both our interests. It's an exchange partnership but has never involved research. Um, but it could've involved research. That just hasn't happened. But the exchange serves both our interests.

Q

Do you mean it is perfect if it could've involved research? Why?

Q

So how does this partnership come about?

A

Well, sometimes, um, very often, the partnerships comes about just by a change of event.

Q

By chance.

A

I mean nobody sits around and says, well, let's develop a partnership with this university,

I mean, that never happens. Usually, it's just somebody met somebody in a conference, or they gone abroad and visited somewhere and they met somebody.

I mean, really, you know, it would be nice to say that partnerships develop along some kind of scientific arrangement, but they don't. In the end of day, people and people. They are not academics. They are not professors. They are just people like anybody else. They work with people they like working with.

Q

Some people may say it's changing in terms of developing partnership. We are pursuing a sort of strategic approach. But from your experience...

A

Yeah, I understand that. I understand that. But that hasn't happened here. There has been no formal, um, there's no formality in the partnership. I can understand it is happening in today's higher education sector. But it hasn't happened here. And actually I can't think, you know, um, I'm not sure how it would work if we just chose a university and say we want to... [Laugh]. Basically, fundamentally, it's difficult to do unless you know them. People want to partner with people they were seeing before.

Q

Do you think it is better to adopt a strategic approach?

A

No, I don't think this strategic approach is a good thing, kind of forcing people to do [Laugh], forced partnerships, I think, you will get on with each other. I mean, you know, come on [Laugh].

Q

No, you don't think so.

A

No, no.

Q

OK.

A

The university can see, look, partnership is important, we should have partnerships, and if we haven't got any, that won't look good. That is the case.

Q

So what lessons have you learnt from developing international partnerships from your

past experience?

A

We need them. They are really important. They make life interesting. They are fun?

Q

Why are they fun?

A

Fun because it changes things. It changes, um, you know, just having people from other countries in the environment, changes your everyday working, makes it more interesting. It does make it more fun. You know, academic work can be astonishing and boring, and anything that you know, adds a little colour into your life, is a good thing.

Q

Have you brought any colour here?

A

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

Q

Could you give me an example? What colour?

A

Yeah, I mean, we had a partnership with [inaudible] a few years and we have about 35 (...) students here, and they add colour, you know, because they think differently, they got different experiences, they are much more polite than we are. When they are in the classes, you know, you have to adapt all your teaching because you got the (...) there, students in your group, and that make you have to think again, you know, what I am teaching, why I am teaching, and, um, and that's all good. It's been really very good here now and the last few years.

Q

What do you see the challenges in developing sustainable international partnership in future?

A

Challenges are everywhere. Any partnership requires funding, you know, you could never be sure the funding will be there next year. As I say, people change. You may suddenly have to try to create a working relationship with somebody you don't actually know in the institution. That's really difficult. And it's for all those reasons that partnerships tend not to last forever. It's not because we get tired of them. We stumble over something in some point. It's difficult, very difficult to keep them going.

Q

Have you done something to make it longer or work?

A

Well, you get experienced with working, with partners. You get to know what they need, what they want, how they like to work. That helps a lot. But there's no magic answer to make them last forever.

Q

Do you think the university is supportive partnership development in the Faculty level?

A

Yes

Q

What did they do?

A

That anything the university could make easier is their processes for formalising a partnership. Sometimes it takes too long.

Q

How about the financial resource?

A

No, usually, it has to fund itself.

Q

They don't provide...

A

No, you can't go and say, look, I'm trying to develop a partnership with so and so, can I have some dosh please, you know (Laugh), although they do likely to fund, um, travel something like that.

Q

How do you think mutual benefit to international partnership?

A

Because it's great to work with people outside of the institution to share knowledge, to share experience, to share ways of thinking, to discover new things, new ideas, new ways, so we are not just, there is not just one university, there's a whole world of universities, and our own, you know, we are not very clever, both, but when you put every university together, than we are clever, and that's really an enjoyable thing to do because we all like to learn.

Q

Sounds very romantic.

A

Yeah, that's me.

Q

Have you got specific recruitment partnership in the School?

A

Yeah, so, we have. I mean among partnerships, there're recruitment partnerships, but they are always (fake?) things. You never really know when they are going to turn around and say we've got another plan now.

Q

So what's the mutual benefit for both parts in terms of recruitment partnerships?

A

Oh, they are. It isn't just about providing courses for a government for example. It's not about that at all. It's about sending students back in this case (Amar?) or wherever, um, with a new level of learning, something staff they could never learn in their own country, could not learn in their country. And they come here, and it's not just what they learn in the classroom. It's being in the United Kingdom, seeing our way. I often say to them, you know, you can be for example, in Amar all your life and not know it. It's only when you've been somewhere else and see their perspectives. That is beneficial to this sponsor. And you can work both as well, you know, I'm hoping that sponsor will allow us to send them students. So they can be working both ways.

Field notes

The international partnership is interpreted for both educational significance in general and survival necessity for the institution in particular. International partnerships are represented as different forms, both the formal one and the informal one, one-way relationships and the two-way relationships, research collaboration, recruitment partnerships and exchange partnerships, and exist at various levels. In the eyes of this academic, international partnerships are developed by chance of event, usually imitated by two people who know each other and like to work together. In this sense, whether a partnership would be sustainable is subject to whether the two people get along. Put another way, it would be the human relationships that makes the partnership consolidate.

Also, it would be the human relationships that makes the partnership fragile because people transfer, people leave, and people retire. That being the case, what constitutes sustainable international partnerships seem subject to contingent development. But this interviewee also proposes a possible solution to ease the fragility of the relationship between two people, which is to allow multiple people involved in the partnerships developed from the established relationships between people. This point seems to allude an interface between the contingent development and the scientific arrangement, which is interesting to see whether the following the interviewees would echo this point.

Appendix 4 The interview schedule for the pilot study

- Could you tell me your views on your university/department' links with other universities/departments?
- Could you tell me your views on sustainability?
- Could you tell me your experience of engaging in international partnerships? Any opportunities and challenges?
- Which country do your university/department link with? Why?
- What kind of international links are there in your university/department?
- How do these links come about?
- How do these links sustain?
- Does the university help or support departments to develop the international partnerships? How?
- What can you learn from the past experience of engaging international partnerships?

Appendix 5 The interview schedule for the main study

-
- *Could you tell me your views on international partnerships between higher education institutions?*

PROMPTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>With Chinese/English institutions?</i>

- *When you hear the term “sustainability”, what does this mean to you in the context of international partnerships?*

PROMPTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Longevity (how long?)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Activity (what activity?)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Growth (what thing?)</i>

- *Tell me a bit of your role and responsibilities of engaging in international partnerships in the University/Faculty/School/Department?*
- *Tell me a bit of your experiences of engaging in international partnerships in the University/Faculty/School/Department?*

PROMPTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How to develop?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What aspects make it work?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What aspects make it collapse?</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>With Chinese/English institutions?</i>

- *What lessons have you learnt from past experiences of developing international partnerships?*
 - *What do you see challenges of developing a sustainable international partnership in future?*
-

Appendix 6 The letter for participants

Dear *

I am Jie, a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Education, supervised by Professor Catherine Montgomery. I am contacting you to invite you to participate in my doctoral research which is exploring the sustainability of international partnerships in England and China.

The main aim of my research is to further our understanding of what constitute a sustainable international partnership in English and Chinese higher education institutions. For the case study here in England, I would like to interview you about this topic and how you see your role and your experience in relation to this.

I would be very grateful if you could participate in a semi-structured interview roughly for 40 minutes. The focus of the interview will be on how you understand and engage in international partnerships in relation to sustainability. I can do the interview at any your convenient time and I will of course ensure that all data collected will be anonymised.

In addition, it is greatly appreciated if you could suggest me some appropriate academics who are closely involved in the international partnerships or international engagement in the University/Faculty/School/Department.

I hope you can agree to this request and I can supply you with any further details about my proposed research should you require them.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely

Jie Ma

Ph.D. candidate

Higher Education Research Interest Group (HERIG)

Faculty of Education

University of Hull

Hull, HU6 7RX, UK

尊敬的*老师：

您好！

我是马杰，2014年毕业于厦门大学教育研究院，受国家留学基金委资助，赴英国赫尔大学（University of Hull）教育学院攻读博士学位。

我的博士研究课题是：**大学国际合作的可持续性研究**。本研究旨在探究构成国际合作可持续性的因素。作为**学校/学院/学系**发展对外交流合作的重要领头人之一，我想向您发出正式的访谈邀请，和您一起探讨如何构建可持续的国际合作关系。如果您能在您方便的任何时候给我一个访谈您的机会，我会非常感谢您对我研究的支持与帮助！

访谈的内容主要围绕您对国际合作和可持续性概念的理解，您对学院国际合作关系发展的考虑，以及您个人参与国际合作的经历。

访谈大概持续 30 分钟。需要注意的是，我可能须对我们的访谈进行录音。但是请您放心，根据赫尔大学研究伦理条款的相关规定，您所提供的任何信息都将只用于本项研究。对您所提供的资料和信息处理也是绝对匿名，保密且妥善保管的。

作为研究参与者，您享有绝对的自由权。在研究的任一阶段，您可以选择离开或撤回您所提供的信息，并且不用承担任何结果。

如果您有任何的问题，欢迎您随时与我联系。我的工作邮箱是：J.Ma@2014.hull.ac.uk，我的联系电话是：18695678406。

敬待您的回复！

祝好：)

马杰
博士研究生
教育学院
赫尔大学

Appendix 7 The ethical approval

Centre for Educational Studies

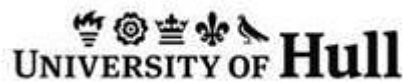
T 01482 465031

E c.m.mckinlay@hull.ac.uk

**ETHICAL PROCEDURES FOR
RESEARCH AND TEACHING IN THE
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

FORMAL NOTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Reference Number:	FoE 15/16-45
Name:	Jie Ma (201401844)
Programme of Study:	Doctor of Philosophy
Research Area/Title:	Exploring the sustainability of international partnerships in English and Chinese higher education institutions
Image Permission Form	N/A
Name of Supervisor:	Professor Catherine Montgomery
Date Approved by Supervisor:	01/11/15 Date Approved by Ethics
Committee:	30/11/15



Faculty of Education Ethics Committee